

Coaches Quotes

Florida State 74, Notre Dame 70

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

Donald L. Tucker Center

Tallahassee, Florida State

Florida State Head Coach Leonard Hamilton

Opening Statement

"I can't say enough about this team, they keep finding ways to go out and represent themselves. We did not know that Matt (Cleveland) was not going to be unavailable until he started flu like symptoms on Sunday night. You never really know how an individual will respond to the medicine and yesterday he did not feel a lot better. Obviously, he still couldn't go today. Yesterday was the first day that (Anthony) Polite had any type of contact. We were not for sure that he would respond with the workout that we gave him. But, he did. His play, leadership, and experience were extremely valuable. Obviously, John Butler got us off to a good start. We shot the ball extremely well; I thought during the first part of the game he gave a big lift mentally and emotionally. We faltered there towards the end of the first half where I thought just defensively, we had some breakdowns. The second half, I thought we gave a little bit more attention to their ability to shoot threes. They had a couple looks but they missed them and for the most part, I thought we defended them well. We got some deflections and steals, got out, and got a few easy baskets. The only thing I can say is that I thought our guys – I've been telling our players to understand that we have an opportunity to prove how you handle adversity. There's a possibility that your roll is stronger, and you build your character when you deal with adversity the right way. Holding each other accountable and becoming tighter as a unit, communicating more, accepting your roll, not only holding yourself accountable but holding your teammates accountable. Obviously, we are not as deep as we have been, so you have to extend yourself where you have to. You have to reach down the sides and try to find a little something extra, because we are short on numbers. I thought our guys did all of those small things tonight."

In the first half they had 15 second chance points, the second half they only had four, just talk about how you guys got to the boards, competing there and obviously changing the narrative there?

"There is no doubt that in the first half that transition hurt us; their second chance baskets mostly were a result of us giving up offensive rebounds. I thought we adjusted in the second half, we did not give up nearly as many second chance points. I thought we improved ourselves on the boards and that made a difference in the game."

Did you feel like you guys were a little more physical in the second half?

"We didn't have a choice because they were much more aggressive going to the boards than we were. I thought we blocked out a little bit better. We got stops, we contested at the rim a lot better, and I thought we closed out, contested and did not give them nearly as many of those good looks that they got in the first half. They are such a great 3-point shooting team that when they are driving towards the basket a lot of times they are driving to pitch to guys on the perimeter. I thought we did not give up as much ground; we stayed closer to our men when they drove to the basket. They are a good basketball team, and I was surprised they did not make a three the second half."

When did you realize you were going to have Anthony Polite back and how big was that especially not having Matthew Cleveland?

"I guess it was Tuesday, when he had a little bit more contact in practice. After having some talks and conversations with him (Anthony), he convinced me that he was healthy and was pain free, and that he felt that he could go. He has been doing an awful lot of running on the side. Obviously, he got fatigued quite a few times during the game so we tried to keep him as fresh as possible, but he convinced me yesterday that he was healthy enough that he could go out and play and not do damage to his own hand."

How much of a credit do you think it is to the culture that you have established within the program that all the injuries, the streak of losses, to have kind of this late season charge, to have that still in the tank?

"We won six in a row. We was feeling kind of good about ourselves. Then all the sudden the injury bug just started raising its ugly head and that was challenging for the amount of first year players that we have to adjust to. Not really knowing who's available, you have no reference to adjust and deal with the scenario that we were dealing with. As a coaching staff, you always adjust, but it's such a different set of circumstances that we are dealing with. We were just having to be extremely aware of what type of mindset we were dealing with, and it was a little bit all over the board. We had guys stepping up in different roles. We had guys, some being motivated, some being depressed about it. Most of them were all over the place, so we were struggling a little bit to try and find a way to bring everybody together. I thought that our worst moment was when we went to Carolina, and it just seemed like Carolina had more juice than us. The fact that we have won I think four of the last five times, they were playing at a high level then we were. I thought we regrouped, challenged each other, challenged the player, and I think we are in a decent place now. From a mental and emotional standpoint, we are just trying to find a way and challenge them; not worrying about anything other than going out and executing, sticking with our game plan. I think you're right, that our culture is getting back to its normal way of operating. Obviously, we challenge them in every way. We are standing on some shoulder of guys who come in and make tremendous sacrifice for us to be where we thought we'd be this year. We've faltered a little bit and we just can't allow ourselves to feel sorry for ourselves. We have to overcome this adversity and to with the best of our abilities with our attitudes, our determination, and our effort. A lot went to unselfish spirit that I thought that we displayed tonight."

It won't show up in the box score probably, but there was a lot of loose balls that like Cam Fletcher, just guys kept plays alive, that seemed like a lot of hustle plays in this game.

"No doubt about that. He just has a way of getting his hands on balls. He'll go from one side of the court to the other, and to his athleticism and his aggressiveness he was extremely tired but I thought he reached deep down in his side and just gave us a little, whatever that extra effort was to kind of give us a chance to be successful. Those tip-ins, those tips, and keeping the ball alive so somebody else can get it was very important during the course of the game."

Redshirt Senior Guard Anthony Polite

Coach said you convinced them, I guess, this week you didn't have any more pain, how bad did you want to get back?

"It's been a process. I've been telling them that I wanted to get back and be with the guys, and the doctor finally cleared me, and I was able to be out there and get a dub today."

How tough was this seven-game stretch for you to just be a bystander, being somebody to watch, watching your team struggle here?

"It was definitely tough for everybody on the team. We went through a lot of adversity, and we all had to deal with it. We all grew from it; we all learn from game to game. We played with a lot of different lineups, there was one game where all of our starters were out, so younger guys had to step up in new roles. In last game, you could see everybody started to click. I feel like each game we learned something that we kept bringing on to the next game, and if we figure out right now, that's a good thing."

Can you discuss a little bit just your kind of your preparation and rehab to get back to this point, running, taking shots, and also, I'm curious you know using that brace on your right hand how much does that kind of affect you, if at all, during game?

"I've been staying in shape just running up and down. I'm in shape getting a lot of rehab, trying to strengthen my wrist and it was swelling down. The brace -- if I wanted to play I had to wear that to protect it (my wrist), but it limits me a little bit. But, if I could be out there and play solid defense and can contribute however I can on offense, that is what I'll be doing."

What impressed you the most about John Butler's performance tonight?

"We see him every day you know he can shoot the lights out; I think he's starting to play outside of his personality and that's something that he's capable of doing pretty much every day. He's got to keep being on him, being aggressive, and being confident, and for him, the skies the limit."