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An interview with:



MODERATOR: For the Florida State student-athlete press conference, we have student-athletes Bernard James and Derwin Kitchen.

Q. For either of you, Notre Dame and Florida State have never met in basketball, but they had this really classic game in college football in 1993. Are either of you familiar with that or remember that?

BERNARD JAMES: Yeah, I'm vaguely familiar with it. I mean it will be good to match up with them on the basketball court as well.

DERWIN KITCHEN: I don't know about it. I was very young then and wasn't really paying attention to stuff like that.

Q. Guys, I'm curious, when coaches give you the scouting report and try to prepare you on such short notice, do they try to give you every possible scenario that Notre Dame or any other team does, or do they just give you a couple of basics and trust that you guys will know what to do when you get out there?

DERWIN KITCHEN: They basically give us the main things that we have to focus on, offense and defense. So that's basically it. They give us the main points. Like you said, we just got to use our instincts when we get out there.

Q. Defense is obviously your hallmark. Can you describe what a typical practice is like for you guys. Is it so tough that, when you get to actual game situations, that it's easier than going up against each other?

BERNARD JAMES: Yeah, I'd say so. Just from my first year here, everything in practice is a lot harder. It's like we barely score in practice just for the fact that we just lock each other up that well. Our defense works that well.

So when we get to the games, it makes it a lot easier to function defensively. But I think it also kind of throws us a little out of whack on offense because we have such a hard time in practice finding what the good options are for plays. I think that kind of carries over to games sometimes.

Q. Is it tougher to score in practice because you're allowed to play a little more aggressively, or there's just such a high level of competition that it makes it that way?

DERWIN KITCHEN: Both. You don't have refs out there, so you can be more aggressive. And just the competitive spirit.

Q. From the limited time you guys had to look at Notre Dame on film or from what you know, what jumps out as their biggest strength that you're going to try to neutralize?

DERWIN KITCHEN: They shoot the ball very well, and they're very smart. That's the main thing, that jump shot screen. They've got five guys on it. Sometimes they have five guys out there at one time that can shoot the ball from deep or from anywhere.

Then they got -- their center brings the ball up the court, which is very unusual for a college basketball team.

Q. How much of a boost was it getting Chris (Singleton) back for you guys yesterday, and what does he provide on the court?

BERNARD JAMES: It was huge. You can see it in the team's energy last night. When he checked in -- I'm not sure if everyone else knew, but I wasn't quite sure if he was going to play or not. When he checked in, I got a really big surge of energy, just kind of got my second wind. I think the rest of the team as well. Just our spirits went



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through the roof when he checked in.

Q. Does Notre Dame remind you guys of any other team you guys faced this year. And what you did against Duke, what can you take away from that game into this one tomorrow night?

BERNARD JAMES: Our coach has kind of compared them to a lineup that we faced when we played Miami just because the shooting ability and the ball handling. But I don't know -- anything else? I don't really see much of a comparison.

DERWIN KITCHEN: They're a completely different team from Duke. I guess you can take the focus and energy from the Duke game to the Notre Dame game. That's basically it. But comparing to another team, they're two very different teams.

Q. If Singleton is the best defensive player on the team, who's second best? Give us a little rundown. Give us two, three, four, five here.

DERWIN KITCHEN: OK. Singleton one. This is from my perspective. Bernard two. Mike Snaer three. Deividas Dulkys four. I'll have to say myself five. That's it. I don't know.

BERNARD JAMES: My list would be pretty much the same, but I'd bump Kitchen up to two and drop everyone else down one.

Q. And why would you -- why those rankings?

DERWIN KITCHEN: Because Bernard, I mean, it's obvious he made some -- he's been blocking shots for us all year, making key defensive -- getting us key defensive stops. But Deividas, even though he hasn't been shooting the ball as well, he's been able to take the other team's best shooter and pretty much do a pretty good job on them.

And Mike, he's our best on ball defender. And Chris, he just does everything.

Q. How much pride do you guys take in your defensive ability? I mean, obviously, highlight shows tend to focus on big offensive plays. But with what you guys do shutting people down, what kind of a feeling does that give you, and how long does that take you to buy into that when you get to Florida State?

BERNARD JAMES: When I got there, it was instant for me. The first practice, I saw how hard everyone played defense. There's no

slacking. Just from a basketball player's perspective, you never want to be the weak link.

So just the way the coaches have set everyone's mindset here, new players come in, and automatically you know you've got to play defense here.

MODERATOR: We have Florida State head coach Leonard Hamilton.

COACH HAMILTON: Obviously, when you're in the NCAA Tournament, every team that you face will be a worthy opponent. Notre Dame obviously is no exception. They've lost, what, six games this year. They've had a great, great year.

They present an awful lot of problems for teams, especially us, because they have such a diverse offensive system that challenges all your defensive principles, running a motion offense where one of the inside players initiates the offense and brings the ball down the floor. They average shooting 40 (percent of their shots from) threes a game. They don't foul you. They're shooting 39 percent from the perimeter from three.

They don't turn the ball over but 11 times a game. They're a team that's very sound fundamentally. They know who they are. They execute the offense completely within themselves every time down the floor. And defensively they don't foul or put you on the line. They make you earn what you get on the offensive side.

Very solid team. We realize that, in order for us to be successful once again, like most teams in the ACC -- I mean, in the NCAA Tournament, we need to be at our very best.

So our players have had good practices and good workouts. Our focus has been good. Once again, we need to be at our very best. I hope we feel confident, and our players will be mentally prepared to go play a team that we have a tremendous amount of respect for.

Q. Coach, they got five senior starters, two of them are fifth year guys. Can you remember the last time you faced a team this experienced? And talk about the challenges that presents.

COACH HAMILTON: I'm not really sure I've ever faced a team with this much experience on the floor. I think a couple of those guys are fifth year guys. That means they make very few mistakes. They make good decisions with the ball. They've kind of been there and done that, so to

speak.

They're familiar with just about every scenario that's been thrown at them. They'll make adjustments on the fly. They will be able to give their team great direction and leadership.

So we have to make sure we're sound and try to make as few mistakes as we can. The type of offensive system that they run, moving the ball, reversing the ball, the ball screens that penetrates and pitches and those kinds of things, it's going to create a lot of adjustments you have to make. So we're going to have to be extremely sound because teams that are very smart and execute well and understand the system as well as a mature team, as this mature team will, they take advantage of every mistake you make.

So we have not been free of making mistakes. We are almost the complete opposite. We have a number of first year players, guys that are still learning and growing and adjusting to the basketball game. We realize we need to be sound in our game plan and execute the things that we feel are our strengths and try to stay as far away from our weaknesses as possible.

Q. Coach Brey said he was really impressed with you guys' zone yesterday and compared you to Syracuse. Is that something you'll be able to use effectively tomorrow night?

COACH HAMILTON: Do you think, if I was going to use the zone, I would tell you? Do you really?

Q. I don't know.

COACH HAMILTON: We play very little zone. I think that goes without saying, anyone who's seen us play or has a scouting report on us realize that we don't play a whole lot of zone defense. We felt it was in our best interests yesterday.

But a team that shoots 40 percent of their shots are three-pointers and they shoot close to 40 percent from the floor, if we're going to play zone, we're going to have to play a bit -- extremely aggressive and be there on the catch.

And sometimes it's very difficult when you're playing against a team that's as sound with their execution as Notre Dame, and with the consistency at which they make threes, it will be extremely challenging to play zone defense against a team like this.

With that said, I doubt very seriously if we'll play a lot of zone, but I'm not going to say that we won't under certain circumstances. But I'd have to feel a lot better about playing zone against them than I do right now.

Q. Coach, can you describe what a typical practice is like for you guys in terms of your defensive intensity and just how tough you guys make it on each other. And then how do you get your guys to buy in when they get to Florida State to the defensive concept?

COACH HAMILTON: We've been consistent over the last 15 years with our defensive philosophy. And we try to make it as simple for our players to understand as possible. We have principles that govern what we do and how we can be -- how consistent we need to be with the things that are not necessarily geared towards your talents, your speeds, your athleticism. We just try to be sound with our principles and be consistent with our stance and how we see the man and the ball.

The things that we can control, they don't necessarily have anything to do with your talent, just being consistent. Our players have bought in because we've been in situations where maybe we have not been the best -- the most skilled offensive team, and maybe we've been young and somewhat inexperienced in a lot of areas. But one thing we've always felt that we could be consistent with is our defense. And so our whole system is built on principles and rules that govern what we do when the ball is in certain positions on the floor.

We have not necessarily been a team that has to have overly aggressive practices that are extremely physical. We try to be just sound fundamentally with the things that we ask them to do, and we want to be consistent with it night in and night out.

It's given the guys a lot of confidence that, if we are all on the same page defensively, that we can be successful in the execution of our defensive system.

Q. Coach, can you talk a little bit about what getting Chris back has meant for you guys and how much you expect him to play tomorrow.

COACH HAMILTON: We don't expect him to play a whole lot more than what he did yesterday, if as much. I thought the pace of the

game was such that in the second half it allowed him to not fatigue himself because the game at that point when he went in the game was more of a walk down setup, execution type game and there were so many time-outs during that stretch that I didn't feel he was getting fatigued during that period.

The way Notre Dame paces the game, even in a half-court defensive execution, you can have so many different challenges. So we've got to be careful how we utilize him. Obviously, that's the first game he's played in a month, five weeks. He's been in several practices, but they have not all -- we have not allowed him to go through every drill in practice. So we kind of learn as we go here, checking with him how he feels.

He seems as though he feels great. So I don't anticipate using him a lot differently than what we did yesterday. Here again, a lot depends on how he feels. We're kind of going on the fly a little bit. And we have in our mind what we would like to do, but the game is probably going to dictate how we utilize him.

We had a long talk yesterday prior to the game. I thought things went real well last night. So we'll see how it goes.

Q. Coach, could you talk about what makes (Ben) Hansbrough so effective and then also does he remind you of any of the really elite guards you face in the ACC with Nolan Smith and (Malcolm) Delaney?

COACH HAMILTON: Hansbrough has a court presence about him that he believes in himself. I think he -- his attitude, his presence, his focus, his demeanor on the floor allows him to motivate his teammates. His confidence is such that he wants to take the big shots. He wants to make the big decisions. He does all the little things that a coach likes to see in a player.

He's communicating with his teammates. He's hustling, giving you that 110 percent all the time while he's on the floor. He not only knocks down big shots but he gets rebounds and takes charge. He does all the dirty work that coaches like to see. He's a rarity. Even though we played against a lot of outstanding guards, I think he is one of the most competitive youngsters that I've watched perform. If you're not playing against him, you enjoy watching him play. When you're playing against him, you have to make sure you give him the proper respect that his talent and his overall desire deserves.

He's a guy that understands the game. You see him finding his teammates all over the place. He has an awareness of their system. Not only do you have to defend him when he has the ball, you know that he will find the open man if you're not defending them properly. So he presents a lot of problems. Very smart, intelligent player. And I think most coaches will feel very fortunate to have a guy like that on the team.

Q. If there's one stat on the stat sheet tomorrow besides the final score that's going to decide the winner, what do you think that is?

COACH HAMILTON: I'm not sure there's any one particular stat. Every game seems to take on a different personality. You see sometimes you win the game on the boards. I've seen a lot of games where you dominate the boards and you still lose the game.

I think, when you're playing against a team like Notre Dame, you've got to play a complete basketball game. They shoot a lot of free throws, but they don't foul a lot and give you an opportunity to get those easy baskets. They don't turn the ball over. So they don't give you an opportunity to get a lot of easy baskets from their turnovers. And they challenge you from the three-point line, which means you have to extend your defense, which gives them more opportunity to extend from the post and drive into the lane.

We feel we need to be solid in all of those areas. You can shut the inside game down and don't protect the three-point line, and you can still be in trouble. You take the three-point line away, and if you don't cover down when the ball goes inside, you can get hurt there. You know you've got to try to get to the free-throw line, but they don't foul you a whole lot. So they don't put you on the line. And they don't turn the ball over.

There's a lot of aspects to this game that we feel like we need to be at our very best. That's out of respect for them. But we played a lot of teams in the ACC that create some of these same scenarios. So I'm sure that our players are excited about playing the game, but I also know that this is a team that has a great system. They challenge you. And we need to be at our best. We're confident that we can just be who we are, and we can't change at this particular point. Hopefully, that will be enough for us to win the game.

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