

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 11, 2021
Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Miami Hurricanes

Jim Larrañaga

Postgame Press Conference



Georgia Tech 70, Miami 66

JIM LARRAÑAGA: Well, that was a heck of a fight. I thought we gave it all we had right up until the final buzzer. What killed us were the turnovers in the second half. We struggled to complete passes against their defense, and those turnovers led to easy baskets. Our half-court defense was pretty good, but their ability to convert -- we had 18 turnovers and they scored 16 points off of those turnovers.

Nysier Brooks, I thought played a fabulous game. They started doubling him, which really took his scoring away, but he ended up with 19 points and six rebounds. We couldn't get Isaiah going. He ended up with just 12 points. Kam had 25, which was a great game for him. But we needed just more offense and fewer turnovers, more shots, fewer turnovers.

Q. As far as Isaiah goes, do you think it was more what they were doing on him or do you think he was just tired, off, ran out of gas? What do you think happened with him today?

JIM LARRAÑAGA: I would say there were at least three things, if not more. One, he was being guarded by Jose Alvarado, the Defensive Player of the Year who puts a lot of pressure on you.

Two, he got a lot of help on any of Isaiah's drive. That's why -- Isaiah normally can get to the rim, but their zone really protects the lane, so Isaiah couldn't get into the lane to get it.

Third, I'd have to say the third game in three days, him missing free throws was kind of an indication to me that he was a little bit fatigued.

Q. What did you tell your players after this game, and

how do you sum up the season in its totality with everything that went on? Obviously having a little bit of an inspired run here in the ACC Tournament.

JIM LARRAÑAGA: Yeah, I just talked to the guys about how proud I was about the effort that they continued to give. These last four games have been the best basketball we've played. We've gotten contributions from a lot of different guys. Nysier Brooks in particular has really shown that he can score the ball when we get it to him in some good locations. His scoring in the first half really gave us the four-point lead. But when they started doubling him, that option was no longer available, and then it's up to the other guys to step up.

I was very, very proud of them. These last four games, the best basketball we've played all season.

Q. I'm wondering how much does the last few days ease the sting of what has been a very frustrating and difficult season?

JIM LARRAÑAGA: You know, I look at things maybe differently than the media does for sure, at least I hope I do. I look at it one day at a time, one game at a time. We win a game, I put that behind me and start preparing for the next one. Every game is different in its entirety, different defenses we face, different offenses we have to use, different players who play well, different players who don't play quite as well. And when that game is over, we put it behind us and move to the next game.

In this case, this is the last game of this season for us, so we'll put this game behind us. We'll look back and feel like, hey, we ended this season in the ACC Tournament, playing our best basketball. And hopefully we can move forward looking forward to next year with hopefully a healthy team for the first time in a number of years, and if we do that, I think the results can be better.

But our league is very, very good from top to bottom. You can see teams get better (inaudible) twisted an ankle. If he goes out of the game, this game changes completely. Just like us losing Sam Waardenburg early, Chris Lykes,

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Rodney Miller. All of a sudden, you're playing a game with less ammunition. And to fight in this league, you need every player healthy and playing well.

And if you do -- I think Florida State and Virginia, just look at their rosters. How many guys have been hurt in missed games? I think M.J. Walker missed one. I don't know about Virginia, maybe Woldetensae missed a couple because of COVID or something. Don't quote me on that. But when you can keep your starting five intact and you can keep your rotation for the most part healthy and playing together, you can build throughout a season.

I mean, look at Kam McGusty. He played the point today, scored 25 points. He hasn't played the point that many minutes in his entire career. He's always played along -- even when he was at Oklahoma, he played with Trae Young. He comes to Miami, he plays with Chris Lykes. Those guys handle the ball and make a majority of the decisions.

To think of the job he did tonight and think of the job that Nysier Brooks did in these last four games, the season that Isaiah Wong had were -- in my mind, he was as good as any player in the conference. You can look at any player. Moses Wright, great player; Jose Alvarado, great player; Michael DeVoe, great player. All those guys that we just played against. Isaiah Wong had a sub-par game for him, but I wouldn't trade him for anybody.

Q. I want to know what's next for you and these players now? What are these next couple weeks going to look like? I know you mentioned it'll take a couple weeks before some players make any decisions on coming back, but do you have any indication whether guys want to come back with this team next season?

JIM LARRAÑAGA: Well, normally after a game, the last game of the season, I might sit down with all the seniors. But after a season like this with the circumstances being so different where guys could actually come back for a fifth or even a sixth year, we want to give them that option. And it's going to take them some weeks to investigate their own circumstances.

Like for a fourth-year senior, let's say, like a Chris Lykes, would he want to come back and get his Master's Degree because he'll earn his undergraduate degree in May? All right. Would he want to explore the possibility of playing professional basketball? There are probably going to be plenty of agents that would love to represent him.

So he and all the other seniors on our team have to do their due diligence, research their own circumstances, and then determine what they want their journey to be next. Is

it come back to college? Is it turn pro? Is it do something different?

I look at Rodney Miller. He just got his real estate license. He might want to forget basketball and go make a ton of money in real estate because I think the real estate market is going to boom.

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Q. Can you just talk about that first half today, 16 points, five rebounds; what were you feeling in the first half, and then was it just that they clamped down on you in the second half?

NYSIER BROOKS: In the first half, I knew that the last game that we played, like I could work different angles and try to score. So coming into this game, it just was like -- I just tried to do the same thing but earlier in the beginning of the game just to try to give my team a presence in the paint.

To the second half, they started adjusting. They started sending the double-team as soon as I put the ball on the ground, so I couldn't really get into my sweet spots for real. That's all I can really say on that.

Q. Can you just talk about -- you guys got so close, even in this game to pulling off another upset. What was the feeling in the locker room after and just immediately after this game? It really did go down to the final minute.

NYSIER BROOKS: Some of us are down right now, to be honest with you, because we really thought we had a chance to win. We came out with the first punch. We took a couple punches back and we really -- it was a real good game, and we really thought we could win, we just fell a little short like a couple other games this season, two points, two, three points, and it's tough.

Q. You think fatigue kind of caught up with you guys today?

NYSIER BROOKS: A little bit. You know, it gets tough with six guys and the rotations are pretty short. We were playing like -- no offense to my teammate Willie, but we

were playing a walk-on like serious minutes. So it was just a little tough on our team together.

But we were -- I guess you would say we were compromising for that by just playing together and not just trying to depend on him for most of the scoring.

Q. You closed the season playing your best basketball. What clicked for you late in the season that allowed you to go on this run?

NYSIER BROOKS: It's March. It's my last season. Just trying to play my hardest like I have been any other game. When the ball gets in my hand, it's my night. And if it doesn't, I'm not a person who's going to force anything. I try to play within the rhythm of basketball and the rhythm of my team, and I just try to play fundamental basketball.

Q. The end of the season that you had -- and not only you, but the whole team -- going on this run, does that make it more enticing to maybe think, okay, maybe -- what could this team accomplish if I come back for another season and so do a few other guys, especially if we can all get healthy? Where are you right now in the decision that you'll have to make pretty soon here?

NYSIER BROOKS: Like I've been saying, I haven't really gave it too much thought. We just played our last game, and it's something that I'll be thinking about over the next couple weeks.

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Q. I know the result was not what you wanted today, but you said before the tournament started that the six of you who are scholarship players became closer. Just talk about the run you guys had in this tournament despite the fact being shorthanded?

KAM MCGUSTY: You know, for the first time in a couple months -- not a couple months. But for the first time in a couple weeks, I just felt everybody's good energy. I felt us having fun out there again. We had a long stretch where we lost six or seven games, and it was very tough for us mentally and draining for us physically, having to adjust to play with six guys. It would be a little different if we had a whole season to prepare for -- a whole season to prepare for that. We kind of just -- it just happened.

Like I said, I couldn't be any more proud of us. We fought. We brought good energy. You can ask anybody in here, we were the loudest ones the last two, three days, warming up and through the hallway. I couldn't be more proud of our guys. And when it comes to bonding, we definitely bonded on the court, off the court, all the traveling. It's only six of us, not a lot of us, so we were talking to each other a lot. We love being together. I'm definitely going to remember this year for sure.

Q. With you guys having such a tight rotation of available players, and also in the tournament playing three consecutive game days, at the end of the game, what did it take out of you just to be able to get those shots to go with those tired legs? Do you sense the other guys were really affected by fatigue and you had to pick things up for the team at the end?

KAM MCGUSTY: I feel like it was more of our turnovers. Yesterday one of the big things that I was asked coming into the game was how to beat Georgia Tech. If it's not

going to be defending, it's going to be taking care of the ball. They are one of the top teams in the league in forcing turnovers, and I feel like we had a stretch -- a three, four-minute stretch where I don't think we got up a shot. We were just giving them the ball, and they were running in transition, getting easy buckets. That's their game. That's what they like to do. I definitely think that's what set it off for us today.

Q. Can you just take us through the final minute there? You guys were still just down by two, you hit a big shot, you were just down by two with 30 seconds to go or something like that. If you could talk us through from your perspective the last 30 seconds of that game.

KAM MCGUSTY: I think we had them in the backcourt for a good amount of time, and -- yeah, the first time, I don't know -- the first inbound they had, I don't know what happened, but they had a second inbound. I think they called a time-out or something. And I had tipped the ball, Alvarado went and saved it, and it was just -- we're trapping, we're in scramble defense, so they just executed, I guess.

We didn't get a steal, and we left someone down the court open. That's kind of what happens when you trap. There's two people on the ball so someone is open. They did a good job of executing, and it just wasn't our luck because if he would have stepped one wrong way, Alvarado was out of bounds and he wasn't able to make that pass to Usher for the dunk.

It's unfortunate, you know. Sometimes you lose some, you win some. Sometimes they don't come your way.

Q. I'm wondering, how much temptation there is with this great run this week as you look back to wonder what might have been if you guys had been closer to full strength?

KAM MCGUSTY: Man, I mean, I'm sure y'all ask the same question. We made it all the way to the quarterfinals without six players. We're missing, five, six players? Five



players, and some of these guys are rotation guys. Obviously Chris Lykes, returning best player, pre-season all-ACC, so it just goes to show the promise that we had coming into the year.

We go from being projected as one of the best teams in the ACC to having to play one of our walk-ons big minutes. Don't get me wrong, Willie does a great job when comes out there. He's very productive. I always tell him he's best walk-on in the country. So I appreciate his effort. But things just took an unexpected turn. And it's unfortunate but you can't dwell on it. That's life. Life isn't fair. You've got to find a way to dig yourself out of the hole, and I think we just started to figure it out a little too late.

But I'm proud of my guys, I'm proud of the coaches. There's been some very, very, very low days for us, know what I'm saying? It's just good to be around those guys and have our energy up. I enjoyed this last -- we've been here since Sunday, so the last four or five days. It's been so fun to be here with my guys. It just sucks that it happened the way it did, but that's life.

Q. Going into the off-season, Coach L said he would give you a couple weeks to figure out what your plan is. Do you have an idea what your plan is going into this off-season?

KAM MCGUSTY: Honestly, I don't. I've been focused on the season, trying to get some wins and trying to help my team. So it's definitely something I need to think about within this next week. I've just got to see what's best for me.

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