

March 6, 2011



Indiana State – 60
Missouri State – 56

An Interview with:

**COACH MARTIN
ADAM LEONARD
JERMAINE MALLET
KYLE WEEMS**

THE MODERATOR: Regular season champion Missouri State Bears are with us. Tournament runners up, and we're going to ask coach Cuonzo Martin to start off with a statement about the championship game, and then we'll go to questions for the three student-athletes for Missouri State. Cuonzo, please?

COACH MARTIN: First I'd like to congratulate Indiana State for winning the championship. They did a great job throughout the weekend of competing and playing hard. So credit Coach Lansing and his team for doing such a tremendous job. Happy for our guys, but we came up short. But I told them before the game, win or lose, I'm happy for their success, and I love coaching them. I said it before the game, win or lose.

But it was a good game. We had an opportunity, in the end just came up short.

Q. Adam, how do you explain 19% shooting in the second half?

ADAM LEONARD: You know, really got to credit their defense. Again, they were physical, and they knew our set plays pretty well. We tried to run them, and they were breaking it up. But our shots just weren't falling tonight like they were the other two games, I guess. Once again, you have to credit Indiana State for that.

Q. Kyle, could you talk about that last possession there? What were you trying to accomplish? Looked like they double downed on you and you were trying to get the ball to Mallett.

KYLE WEEMS: Yeah, it was kind of a play similar to the one on Friday afternoon. Coach wanted to get an opportunity for me to tie the ballgame. To attack -- well, the left side was kind of crowded too, but when I drove it, Jermaine's man collapsed and I passed to Jermaine. And he felt a three-point opportunity wasn't the best for our team, so he tried to make a play.

Stuff like that happens. It's not his fault. There is nobody other than one of those seniors that I wanted to pass the ball to if I wasn't able to take a shot.

Q. Kyle, can you talk about a tough night shooting the ball, and what were they doing defensively that maybe frustrated you?

KYLE WEEMS: I didn't shot fake like I do on some of them. Aaron Carter got his hand on one of them. There are a couple of drives that I usually finish and I usually make.

But this is a horrible feeling. I kind of feel like I let my team down, but we'll see what happens.

Q. Jermaine, I was going to ask this of any of you guys, you guys missed a lot of shots in the lane. What was going on? Was it simply like Adam said, their defense, or was it something else?

JERMAINE MALLET: Like Adam said, they did a good job pressuring us. And Kyle just said it too. Some shots we usually make, we just didn't make tonight. That happens sometimes.

Coach Martin always tells us you have to take care of it on the defensive end to work it on the offensive end. But they came up with the win, and we've got to give them credit for that.

Q. On that last play the ball goes to Weems, he was stuck, passed it back to you. Were you ready for that ball at that point? Were you going to put it up? Did it slip out of your hands and out of bounds?

JERMAINE MALLET: Yeah, it just slipped. The play was for him to drive right, but they were playing him to the left. And my man was right there. I think Lathan or someone else was helping him, and I just ripped him. That's something that just happens sometimes.

Q. Jermaine, were you thinking three-pointer or drive on that play? What were you thinking?

JERMAINE MALLET: When I first caught it, I was thinking three. Then I saw Lathan, and I don't know who, I saw him step up. I don't know if he was bluffing or taking it away from me. But I just lost it.

Q. Do you have any thoughts of the NCAA Tournament? Now there's been a lot of talk of whether you needed to win this game or not.

ADAM LEONARD: Right now it's out of our hands. We can't really think about that. We've just got to wait. We've got at least five more games left. We've got to prepare and keep working hard at it. Whatever the outcome is, we've got work to do.

Q. Adam, you guys went through that stretch, 11 minutes and 13 seconds, but then you started rolling. You hit a three to get it within one. Tell me your thoughts at that point?

ADAM LEONARD: Yeah, it was tough. They were pressuring the whole game, up-and-down the court. We couldn't get anything rolling on offense. We got some stops finally at the end and hit that shot. So we had a chance to tie it, and they missed the free throw at the other end. It was a two-point game. Just unfortunate we couldn't get the shot up.

Q. Kyle, how long of a week is this going to be? It's a whole week until Selection Sunday?

KYLE WEEMS: It's going to be a long week. Kind of have a sour taste in our mouths, especially myself, for not shooting the ball the way I'm capable of. But coming in we didn't want to leave it in the committee's hands, but now we just

have to sit and wait. You're right, it is going to be a long week.

But like Adam said, we've just got to take a couple of days off and come back ready to work as if we're in. If we're not, then we're not. The NIT, we'll play in that. But if we are, we're definitely blessed and we'll get ready to go play whoever we're going to play. But if we're not, it's definitely going to leave a sour taste in our mouth.

Q. Obviously the foul trouble on Jermaine early in the half was costly. Adam, can you talk about how that affected the game? And Jermaine, talk about the frustration of the foul trouble.

ADAM LEONARD: It was tough, because Jermaine actually shot pretty well tonight. Shooting 7 for 15. Him getting out of the game really got us out of rhythm, because not too many of us were on point tonight for shooting. So with him getting into a little foul trouble was tough.

JERMAINE MALLET: I don't think it was frustrating. I know we have people on the bench that can come in and play. Nathan does a good job coming in and backing me up. He done a good job all year. He averaged 20 minutes a game. He does the same thing I do. He brings energy, he can rebound, shoot open shots. So I don't think there was any frustration there.

Q. How will you spend this week? If you're watching every tournament, every bracket expert, you'd probably drive yourself crazy.

KYLE WEEMS: Personally I'll spend it with my team. We'll probably have a couple days off. We'll probably need to be around each other, because in the long run everything will be okay.

But like I said before, it is left in the tournament committee's hands. And we've got to really sit back and wait and say a couple prayers, and hopefully they know the type of team we can be in that tournament, and hopefully they give us the chance.

Like I said before, it's going to be a sour taste in our mouths all week. There is no doubt in my mind that we'll stick together through it, and most of all we'll probably be together this week as a team.

JERMAINE MALLET: Like he just said, I think we should be around each other. We'll have a couple days off to rest. It will be a long week.

It's really up to the committee. Right now some analysts say we're in. Some say we needed to win this tournament to be in. So it's out of our hands.

ADAM LEONARD: Just like they said, we can be with each other like we have been all season, I think we'll be all right. We'll rest our legs a little bit and get right back to work. Because we still have another game to play.

Q. Kyle, you guys won the regular season championship for the first time ever. You won Player of the Year, Coach won "Coach of the Year." Is it unfair that the NCAA has such a big weight on that importance?

KYLE WEEMS: Hopefully they judge it the right way. And hopefully they tell us if we should be in or not. I feel we should be in, but it's not up to me. It's up to the committee, and I think, like Coach said, we've done a good job of putting ourselves in position for our name and our university to be out there.

There is no doubt in my mind that our fans most of all deserve it. I think those 12 guys in that locker room deserve it, our managers, our S.I.D., everybody in our whole program. It's not just one person. We weren't trying to do this just for ourselves. It was for the whole City of Springfield.

It's disappointing, but it's left out of our hands and that's a horrible feeling.

Q. Talk about the team's shooting 27 three pointers. Do you think your team settled a little bit tonight?

ADAM LEONARD: A few times we did, especially myself. They were flying at jump shots and we still shot them. We need to shot fake or get into the lane or get in and pitch the ball. There were a few too many shots that we maybe rushed or forced up a little bit.

Q. Do you think three hard games in three days, do you think maybe the heat got to you guys?

JERMAINE MALLETT: No, Coach Martin told us you can't be tired. The last three games you have to give it your all. We have people on the bench that came in and gave good minutes, so fatigue is nothing. Indiana State just played a good game. You have to give them credit for that.

ADAM LEONARD: They played the same number of games we had. They're tired also. We can't use that as an excuse. Just tonight they were a better team.

Q. Your assessment on the shooting problems. Indiana State doing anything different defensively?

COACH MARTIN: They just did a good job defending, a solid job. Nothing we hadn't seen in the previous two games. Those are the shots -- some shots were probably rushed, but for the most parts they were shots we missed. Got around the basket one-on-one, but couldn't capitalize on some shots. I thought we missed five or six lay-ups around the basket.

But other than that, I thought they did a solid job, but nothing that we hadn't seen.

Q. How tough was it to start that second half with Mallett on the bench with the fouls and they kept going and going and going?

COACH MARTIN: It was kind of tough because he was doing a really good job of penetrating, shooting the ball. We were kind of post him up or going through him, so to speak. When he got that foul, it was just tough because he was the aggressor. The way they were playing Kyle and Adam, hugging up on him, Jermaine's the guy that can go off the dribble and make plays. Same way with Nafis. So we had to make adjustments and it was tough.

Q. You added more players to the lineup tonight. Was it maybe fatigue setting in or getting more players rest or what?

COACH MARTIN: I don't know if fatigue set in. I imagine three games in three days, both teams are playing. You can't use that as an excuse. Boy, Nick put them in to give Nafis a blow. And one of those guys got a foul. But at the end of the game it's more or less trying to get a foul or get a steal.

Q. Could you go through that last play about going to Weems in the back of Mallett?

COACH MARTIN: The key was to go to Weems. We put Caleb and will in the game so the shot goes up to be to crash the glass. They played him to the left knee. He shot faked hit Jermaine. Jermaine had a shot fake, and it went. He just turned the ball over the.

The key was to go to Weems. He was isolated, shooting up and having those two bigs and able to rebound the ball.

Q. Could you talk about that last time out, what did you tell your players to do?

COACH MARTIN: We were down with a 2.4 second foul. Just really trying to get a steal more than anything to make a play. We've got a 5-second count on the first one. The second time Kyle had an opportunity and he fouled. So really just tried to get a quick foul if you can't get a steal.

Q. You had such a great regular season. You're going to be sitting here for a week wondering if you'll get the call you wanted to get. For you is it kind of unfair that a school in the valley that can do pretty much everything right all year is sort of hanging by a thread here? Whereas maybe the so-called power conference, the team may finish 500, may lose a bunch of games late. They probably have a better chance of getting it because of the system the way it is? Just your general thoughts on it. Do you feel it's unfair in a sense?

COACH MARTIN: The one thing I struggle with while I'm sitting here is whether Creighton's head coach or anybody in the Valley, this is a tough league. This is one of the Top 10 conferences in the country in my opinion. 15-3 in a tough, physical lead speaks for itself. 25-8 for this league. Just the work we put in. There is a set criteria. Can anybody say this is the criteria for getting into the NCAA Tournament?

So it's hard for me to say one or the other. I think this is a mid-major plus league. So when you're talking mid-majors, it's not a low Major League. It's a very competitive league, and it's tough to get teams to play us.

We stack up against anybody, win or lose. I just think with 25 wins, winning the Valley outright, I just think it speaks volumes for what we've done over the course of the season as opposed to being gauged on one game or a weekend. What is the point of having a regular season if it comes down to this? It just doesn't make a lot of sense.

But I won't be belly aching over it. We'll go out recruiting. We'll take a couple days off and whatever happens happens. I just think it's unfortunate. I think our guys have done the work. If you put our schedule up against most teams, they'll say whoever these guys are, they're in. But we'll see.

Q. Talk about the turnovers tonight. Only three yesterday compared to ten tonight, how that really hurt you guys?

COACH MARTIN: I wouldn't say it hurt us. We averaged ten turnovers a night. Really for us it's not getting shots to go around the basketball. But the ten turnovers is what we averaged. Just not getting the shots to fall around the basket, that was the biggest key.

Q. Your long playing career, and assistant coaching career was at Purdue, an elite program and a big conference. How has your perspective about mid-majors maybe changed in the three years you've been here?

COACH MARTIN: It really changed. Because when you're at that level, you don't understand how it goes on, and how you have to compete and fight to get into a NCAA Tournament. I wouldn't say you don't understand or you take it for granted, you just don't know. But now that I'm here it's like, man, it's very tough.

I go back to Southern Illinois, six straight NCAA Tournaments. It is just tough to do at this level, especially getting mostly at large bids and teams have to scratch and claw to find their way.

But I've got to -- when I got into it, I have a true respect for this level. I wish more people would fight for this level. I'm not just saying that because I'm in it. But especially mid-major plus. I understand low-Major Leagues, that's a little different. But at this level, most teams should be getting in the way teams compete at this level and go about their business. The competition we play against.

But when I got into the league, I had a real respect for how tough it is to make the NCAA Tournament on a consistent basis.

Q. How frustrating is it as a coach in the second half when you saw your team's offensive production just disappear?

COACH MARTIN: Well, for me it's not necessarily frustrating. I'm upset about the loss, but this is 33 games. I can't do that to our guys. They put too much work and time into what they do. They just didn't shoot the ball well.

But for us it was how we were defending. We got stops when we needed to. Just couldn't come up with the win. Not frustrated. I was a ballplayer, and I know how some nights they're just not falling.

Q. Coach, your players have been saying the right things, and they did it again today when Pam asked what they were going to do. How are you going to try to keep their heads up and keep their sanity because it's a long time until next Sunday?

COACH MARTIN: Just be themselves. The good thing about it is it's spring break, so these guys can get away from this thing a little bit and be with their families. How will they grieve, how they handle it, that's fine with me. They're ballplayers. It's very emotional for them. They probably won't eat tonight. This is just part of it because we felt like we had a great opportunity and let it slip.

However they handle it, we'll get after it and just go from there.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

COACH MARTIN: Without a doubt. We talk as a team, but they're always together anyway. We won't do anything specifically outside of maybe inviting them over my house and that sort of thing. But, I mean, they'll be okay.

Q. How will you handle this? You watch every tournament result and try to figure it out yourself because you could drive yourself crazy too, right?

COACH MARTIN: Outside of doing my day-to-day recruiting, I don't know. I don't waste that kind of time and energy. I figure 25-8 is good enough, if not we move forward.

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