

Postgame Quotes

Florida State 58, Michigan 76

March 28, 2021

NCAA Tournament Sweet 16

Bankers Life Fieldhouse, Indianapolis, Ind.

Florida State Senior M.J. Walker

Q. When you think back at your time at FSU, what you guys accomplished, and where this program stands as you're exiting stage left?

M.J. WALKER: I feel like I contributed to a lot of great teams and a lot of great progress here at Florida State. The growth that I've seen since my freshman year all the way up until now has been tremendous, the way that our coaches and players have been locked in. Everyone's spirit is just in the right place to continue to get better. I'm just glad I can be a part of something special, the way that we did, and all the great players that I played with, all the coaching staff and the fans, everything was just a great experience being here at Florida State. It's sad it had to be this way, but I felt like, even with all the adversity throughout this season, we still put ourselves in the best position possible to be successful. It wasn't the ending we wanted, but I feel like we just left it all out there and tried to do the best we can to make the Nole Nation proud.

Q. I assume you think this program is built for the long haul. Like you're leaving, Scottie might be leaving, who knows who else? But do you think what you guys have done and what Leonard has built has built this program for the long haul where there will be plenty more Sweet 16s in the future and maybe Elite Eights and Final Fours?

M.J. WALKER: Definitely. Our coach is just in the right place. I think that's what's going to carry this program over into that Blue Blood era that's coming soon. We're doing everything the right way, and you do that for so long, good things are going to start to come. We've been putting ourselves in position every year, contending for a National Championship. I think Coach Ham has definitely -- Coach Ham and the staff, they're doing a great job putting us in the right position to continue to build this culture the right way and taking this program to the next level. I think it's only going to go up from here. When I leave, I definitely will be looking back and just wishing the best. I just want to see the progression continue to build as I leave. You know, it's kind of one of those things where I appreciate it, I'm sad, but at the same time, I'm just so thankful and appreciative of the success we've had, and we're continuing to build through the next couple of years. You'll definitely see -- I feel like a National Championship is definitely on the way.

Q. Is there a certain memory that stands out to you at Florida State that really trumps everything else, whether on the court or off the court.

M.J. WALKER: There's a lot of things I can say. It's really just the experience, honestly. I wouldn't trade it anywhere else, just the growth that I've had as a person on and off the floor has been -- helped me in my life tremendously from the coaching staff and all the way to the players. I mean, I don't want to say there's a moment that sticks out the most, but every moment has definitely made me to who I am today and helped me going forward in life.

Q. I know you guys just talked about your four years there at Florida State. Are you considering maybe coming back for an extra year? I know everybody has that extra option now because of what happened with COVID.

M.J. WALKER: I'm definitely going to discuss that with my coaches, and we'll definitely make that decision when we get back to Tallahassee.

Q. You guys went through three separate scoring droughts of four minutes in the first half. Did you get a feeling, as the first half was proceeding, that you guys were just out of sorts and you were just having a lot of difficulty trying to find any kind of groove at all?

M.J. WALKER: I mean, we've kind of been struggling shooting in March Madness for a majority of the part. We haven't been shooting kind of how we have in the regular season. I think that Michigan did a good job with their game plan and executed defensively and offensively. The ball just wasn't going our way today. I think that we were still trying our best to execute our game plan. Sometimes the ball doesn't go the way you want, and turnovers kind of didn't help us as much. We weren't rebounding the ball as well. So not a lot of positives overpowering the negatives, and I think that's kind of what hurt us. We're a defensive type program, and we didn't do a great job defensively as well,

trying to get stops throughout the whole game and didn't control the run. So that's just something that we've got to learn from going forward, and it will definitely make us better.

Q. I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit about how different this year was, you know, with everything going on in the world and just the on and off stop and how different the tournament was. What kind of an experience was this, and how will you remember it?

M.J. WALKER: It's definitely been the toughest year in my four years here at Florida State, just from the way it started. I mean, it wasn't -- it was nowhere near the typical year that I've had here at Florida State. We didn't start training until pretty much the beginning of October, late September. The summer is usually a big, big part of our program and how we develop players. We tried to do what we could, and I'm sure other teams across -- pretty much every team across the country, whether it was men's sports, women's sports, it was tough. It was definitely one of those things you had to try to figure out and kind of just playing it by ear and continuing to adjust. But it was tough. I feel like we didn't -- one thing I'm proud of is our team and program, we didn't make any excuses for COVID and what life is throwing at us. We found a way to continue to press through and found a way to continue to figure out ways to get better, stay connected the best way we could. It was tough. I mean, not having the gym for over three or four months, really kind of five, I mean, on top of limited time in the gym throughout the whole entire season and treatment. So it's kind of one of those things you've got to continue to adjust and just take it for what it is and deal with it the best with what you've got. That's all you can ask for. I feel like we did that as a program, just tried to give it as much as we can, and we just rolled with the punches. So it was definitely one of the toughest years I've had here at Florida State mentally.

Q. M.J., you mentioned kind of the shooting struggles there at the end of the year. Is there anything you can put your finger on?

M.J. WALKER: Honestly, I think it was a lot of our defense affected my offense. A lot of times when we're in shooting slumps, we kind of take our focus a little bit off defensively, which creates some runs for the other team. We kind of let runs affect our offense -- our defense affect our offense by either getting rushed shots or not getting the shots we necessarily want. I can't really put my finger on why we shot not as well as we have during the whole season. It's kind of one of those things you've just got to -- we try to depend on our defense, honestly, to carry us. You need both if you're trying to win a National Championship, if you're going to continue to get to that next level. Honestly, we didn't do both today. Defensively, we weren't that great. We didn't take care of the ball as well as we need to, and on top of that, we weren't shooting the ball well. It's just something we've got to learn from and just figure out ways to keep that consistency later in the season as a program, offensively and defensively. So I can't really -- it's not something I can really put my finger on.