

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday March 16, 2019

Leonard Hamilton Terance Mann Mfiondu Kabengele Florida State

Duke - 73, Florida State - 63

LEONARD HAMILTON: Tonight we lost to a team that had a spurt there in the second half where they imposed their will, their physicality on us, and we did not match it. That's to their credit. I thought they had a great game plan during that period. They came out in the second half more determined, and I didn't feel that we had that same level of focus and energy that they had.

Obviously it was one of those that they have what you call superior athletes, world-class athletes, and I thought in order to compete for us to be able to compete with that level of athlete and skill, we had to be really on point, and I thought there was a period where we were not quite on point.

We had the score cut to five and we had four possessions, we missed a one-and-one and got the ball right in the paint, and because of their athleticism and their ability to contest shots inside, we didn't finish them, and that was the last opportunity we had.

We've got to give them credit; they're a legitimate National Championship contender. My hat goes off to them. Mike always -- he always has those guys playing at a high level, and tonight the best team came away with the victory.

Q. It seemed like in the second half most of your jump shots were short, like it just seemed like you ran out of some energy. You shot 25 percent; was there anything that Duke did defensively specifically?

LEONARD HAMILTON: I thought they did a very good job with the ball pressure, probably the best that we faced all year, and that kind of took us out of rhythm because I thought Jones did a tremendous job of keeping heat on our point guard, and then I thought that gave them a little bit more of an opportunity to



pressure our wings, and it kind of took us out of rhythm where we played -- I think three of the last four teams played more contain, almost pack line type defense, and that was tremendously different, a different type of style than we played, and I didn't think we adjusted.

I didn't think our cuts were quick enough with the ball pressure, and they did a great job of getting us a little further out on the floor, and then it wasn't the jump shots that I was concerned about, it was those opportunities that we had going to the basket where we had it right there at the rim where we just couldn't finish because of their ability to contest and change our shots.

That's what great teams will do, and you got to put them in the category of being a great team.

Q. Congratulations on a great effort by your team during this tournament. I thought you guys acquitted yourselves well. I know you wanted to take home a W to Seminole Nation and of course the local folks here in Gastonia, but didn't quite happen. How big a deficit was it for you not to get more production out of Koumadje? Was that a big factor?

LEONARD HAMILTON: Well, we have had plenty of games that we've won the way we played tonight in terms of our rotation. They went small, and he just didn't match up with them having a smaller perimeter-type player for him to defend. And we have made those adjustments all year long and we've been just fine, but it wasn't the lack of Koumadje, it was more of the pluses of the Blue Devils.

Q. No one knows what the selection committee will do, but with Kentucky losing today, that would seem to create the possibility that the ACC would get three No. 1 seeds. How would you feel about that, and what kind of a confidence boost would that give your team to know that you played -- you beat a No. 1 seed and played with another one seed tonight?

LEONARD HAMILTON: Well, I think we are fairly confident because we have had a pretty good year. We can boast that we beat the ACC regular season champs, the Big Ten regular season champs and the SEC season champs. However, that won't do any good once we get in the NCAA tournament. I wish we

could use some of those points, but to be serious, that's a strong possibility.

But we have the new evaluation formula that none of us really know exactly how that works. We're having conversation because this is March Madness and everyone's making their predictions like they know exactly what's going on, but none of us will be in the room, and I'm still a little confused about the quad system and how they're going to evaluate it.

I think we have done enough to make it to the NCAA tournament, and quite frankly to be honest with you, I think the teams in our league that will go, make it to the tournament will represent us very well. I wouldn't be surprised at the end of it to see more than one team from the ACC in the Final Four. I think we are just that good and that well-coached and loaded with talent.

But from a -- I have, I wish I could speak to that. I've tried not to allow myself to get too involved because it would confuse me, I'm just kind of more concerned about what I can control and that's trying to get a team back up again who I thought they had a great year but just came up a little short.

Q. Talking about getting the team back up, you've had a real good run. Moving forward, I mean obviously you had good success in the tournament last year and have had some recent success. How much do you draw from that? And obviously you've had a good end of the season minus maybe tonight.

LEONARD HAMILTON: Every team takes on a different personality, and I'm concerned that this is another opportunity for us to grow and mature and learn that we have to adjust. But when have you a team that works all -- they come together, they care about one another, and you don't go out and play quite as well as you had hoped, but you are playing against a team that's really put it together for 20 minutes and puts you back on your heels, you got to be concerned about how you manage that, and that's what my most concerns are.

Yes, I think we had a good year. I think that we have potential to be a challenging match-up for most people once we get in the NCAA tournament.

But that's one thing about the NCAA; that's why they call it March Madness, because anything can happen. But we have experienced that all year long in the ACC where just about every game is decided by four points or less almost and we played a lot of overtime games, and so I'm just looking forward to finding out where we are, where we're going, who we're going to play and let the chips fall where they may.

Q. You traditionally play about as deep a bench as anybody. Duke barely substituted in the second half. Was it part of your game plan to try to wear Duke down in the second half, and are you surprised it didn't happen?

LEONARD HAMILTON: We play -- we try to come as close as we can to being who we are. We played as many players as we felt that we could play tonight and give ourselves the best chance to win.

Duke's a very, very good basketball team. They have -- I read somewhere they might have three guys that might be selected in the top 5 of the draft. I don't know if I've ever seen or heard anything like that. All on one college team. They have had some challenges with Zion being hurt and so on. They probably had to make some readjustment.

They're a good basketball team, even without their center. You know, they're a good basketball team, superior athletes. The game was not as fast a pace of maybe as some of the games they played, some of the games that we played, and they did what they had to do to win the game.

I think you can philosophically try to pick and choose what made the difference in the game. We just got beat by a team that had a little better talent, and they played a little better than we did tonight. I mean, that's I think the end of that story.

Q. This event is almost as old as you are, and Zion Williamson just became the fourth freshman, only the fourth freshman ever to be the MVP. You've been around a long time; how do you put his talent and excellence in perspective through the eyes of a guy who has seen a lot over the years?

LEONARD HAMILTON: I tell you, he has to be one of the top five best athletes that I've ever seen on the basketball court. He reminds me of, you remember a name I'm going to bring a name from the past named Henry Logan. Do you remember him?

Q. Barely.

LEONARD HAMILTON: Barely. You were was a child when he played. Well, you heard of Michael Jordan? This guy, he's a world-class athlete. His quickness, his speed, his strength, his power, his ability to stop and start and change direction, how fast he gets up, he changes things. I mean, and it's hard to match that level of special athlete.

And he deserves the recognition that he's getting. He's a great guy, competitive, plays with -- loves to play. He makes everybody around him better, and our hat goes off to him. So you can put him down as one of the

greatest athletes that ever has ever come through the ACC, and there have been quite a few of them.

Q. You got Duke's lead down to five late in the game and Zion got his fourth foul. It was a big call, wiped away a basket, and he's got four. And then for whatever reason you couldn't get the ball in the basket. What was it like out there? I mean from your standpoint was it fatigue? Obviously they stepped it up defensively, but can you describe what it was like trying to go against that defense and get the ball to go down?

TERANCE MANN: I just think we got good looks and didn't execute them. We got what we wanted from the drops and the time-outs and we just didn't finish them. I don't think it had anything to do with fatigue. There was bodies on us and we just didn't finish. And we missed, I think, the front end of a one-and-one, so that was key, too.

MFIONDU KABENGELE: I agree. We had some good looks, just didn't finish properly. Coach just did a great job drawing up great plays to minimize the lead, and we just didn't finish.

Q. Terance, obviously a disappointing result in the end, but when you look back on this tournament and all the success you guys have, what are you going to take away?

TERANCE MANN: Definitely experience and use that leading on to this next tournament next week. We had a good run, gave a good fight, didn't come out on top but we're just looking forward now to this next week and the tournament.

Q. Duke has not shot the ball well all season from three. They did not tonight. Why do you think they were able to overcome that just in terms of being a team that has not lost a lot of games even as they're susceptible to bad three-point shooting?

LEONARD HAMILTON: I think they're very well-coached, and Coach K has done a great job of adjusting his schemes to match his talents. And they scored 42 points in the paint. Superior athleticism, quickness and speed that challenges your ability to keep them in front of you.

I think Jones is such a smart -- I thought he had an exceptionally good game tonight. He hit a couple of, he hit one shot but he hit a couple jumpers, and he took the ball to the basket. I thought he did a great job of running the team.

I just think that that's who they are. They have the ability to get put-backs and tip-ins, and Zion can miss a lay-up, but he's almost back up tipping it in quicker than anyone can realize the shot's been missed. He's just a

superior athlete with an unusual uncanny way of following it up. And I thought we did a -- he has the ability to make tough shots.

You have players who can make open looks like most players can, but he has the ability to jump so high and move the ball around and has good hands and good touch, he finishes at a high rate. I think that makes it easy for him to be able to do things. And then when he does that, he draws so much attention that now he is going to draw two or three -- at least two guys going to the basket, which now that means someone's going to the basket naked to tip the ball in. They're really, really a hard match-up.

We thought that we could have done a pretty good job, a much better job, but tonight you just got to give them credit. They have a chance to win it. I think we will learn from it and I think we're going to be better as a result of playing against this level of caliber of team.

Q. Obviously three games in three days, but how important is it going to be to go back to Tallahassee and get some rest and get healthy before the tournament?

LEONARD HAMILTON: Well, we have a plan that we'll talk to our guys about, no doubt about that. But I think that physically we'll be fine, I just want to make sure that mentally and emotionally that we're getting that type of rest, as well, and maybe some growth and maturity with an understanding of how to appreciate the success we have had so we can draw from the experience of the season but also that we can grow and improve from the lack of our ability to match a superior team as we did tonight. Hopefully we can grow from that, mentally, emotionally as well as rest our bodies up physically.