

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 7, 2023

Florida State Seminoles

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Coach Leonard Hamilton

Matthew Cleveland

Postgame Press Conference



Georgia Tech 61, Florida State 60

LEONARD HAMILTON: Congratulations to Georgia Tech, Josh. I thought they had an excellent game plan, switching the defense. At some times, great indecision on our young guys.

I thought that they made the big shots when the game was on the line, and I thought that we had the same looks on the other end, and they just didn't go in.

When you're in the ACC, every possession of every game is important, and I thought they played with a little bit more desperation, and I thought that they showed a little bit more maturity, and it gave them an opportunity to be successful.

As far as our team is concerned, obviously this has been an extremely challenging year for a lot of reasons. I think I've grown. I think I've learned a lot during this process. Sometimes as a coach you get a system going and you feel good about it, and then of course you have the same level of success in executing your plan. And then you have some unexpected bumps in the road that you're not prepared for.

You can either make excuses and don't want to acknowledge them, or you can learn from them and make sure you never let it happen again, and that's the mindset that we're on right now.

Been a long time since we've been in this position in the ACC Tournament, and as painful as it is, we're going to use this to move forward, and you don't have to worry about us being in this position again.

Questions?

Q. Coach, you spoke about the adversity this season, but we also saw you defeat Miami, the No. 1 team that came into the ACC Tournament, did that on the road. What positives, including that Hurricanes game, do you build off of as you get set for next year?

LEONARD HAMILTON: We have some really good pieces. I think we have a good foundation. To move forward, we just need to make sure we add the right ingredients to this team. Like we've never been this young before.

I looked up many times today, and sometimes we had three and four freshmen first-year players on the floor at the same time. We've always, as a coaching staff, we've been kind of -- we've taken for granted those juniors and seniors that we've always had in our program setting the tone for our first- and second-year players.

You grow accustomed to your system, and to be honest with you, sometimes you don't realize how valuable that is to have those guys that have been in your program and they've grown and developed and learned the system. In their apartments and at the dinner table and when they're hanging out playing video games, they keep imparting that wisdom to the less experienced guys.

We've been void of that, and I've learned -- one thing I've learned this year is it is so valuable to have mature and experienced people around that can fill that gap.

We haven't always had what you call five-star players, but we need to be successful with -- in the 11 guys, about the same, executing your game plan and giving tremendous effort for the whole game.

We were a little void of that this year, and we have a great value on the importance of that moving forward.

Q. I noticed that y'all played Georgia Tech two months ago to the day in January, beat them at home by seven or eight points. And interesting in the box score, it was your team with a shorter rotation. I think you played eight players that night, they played nine. Tonight they do five and a little bit of a throw-in, and I



think you had 10 or 11 guys that saw minutes. Was that part of the plan coming in to wear them down with the height and with the numbers?

LEONARD HAMILTON: Well, we didn't have an opportunity to wear anybody down tonight. We had two guys that got injured in the first half. Not to say anything about the guys with two ACLs we've got already on the bench.

That's college basketball. I look back and I see we went 50 percent from the free-throw line down the stretch there. There was six points that we left on the table that I thought would have kind of kept them at bay and allowed us to make a few mistakes, but when you're missing those free throws -- and we missed the front end of a one and one, and we had two shot fouls that we missed both of them, whatever the scenario was. But you've got to have enough experience where you're calm and you're a little bit more relaxed and you've been through that situation over and over and over, and you sit there and you knock them down.

I told our players, you can look back at a lot. Statistics can make you think that we can do anything. But in reality, it's those little things that you didn't quite accomplish the entire year.

We had about four shots they made where we didn't properly contest it. We had a couple of switches that we thought we had down pat that allowed them to get an uncontested shot at the basket. There was a couple offensive put-backs with a guy that nobody blocked out.

You go back and you evaluate the game. The most experienced players don't allow those little things to happen. Inexperienced players that have not been in that situation, they learn from the repetition of doing it over and over and over, and that's been kind of who we are this year.

Sometimes we are capable of going and doing what we did at Miami. We didn't tell them anything at halftime that we didn't tell them before the game. But they executed what we had told them at the beginning of the game in the second half, and we were able to accomplish something.

That's part of growing up. That's part of coaching. That's part of being a player. That's part of developing your chemistry and your culture.

Q. Matthew, just going off of that this season, just what your takeaways have been and what those positives are that you focus in on from the message from Leonard Hamilton.

MATTHEW CLEVELAND: Just some positives, that we're a really talented team, and we have our days where we're really good and we have our days where we're inconsistent. It's just been like an uphill battle. But we see the positives are when we're really locked in, we can play with anybody, so that's my takeaways from this year.

Q. Were you surprised to see Ja'von Franklin as the post man for Georgia Tech that he was the tallest man on the floor to start the game?

LEONARD HAMILTON: Obviously they've been playing with him for quite a while and they've been fairly successful with him playing in that position. Josh is a good coach. I think people sometimes take for granted the process that goes in establishing a winning program. They don't get to be that way overnight, and it's equally as challenging sometimes to build it overnight.

Now, there's no doubt that with the portal now where you have about 2,000 guys putting their name in the portal, you probably could fill that gap and get some experienced guys who maybe might be graduating and on the chain for whatever the reasons are, but I think we all now are in a different phase of college athletics where we've always built our program from within and developed it.

I played against Pittsburgh, for instance. They had a very down year last year, and now they're playing for the championship with five transfers in the lineup. I congratulate them for having the foresight how to utilize the new system that we're dealing with right now.

And so from my standpoint we've been very successful building from within, but now that changes a little bit. We've got to step up and take advantage of the new opportunities we have available to fill in some parts. To complement what Matt says is a pretty talented team that we need to fill in with a little bit more experience. Maybe guys that have been lifting weights for three or four years and have closed out and contested, a little stronger and a little more experienced.

It's a new day, and I think we've just got to be committed to evaluating and making sure that we don't make any mistakes in our evaluation.

Q. You've worked on this program for many years at building success, and like you said, this was an atypical year as far as where Florida State was coming into the ACC Tournament. What can you say about building that program over time, how you've seen this Florida State program truly develop into something that can be sustained success?

LEONARD HAMILTON: Well, I'd say this is a bump in the road. This is not a volcano eruption. We've got a great staff, tremendous administration. I thought our fans were there for this year like no other. I was just so pleased and impressed with the support that we got from the community, even though we were having a down year.

I think our fans stuck with us, and I think we have made some progress, but in order for us to maintain and beyond the level that we -- the standards that we have had over the years, we're going to have to do things a little differently.

You have no idea how I feel every day I get up, because I feel like the buck stops with me. We've got to be prepared for injuries. We've got to be prepared for youngsters exercising their right to make decisions to move on with their careers, even though it might not be the wisest thing to do. You've got to respect that, and I think sometimes as coaches, we don't -- we think about what's best for them and what's best for us. But sometimes we don't have the right to dictate, and we only can inform and have conversations with kids to help them navigate through the challenges that they have.

I think that's one thing I could do a better job of is having direct communication and helping guys have the right information.

But what I think maybe is logical for a program and for us personally as a staff and as a school might not be what other individuals think are important. So now you get caught with decisions being made that aren't expected, then you throw in a couple injuries, then you've got some inexperience, this could happen to you.

But I think moving forward, we will be working hard to prepare for the unexpected so that we don't ever get caught in a situation like this. You've got to prepare differently. But I think we know exactly how we need to fix this. We've got to be on it.

As far as I'm concerned, next season starts today. That's where we'll be placing all the emphasis as we move through this process.

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