

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 13, 2021

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

LSU Tigers

Will Wade

Postgame Press Conference

LSU 78, Arkansas 71

THE MODERATOR: We have head coach with us.

WILL WADE: All right. Great win. We had tons of contributions. I thought just a total team win. Very proud of how we've been playing. I thought we showed some toughness at Missouri, showed some toughness last night, tonight. We made some key defensive stops. We got just enough rebounds when we needed to. I thought it was just a huge, huge win. First time since '93 we're going to play for the championship tomorrow afternoon.

Very, very excited. Our guys are really excited. We'll have to figure out something, see if we can keep it close with 'Bama tomorrow. Just very, very pleased with today. We're starting to play some of our best basketball, get some toughness to us. We're making plays when we need to. We're starting to get there.

Very, very excited. Excited for our players. Excited for our fan base. Excited for the state. We'll get back and get a little bit of rest, get some recovery, go at it again tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Really seemed in the second half that things really turned defensively when you put Eric Gaines in there. Talk about his contributions down the stretch.

WILL WADE: Huge. How about the block? That's as good a block as you'll see. Just takes the ball from him, steals the ball late in the game. Hits a huge three. Made the front end of a one-on-one. Made some free throws at the end. He was tremendous.

That's what he does, he brings us energy, brings us some toughness. He can really, really pound the ball and guard the ball. He was tremendous for us.

Q. Talk about your defensive philosophy. You are not



wedded to one style of defense. What worked for you? Javonte said it was the man. Was that the plan going in or something that developed?

WILL WADE: We probably got too cute on this quick turnaround. We tried to press back to a zone back to man, which had given them some problems in the past. We got too cute. We didn't have time to work on it and put it in.

The last probably 32 minutes of the game, we basically played straight man with a little bit of pressure, but it was basically straight man, which allowed us to try to stay square.

Like you said, we've got two or three different presses, two or three different zones, we have a bunch of different stuff we can throw to kind of see what sticks and what works. Obviously nothing was working early. Moody was getting loose, things weren't working like they needed to early.

We went to our straight man. We still gave up some at the same time. I think the last 8 to 10 minutes of the first half, we only gave up six points. In the second half we did a much better job.

Q. Javonte, we asked him about the last 25 or 30 seconds. He said that's what point guards do.

WILL WADE: Great leaderships do.

Q. Great guard, that's right.

WILL WADE: You teed that up for me (laughter).

Q. You're welcome. You put the ball in his hands in the last 30 seconds. Your most experienced player. He delivered.

WILL WADE: It was huge. That's what you do. I thought he played a great floor game. They were hounding him, pressuring him all over the court. I thought he played a really, really good floor game.

He attacked the pressure. That's as good a shot as you'll see at the end. That's a big-time, big-time, big-time floater,



big-time, big-time shot. That was huge for us. So very, very proud of him. That's what you want. You got veteran guards, a junior guard, that's what you want.

Q. The second half, was that the best defense you played all year?

WILL WADE: That was close. We were active, we were contesting things. Gave up a couple slips and that sort of thing. Like I said, I thought our conditioning was top-notch. You have to give Greg Goldin a ton of credit with our conditioning. I thought we were really, really fresh down the stretch, fresh defensively. We forced them to take a bunch of jump shots, which is certainly an advantage for us defensively.

Q. Your last four opponents have averaged 39.6% from the floor. Talk about the catalyst of that type of defensive effort.

WILL WADE: Well, that's a great question. Any time you can hold them under 40 and win the field goal stat, you're going to give yourself a great chance to win, especially with as potent and dangerous as we are offensively.

Really been staying in front of our man. We haven't given up nearly as much in transition, which has been huge. We've been giving up a ton in transition, but we haven't given up nearly as much in transition which has helped our defense. We've rebounded the ball a little bit better.

They got going a little bit at the end of the first half. Ethan Henderson, he's been a thorn in our side. He played well against us two years ago in Fayetteville. He got going against us on the offensive glass.

When you don't give up a bunch of offensive rebounds, we gave up some today, your defensive numbers are a little bit better. Our halfcourt defense has been fairly solid all season.

Q. Trying to keep Notae and Davis and Smith from beating you, what was that the situation there?

WILL WADE: Yeah, I mean, it's hard to add the scoreboard up when you're not making threes, threes in bunches. If we could limit Notae and Moody's threes, it's just hard to score enough points as long as we do what we need to do offensively. Notae has been playing great. Moody is obviously a first-team all-league player, tremendous player.

I think that our guys did a good job on them. Like I said, it's tough to win two-by-two.

Q. You talked about developing some toughness there. These two games have been pretty physical, but they've been letting y'all play through it. Javonte said that's something he noticed. Is that as important?

WILL WADE: Yeah, I mean, I think it's tournament basketball in March. They're going to let you play. I'll say this, I think the overall, if you watch every game in the SEC tournament, they're all officiated the same way. I think that's a total credit to Mike Eades, him having taken over the officiating program.

They're all called the exact same. It's not hard to predict what's going to happen when you're watching Tennessee and Alabama play because you know the officials in your game are going to do the same thing.

That's what you want: players to make plays in March. You don't want the ticky-tack stuff. You have to play and finish through contact.

Q. You spoke last night about how you thought today would be the last big chance to make an impression on the NCAA Selection Committee. Jerry before the game had you guys on the five line.

WILL WADE: I've always liked Jerry. I don't know if you know this. I really have. It's just the truth. When we got in in 2011 at VCU, we were one of the last four teams in, literally the last team in, went to the Final Four. Jerry was the only bracketologist that had us in the field. We were holding up hope for Jerry all the time. I've always liked Jerry. Happy to be going to Indianapolis. Happy to be in the NCAA tournament.

We're not going to start bickering over seeding and that sort of thing. Doesn't matter whether you're five, six, seven, whatever it may be, it's all about the matchup. Your matchup as a five versus a 12, if you play one of the those play-in game winners, it could be worse than your matchup in the (indiscernible). It's more about the matchup than it is the seeding number.

I can't tell you till I see the bracket.

Q. Very familiar with Alabama. Is it going to be a long night tonight with an early tip tomorrow?

WILL WADE: Yeah, I mean, we've got to obviously do something quite a bit different than we've done the first two times. They've absolutely blasted us. We've got to change some things up and figure some things out.

We'll work on some things and we'll put the best plan together we can as quick as we can.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

WILL WADE: Thanks, guys.

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LSU Tigers

Javonte Smart

Postgame Press Conference

LSU 78, Arkansas 71

THE MODERATOR: We have Javonte Smart here.

Q. Last minute the lead is slipping away. Talk about your drive to get to the bucket. Took it upon yourself to close it out.

JAVONTE SMART: Yeah, I just felt like I needed to lead the team to get this victory. Whatever I felt like I had to do, I needed to do in that particular time. I just wanted to get to the championship game tomorrow, play against 'Bama. I think we owe them, we need some respect. This is the way to get it, by winning games.

The last stretch of the game I think we all just wanted to win, just be ready for tomorrow.

Q. You're a Baton Rouge boy, been around this program for three years. What does it mean to be the point guard of this team, lead this team to an SEC championship for the first time in almost 30 years?

JAVONTE SMART: It means a lot. This is what I came to LSU for. This is what I came to do. I like winning. I love winning. I think just the winning culture. I'm honored to be a part of this.

We got many more games to go. This is one of the steps, winning this game. It was a big win for us to get under our belt. Bringing the ship back home would mean a lot to all of us. I think that's the biggest thing, just bringing it back home, showing them we really good.

Q. How important was it for you to have the ball in your hands the final minutes, trying to close that out at the end?

JAVONTE SMART: That's what point guards do. I think my team, my coaching staff put the ball in my hand for me to make plays for others. Just to carry us to the lead.



Before the game, coach always tells me, Lead us to the win, whatever that is, rebounding, assist, playing D, whatever I got to do to give us that victory, I'll do it.

With me having the ball in my hand, knocking down the free throws, that's a big step. I'm looking forward to tomorrow doing the same thing.

Q. I think coach always talks about y'all just wait and see, Gaines is explosive on offense. Today his defense and sticky hands really showed as well. Is that an underrated aspect of his game?

JAVONTE SMART: No, he's a play-maker on offense and defense. He's a point guard that block shots. Not too many point guards block shots. He guards the ball real well.

He's not a freshman no more. The shots he's taking you have to take. We trust him, we want him to knock them in. He's not a freshman no more, like I said. We believe in him. He stepped up big tonight.

Q. What worked well for you today in the defense to help slow down their offense in the second half?

JAVONTE SMART: We tried to throw a couple defenses at them, man, zone, our press. I think the man really struck. I think that was one of the best defensive halves we've played. We just got to control the boards and stuff.

But I think the man-to-man defense we played tonight was very good. I think everybody on the team bought into guarding somebody. I think that's a big step for us.

Q. The thing I noticed in these two games is they're letting you play a little bit. Physical out there. Is that something you guys are getting comfortable with doing, being more physical?

JAVONTE SMART: Yeah, some of the guys watched the games, the previous games, before we played. We saw how they was calling fouls, calling charges. Coach told us they going to let us play. We got to play through contact even, go up strong. They not going to give us anything.



We just got to go in there and earn it. That's what we've been doing, trying to earn every bucket we put up.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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Darius Days

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LSU 78, Arkansas 71

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Darius Days.

Q. For as good as y'all's offense is, today your defense won this game. Talk about the defense y'all played. Talk about Javonte in the final minute.

DARIUS DAYS: Javonte played great. Coach has been preaching defensive rebound, defensive rebound, just closing the gaps, not let them get to the rim as easy. We had a couple times where they got to the rim at will. They was getting to the basket easy a couple times.

Javonte played great up top against Notae, against all the guards up top, against Tate. He closed the game out for us with the free throws, as well.

Q. Eric Gaines for a freshman had some unreal plays in the last 3 minutes. The resilience of this kid was unreal.

DARIUS DAYS: Right. We believe in each other. He came in the game, even though he's a freshman, came in the game and he did his job. He got a big stop at the end of the game. Javonte knocked down the two free throws. That just shows what kind of young guys we have on our team, what they're going to do next year.

We love these guys. We believe in these guys.

Q. Talk about your game today. Stayed out of foul trouble, got to battle till the end. That had to please you.

DARIUS DAYS: Most definitely. Sometimes I get in foul trouble, I have to sit for a long period of time. I don't enjoy sitting on the bench because I feel like I can't help my team win.

Being out there at the end to close it out, it was a great

feeling to get that win. Everybody played well today.

Q. You get another shot at Alabama. Getting this third shot at Alabama, talk about that.

DARIUS DAYS: It's going to be a good one. Like I say yesterday, bring your popcorn, it's going to be a great one. I feel like it's going to be one for the ages. It's going to be a heavyweight fight, punch to punch.

We got to play great defense. We know they going to play great defense like they've been doing the whole year. I feel like it's going to be a shootout tomorrow. It's going to be a great game.

Q. How much would it mean to have a chance to take a tournament title home to Baton Rouge?

DARIUS DAYS: It would be great. It's been a long time since we had an SEC championship. Even not going home the first game, because I've been a part of that early part of my freshman and sophomore year here. It's great getting to the championship game. It feels really good.

Q. The idea that you guys are playing some of your best basketball right now. Even the commentators said if you have the defensive tenacity and effort that y'all showed today, not a lot of teams can hang with you guys.

DARIUS DAYS: Not really. Not at all. We're playing defense. The guards are playing great defense. Cam is playing pretty good defense. Trenderon is playing good defense. Everybody is playing great defense. Off the bench, that's a big spark to the defense as well. Everybody is doing their job. If everybody do their job, we should come home with a championship.

Q. We saw the locker room. Talk about the fun you get to have after big wins like this.

DARIUS DAYS: It's unbelievable. The music is playing. Even Coach Wade is dancing, some of the coaches are dancing. It's unlike no other. It's just fun. It just shows us, if we keep winning, we'll have great times like that again.



Just got to keep winning.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

DARIUS DAYS: Thank y'all.

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