

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Pittsburgh Panthers

Jeff Capel

Postgame Press Conference



Miami 79, Pittsburgh 73

JEFF CAPEL: First and foremost, congrats to Miami. They played better than us this afternoon. They were able to score more, and we didn't do a great job of stopping them. They have a really talented offensive group of guys, and that was on display this afternoon. Wong is as good of a scorer as we have in our league, and he creates so many things for the other guys, as well.

Congrats to them and good luck to them as they go forward.

I'm really proud of my team. This has been an incredibly difficult year on so many different levels. Obviously the very first one is COVID, and everything that everyone has had to deal with with that.

I'm really, really hopeful that when this thing is finally over with -- when I mean this thing, the season -- I am hopeful that everyone that's involved, people in TV, people in media, everyone thanks these kids, thanks these student-athletes for allowing us to be able to work this year and thanks them for their commitment, for their perseverance, for their discipline, all of the things to enable us to have a season.

I'm really, really thankful to all the workers, the doctors, the trainers, everyone that made it possible for us, that worked tirelessly throughout the year -- certainly in our program but in all the programs -- to allow us to be able to play, be able to have a season.

Like I mentioned, it's been a year unlike any that I've ever experienced, with the pandemic, and then all the things that we've gone through as a program. I wish that we could have had a little bit more time with this group because I think we could have grown into something that could be pretty good.

You know, it ends abruptly. It's cruel when it ends, and it happened to end for us today.

I'm really, really grateful to my team and really, really proud of them for the effort that we had all year.

Questions?

Q. On Saturday you had nine different guys score. Today only four. Was there something from your secondary scorers you thought was lacking or something they did defensively?

JEFF CAPEL: Nothing they did. Look, they did some things game plan wise, but Justin missed some shots that he normally makes, and those other guys really didn't get a lot of shots. So you can't make shots if you don't get a lot of shots.

Q. Justin just seemed to be pressing. Was he just having an off day?

JEFF CAPEL: Just had an off day. It happens. It's unfortunate that it happened today, but it just happens.

Q. When did you say for Femi and Nike? Both of them had season highs for you guys in the a game where their performances kept you in it when Justin was struggling.

JEFF CAPEL: Yeah, they did some really good things, especially on the offensive end. They were able to make some shots. You know, Femi was able to create some things. So really pleased for them individually. But we have a lot of work to do. They have a lot of work to do, just like all of us.

Q. What are the biggest areas of growth that you've noticed from Femi over the course of the season, and I guess especially over the past two weeks as he's stepped into a bigger role?

JEFF CAPEL: I think confidence. I think that's a big thing. I think becoming more comfortable with college basketball



and the speed and the physicality and all of those things.

I just think the confidence, the opportunity and getting used to the speed of the game and the physicality of the game.

Q. You had mentioned you wish you had more time with this group. When you look forward, what do you tell this group and what do you think will be good about it moving forward?

JEFF CAPEL: Well, I didn't talk about the future when I just spoke to them. As we let the emotions of the loss and our season end and die down, we'll begin to talk about that.

I'm excited about our future. I think we have some really good pieces. I'm very hopeful that we have a spring and summer where we can work with the guys and help them get better. That's one of the things that I think hurt us and any team that's relying on young guys. You didn't have the spring and the summer to really, really work, and we have some guys that really need to change their bodies, get stronger, get in great shape and all those things.

I look forward to having the opportunity to do that with these guys.

Q. Even though it came in a loss, the games that Femi and Nike had today, a nice launching pad into the off-season?

JEFF CAPEL: I think so. Again, I think we have really good pieces, but we have to work. We have to get better. Like I said, at the end of last year, this is a big off-season for us. Unfortunately, last year we didn't get to have the off-season. So I'm really hopeful that we're able to do that this year and really help these guys elevate their games.

Q. With the season being over now, what is the process talking to Justin about his options and what does that process entail? As a coach, what goes into those conversations?

JEFF CAPEL: Well, you know, I had a discussion with his parents probably about a month ago, maybe a little bit longer than that. I can't remember exactly when it was. When the season is over with -- let's figure out a plan from right now until the season is over with, and then when the season is over with, we'll figure out another plan.

What I try to do in all these situations -- and I've been fortunate enough to be in a lot of these situations when I was a head coach before, certainly my time at Duke and now, we're in a situation right now. The biggest thing is that Justin and I and his family have to be on the same page because there will be a lot of people trying to divide

us. And what I mean by that, there will be people saying that I'm going to try to make him come back to school for me. My thing is that Justin doesn't owe me anything. Like he needs to do what's best for him.

Because of my connections, because of people that I know that are in the NBA, I will be able to get him accurate information, not information that you see on a draft website or mock draft or any of those things. I know how those things work. I've had a lot of experience with them, and I know those things, the majority of the time, are not accurate.

I will be able to gather accurate information for him. I will share that with him in complete honesty, and his family. And then I will support them in whatever way they want me to in making the decision. That's what I've always done. I've never been a guy that's said to a kid, you should stay or you should go. That's not my decision. My job is to get the information.

Now, if they ask me my opinion, I'll give them my opinion. I'm not just going to volunteer my opinion because that's between a kid and his family.

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Q. What was different for you today? Obviously the 28 points are a career high, but what felt different out there for you, if anything?

FEMI ODUKALE: Nothing really felt different. I'm just trying to win, trying to find a win so we can keep playing. And today I just said I would do anything, and I'm going to play my game.

Q. I'm sure the result is kind of tough to stomach, but your performance personally, how do you take that into the off-season now and build of anything that could be a good building block going into next year?

FEMI ODUKALE: Yeah, I know I've got to just keep staying in the gym. I've got to make my free throws. That's what I was struggling with this year. I had a lot of confidence shooting them, but I've just got to knock them down so I can be a better player next year.

Q. What did you learn about your game this year and playing at this level?

FEMI ODUKALE: Just being mentally tough, always wait your turn, and just keep working. If you keep working, it's going to show.

Q. You have a lot of strong takes going in and drawing contact. That's something that Jeff Capel has been saying you guys need to do a lot more is finishing through contact. How much have you been working on that because it seemed like it really paid off a lot of times offensively.

FEMI ODUKALE: That's just a New York thing to me. I think from Brooklyn where I'd go to the park every day and we'd go like try to make lay-ups and just be tough. That's

just something I always had in my game.

Q. Only four guys scored today. Did you feel like maybe you had to shoulder a bigger part of the burden today because of that?

FEMI ODUKALE: Not really. I was just playing my game. Whatever I felt like was a good shot, I was going to shoot it. Whatever I felt like was a good play, I'm going to do. I didn't really recognize only four guys scored.

Q. What do you feel like have been your biggest areas of growth over the season, and I guess specifically the past two weeks since you've stepped into a bigger role?

FEMI ODUKALE: My growth is my confidence. I believe in the things, I can do more. And knowing that I could showcase my opportunity without being nervous or what people is going to think. My confidence is just building over these weeks.

Q. Miami scored 22 points in transition tonight or this afternoon. What were they doing so well so make them effective in that area?

FEMI ODUKALE: They were just grabbing the rebound and pushing it, and they were just finding the right man, and the big men were just running hard. Credit to them.

Q. We talked with Coach Capel about this a decent amount over the past two weeks, just how much confidence he has in this program moving forward. As someone who's been there a year now who's going to play a primary role for them moving forward, what makes you confident in this program and the direction it's headed?

FEMI ODUKALE: That everybody got their edge back. Everybody is hungry to win. We were more together. Everybody was just looking for each other and ready to play ball. It's just like everybody got their edge back. I wish we had more opportunities to play with this group, but the game is short.



Q. How soon will you be back in the gym putting up shots?

FEMI ODUKALE: Five minutes after I get off the floor, I'm going to go straight to the free-throw line.

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