



2007 State Farm Missouri Valley Conference Tournament Game Seven Press Conference

March 3

St. Louis, Mo.

Southern Illinois Head Coach Chris Lowery and Student-Athlete Quotes

Chris Lowery

Opening Statement: I just thought Bradley did a tremendous job making it a slugfest, and that's how we like to play, but you know, they were tougher than us for most of the game, and we challenged our guys and just told them hey, you know, these guys are good. They're talented and very fast on the perimeter and playing a different style than anybody else in our league. We just felt we had to really, really, you know, just strap up and just guard them from the 5-minute mark on. J.T. hit some big shots. Matt Shaw played really great defense. I thought we had terrific poise from the 2-minute mark down to the end of the game.

MEDIA: How does it feel to be the hero with that last shot and sending your team to the championship game tomorrow?

MATT SHAW: I mean, it's a great feeling but at the same time you've got to recognize it was definitely a team effort. We pride ourselves on playing great team defense, you know. Several people made plays down the stretch to put us in that position, you know. I just took advantage of what they gave me. Like I said, it feels great, but at the same time, you've got to realize it was an entire team effort.

MEDIA: Matt, just to follow up on that, can you tell us how you got open on that last play and how that all developed? It seemed like you were in the right place at the right time.

MATT SHAW: We were just going to let J.T. make a play. Obviously he's our best playmaker. We rely on him to make a play for us. I think everybody kind of knew he was going to take a shot. Everybody kind of collapsed on him, so my guy left and I just went to the basket and came off the right way and I was able to put it in.

MEDIA: Can maybe all three you guys talk about how big a role the bench played today? The guys coming off the bench gave a little offensive push.

TYRONE GREEN: We started off pretty slow, but our bench picked us up and everything. We came out with energy and enthusiasm. We picked them up. Like Matt said, it was a great team effort.

JAMAAL TATUM: I think Tyrone did a good job today along with everybody on the bench, and it was a complete team effort from everybody, you know, that didn't even get in the game to everybody that did get in the game. I came out with a few turnovers and kind of looked down the bench, and I was kind of upset. I said we all got to get involved in the game somehow. People that don't normally play got up and started sharing. It was a complete team effort today from everybody, even from people that didn't get in the game.

MATT SHAW: I think the bench did a great job coming out with extreme energy and enthusiasm. Obviously we were off to a slow start at the beginning and got down a little bit. Our bench came in and gave us great energy and got us back in the game.

MEDIA: Jamaal, it looked like you took a pretty good shot to the chops early in the game and were your ribs hurting later? Can you describe what was going on?

JAMAAL TATUM: I think everything's hurting today. I was on the floor a lot. That's my type of ball game. If I don't hit the ground, something's wrong. I'm supposed to hit the ground a lot, but it was just -- I was just walking, playing defense on my guy. I guess his shoulder hit me in the chin and I bit my tongue. It surprised me because it wasn't one of those things where we were going really hard and running really fast. I stepped over, and his shoulder hit me in the chin. I don't think my ribs are hurting. We'll find out tomorrow morning.

MEDIA: Jamaal, this will be the second straight championship game for you. What will you tell your young guys tomorrow when you've got a quick turn around coming back tomorrow afternoon and playing in a championship game after such a game and so much enthusiasm and intensity as this one had?

JAMAAL TATUM: Well, first thing's first. I'll just tell them, you know, yesterday's over, you know. What we did yesterday is forgotten about. Now it's time to prepare for what we have to do for the present day to win a championship, and next is something Coach always talks about and that's not getting emotionally drunk. It's nice to have your fans cheering for us and being in a very good atmosphere, but at the same time we can't let the crowd force you into something you wouldn't normally do. You have to stay poised and do things you would do in practice and do things you're capable of doing in games.

MEDIA: Jamaal, I just want to know. How much were you feeling the corner 3 today?

JAMAAL TATUM: It fell for me today. I mean, it fell for me today. That's all I can say about it. I stepped up and shot it.

MEDIA: Tyrone, how do you feel about your first experience playing in the Missouri Valley Conference?

TYRONE GREEN: I mean, coming in, I knew it was going to be tough, but as I got the hang of it, it's a great feeling. I mean, I never thought that, you know, he told me great things was going to win championships. I never thought it would be this exciting. It's a great feeling being out there with these guys. I just want to send the seniors out on top.

MEDIA: Matt, you guys fell behind by 8 midway through the second half. Coach said he was challenging you guys' toughness. What turned it around for you guys?

MATT SHAW: I think it was getting rebounds. We struggled in the beginning of the game. We gave up a few towards the end of the game as well, but just getting tougher, fighting, getting in the right position, being in position to make plays defensively, and I think the last few minutes of the game that's what we did. We did that extremely well. We got in position where we needed to be and made plays offensively.

MEDIA: For Jamaal, you've seen the crowd size increase here obviously over the last few years but never really anything like this. I think it was more than 22,000 today. Can you describe what you took in about the atmosphere, if anything?

JAMAAL TATUM: Well, it's a great atmosphere, you know. There's only so many times in the Valley where you get an atmosphere even close to that. You go to Creighton and you get something similar to that. At our school we do a great job. We don't have 22,000, but it seems like it's 22,000 when you get caught in a game like today, everything gets exciting, and you're so caught up in the game you don't see anything, you don't hear anything. You just focus on the game.

MEDIA: Jamaal, just to add to that, did it seem like an NCAA tournament game, the atmosphere, I mean, the big crowd, the tightness of the game, more than just a conference tournament game?

JAMAAL TATUM: It definitely felt like an NCAA tournament game. When you put two NCAA caliber teams together, you're going to get that and when you bring, you know, a great fan base in St. Louis, you're going to get that, so the combination of the two will make it that.

MEDIA: Chris, at the beginning of the second half your kids picked up 6 fouls in the first 4 minutes. Bradley built up a little cushion then. What were your thoughts at that point? What were you thinking about what to tell the kids.

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: We just told them to play and just at some point you just gotta not worry about it. That's what I told them, and you know, we can't worry about refereeing. We've got to worry about winning games. Once we started doing that, I think that's when the game turned for us and we didn't worry about fouls. We worried about winning and focused totally on us and really trying to stop them and give them one shot.

MEDIA: Chris, when Jamaal gets off to the slow start that he got off to today with all the turnovers, because you had him for so long, do you get on his case, or did you just leave him alone?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: No. I got on him today. Today I told him don't make me take you out again for being selfish. He took bad shots, and he -- he really forced the action. He didn't do what we needed him to do. He tried to do it by himself. I said enough. I took him and sat him down. I didn't say anything else to him. He started cheering and got up and got his body language better and really his approach changed. I said don't do that run stuff. We'll do stuff for you. Don't try to overcompensate because you're mad at how we're playing, and he didn't. That's what special people do. We drew some things up for him. He hit the big 3 in the corner. We ran space for him and allowed him to make a play. We really wanted Matt and Randal flip-flopped because we had Randal at the three-point line. We usually have Randal guiding to the rim on that last-second shot, but it ended up working out because the guys actually stayed over their own rim. I have no idea why, but you know, Matt followed him and made a terrific shot.

MEDIA: Coach, two things stand out on the stat sheet. One, you limited Bradley to no fast break points, and two, only 6 points in the second chance opportunities. Is that a point of emphasis in your game plan? Talk about your rebounding as well.

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: They're the leading scoring team in our league, and they really do a tremendous job getting out beyond the break. Dan Ruffin is so tough to deal with, and he is so good. He can go both ways. He can hard push with his left hand, hard push with his right hand, pass with either hand. We really wanted to stay in front of him on every outlet pass and every out of bounds pass, you know, inbound as far as into transition. I thought we did a good job of that because if you don't, I mean, he gets it going. You know, he's so talented, and then also Will Franklin can do the same thing. We really just tried to wear both of them down and just wear them down and really get into their legs in the second half. Rebounding was just a group thing. Randal didn't do much else, but he really did rebound. He was out of whack, and then I played him from the 10 minute mark on. I told him I'm taking you out so you've got to act like you want to be in the game. He did. He was a big part of defensively why we were successful down the stretch.

MEDIA: Chris, yesterday you kind of shouted at the bench for not contributing. Can you talk about how today they held it together for you in the first 8 or 10 minutes?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: When they came in, they were really explosive. Opposite yesterday our older guys were kind of dragging, weren't sprinting, weren't running. They brought electricity to the building when we brought them in. Tyrone Green was guarding everybody. Wesley played hard. Five rebounds for Wes off the bench. Tony did a great job when he was in. Josh Bone was aggressive for a freshman. Right away he goes and gets a layup. That's what you've got to have. They can't have a fear factor when they check in the game. I think that's what he did yesterday, being the first game of the tournament. They were a little bit timid, a little afraid about making plays. Our older guys knew what it was about. That's why they played so well yesterday.

MEDIA: You mentioned in your opening comments that you thought Bradley outplayed you for a good part of the game today. Can you tell us what your message was to the team afterwards, after you guys won a game where you didn't play your best?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: Our message was very clear. Bradley's not going to lay down, and they've got seniors. Any time you've got seniors, they're going to play hard, and that's the key. That's what you want from your guys in the program. You want them to put everything else aside and put playing hard first, and I thought they really did a good job of that. They're just so hard to guard because they ball screen, they dribble handoff, and they play four guards all the time, and they make you play how they play, and I thought we did a poor job of trying to put our will on them in the first half and in the first five minutes of the second half. I think at the 10-minute mark we actually flip-flopped places. I thought we imposed our will on them, and we really wore them down down the stretch.

MEDIA: Chris, in the two days we've been here, Tony Young hasn't come out for interviews. I think today is his 23rd birthday. Are you managing harmony problems back stage again?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: No. I mean, they pick who is going to come out anyway, so no. He's fine. He's our senior. He's the oldest guy. I mean, he's the guy who ripped Randal's butt away from the huddle in the first half, took him off to the side and ripped him up and down and then put Randal back in the huddle. I didn't even notice until we go back out there and I'm like, you know, there was only four guys sitting down, so that's what he does. He's the guy, he got on Jamaal Tatum when he was -- that's what he does. He's our senior leader because he's been here the longest. Him and Jamaal run the team. Whatever they say, that's what goes, and that's kind of how our seniors do in our program.

MEDIA: Chris, just to go back to the last play, you were saying I have no idea why. Were you talking about why they stayed out with Randal or why Matt was where he was?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: No, because we flip flopped. Randal was in the corner. We want to penetrate from that side and shoot. Randal obviously is not a shooter outside of the arc, but that's -- I mean, at the end of the game, sometimes kids say I'm not going to let my man shoot, and then obviously with the hard penetration by Jamaal, they rotated over and Matt had a clear path to the rim, and you know, that can happen to anybody, you know. With the heat of the moment trying to stop that last play, the kids got out of whack and they run to the ball.

MEDIA: Sort of instincts kicked in for Matt or --

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: I told them to stay spaced. One of them has to stay in the corner. Randal is usually at the elbow so he can dive to the rim.

MEDIA: Coach, I was wondering if you could talk about what Randal was guarded so heavily. What you do to set up the rest of the team to score points.

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: Well, they were doubling him. They guarded us. I mean, we only scored 53 points. I mean, they guarded us, you know. Not only Randal, but they guarded everybody else, and you know, J T had a good game. He got off on them in the second half. We didn't do anything. We tried to grind them out and make them guard us. Then we go on the other end and guard them, too, and Randal had to be a good soldier. We told him you're not playing well, don't have bad body language on offense. He missed some layups. He kind of sputtered a little bit offensively, but we hung in with them and he needed the things -- he did the things he needed to do.

MEDIA: Going into the locker room at halftime being tied 26, what did you tell your guys to do coming out of the second half.

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: I told them to quit acting like babies. It was tied up, and we were acting like we were down 10. That's the key. We always talk about how to act in certain situations and then we have bad body language in the first half and things weren't going our way. You know, I didn't get enough shots. You know, I'm missing layups so I'm going to pout. You missed me when I was open. You're supposed to rotate on defense. We had too much of that going on, and I think that once we got in halftime and corrected it, it got worse to start the second half, and then you know, we got down. They jumped on us, and then, you know, we had to keep challenging in the huddle. I think when J T went to the bench, I think that changed everything because now he understood what we were talking about when you sit on the bench and watch and see your guys losing and somebody makes a play and see that emotion. Everything upstairs changes for you. I think that was the key.

Bradley Head Coach Jim Les and Student-Athlete Quotes

Jim Les

Opening Statement: First of all, there was a shame it had to be loser because that was a heck of basketball game by both teams. I'll tell you what I told my guys afterwards. They gave me everything they had. I couldn't ask for any more. When you do that, sometimes it doesn't -- you don't always get the outcome that you want, but you can certainly live with the results, and these guys played their hearts out and I'm just proud to be their coach.

MEDIA: Jeremy, can you describe the intensity out there? It seemed both ways the entire game it was just a war.

JEREMY CROUCH: It definitely was. Seeing a team for the third time, I mean, yesterday just this tournament, the Valley is very competitive. It's a good brand of basketball. It's a defensive-minded league, and yeah, you can definitely tell that both teams really wanted this one.

MEDIA: Daniel, Coach Lowery said that he thought the last stretch of the game that they wore you guys down. Did you feel that way?

DANIEL RUFFIN: No, not at all. I think we as a team did a good job this year of being in shape, and I thought we were definitely ready, you know, for anything that SIU had for us. We were definitely in shape.

MEDIA: Watching the game, it felt like it was an NCAA regional. How did you guys feel about the intensity and maybe you could share a little bit about your feelings on the NCAA.

DANIEL RUFFIN: It was a lot of emotion out there, you know. We got a few seniors, and SIU has a few seniors, and I think everybody was just laying their hearts out and leaving it on the floor today. As you can see, it was a great outcome, and you know, too bad we fell short, but everybody was just playing hard. That's what you've got to expect.

MEDIA: Jeremy, can you just describe what you saw in the last screens and what you guys were anticipating? You probably were anticipating Tatum going with the ball.

JEREMY CROUCH: Well, it happened pretty quick, you know. We expected Jamaal Tatum to have the ball, and you know, he made a good move but we stayed with him. He got a put-back, and they made a play.

MEDIA: I'm sure you guys feel your season's not over yet. Can you just kind of speak to what may lie ahead for you?

DANIEL RUFFIN: Well, we really don't know what's coming. We know we're going somewhere, and in the next few days I think we'll get a little rest and prepare for whatever -- for whatever game. I think coach will do a good job of doing that for us.

JEREMY CROUCH: Well, I mean, you know, at some point Coach has been saying this for a while. You've got to turn it over to somebody else, and we're just going to kind of wait and hope. I think we proved today that we can play with very good basketball teams, so wherever they take us, we're going to play hard and then take it from there.

MEDIA: Daniel, you were on Tatum much of the time. He got off to a really slow start and wound up with 20. How tough a player is Tatum, and what kind of things did you guys do to him to make him have a slow start?

DANIEL RUFFIN: Tatum is a hard player to stop. Our main focus was staying in tune, challenge every shot he took. He's a great player. He's hard to stop. You've got to expect him to make some shots. I think overall we did a good job on him.

MEDIA: Dan, in this tournament last year when you guys lost the championship game, Bradley still seemed to have a little bit of a happy vibe like expectation. Today you seem really glum. How would you compare the two losses?

DANIEL RUFFIN: Well, last year the loss was in the championship game, and you know, this was a semifinal, so it's a bit of a difference, but I don't think we're too down, you know, because there's still hope. You never know what could happen, so we still have a positive -- a positive vibe right now.

MEDIA: The beginning of the second half you seemed to really, you know, take the ball to the basket more. Was that a result of how they were defending the perimeter? Obviously you got them in foul trouble right away with it.

COACH JIM LES: Well, we just talked a little bit more about our spacing and, you know, some opportunities that we thought there was some holes. At least we put some pressure on their defense, and I thought a couple of times in the first half we were content to stay out on the perimeter and maybe take some contested perimeter shots whereas we wanted to at least get into the teeth of the defense and explore and then maybe kick it back out or try and finish some shots, and I thought we did a good job of getting into the bonus early.

MEDIA: Can you talk a little bit about how you forced the outside unit to make a bunch of turnovers mainly on pass breaks with the passes, throwing error passes? Do you guys think you did a good job holding down the passing lanes?

COACH JIM LES: We talked about pressure. All year long we've been a pretty good team at forcing turnovers and getting steals. We've got a lot of guys who can make plays. Team speed is one of our strengths. We try and play that.

MEDIA: Jim, looking back on that last play, do you think Shaw was in the right place at the right time, or is there something you guys could have done?

COACH JIM LES: It's tough to say until I see the tape. You know, in that instance certainly Jamaal, we played good defense, but he draws a lot of attention. I know we had some guys come over and help, and that's a prime opportunity for someone to get to the offensive boards and, you know, I like him because he's kind of a lunch pail guy. He just works hard and makes those -- those somewhat unassuming plays and comes out of nowhere and just battles and works, so yes, he was in the right place at the right time. He put himself there by, you know, attacking the glass and not giving up on the play. Certainly size isn't one of our strengths, so we've got to battle underneath the boards. With his jumping ability, he got a nice put-back.

MEDIA: Coach, can you talk a little bit about the energy that you came out with? I thought you guys clearly took the play to the Salukis early in the game.

COACH JIM LES: Our team has been playing with tremendous energy. We know that's part of who we are. We're not just going to show up and beat people. We've got to play with great intensity and great energy and enthusiasm for 40 minutes, and when we do that, we give ourselves a chance to win. That's an awfully good team we played. Our guys played extremely well. It's unfortunate we had to lose, but I can't fault the effort and energy and enthusiasm our guys put forth. If that's the case, then you can live with a game like that, in my opinion.

MEDIA: You guys got into the game certainly in the second half but couldn't capitalize on the free throws.

COACH JIM LES: I'd just say in general we had some opportunities, and you know that's the way the ball bounces sometimes. I know all those guys. They wanted in their heart of hearts to make them. They work on them. Sometimes they go in. Sometimes they don't. I certainly don't fault their effort, though.

MEDIA: Jim, this question is a little bit redundant from what you just said. Knowing how you worked at your career from Notre Dame to Omaha and everything, when you look at a fellow like Danny Adams who will live with what happened, what do you feel? What do you think?

COACH JIM LES: I just say Danny is -- he's the poster child for hard work and determination and spend time in the gym. You know what? When you do that, you've just got to live with whatever the results are, and you know, he's down right now, and he should be because it means a lot. Basketball is important. Doing well and being a good teammate, all those things he embodies, and you know I'd say hey, if he didn't prepare like I know he prepares, you know, then you can carry this with you, but hey, that kid works so hard. He's just gotta let it go. It's something that happened. He's a strong young man, and he will and we're going to need him for our next game, and he'll be ready to go.

MEDIA: Coach, what are your post season prospects? Where do you think you're headed?

COACH JIM LES: I certainly don't know, but I'd be hard pressed to say. I think we're one of the top 65 teams in the country, you know, based on our RPI, based on our strength of schedule, based on the fact that we had to play 13 games without one of our best players in our starting lineup. Those are major factors, and I hope somebody considers those as we move forward. This league is a major basketball league, I don't know, fifth, sixth, seventh in the country. We deserve four teams in the tournament, and we proved it last year, and it's funny. Last year the argument was well, what's been the history of the league and how well have they done in the tournament? I'm not a big history major, but I can go back a year and say, you know, we prove we belong and this is an awfully good league, and I hope we get the opportunity. These young men deserve it.

MEDIA: Jim, continuing with the train of thought you just had, Bradley, of course, remains a brand name in college basketball. Do you think you're picking up some positive fumes from having made a run in the tournament last year in terms of what may happen next Sunday?

COACH JIM LES: There's always speculation that teams get in on reputation, teams get in on what they've done in the past, and you know, I just hope some people in that room have a memory, a one-year memory, I should say.

MEDIA: Coach, how hard is it for the next eight days, you know, to keep the players focused, especially for the next eight days when they don't know where they're going to play next? Some of the players, it could drive them a little crazy. I mean, they can't do any more. How tough is it to keep them in the next eight days –

COACH JIM LES: I don't think it will be too bad. First of all, they have experience. Most of you were around last year. We weren't sure of our fate and what was going to happen. We gave them a couple days off to reenergize mentally and physically. We did some things with some workouts and had some fun and played some shooting games and just -- just kept practice lively and enthusiastic and fun, and this is a great time in their life. They're playing college basketball. They have a chance to play, you know. They played themselves. No one's given them anything. They gave themselves a chance to play in post season. We don't look at dreading this week. It's going to be fun. They should enjoy the fruits of their labor.

MEDIA: If you were seeding the tournament, where would you seed yourself?

COACH JIM LES: Where would I seed them? 13 was pretty lucky last year.