

Coaches Quotes
Florida State 57, Syracuse 96
Wednesday, March 9, 2022
Barclays Center
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Florida State Head Coach Leonard Hamilton

Opening Statement

"I'd like to congratulate Syracuse on being a lot more focused and a lot more into their game plan and executing the things that I thought was important for them to be successful. I have a tremendous amount of respect for Coach Boeheim and his system and his team. That famed two-three zone defense has really, really served well for the culture and the tradition at Syracuse. I've got to congratulate them. I'm extremely proud of our team because they have been such soldiers, and they've demonstrated such ability to overcome challenges and obstacles that I've never seen in the 50 years of coaching that I've been involved at this level. Last week against Notre Dame, I think we hit five threes in a row. Today we couldn't seem to buy one. I don't think we became a bad shooting team within a week, but I think that the circumstances that we've had to deal with this year has just raised its ugly head today and had a little bit more of an effect than some of the other games that we've played. We went 6-0 and were Number 1 in the league. It seemed like those what I call basketball demons started raising their ugly head almost every other day through all the challenges we went through. And this team stuck together, fought through it. We won our last three games, four of the last five. I can't say enough about them. I hope that our team and our fans don't allow this poor showing -- no doubt about it, it was a poor showing -- to take away from how courageous these guys have been, how they have fought through adversity and certain circumstances that I think is going to make them stronger as individuals and also make us a better team. I've never been involved where I have all five starters when you play against one team and you're successful. The next time you play them, none of the five starters is dressed. That's a little challenging for a bunch of young people who are trying to represent themselves, and our guys have really fought well. Today we got beat by a team who just played better than us in all facets. I thought they shot the ball extremely well. They executed their defense very well, and I've got to give them the credit where credit is due. What we've got to do is take our lumps with pride, go back to the drawing board, and let's see what's in store for us the remainder of the year. But, our culture is intact, our system's intact, and I'm sure we'll come back and represent ourselves the way we have over the last several years."

I'm not sure if you saw the play live or maybe on video, but in the first half, Buddy Boeheim sort of swung around. It seemed like he hit Wilkes in the stomach. There was some, I guess, question of whether it's intentional or inadvertent. But I'm wondering, A, if you saw the play, and B, if you think it was a play that was worthy of maybe some discipline?

"Yes, I saw the play. First, let me say this. There's not a better kid in the ACC than Buddy Boeheim. He's a class kid, tremendous character. He's a young man who's competitive, like everyone else, and I don't want anything to take away from how well they played and what type of fine young man he is. The game is physical. You expect guys to go out and bang and be aggressive, and if something inadvertently happens, sometimes we want to categorize it in one way or another. I've lost my composure at some times. I've made some mistakes. If there's anybody in here who has not, I'd like for you to raise your hand. So I think that even though you're -- I understand you're asking the question, but I know his family. I know his mother. I know Jim. I know what kind of kid he is, and we're going to move on and let how well they played be the information we need to talk about in relation to this game."

Earlier in the season when you guys went up to Syracuse and beat them, you guys shot the lights out from three in that game, 12 of 20. Obviously today wasn't like that. Did they do anything differently defensively, or was it just not hitting the shots?

"We did shoot the ball very well up there, and we had the same shots tonight. I think I had someone keeping statistics, and at one time, I think we were 1 for 18 or 19, and I think only three of those shots were highly contested. We had good looks. I think that there's just no doubt that, number one, they played exceptionally well. We would have had to -- as well as they played, we would have had to really play well to win the game. Caleb and Anthony, two of our better players, have practiced very little. They were not in the kind of game shape that we needed them

to be in to go out and play, and they were consistently -- after about two or three minutes, they were raising their hand to come out. Syracuse was playing -- their defense was excellent. They dropped off a couple of our guys. I think that error is where we are growing mentally and emotionally, and that's what happens to young people along the journey when you've had all these consistent challenges we've had to go through. Today we were not as confident as we were when we went to Syracuse, and we had less players. We had more guys hurt, and we shot the ball extremely well in that particular game. We had to in order for us to be successful. But that's what's happening when you're growing and developing, and that's pretty much who we are this year. Most of the time on the road we've had more veterans than we've had underclassmen. This year was completely the opposite, and I think that the way we played throughout the year was a reflection of who we are this particular year. So, yeah, we did shoot the ball well. I think they played a great defense against us. We had some open looks that didn't fall, and I think that kind of affected some of our guys a little bit. We've had games where John Butler's hit three, four threes in a row, and I think the first three he shot tonight might have been an air ball. But that's part of who we are this particular year. I think, if most of who have seen us play over the years, you probably would estimate that we'll come back and we'll be what we always have been. This year we had some challenges that we had to overcome, and we dealt with it well sometimes, and sometimes we didn't. Today was one of those days that I thought Syracuse had the mental and emotional edge on us. I thought that had as much to do with the game as anything."

As this game might be the last game of the season or you might go to the NIT, what are you going to do to get better for the next game, if there is a next game, and not have a repeat of this?

"I hope that we can get back to where we won our last three games, and I thought that we were showing some character and some progress that we're making. I still think today is one of those games where you've got to give Syracuse a lot of credit for them just being on point, offensively, defensively, with their energy and everything they did correctly. We got beat by a better team today. Last week I thought we played -- the last three games we played, I thought we played extremely well. I don't think we've gotten worse in three, four, five days. I just think that we didn't play as well as we're capable of. I'm not real sure it's all broken. I hope we have some opportunities to play some more basketball games. But that's not up to me right now. Let's just see what happens along those lines."

Coming up from Tallahassee, you had the chance to play Syracuse in Brooklyn, what's your impression that the impact having the tournament in Brooklyn this year has on the league?

"I think every basketball player in the world, not in the United States but in the world, would love to play in what is considered the basketball mecca of the world in New York City. It's a privilege and an honor to be part of this atmosphere in this great ACC tournament, and I think our guys felt that way almost to a fault. I thought that they could have been excited and could have been a little nervous, I don't know. I think that everybody is affected by different circumstances differently. We have seven first-year players, and right now some of our veterans are not here to give us the leadership. So we'll be a stronger, better team from the experience that we had today. I thought our guys were excited. I think they look forward to having the opportunity to come back again. It's unfortunate that we didn't play as well as I think we're capable of. I don't think -- but I do not want this poorly played game by us today to take away from how well Syracuse played. But I also think that with the challenges that we dealt with this year, for our guys to be clawing and scratching and scratching and clawing as well as they did and demonstrating that unconquered spirit and representing our Seminole brand, I just couldn't be prouder of them. We had a bad day against a team that played very well. Whether it was in New York or Greensboro or Atlanta, I don't think would have made that much difference."

Despite the final score, is there something that you're proud of in today's performance?

"Today's performance was just what it was. It's kind of hard for me to say that I'm proud of how poorly we shot the ball, how we didn't defend near as well as we've been accustomed to defending. Most people know that it's hard to run your offense against us. Most people know that. Today just was one of those days where we did not play as well as we're capable, and we played against a team that seemed to be at their very best, and that's a bad formula to deal with. I'm just going to say I'm proud of the way our guys have represented themselves under adverse circumstances. I don't have a lot negative to say about this team and the character that they have and how they represented. I just want to learn from this. Sometimes you can learn more from a failure than you can kind of learn from a success, and I'm hoping that we can utilize the challenge that we had in this game, that we didn't live up to our own expectations, to be a learning experience for us to move on and hopefully challenge ourselves to be a better

team. It's been a long time since we've been in this position. So we stand on some wide shoulders of guys who have set the table for us to emulate. I want to try to find the positives about this and see how we can just move on and learn and grow."

Senior Guard RayQuan Evans

Coming up from Tallahassee, you had the chance to play Syracuse in Brooklyn, what's your impression that the impact having the tournament in Brooklyn this year has on the league?

"I'm just thankful to be able to be in this opportunity. This is something that kids dream of. I had this dream when I was younger, when I was in junior college, and that's what I worked for. So to be able to be in this environment and play in a facility like this knowing the culture, the culture that comes with New York and basketball, I mean it's just a great experience. I couldn't be more thankful to be able to be a part of that. I'm just thankful to be part of this opportunity."

In your first two seasons in the program, they're really terrific seasons by the team as a whole, and then your perspective as an older player now with this team, what are the main take-aways from this year?

"I think the main take-away is you've always got to continue to grow. I kind of beat myself up sometimes because there were times I felt I could have been more of a leader. I was coming into a new role this year, so I was trying to figure it out with the younger guys. I could have been a little more focused. I could have willed them along a little better. I could have used the experience that our older guys had that I got to play with, like Trent Forrest, RaiQuan Gray, guys like that. I think there was a lot of growth from this experience and having so many young guys. I was thankful, like I said, to be part of the entire process. I still made it this far, so I couldn't be more thankful."

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