

March 11, 2010



Georgia – 77
Arkansas – 64

An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue on with Arkansas. We'll ask Coach Pelphrey for his general thoughts on the game first. Then we'll take your questions just for the two student-athletes. And then finish up with coach. Coach, would you begin.

COACH PELPHREY: I thought that obviously a very hard fought basketball game. Came down to the last three minutes there, and we had some opportunities, like we missed a free throw. I think we turned it over, and then we had a bad shot, and Georgia was able to capitalize on it.

I think we had a chance -- it was six. We had a chance to cut it on down and didn't do it. I think we may have scored only three points from there on out.

Georgia played very well. Obviously, well coached, good players. They're getting better and better every day. They were just better than us. Tonight. And especially in the last three minutes.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take your questions for either of the two student-athletes.

Q. Marshawn, you obviously got down 11 in the second half. Just talk about what you all did to get back in the ball game and then what happened down the stretch.

COURTNEY FORTSON: Defensive intensity picked up. We started pressing full court,

started getting to them, and it caused some turnovers and let us get back in the game.

MARSHAWN POWELL: Like Courtney said, coaches told us to keep fighting, which we tried to do. Georgia is a very good -- they have very good big men, and Trey Thompkins, right? We just tried to contain him as best we could. But we just continued fighting.

Q. For both players. As the season went along, what did you like about the team, and what has maybe been most frustrating here down the stretch?

COURTNEY FORTSON: I think attitude, attitude overall. No matter what happened during the season, you know, we had the suspensions, everybody stayed positive. The attitude of this team is great, I think.

MARSHAWN POWELL: Same thing as Courtney said. Attitude-wise. But I just like the fact that we just kept working. Even though like we've been through all the things we've been through throughout the season, we just never like gave up, never rolled over for anybody. We just continued to fight.

Q. For Marshawn and Courtney both, could you talk about what you're looking forward to looking ahead to next season.

MARSHAWN POWELL: Well, for me, the off-season is going to be a big deal for me. I'm not really thinking about next season yet. I'm just thinking about all the work that I have to put in through the off-season, you know, like getting in the weight room, working on my jump shot more, working on everything that has to do with basketball. Just working on it and just trying to get better.

COURTNEY FORTSON: Yeah, like Shawn says, you know, I'm pretty sure my off-season will start within a week or so, get back in the gym and start working and prepare for the

next game or whatever.

Q. Just talk about how at one point you all were 7-4, lost the last six. Just talk about how frustrating it is and how it might push you into next year.

MARSHAWN POWELL: It's frustrating, but for me I'm going to take it as motivation for next year just to better myself over the off-season.

COURTNEY FORTSON: Yeah, I think so too. With us losing those close games, with us being 7-4 at one point and losing tough, close games. I think to have the attitude going into next year knowing we can beat those teams.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse you back to the locker room. We'll continue on with Coach Pelphrey.

Q. Coach, you talked about the last three minutes. What do you attribute that to, the way things went there?

COACH PELPHREY: Well, I think, you know, obviously, play well is a part of the game.

Like I said, we had a couple of free throws. I think we turned it over trying to get it to Mike. I think Court thought he had an opportunity there to get fouled on a three-point shot. That didn't work out too well.

It's a little bit different than the other day. The other day we had had five shots go in and out. We had some really good looks. For whatever strange reason, those balls didn't go down. But it is similar in terms of we just struggled scoring that last three minutes.

I don't know, I think you've got to give credit to Georgia, give credit to their defense.

Q. Coach, obviously missing out on the tournament for the second straight year, but just talk about where you see this team, what do you like about this team, maybe what is the number one glaring thing that needs to improve next season?

COACH PELPHREY: I think, you know, you look at our team, you look at our season, obviously we had a lot of things we had to deal with.

I agree with these guys, the attitude stayed pretty good. We talked about those things during the course of the season. I think there's a core group of values here that we got a chance to build on.

We're excited about who we've recruited. We're excited about who we've got a chance to

recruit and the piece we'll be able to add next season, obviously. And then on into the future with other recruiting classes.

I think we showed progress as a program. We put ourselves in a situation to have a chance to compete. You know, up until probably the last ten days, two weeks, we were in first or just barely out of it and had a chance.

And I think that's what you want to do. You want to put yourself in a situation where you've got a chance. You know, there were points in time in the season that were very, very difficult, and probably a lot of people didn't think that we could have a chance, and we did.

With that being said, like I said, I think progress was made, and certainly proud of some of the efforts. But it doesn't make it any easier because I understand as well, having played and coached in this league and having been a part of rebuilding situations as an assistant coach and a head coach, man, when you get there, so hard to get there. It's a tough thing to let go.

That's something we're going to have to live with this summer. Hopefully, it will be motivation because, you know, I know for our coaching staff, and obviously it sounds like from our players, that we recognize the opportunity. And we know in sports we're going to be disappointed. But it's kind of how we respond to that. And it's tough. It's very tough.

Q. You talked about the progress. Where are the areas that you all definitely have to improve in over the course of the off-season?

COACH PELPHREY: You know, I think some things that have got to happen is we need to see some guys make the freshman to sophomore jumps. Marshawn had a big year. He needs to physically change. He didn't get to do the things in the weight room he would normally do because of the broken hand.

Delvon Johnson needs to continue to grow. I think Rotnei -- all those guys are going to get better. Obviously, the recruiting is critical. We're very excited to pieces we've had a chance to sign early. We're pretty excited.

I think the overall attitude and work. The collective oneness of taking ownership and what's going on. I think that's real, real important.

I think that we have had that in the past. That's why we've done some very, very special

things, and that's what we're working so hard for right now is to have some repeat success of those.

So I think, you know, once you look at our team, we're going to have pretty good guard depth, and hopefully very talented guard depth. At least that's kind of what we're thinking right now.

We've got to obviously try to replace Mike. Somebody's going to have to step up into those roles. I think Marshawn will grow. I think Delvon will grow. It will be interesting to see how Michael Sanchez responds. And obviously what we'll get through the recruiting process.

I hope we'll be able to continue to get a little more chaotic with our style of play. I hope we have eight, nine, ten guys -- at least that's what we're anticipating.

Q. Is it tough to feel progress when you have a six-game losing streak? Are you able to kind of separate the big picture from the ending here?

COACH PELPHREY: Like I said before, I did talk about this, Bob, but I will do it again. I have no problem doing that.

I think that, yeah, you look at the whole. You do see progress because of some things that we had to deal with, because of our schedule being really difficult in terms of the start of the SEC play and getting 1-3, and then being able to respond.

So, yeah, there was progress from the prior season. Obviously, we did not make any excuses for not having everybody together. It's on us. We'll take ownership in that.

But with that being said, no, it was difficult, when you put yourself in a situation, you know, to compete for the West and not be able to finish that off.

Like I said before, I've been around this long enough as a player and a coach. That's what you want to do is repeatedly put yourself there because you understand how hard it is, and when you don't get it, it's tough.

Q. Coach, can you try to specifically just explain the gap. You know, you've made some progress this year as you've said. What's in the gap between what you did this year and where you're trying to go?

COACH PELPHREY: I think the biggest thing is, when you look at how much we lost from that basketball team, we lost 7 of 13 guys. Seven were seniors, and obviously one young man who

played as a sophomore went pro. You lose your top seven of anything, it's very, very difficult.

So some of the pieces that were recruited obviously didn't -- don't have it worked out as well as some others. That's any program. But I think, as we're going along here, I think that we've had a chance to get better in a lot of areas in terms of how hard we work, understanding of being a basketball team, work ethic. You know, the understanding of what it's about to be a student-athlete. Those challenges from some of the academic situations we've had to deal with. I think we have gotten better.

But we're nowhere near where we're going to be, make no mistake about that. It's going to be special on the floor. It's going to continue to grow and be special off the floor. That's what's exciting.

I don't know what you asked me 'how big or what's it going to take to get to where we want to go?

Q. What's in the gap from where you are right now?

COACH PELPHREY: Just continued growth. The young players need to continue to grow. We need to continue to add pieces to our roster in terms of recruiting.

Just like I said before, we lost a tremendous amount after our first year. I mean, you're talking about six seniors that were heavily decorated, guys that had won a lot of basketball games. And then maybe arguably the best one of the bunch, the sophomore that left, you know, that's a lot.

And not one recruiting class, or one or two guys is going to patch that thing up overnight. There's a lot of work to be done. We're making progress. We're excited about where we're going.

Obviously with this basketball team, certainly Mike's heading out, tremendous player. Steph's been very good for us. Stephen Cox has given us three years. I always call him the golfer, but I need to rephrase it, I need to call him a basketball player. He's played more basketball at the University of Arkansas than he has golf.

I'm very, very appreciative of what those young men's efforts are. And hopefully, there's no question, it's going to get bigger and better after them, but they can be rest assured that their hard work and efforts won't go for nothing.

Q. Specifically about Mike, what has he

meant to this program?

COACH PELPHREY: Well, you know, he's a four-year guy, which is rare to have a guy that good and have him for four years.

Michael is a team guy too. He's got a great, great IQ for basketball. He went through a phase in his career where there was a lot of frontcourt players, and he was kind of -- you know, I don't want to say took a backseat to those guys because that's not accurate, but he was respectful of the guys in front of him in his, at those times, junior and senior class.

When those guys moved on, he had something to prove, he jumped out there, he made tremendous progress. Goes all the way to second team all league, led the SEC in rebounding. Certainly had options to potentially leave school a year ago and decided to come back and further his academics and try to help lead us to a championship. Fought off a number of injuries this season.

His numbers, over 1,000 points, 600 rebounds, couple hundred blocks, whatever the case was there. Tremendous player. He's going to be very, very proud of those numbers as he goes on.

But, you know, the last part of it in terms of him wanting to win a championship, we were right there. Just couldn't play well enough to get that done. That's because of how good our league is.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports