

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday March 15, 2019

Leonard Hamilton David Nichols Phil Cofer

Florida State

Florida State - 69, Virginia - 59

LEONARD HAMILTON: It was obvious that our kids were really locked in for this game and a lot of it is because we have such a tremendous amount of respect for the job that Tony does and the legacy that he's built there at Virginia. They have an offensive system that obviously is extremely difficult to defend because they have so many options and they have great shooters that any time you make a mistake, they make you pay. And that's, that goes all the way back to Tony's father with that system. I'm very familiar with it and it's very difficult, but I thought our guys were locked in and trying not to give them at least the easiest opportunities, at least make them work for the shots that they had and our guys, it was difficult, we played a lot of guys, they expended a lot of energy, and that's as a result of the quality of the team, the system and the job that they have done over the years. On the offensive end, we basically felt that because they are one of the best defensive teams in the country, that we had to do things a little different than what we have done in the past and we put in a couple different sets, just so that we could get some movement and get the ball inside. Now I think that the combination of the respect we had for them and our guys being locked in executing offensively and defensively gave us an opportunity to win a very important game for us.

Q. First of all congratulations on a great win. You had a good game plan. What did you learn from the game January the 5th that were you able to carry over to tonight?

LEONARD HAMILTON: We had a lot of issues in that particular game. Phil hadn't practiced, he had come back from an injury, he was trying to get his health back and he didn't practice. Phil, Terance didn't, we didn't know Terance was even going to play until he warmed up to the point where we had put PJ Savoy in the lineup because we didn't think Terance was going to be available because he didn't practice. MJ Walker



had gotten a bumped knee, had missed two games and came down with the flu. Trent had come down, no Terance had come down and bruised his heel and Trent was suffering from turf toe. And we all go through those things. Now they totally outplayed us, they out-executed us they were much more prepared, we were not a very good basketball team that particular day. So I'm not real sure that represented the progress that I thought that we have made since then. But to their credit, it was a two-possession game with four minutes to go in the first half and we just fell apart. It went from a two-possession game to a 17-point deficit and we never could get over the hump. They actually beat us worse than the score indicated. They put their subs in the game and so we just didn't totally didn't get embarrassed, we scored about eight points and I think Tony just felt sorry for us and allowed us to get a couple buckets so we just wouldn't look like we were destroyed. But really they outplayed us every way, we weren't prepared, we hadn't really practiced and it was just one of those games that, in college basketball it happens and the day gave us, we were pretty healthy today and I thought it represented the progress that we have made during the season.

Q. You guys got off to that 1-4 start, but you've only dropped one game in the last 53 days. Other than being healthier, what's different, what changes have you made that are allowing you guys to be more successful in the second half of the season?

LEONARD HAMILTON: Well we started the season off and didn't have Phil at all for seven, eight weeks. He was our leading scorer returning from last year. Then when he came back it was a little cumbersome because he wasn't, he was healthy, well enough to play, but he wasn't in good enough shape and so it was a lot of indecision. Who is going to start, how many minutes you going to get. And we were, we had five new guys who had not played with us before that we had to integrate into our system. And we play a lot of guys, so it was a little more challenging for us to get in sync early because we're not playing seven or eight guys, we're playing 11 and sometimes 12 guys because we wanted to have a full compliment of guys with experience once we got into February and March. So we were not a very good team. I thought that the Duke game really, I didn't think we handled that emotionally. I thought that that took a, five guys who had never played, other guys who now were taking on

different roles, this is the first year Trent was starting, first year that Koumadje was starting, first year that MJ was starting. And so we were going through a development, we were growing and we were just growing and developing and I think that our play showed that. We were inconsistent, we were not shooting the ball very well, we were not defending very well because we were playing a lot of guys and when you are playing that many people it takes a little longer to get in sync. But now towards the end of the season I think that we started getting a little better and I think that, I also think that the 1-4 start brought us closer together. I thought it created a mindset that, hey look, we got to get busy. This is important to us. And our guys kind of grew and developed and I think that's one reason why we have the culture that we have now. Our guys really cheer and pull for each other.

Q. Last week you told us to put in the paper that there's, that you don't have any tickets to the folks in Gastonia. Tomorrow do you think you might have a couple extra tickets available for this one?

LEONARD HAMILTON: No, because if they were not supporting me prior to this game, I'm not going to take any phone calls.

(Laughter.) This is a business trip. I wish I could stay around to go over to Tony's Ice Cream and get some butter pecan ice cream and one of those good hot dogs with that good chili.

Q. Most people would categorize this as an upset, what would you categorize this win as?

LEONARD HAMILTON: I don't think there are any upsets in the ACC anymore. I think you guys categorize them as upsets. We're kind of an unknown team, not very many people felt that we could even have a chance to win this game. I mean that's part of the journey that we're on. When you're in a conference with the quality teams that are in the ACC, and you're a team that's trying to find a way to get into that hierarchy, it's challenging. And so sometimes you get overlooked and you don't get sometimes the proper respect, but that's, one thing about respect, you have to go earn it and hopefully this gives us an opportunity to earn a little bit more respect and maybe people will look, have a little better feeling about us in the future.

Q. David, in that, there's a 13-1 stretch there in the middle of the second half where you sort of in part took over that game. You backed somebody down, you had a drive. Can you talk about that stretch and was that something that coach told you to go do or is that something you did on your own, was that part of the strategy at that point in the game?

DAVID NICHOLS: We're just playing connected basketball, we're doing a good job of driving the ball

downhill. Phil, Terance, MJ, Trent, just getting the defense to really spread out and open up lanes to attack. Raiquan did a tremendous job doing that and then just getting off the ball early and lanes were just opening up and I was the fortunate one to get the ball when the lanes opened up and I just drove to the basket.

Q. For all three of you. What does it mean for you guys being in the title game tomorrow for Florida State, first time since 2012?

DAVID NICHOLS: It's just one of our goals this year was our goal when we started the first day of this tournament when we started ACC play to put ourselves in this position to be in the championship game, so we're excited and we're ready to just prepare for whoever we have to play.

PHIL COFER: I think with us I think we kind of knew, I guess coming up this year we got high expectations. And the main thing was just keeping our head on no matter what and win or losses and just playing through anything and just trusting these coaches.

LEONARD HAMILTON: This is the third time we have had an opportunity to play for the championship. We won it once and we lost to Duke, I think the year it was -- I can't remember what year it was -- a long time ago -- and we were fortunate to win it in 2012. And like the guys say, every team in America starts off wanting to win a championship. Every team that's in the conference. And we were one of those teams. We felt all along that we were capable, but we had to go and earn it. And I think it was an ideal situation for us because we had a chance to play one of the premier powers in the country that probably would have been ranked number one in the country Monday, had they won the game, but they're definitely top three or four team in the country and we're trying to carve out a little niche for ourselves so it gives us an opportunity to play against a good team and we were successful and playing for the championship was our goal at the beginning of the year and I feel fortunate that we are here but now we got to go get some rest and enjoy this for a minute and get ourselves mentally and emotionally prepared to go play a great team, because either one of the teams that win it's going to be a tremendous opponent.

Q. You mentioned you're going to enjoy this for a few hours but this is for Phil and David. Tomorrow you're going to go up against either Duke, Carolina, two teams you are very familiar with, just your thoughts on and not just playing for a championship but playing against one of those two programs who are at the top of their game right now.

PHIL COFER: I think the main thing is just March Madness and stuff like that we pretty much just kind of our game plan is just going out and giving it all we got and I think just all the quick turnarounds you can't really do much of scouting or going back to scouting reports, main thing is just trusting these coaches and be able to just watch a quick film and the main thing is just coming out and playing hard.

DAVID NICHOLS: It's a great opportunity and I know our coaches are going to have us ready, our green team guys, they're going to have us ready with the scout and preparation, and just got to go back, rest, watch film, and get ready for Duke or North Carolina, just two great programs and it's going to be a great opportunity.

Q. Florida State, you guys are an unusually long team, you're big at every position, obviously I'm sure your opponents noticed that. I was wondering if that's something you guys notice while you're playing that you tend to be like longer than the other team and if that affects the way you play?

PHIL COFER: I think with us I think the main thing is our defense, I think it kind of does that for us. And I think just ball pressure, being able to just get down and dirty on defense and the main thing with us is our junkyard defense and we kind of take it in each and every practice, being able to just have high hands, long arms, a lot of times try to get steals and deflections and those are the main things that win games for us.

DAVID NICHOLS: Oh, yeah, we definitely try to use our length to our advantage get in the passing lanes, getting deflections, Coach CY preaches having high hands at all times and he'll just say it over and over and over again, so he's out there reminding us how tall and how long we are.