

2018 Orange Bowl Basketball Classic

No. 11 Florida State 81 vs. Saint Louis 59

Saturday, December 22, 2018

BB&T Center

Sunrise, Florida

LEONARD HAMILTON, FLORIDA STATE HEAD COACH

Opening Statement

“Realizing that we had three games in six days, we challenged our players to start trying to be locked in to this period of time so that we could maximize our opportunity as it happens in as many games, but also not allow ourselves to allow fatigue to step in. Sometimes, when you look around the country, this time of year when guys are playing their last games before they go home for Christmas, they’re going through finals and they’re looking forward to a break. Sometimes, their minds can kind of wander. I’m very proud of the guys. I thought they locked in to the game plan, the effort that we had to give against what we call a really good basketball team. I thought our kids played extremely hard, I thought they played with a lot of determination and that was a result of the respect that we have for the type of team that their coaches put together. We watched a lot of film. They play extremely hard. They were up three with a minute and a half to go at Houston, one of the few undefeated teams left. We knew that if we didn’t come out and give our best effort that it could be a challenge. I thought our guys came out tonight with tremendous effort, focus, moving the ball, making the extra pass. We got up and there was a period there in the second half where when we got up double figure points, we could not extend the lead because they kept coming back at us. We came out in the second half and were able to take a lead and get comfortable, but once again they made a little run at us, and we were able to hold them off at the end. I’m very proud of our kids. I thought they did a good job today. They get a chance to get home and get a break. We get some guys kind of halfway healthy. It’s the first time we’ve had Phil Cofer play extended minutes. I was pleased with what I saw with him. Unfortunately, we didn’t have M.J. Walker today. He bumped his knee there. I don’t think it’s anything serious. The win-by-committee frame of mind that we operate in was obviously working well today. M.J. went down and other guys stepped in. David (Nichols) stepped in and gave us a good lift. This is the kind of team we have and hopefully, we can continue to keep moving forward. The thing I like about this team the most is the fact that we’re still trying to find ourselves. Five new players trying to work in. (We’re) just getting Phil (Cofer) back and we still have a lot of room for improvement. Hopefully, we can continue to keep getting better as the season moves on.”

How do you think David Nichols played?

“He got a little fatigued there at the end. Trent (Forrest) had a bump in the eye and he extended his minutes probably a little longer than what we normally would like to. I think he got fatigued there towards the end and turned the ball over a little bit. That doesn’t worry me at all. He’s very smart. He graduated in three years with a 3.9 grade point average from the University of Auburn. He’s a graduate student. He’s going to graduate with a master’s degree in the summer, so he’s a very bright youngster. He gives us a tremendous amount of leadership. He’s had three years of college basketball. Nothing really rattles him. It says a lot about him to have to come in, get adjusted to a new system, a new coaching staff, adjusting to new players and still be able to find a way to rally the team, make the decisions and when he sees that we need offense, he’s able to give that to us to. That says a lot about the type of player that he is.”

You had a season-high shooting percentage. What went into that?

“I was talking to coach (Stan) Jones the other day, and I think we’re a pretty good perimeter shooting team. I think two games ago, we went three-for-23 and the game before that we were something ridiculous, like 16 percent. I was beginning to wonder, but in reality, it kind of comes back as long as we continue to take good shots. That’s part of our game that we have not really displayed on a consistent basis. Tonight, I thought that we took good shots. I think that kind of comes back around. Sometimes, you’re going through those little slumps when we’re not making shots. That’s tested our ability now to execute the offense and play to your strengths when things are not falling. That’s part of the growth process these guys are going through, being able to make those kinds of adjustments.”

Is 17 minutes where you wanted Phil Cofer coming in today?

“We realized I had no predetermined idea of what he was going to be able to do. Probably a few more minutes than what I would’ve liked. Christ (Koumadje) and Mfiondu (Kabengele) both got in foul trouble early, so that put us in a situation where he had to play a little more extended minutes. They were a very strong, physical team. I thought that Phil, with his maturity, he held his own and did a good job for us.”

What did you guys do defensively to hold them to 30 percent?

“We didn’t do anything different than we normally do. We always make little adjustments in relation to who we’re playing as game plan type of adjustments. We really didn’t do anything different. I think today, our guys were just extremely aggressive and we kept trying to keep them as fresh as possible. They played with a lot of energy. We got some deflections and steals, and we were more disruptive than in some of the other games.”

Coach Travis Ford had a lot of praise for your team. He said you’re one of the best teams in the country defensively...Could you just talk about how you guys have been able to also put points on the board in beating quality teams like Purdue, LSU and Florida?

“I’m not sure I can feel that good about what we’ve done to this point because we played well enough to be successful against LSU and Purdue. Last second shots, they were hard fought games and we played well enough to win at the end. This team has not really been totally in sync. We still have a lot of growth. I think we have potential and I expect us to get better as the season goes on, but there’s only thing I’m taking away from the early part of the season to feel positive about it’s the fact that we find ways to have some level of success. We just to continue to stay focused and keep playing hard and I think we have the ability to reach our potential.”

You don’t get a lot of graduate transfers. How did you find David Nichols?

We had a decent core of guys but he graduated and was available. We had an opportunity for him to be involved as an experienced graduate student. He was looking around and we were looking around – he had other visits planned – but I think we were a good match for each other.”

Mfiondu Kabengele throws the ball off the basket and it goes in. Is that just good coaching or is it our day?

“Mfiondu has a lot of talent. He’s grown and he has the potential to do a lot of things. He shoots the ball as well as any of our perimeter guys, he’s a big, strong young fellow and he has great hands. He seems to be able to just seize the moment. He’s a guy who seems to be able to rise to the occasion. He’s on the surface of his potential and I think he has a chance to be a guy who really gives us a lot.”