

March 4, 2010



Post-game interview with:



THE MODERATOR: The victorious Bears are here. They will play Wichita State at six o'clock tomorrow night.

Q. Adam, talk about that three-pointer. You had not made a basket all night. Talk about stepping up and shooting it and making it.

ADAM LEONARD: They pressured me all night real good. Their defense in the first half, they were shoving me and pushing me it was really physical. And the second half they did the same. But our players kept my head up after I missed some shots and they told in the last two minutes, I'm going to hit one, and I just stepped up and hit it. Basically it was just a routine shot.

Q. Evansville obviously was a team that struggled all season, but in the last couple weeks of the year, they were able to knock off some of the top teams; what did you see differently from the first two match-ups?

ADAM LEONARD: They were real physical. Every loose ball, they were diving on the floor and getting rebounds and working as hard as they could. We knew they were going to come out and do that. The last few weeks they have been playing real well, beating the top two teams in our

conference and we knew it was not going to be an easy push down for us. They competed real hard from the beginning to the end.

Q. For Kyle and Will both, was there some tension out there tonight, nerves trying to get past the first game?

KYLE WEEMS: I think there might have been a little bit. We got six new guys, so it's kind of new. But for the most part, I thought we did a pretty good job of just kind of settling down and getting stops when we needed to. That's been one of our lapses all season, getting one or two stops that we needed down the stretch, that one or two rebounds. I think we did a good job of that tonight.

WILL CREEKMORE: I'm not sure nerves were that big of a deal. Maybe for a couple of the new guys, but I thought they stepped up well. I mean, Evansville is a good team. They are a really tough team. They play as hard as anybody in the League. They defend and they bump you on cuts. I'm happy to get the win. We did what we've got to do and move on to tomorrow.

Q. Can all three of you talk about tonight, you were the favorites. Will you be in a different mind-set going in tomorrow, where you won't be the favorite and you'll be the underdog?

ADAM LEONARD: We really don't have anything to lose. We lost by three to Wichita at our place, two at their place; I think those were games we let get away from us. And like Coach just said a couple of minutes ago we have the opportunity to get some revenge I guess if you want to call it.

So we are going into that game confident just like any other game and just look at it just like any other game.

WILL CREEKMORE: Wichita is obviously a great team. Their record proves it, but we have proven to ourselves over the course of the season that we have lost some close games and that we can play and beat anybody. We just have to be better at closing games out. Like Kyle said, we have nothing to lose, but we respect Wichita and we are going to go after it and try to give them all they can handle. Hopefully come away with the win.

Q. Kyle, it reminded me of the Nevada game where they didn't score down the stretch; did you guys learn anything from that?

KYLE WEEMS: Coach always preaches, every 40 minutes, just stay the course of the game whether we are up 20 or down 20. Just have pride in our program, in our system and what we do, and just like I said, just stay the course and just keep grinding it out and we'll be okay.

Q. It seemed like maybe you had a little trouble getting into the flow sort of early, and then maybe the energy picked up down the stretch. Did you guys feel like maybe a little sluggish out of the gate and what turned it around towards the end?

ADAM LEONARD: Some of it has to do with Evansville because they are a grind it out. They are not going to let you run your offense smoothly. Sometimes you won't get where you're supposed to go. We have to do a better job of getting there. Evansville is a grind-it-out team. They make everything hard work for you on every possession.

Q. Can you talk about what you might have told Adam? He said his teammates told him he was going to make a big shot in the last two minutes.

KYLE WEEMS: I talked to him the whole game. Adam is the type of player that plays the game with an extreme amount of confidence, and that's why he's so good and that's why he's such a great shooter. No matter whether he misses ten in a row or he makes ten in a row; he's going to shoot that next shot the same way.

I just told him at halftime, don't worry about that first half. You're a shooter and just do what you're going to do. I told him he was going to make a big three the last time out, just six minutes left, I told him just stay the course and we are going to need you here, and he made it.

Q. Adam, will you talk about your night in general because it seemed like you could barely breathe without getting a foul or just the frustrations of being able to keep your head in it. It's not that easy.

ADAM LEONARD: It was tough. Just from getting the tip and like Will said, they are physical and pushing the screens. I missed my first five or six shots and like I said, teammates just kept telling me to keep my head in the game and the outcome of the game, I'm going to hit that big shot. It really helped when they said that.

Overall, the game, it was tough. Four fouls, I don't think I've ever had four fouls in a game. But I kept through it and Coach put it at the end. The guy that scored on me played defense and came out with the win.

COACH MARTIN: First, I'd like to acknowledge Evansville. I thought they did a great job. It's unfortunate because when you look at the records, you'll say, well, they should have beat them but no, that wasn't the case at all. This is one team we didn't want to play today. They play physical. Marty does a great job coaching them, tremendous job, and he was actually one of the guys I pick as far as coach of the year. I picked him as one of the guys, because it's not always about wins and losses. But you have so many young guys and they compete and play hard and I just thought throughout the season they got better and better. I'm really impressed with this team. They really grind it out and they are very physical.

I just like the way Marty coaches his guys. I like playing him as a competitor, but I don't really want to play him. Just true competitors of basketball, his teams battle and play hard and they go to class every day. I look at the big picture and I like what he does as a coach.

Q. You've lost so many close ones, was tonight the difference defensive stops?

COACH MARTIN: I think so. Once again, remember, for me it's always defending. Like when Adam missed those shots, I could truly care less about him missing shots, because he has the green light to score, just shoot it. I'm fine with that. My big thing is if he's defending, rebounding.

I didn't like his body language when he was missing shots, his facial expressions. He was getting down on himself. I said I don't want to be concerned whether or not you miss them, I'm not complaining, so keep shooting the ball and be

aggressive.

I told Kyle, you can't consume yourself on whether or not you're making or missing shots, you have to defend all the time and I thought our guys did that. This is the defense I am accustomed to seeing down the stretch all season. I could truly care less if we score 60,70, 50. As long win and we are defending, we'll be fine.

Q. Yesterday you talked about Weems being one of those guys that when things break down he needs to take over and he did that tonight. Can you talk about what he did that tonight?

COACH MARTIN: Weems has the ability to get to the basket. Any time you have a guy that can get to the basket, it's a major asset because in this setting like this, they take away your plays and we execute on defense, take away what they try to do. So now you have to have individual plays.

And the same thing they did for us. They take away our plays, and you have to execute our offense and he's one of those guys that can make a play off the dribble. It's tough to guard that. He did a tremendous job of getting to the basket and he's very, very aggressive at it.

Q. Obviously you guys are not done yet this year but after a 20-loss season last year, what does a 20-win season this year mean for your program?

COACH MARTIN: Well, it's just for us. I think what happens, for our guys, this is my second year as a coach at Missouri State. The university has a great history of tradition, southwest Missouri, Missouri. But for these guys, it's not about what happened in the past from the standpoint whether they won this many games in the past.

Our program is traditional. And I told these guys, this is your second season. This is where we start from here, and that's what it comes down to. As far as wins and losses, we'll be successful. We had 11 exactly to this day, we were 11-29, we are 28-11. That's just progress. At the end of the day, we haven't done anything yet in my opinion. It's 20 wins and I expect God willing, we get 20 wins every year. I think that's part of our program. I don't think you want to be 11 wins, whatever it is, 15, 20, 16. When you're in a program trying to build a champion, 20 should be expected.

Q. With the quick turnaround tonight, what do you have to do to prepare your team to

overcome that hump and meet Wichita State tomorrow?

COACH MARTIN: We'll just watch film tonight. We won't shoot around tomorrow. It's just playing basketball.

We understand Wichita State is travelling. I think probably for Wichita State, the difficult thing is trying to scout the team they are playing. That's probably the difficult thing, you see in tournaments certain teams get off to a slow start because Evansville does something, Missouri State does something different and so now you have to go and watch film. Normally, you have walk through and you can gauge them, go through it live and you don't have this, so it's tough.

I think the only thing both teams play physical, Missouri State, so that is the only gauge for us to defend. But other than that, it's tough to prepare when you really have not had a chance to go through walkthroughs and situations live.

Q. Your second season here and a lot of new guys this year, will you talk about mind-set of this tournament and going in as a favorite tonight but you'll be the underdog playing the No. 2 seed tomorrow and I'm sure you'd like to approach it the same way both nights but not quite as easy with the new guys?

COACH MARTIN: It isn't. The thing about it, I think our guys will be a little more relaxed. I'd like to think both teams were a little tense tonight, just not afraid of the opponent, but just different, unfamiliar situations.

But other than that, I think our guys will be ready to play tomorrow because we had a chance to shoot on the rims and got a feel for the atmosphere, kind of gauged it.

So from that standpoint we'll be ready to play. And what happens, it's tough to play this Evansville team, they play four guards. They are cutting and moving, and you think, well, okay, pass to 60, we should be able to go to the post-up with smaller guys, when they are grinding and banging and they have got weak side help, and they have two guys in the lane at all times. That's not easy.

Now at Wichita State you have traditional guys where you can bang and make plays and they will be physical, so I think it will be better for our big guys but it's tough for big guys to score on smaller guys. I know it don't look like it but it is.

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COACH SIMMONS: Like to give Missouri State credit. They battled. They are a tough team, and they made more plays there at the end than we did, but I'm very, very proud of our basketball team. I thought they competed extremely hard and they battled adversity a lot of different times this year. We didn't get the result we wanted, but it wasn't because of lack of effort.

Q. What kind of improvements did you see from your team this year from week one until now?

COACH SIMMONS: Well, I think we improved in most areas really. But probably the most important was just togetherness. I think through the adversity of what we had to go through with injuries and so on and so forth, I thought it brought these guys closer together. I thought they did a really good job of coming to practice every day with a good attitude to improve. I guess an area in the game of basketball I thought as the season progressed, we did a better job of taking care of the basketball and that's an important thing for us; if we do that, then more times than not, we are going to give ourselves a chance to win.

Q. This post-season, I know it's getting ahead of ourselves, but this off-season coming up, what does this team have to do to be more

competitive next year and play the way it did here in the last few weeks the entire season?

COACH SIMMONS: I think we have got to learn from our mistakes, and we have got to get a lot stronger. I mean, we've just got to get stronger, both mentally and physically. But there's a lot of individual, fundamental skills that I think right down the line that each player has to commit to get better.

And I think they will.

Q. Denver, Kyle Weems pulled you aside at the end of the game. Everybody was battling through the game; what did he say at the end?

DENVER HOLMES: I played AAU with Kyle and we are good friends and we've been talking this week just a little bit. He just told us way to finish the season out and we gave him a tough game and for a second there, he thought we had gone 4-down on him. He was just telling us that we finished the season strong and he's proud of us.

Q. The way you were playing better at the end of the season; it seemed like Lacey was 100% healthy, what impact did he have coming in and getting fully healthy?

COACH SIMMONS: I thought he did play well in these last three or four games, or more towards the end of the season there. I think he got more confidence. I thought our entire team did. I thought we played better the last month for sure. I just felt like each and every guy played with more confidence and you know, he's been -- he's battled injuries quite a bit early in the season, but really the last month or couple months, he was pretty healthy. I think it was more confidence than anything else.

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