

Coaches Quotes

Florida State 81, Mercer 72

Monday, November 21, 2022

Donald L. Tucker Center

Tallahassee, Fla.

Florida State Head Coach Leonard Hamilton

Opening Statement

"I thought Mercer came in very well prepared. They moved the ball, made the extra pass, created a lot of offense for themselves with the ball movement. It's interesting that every team that you play against now has great perimeter shooters and their two guys shot over 52 percent. I was questioning whether or not the 3-point shot was what we needed, but you've given a lot of guys more of an opportunity to participate in the game and those guys came in locked and loaded from the perimeter. It's a good combination when you have a seven-foot guy in the middle who's big and strong with big hands and finishes around the basket. I thought tonight, our guys played with a little more energy consistently because they knew that they could come out of the game as we start to get a rotation. I felt like I was trying to figure out what to do with our team; it's like starting all over again and trying to integrate guys who are coming off of injuries and haven't played very much or have a lot of experience. I'd say I was pleasantly surprised, they were able to come in and make contributions. Obviously, Naheem (McLeod) gave us a big lift with his energy, he blocked five shots. He showed his presence in the lane, he made a huge difference and even when he wasn't blocking shots, he was altering those shots. We need him playing at a high level. I looked up and I couldn't believe that he really played 31 minutes. He's been averaging about 12-14 but all of his minutes were good, energetic and locked in. I thought the players themselves made some adjustments in the game. They were talking more and going through the 2-2-1 in the latter part of the game. It was their idea, that's what they wanted to do, so they take a little ownership. I think we realized that now we're close to where we want to be but I think our guys are growing and understanding that we need each other and we need to how to play to each other, create for each other. I was glad to see us create shots for each other. It's hard to get uncontested threes unless somebody creates for you. Most teams aren't going to give you open shots. They understand that (Darin) Green is a tremendous shooter so they're locking him so they aren't leaving him at all. So that should open up driving lanes for somebody else and that's something we should take advantage of. I thought that tonight he wasn't shooting as well as he normally does but him being on the floor created opportunities for other guys because when the ball came down this side they would just refuse to help on him. We set some back screens and they would leave him on the back screens. We have to learn how to utilize that. Overall, I think we showed that we have some capabilities but we're a long ways from being as good as we could be with this team."

How has Cam Fletcher with the sense of being patient within the offense and just his game developing and knocking down shots like he did tonight?

"We know that Cam has always played with tremendous effort and passion, sometimes almost to a fault that he's a really, really competitive youngster. He spent so much time over the summer improving his shot and he's not shooting very well from the free throw line but he's actually really good in practice. I think he'll be able to translate that to the game. He's become more confident, he's maintained his poise, and he's given me tremendous effort on the boards. I mean for a guy his size, it says a lot about his desire to compete. It's one of the reasons why he exhausts himself because he only has one gear. As he continues to grow and learns about how we need him to play in our system, I think he's going to continue to keep growing and improving. More than that, I think the game has slowed down for him mentally. He's thinking about the game instead of reacting and playing hard. He has a better understanding of what he should be trying to do, how he can create for his teammates, how he can fit best in our system, locking in with all the things we do offensively and defensively. He's taking an amount of pride in that. He's kind of emotional, sometimes he'll make mistakes and get down on himself. Very proud of him."

Did you sense the guys struggling with confidence at all during the losses and do you think getting a win will help at all?

“I think that’s only natural because when you have seven first-year guys, all best players on their high school teams, they come in, they’ve heard about what we’ve done in the past and the legacies these guys have left. There’s a little anxiety with that. When we went to Canada, I was kind of surprised when two of the freshman flat-out said that they were nervous. But that means that they care, their heart is in the right place. I also think though that we’re putting these first-year guys in positions where they have to be more efficient than would normally be expected of them. They know they have not had to carry the mail this early. Normally we have some third and fourth year players that are setting the table. These guys now are getting thrown right into the fire. I can tell they look anxious but I love their attitudes. The future is bright with some of them, they’re just being put into positions that a lot of guys haven’t been in the past. We’ve always had one freshman step in every now and then, but now we have a whole plethora of them on the floor. I got a lot of guys that are still learning and growing. That’s what we are, not making excuses for it so let’s just hope that we continue improving and hopefully that’ll be enough for us to have the type of basketball season that were accustomed to having.”

Was it great to see Matthew Cleveland knock down free throws like that?

“Matthew is the guy that plays extremely hard and is extremely emotional. He’s one of those guys that as he grows and matures a little bit, he’ll be a little bit more relaxed. I noticed he was tonight. He always plays hard and is always a tremendous help to the team, but I thought he was extremely confident. That’s what normally happens when you get into your sophomore year and you’re playing the major minutes that he’s playing. I didn’t think last year he was quite as emotional because he has some older guys around him that led the way. I think he’s growing and maturing and you can expect more good play from him. I mean defensively he’s just a junkyard dog. He guards inside, he guards outside, and he’s pushing the ball. When you growing and learning, you’re going to make mistakes at some points that bother you but tonight I think he handled it really well. He would make a mistake or miss a shot and not let it bother him.”