



Florida State 95, North Florida 81  
Wednesday, December 19, 2018  
Donald L. Tucker Center  
Tallahassee, Florida

**Florida State Head Coach Leonard Hamilton**

### **Opening Statement**

"I saw a lot of things out of our team that I liked tonight. We have not been taking care of the ball the past few games, like we are capable of, but as we move into the ACC schedule you can't turn the ball over at the rate that we are. We asked our kids to start taking care of the ball and I was very pleased with how they responded. I also think our effort was really good, but you have to give UNF credit because they are a really good perimeter shooting team. I think there was a few of their three pointers that we didn't contest, but I thought we had as good of perimeter shots as they did. We have seemed to have gotten into a little bit of a shooting slump but I'm not going to get worried about M.J. (Walker), PJ (Savoy), (Devin) Vassell, and (Anthony) Polite because they are really good shooters. When you are not shooting well, and there will be games when you aren't, you have to find a way to still win. We got a lot of shots up on the board but we didn't get to the free throw line nearly as much as I would have liked, as a result of us not attacking the basket or getting the ball inside enough. Overall the most positive thing about this team is that we aren't even close to reaching our full potential and I think that we are still finding ways to have success and that's uplifting. At the beginning of the year I was flattered by all the people that said we had an experienced team, but I have five guys who we are trying to get a lot of playing time so they can have that experience. Trent (Forrest), MJ, and Savoy have been taking on new roles and they are adjusting, but if we look back on the season they have all had good games. We just have to keep working and give that same energy that we are giving, and we have to improve before ACC play no doubt. I like this team but I have to give UNF credit for coming out the way they did as they were moving the ball and making good shots. I thought they did a very good job and put themselves into a position in the first half to win the game. They are going to do well in their conference and hats off to them and hats off to JT (Escobar) for his big game for them. We have to play three games in six days so I had to make sure we got to play as many people and try to keep our players fresh. We have a very tough game on Saturday against Saint Louis. They are a very good team and will be atop their conference. Last year we played Oklahoma State down there and I thought our boys had their bags packed and were ready to go home to see Santa Claus. I believe they (Saint Louis) have our team's attention, so we will be ready to play come Saturday."

### **On huge defensive push at the beginning of the second half**

"That's why I said there was some things that I liked, we played very aggressively and were getting our hands on loose balls and playing with high intensity. UNF runs a really good movement offense where they move the ball extremely well and make good passes to create those perimeter shots. I thought we were really disruptive and we didn't allow them to get into a rhythm offensively. But because they are such a good shooting team, even though they were not running their offense as smooth as they would have liked, they still made us pay when we made some mistakes. On the other hand, I saw the potential in some of our guys to be really good with playing the style of ball I think we need to play defensively. I thought our effort was really good, but I think there are some technical things that we can do better. And I think that's going to continue to improve as we move through the season."

### **On Phil Cofer's availability on Saturday**

"It's a possibility that he will play on Saturday. Phil's injury is healed but I feel when you have a lay-off of six or seven weeks, it takes a while to get back into the rhythm he needs to be playing at. We are moving cautiously, and he probably could have played tonight, but I'm looking at what's best for him and what's best for this team. I want him

to be ready to play, but I do think he did a really good job the other night. We are going to play it by ear and he might possibly play on Saturday, but it depends on the progress he makes and how he feels in the next couple days. We want him to be completely healed and be back in shape, and sometimes when you have injuries a lot of it can be mental. We want him to be ready when we put him back into action.”

**On the mindset of Mfiondu Kabengele**

“Fi is an emotional player who thoroughly enjoys playing the game of basketball. He has a lot to prove as he was 6’6 coming out of his senior year of high school and he didn’t have one Division I offer so he went to a prep school, and he didn’t have a lot of teams recruiting him. He has a burning desire to be successful and he turns into another person when the game starts. He is in every single possession, but there have also been times in the past couple games that he has come out of the game to get (Christ) Koumadje into the game, and he didn’t want to go back in because Chris was playing so well. He is such a selfless player and he is all about winning, and there’s not a lot of guys at this level that will say, ‘Let’s get Chris back in there, because he needs more playing time.’ He has a special attitude and he’s a great teammate and he’s working really, really hard, and allowing himself to be coached. Fi is a guy who energizes the other players, and we have fun with him because he has that unique style about him and it’s a contagious spirit that really is important to this team.”

**On the potential of Mfiondu Kabengele:**

“We have to allow this maturation process to occur, as we can’t start evaluating who he is right now, we have to see consistency with his play. There is no question that the potential is there. He feeds off the importance of the game and he was ready to play tonight, and that’s what you want out of the whole team. I thought the way we came out the second half is a good example of the energy and focus we want our guys to play with every single time out on the floor. We are a team that uses a lot of players and we win games by committee and he along with some of his teammates are representing our second wave of guys extremely well.”

**On the reasoning for slow starts in games:**

“We are 10-1 and we are one of the better teams in the country. It’s not how you start the game but it is how you finish. But would I love to go out and knock someone out of the park and go 20-0 in the first part of the season? Well of course. But this is college basketball and teams aren’t going to let you win games, they have a game plan and I think you should notice that when you are nationally ranked and have a tendency of playing hard and being hard to beat at home, teams are going to come into your house and give it all they got. Sometimes you have to give the opponent recognition for their studying of game preparation and how they come out focused and ready to play, rather than worry about what we are not doing. Sure! I’d love to be 15-0 coming out of our non-conference schedule but that’s not going to happen. I want to win all the games and I think our guys have done a very good job making these game time adjustments for us to be successful. We certainly can’t allow teams off to a fast start every time, but I don’t question our energy and poise. When teams stick with their game plan, you are seeing that we aren’t able to play the way we want to. But I do think slow starts are happening all over the country as teams are preparing for their opponents and it’s all about who makes the better adjustments.”