



2007 State Farm Missouri Valley Conference Tournament Game Three Press Conference

March 2

St. Louis, Mo.

Southern Illinois Head Coach Chris Lowery and Student-Athlete Quotes

Chris Lowery

Opening Statement: I thought overall we had a good performance but I really thought once we got up big and we subbed, we really relaxed and we allowed them to get back in the game. We let them push the basketball and get in transition. We struggled. We had a possession where we didn't score and took bad shots. We can't have that if we're going to continue to move forward in this tournament. Our bench has got to be much better than what it was from an efficiency standpoint and from an execution standpoint, and that's where we struggled when we had the bench guys in there.

MEDIA: Coach, overall what do you feel the key was to the win today? Matt, you were 10 for 11 at the free throw line. How huge do you believe that was today?

MATT SHAW: Any time down the stretch free throws are going to be big, especially in a tight game like it was today, and obviously hitting free throws down the stretch is huge. They were getting relatively easy buckets on us so it was key for us to make them down the stretch.

MEDIA: Matt and Jamaal both, after seeing and hearing what Drake did this morning with 101 points yesterday, did you think you'd have to really tighten your defense or that your regular defense would do the job.

MATT SHAW: We approach every game the same way regardless of who it is. We hang our hat on our defense, so you know, regardless whether they scored 100 points the first game, we focus on what we can do defensively.

JAMAAL TATUM: Yeah. It's the same thing. I definitely agree with Matt on that. We come out with the same defensive intensity every game. That's the way play, and that's the way we're going to continue to play. That's how we've been successful, you know, so many years in a row going into every game with the same defensive mindset. That's pressure and sticking to the principles and play with intensity.

MEDIA: Jamaal, do you agree with coach that once you guys got up big, you kind of lost your focus, lost that intensity, and if so, what do you do to prevent that from happening tomorrow?

JAMAAL TATUM: Yeah. I think we did lose our intensity offensively once we subbed. It was on the offensive end, too. After the game when we had the starters in and we were pushing the ball and running, when the guys came off the bench, they weren't running as hard and kind of slacked off. To change that all we have to do is make sure everybody's cut in on the bench, they have to come in and play every minute. You have to take advantage of the minutes.

MEDIA: For both you guys, when the offense did sputter, it seemed like the defense created some offense again to get you going again.

MATT SHAW: Like I said, that's what we pride ourselves on is our defense. Our pressure defense creates easy baskets for us. Any time we get a steal, a deflection, a loose ball, that feeds our offense.

MEDIA: Jamaal, could you talk a little bit about how you and also the other two guards on the starting lineup are a steadying influence on the team?

JAMAAL TATUM: Well, we go out and play hard, and everybody sees that and they want to be a part of that, and that's just not with the guards, it's with everybody on the team, and the older guys on the team that have been here before and experienced these kind of games in this atmosphere know what it takes, and the younger guys kind of see that and they, you know, buy into the system and they know what it takes, so it's kind of like a chain reaction. Everybody buys into the system and plays hard.

MEDIA: With what they did last night with 101 points overtime to have them turn around in less than -- you know, just over 12 hours, were you surprised at all that they didn't seem like they were slowing down? Did you see a little tiredness in how they played today?

MATT SHAW: Any time you play games that close together where you play at night and especially when it goes to overtime like that, in a fast paced high school game like that, obviously you're going to have some fatigue, but they played extremely hard. I didn't see any of that in them. They do a great job just playing their style of basketball, but you know, at the same time we pride ourselves in what we do, and we try to take care of the things we can.

MEDIA: Jamaal, a couple times you got wide open looks off the inbounds plays. I want to know how you got those looks.

JAMAAL TATUM: Basically I just found an open area and was waiting there and my team found me. It was nothing I did special. I was kind of tired so I was standing in an open area. Bryan and Tony made one, and midway through the second half. I think somebody else did, so my teammates made great passes to me and I stepped up and knocked the shot down.

MEDIA: Matt, I just wanted to ask you about how you asserted yourself early on in the game, taking more shots. Do you feel like you have more confidence flowing now?

MATT SHAW: I mean, I just got some open looks early. We always do a great job of finding each other when everybody's 5 open, and you know, I got some open looks early and knocked down a few, a couple easy baskets. Any time you hit early shots it's always going to give you a little more confidence, but we do a great job of finding each other when we're open.

MEDIA: Jamaal, you guys took a lot of three-point shots in the first half. You took 13, and you only took 3 in the second half. Was there sort of emphasis on getting something closer to the basket and working it into the bigs in the half?

JAMAAL TATUM: Coach really harped on that at one time. He tried to get the ball back to the ref and he said -- he apologized about it but he was really mad at us about how many 3s we was taking. We listened to him and started getting it on the rim, started getting in the net and the coach didn't have any more hard passes to throw.

MEDIA: Chris, I didn't see the hard chest pass. Was it kind of a look thing or was that in first half.

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: I wanted to throw it at one of my guys, but I figured I'd divert it to the ref. Once I threw it that hard, I almost hit him in the face. I apologized and he just laughed at me. He said I know you're upset.

MEDIA: At what point was that. Was it a couple minutes left in the half?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: It was earlier than that. They gave us wide open shots. We struggled. After I called a timeout we took another one right after I called a timeout. We ran something for Randal and had him wide open, but I talked about having a little more poise than that, being able to deflect open shots and really be patient and once we started the second half and got that run, we were very patient, you know, we took good shots inside the arc from our guards, and from that point on I thought we really played well, but you know, these guys are older. They know what we know what we need to do, and it showed today.

MEDIA: Chris, the primary goal is obviously to win the championship. One of the benefits of doing that would be an improved seed in the NCAA tournament where seeding is so important. Do you spend any time contemplating that as one of the benefits.

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: No. We're talking about playing tomorrow. We can't get ahead of ourselves. We have to focus on what's at hand and not allow ourselves to be panicked by a seed. If you do that, you get panicked, tightening up and worrying about where you're going to be seeded instead of winning a game. We need to be calm and cool at this point.

MEDIA: Coach, overall, what do you feel was the key to the win today?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: The biggest thing is we played with poise when we needed to and our kids played hard. We came out and we jumped on them and got away from them in the second half, but we had mental lapses. I told them, you know, you can't do those type of things in the NCAA tournament and that's the one thing I did move forward on, our effort. You can't go in and out of effort and what's possibly their last college game as a senior. I think they got the point with that, and that's obviously why we continued to play hard the rest of the half.

MEDIA: Just to follow up on that a little bit, you created turnovers and you had 22 points off turnovers. That's pretty efficient in terms of taking advantage of them.

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: We wanted to push. We understand that they played the night before, and we wanted to push, and if I probably would have held myself out a little longer and tried to extend, we might have got away from them, but we can't -- we need to rest our guys, too, and that was important. It doesn't matter. They have seniors. Any time you have seniors on the time with a possibility of being done, they're going to -- that overcomes fatigue, that overcomes being tired. They played very hard. You've got to give credit to them, it was a high energy, high scoring game and they had to deal with our defensive pressure and the way we play.

MEDIA: Coach, you had a 16 assist, 23 field goals. Talk about your team's ability to pass the ball and find their open teammates.

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: One thing we wrote on the board against Drake you have to value the ball because they do so many different things to disguise what they're really trying to do. They don't allow you to rest on out of bounds plays but we kind of counteracted on stuff we did against them that we haven't done before. They make it very tough for you to have any inbounds, whether it's dead ball, inline, side line, they do a tremendous job of taking stuff away from you.

MEDIA: Do you at all look at the situation when you guys didn't have your intensity when the subs were coming in in the first half, do you stress to your team hey, it's a good time to have this problem now before you get to the NCAA.

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: Everybody says you have to play a close one anyway. Now learn to play when maybe your back is against the wall, learn to play when your coach is upset with you, learn to play when things aren't going right obviously helps. We've done that all year. We've played so many close games and really gutted out wins. We've prepared ourselves in the conference and non-conference leading up to this point.

MEDIA: Chris, probably nobody gets a pass on those lapses, but was it really primarily the bench you're talking about?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: The majority of what we were trying to do when those guys came in, we made mistakes, and that's part of it. You know, some of those guys, it was their first conference tournament. They didn't understand the intensity. Some of them just came in a little bit casual. Against a team that presses, you can't be casual because they take away stuff when you jog to the ball, when you jog to an outlet, when you jog to get open against the press. That's what happened to us.

MEDIA: Coach, obviously you don't know yet who you're going to play tomorrow. Could you go ahead and size up Bradley and Northern Iowa?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: We really don't want -- we want to relax today. We don't care about what's going on out there right now. They're both good teams. We know Northern Iowa swept Bradley. That's part of that. Right now we don't care if it's anybody. We're going to watch our film and see what we did wrong and move forward and still carry our daily business just like it's a regular game.

MEDIA: Coach, could you talk about how big those shots from JT are, like the buzzer-beater and those other two he had on those plays?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: That's what we do. We ball control and we make plays at the end of the shot clock and we lay different types of styles today. We played fast, we played slow, we grinded it out and ran stuff on the shot clock for JT at the end. That's what your best guys are supposed to do. We're not afraid to go to the end of the shot clock, and that scares people when they play us because we can score on the end of the shot clock and we can hold you on your end of the shot clock.

MEDIA: Chris, to win this many games in the row in the Valley and in the regular season and in the tournament now and the consistency you played with is extremely rare. Can you just talk about how much pride you have in your team that they've been able to accomplish thus far, obviously there's more to do.

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: Early on I was extremely, extremely hard on the guys about doing things right on daily basis and doing things for each other and protecting each other. Now that's stuff we hardly talk about any more because the consistency of it being like etched in stone early on this year, last spring, this summer and fall has really carried over and into how we're playing right now, and you know, when you have good seniors like we have in Jamaal and Tony, good upper classmen like Randal and Matt and Bryan Mullins who's beyond his years, you have bench guys that come in and play as Tyrone did, we have a chance. When those guys are consistent and they play together and they listen, I tell them all the time you can be very special. When you have lapses, when you take bad shots, force the action, do anything out of our character, anybody can beat us.

MEDIA: Coach, talk a little bit about the end where Tony Young had two steals. Do you think that was the ice on the game?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: That's just him. I mean, I screamed at him about letting that guy score on him and he took the ball from him twice. That's just how he is, now. He's very competitive, you know. He's a winner. He's been here five years. He's the oldest guy on the team, and that's what makes his situation special is that he's been through so much, you know, as player, as a person that now it all culminates with him being a senior on a team that he helped take to the highest in school history. That's a very special thing for him.

Drake Head Coach Dr. Tom Davis and Student-Athlete Quotes

Dr. Tom Davis

Opening Statement: I'm really proud of this team. From the seniors, Ajay representing our senior class and Klayton, of course, representing our underclassmen, they gave us a great effort all season long. They were rapidly improving as the season went down on the stretch. I'm proud of all of them. They worked awfully hard in a year in which the Valley was so strong. I'm proud of the progress that this team has made.

MEDIA: Ajay, I know this must be tough for you. Can you talk about your two years and what you gained both as a player and a student?

AJAY CALVIN: It's been great being at Drake. I learned a lot. My junior year I was getting my feet wet. This year Coach let me do a lot. He let me tell him what's out there on the defense. I feel like I could say they're doing this so do you want me to do this. Last year was like a learning process, and he was letting me know that. I was kind of taking it hard, but now that I look back, I appreciate that, and he's taught me a lot of things. When I came out of high school, all I could do was jump. I couldn't shoot. He had me work on my jumper in the summer, work on dribbling and getting stronger in the weight room. I appreciate that.

MEDIA: For Klayton, what makes Southern's defense so tenacious? Are they different than anybody else in the league the way they play defense?

KLAYTON KORVER: The thing that's different is they don't stop coming at you. They're always there. You might get an open shot, but you're so used to having a guy there. Sometimes you rush a little bit because you're not used to being open, and just the fact that they do it for 40 minutes makes them different from anybody else.

MEDIA: Ajay, just talk about the night before you played a real open court, free-flowing, offensive-minded game. How hard is that as a player to adjust to that intense pressure in 12 hours?

AJAY CALVIN: It's very hard when you're playing up and down, and the night before you score 98 points. This game, I don't know how much we scored. It was probably like -- I don't know, but it's hard. It's hard to adjust, you know. You want to get out there and you want to go but Southern's defense is so good, you just can't.

MEDIA: Kind of as a follow up to that for both of you, was fatigue at all a factor in this game with the quick turnaround and playing such an up tempo game last night?

KLAYTON KORVER: I felt all right. I felt we were a little sluggish early on. We had some turnovers, and that was due to the change from last night's game to today's game. I thought we had the legs, but they were better than us. That's why they're ranked 11th, and that's why they won.

AJAY CALVIN: Same here. I wasn't really tired. At the beginning I was from the adrenaline, but once we got into the second half and started coming back a little bit, I felt really good.

MEDIA: Ajay, just take a quick moment to reflect on being on a team that's accomplished a lot. The first winning season in 20 years which there's a lot there to hang your hat on. Just talk about the pride you feel being part of that.

AJAY CALVIN: I feel great. You know, if it wasn't for Klayton and Josh and Al and all those other guys, I don't know where we'd be right now. We probably wouldn't be in this game. We probably wouldn't be sitting here talking, so you know, we had some great wins this year, great memories, you know, and I can just look back and be happy with everybody on this team.

MEDIA: Klayton, in the first half you had -- you started to drive and just shoot around the perimeter. Is that something we're going to see more of next year?

KLAYTON KORVER: Coach is always telling me to drive, and I don't do it very well. Tonight I put the ball on the floor a little bit and it worked, so yeah, you'll be seeing more of it next year.

MEDIA: From a coaching standpoint, Tom, just talk about the difficulty playing that open court game knowing what was coming, that 12 hours later how you tried to be ready for that.

COACH TOM DAVIS: I think the more the style varies, the more preparation time can be an advantage, you know. If you were playing two similar games, it wouldn't be as hard to get used to, so that's one of the hardest things to do, probably, to change complete tempos, and I think the idea with pressure defense on a fast break is if you can get your personnel to the level that you can force the tempo on anyone you play, that's what your goal is. We're obviously not there yet with this ball club. We can't -- we couldn't -- we weren't good enough to force Southern into a running game. They were better than we were in a lot of ways, and so that's what your goal is. If you're going to try to be a running team, you get so that you can do it against everybody and you force them to play your tempo. Southern does that as well as anybody in the country, I think, getting other teams to play at the tempo that they choose and they're very, very hard to get out of that.

MEDIA: Tom, there's talk that, speculation if Southern Illinois wins this tournament they could ascend as high as a 2 seed in the NCAA tournament, and I was wondering what you thought of that, them being a 2 seed, and second, just what that would state about maybe the changing face of college basketball, that a Valley team without a singular lottery pick talent could -- could get to, you know, could get to that high of a level.

COACH TOM DAVIS: Yeah. It would make a statement. I don't think there's any question, you know. I think you can sense the -- the media's skepticism about leagues like the Valley. Well, they don't really deserve four teams again this year and stuff like that. You can sense that in the media nationwide, so you're going to sense that same thing when it looks at -- if you're talking about the seeding of Southern, for example, so I don't think you should even worry about it, to be honest. I think where you're seeded is not as important as some other things, so I don't think Southern should worry about that, just keep doing what they're doing and then go in there and take chances. In the Valley the, the biggest thing for the Valley is how many teams can be selected. That will be even more important than the seeding process as far as the league's concerned.

MEDIA: Until you coach night in, night out in the league, would you have been skeptical?

COACH TOM DAVIS: It's a good question. I don't know. I don't know if I could answer that, you know. I never thought much about it, you know. When you've coached in a lot of different leagues, of course, I've had experience on both coasts and in the center, and I don't know that I ever thought too much about those other leagues, you know. Maybe I should have thought more, but you just think about your own situation, what you need to get it down within your framework, and I wasn't preparing myself to be a television talking head or something that had to know all this stuff. I think those are good questions, though. I think it's good stuff for fans to consider. This is a very, very exciting time of year. You see the great enthusiasm here at the league tournament, so that's the all-time most attended tournament and setting all kind of records this year with the quality of the teams, so I think the league deserves an awful lot of credit, the front office and the staff and the administrators at the various schools that are making it happen. Doug Elgin can lead, but if he doesn't have followers in the various schools, the presidents and athletic directors and the boards, the league will flounder. He's got everybody on the same page, and you see the result is a good, strong Missouri Valley right now.

MEDIA: What did you tell your team to try to get them to get that run together?

COACH TOM DAVIS: Part of it, Jennifer, was fatigue, you know, that they were giving it everything they had. They were just hitting the wall. You could see it in their faces at halftime, you know. They were pretty tired, so a lot of the timeouts were to try to get them a spot of rest, especially with Al Stewart having fouled out. That depleted our back court, you know. We didn't have quite the back court rotation that we had when we were rotating Leonard and Nick and Al and Josh in there, so that was part of it, but I think just to try to keep your head, you know, your wits about you and not panic and not hey, we're 12 down, we're 15 down, just keep playing and doing the right things. This team has learned that over the course of the year. We have panicked at various other times earlier in the year. We get behind and we just couldn't -- we just couldn't recover. This team has become a pretty good competitive basketball team.

MEDIA: There's been a lot of speculation about whether or not you'll be back next year. Have you given any thought to it, and have you come up with an answer?

COACH TOM DAVIS: Sure. You think about it all the time. The older you get, the more you think about it. I've been in it long enough to know that you've got to sort of let things happen. I worked as hard as I could to get this team to whatever level at the end of the year. At the end of year I'll take some time off and kind of regroup and think about it. We're working on recruiting. One of the advantages of knowing that a team will be taking over that we will keep continuity going, who we want, how we want, scheduling. We haven't missed a beat in terms of administration within the office and what we've got to do for the future. Then I've just got to give myself a little time to think about what's best for myself as well as the program and then go from there, so I just -- I hadn't thought that much about it, but you know, I'd be kidding if I said the thought doesn't enter your mind. I couldn't have enjoyed a group of guys more than this group. They're terrific to work with and so some years you might have a team you say, boy, I'm glad that's over with, and I'm ready to move on to something else, but boy, that wasn't the case with this team and this coaching staff. So everything, President Maxwell sitting back there and the support that we've gotten from President Maxwell, from Sandy, our athletic director, I couldn't ask for anything more. They've just been terrific and trying to help us get this program moving forward. We made some strides, but there's still a lot of work to do at Drake, so I appreciate their support and everybody involved. Thank you very much.