



**2013 Ohio Valley Conference Men's Basketball Championship
Game 5 – Semifinals – #1 Belmont 82, #4 Tennessee State 73
March 8, 2013 – Municipal Auditorium (Nashville, Tenn.)**

Post-Game Quotes

Belmont head coach Rick Byrd

"Tennessee State is a very good basketball team. I know it's a disappointing night for them. They came awfully close here a year ago and they rightfully thought they had a good enough team to get out of this thing and I did to. I thought about it all day as a matter of fact. They're talented and they play hard and I like their team. It's a disappointment to end up losing a game that matters so much to so many kids."

"I thought the difference was our defensive activity at the end of the first half. I thought that turned the momentum of the game around and got us the halftime lead even though we hadn't shot the ball well, had not shot free throws well, had not made a three. In the second half it turned into a little bit more of an offensive show both ways. Our guys got on a roll. Ian [Clark], obviously, with his six three's in the second half, was a huge plus for us. He's shot it great for about 90 percent of the year but he's been in a mini-slump that I'm going to declare officially ended. Kerron [Johnson] kept us in it offensively in the first half. He's just such a competitive guy. I've never had a player, post player, any kind of player that draws so many fouls as Kerron Johnson does. When we weren't doing much of anything he was getting them to foul him and he was going to the line and getting us some points. Not as many as he wanted because he was 12-for-12 in his last game. A very good, quality win for us. I think that team, with all of their players, is one of the better teams that we've played against all year long."

"I exhale after every game. I'm glad they're over one way or the other. I'm glad that I've got to go through another day like today, nervous and anxious and it's an important game and you know how important it is. I felt like the game was close to a toss-up personally. I know that we won the league and all that, but I just really felt like they have so many good players and you guys saw all of them playing. We beat a team when their three best players played pretty good. If Kellen Thornton's a Second Team All-OVC player, then we ought to just take the First Team to the NBA and win games because he's darn good. We've got more work to do. Fortunately I've got a bunch of guys around me that have done that before and they've a semifinal game and had a day to get ready for a championship game and they've got it done. It's nice to have on your side."

"We've always shot a lot of three's and done a pretty nice job of making a high percentage even though we do shoot a lot. I don't think shooters can be effective unless they have a comfortable green light. They learn that from their coach through practice. We'll say, 'That wasn't good enough. It was too quick and too deep, too contested.' That's what practices are for and hopefully they get to games and try to understand what is and what isn't a good shot. When you're not making [shots] and when you're not confident and shooting is an important part of your game, sometimes [a player] wants it so bad that he'll take a shot that he didn't let come to him, kind of forced, and usually you don't your makes back when you start forcing things, hoping one of them will go in so you can get going. You know, we make more turnovers than some teams do and that's another thing with me, just a freedom thing. If a guy's a great passer, are you going to jump all over him everytime he throws one away that might have led to a lob or a layup to a post player? We threw tonight and got one. Every now and then he's not going to make a good pass there. He's going to throw it over him out-of-bounds or short and get it deflected, but he's got to feel like he can make that play because it's the right now to make."

Belmont senior Ian Clark

On what got him out of the shooting slump

"Just being confident in my teammates and coaches. I've got to keep my head in it and go out and make every shot. Tonight I had the mindset of leave it all out on the floor and that's what I did."

Belmont senior Kerron Johnson

On the physical play in the lane

"They're extremely physical and extremely athletic. They are one of the harder teams to finish against. When we get in there we're really focusing on getting it out to shooters. In the first half they weren't really going but these guys are great shooters and they've proven themselves over the course of their careers to be great shooters. Anytime you go into the lane you're going to take a beating, especially when they have Thornton and Rhett and even Miller to a point. They're just so physical and that's part of their game and that's how they play and that's why they get wins. We just want to stay under control, make the right play even when we're under pressure."

Tennessee State head coach Travis Williams

"Just leaving the locker room, very disappointed with how it turned out. But you have to give credit to Belmont. They came out and played extremely well in the second half, came out and made some shots. Some of their key guys made key plays. For us, 21 turnovers, only six free throw attempts, that's uncharacteristic of us. You're not going to beat a good team with that many turnovers. Overall, I'm pleased with our guy's effort. They fault all the way to the end."

"The thing we were trying to do, you cannot let them get going. Ian Clark got going; he was able to get some good looks in transition wide open. He was able to step up and make shots. Kerron Johnson got going where he was able to break us down. You look, they got 36 points in the paint, and that hurt us, especially at crucial moments. Then they got 23 points off turnovers. A lot of that changes dynamics of how you have to play."

Tennessee State senior Kellen Thornton

"We just didn't play hard. I don't feel like we played hard enough to give ourselves a chance to win. We were sloppy with the turnovers. It was more of us turning the ball over. That was pretty much it."

"That's their specialty so we knew coming into the game that they were going to try and shoot a lot of three's. We did a good job in the first half of contesting a lot of them. In the second half, Clark got a lot of open looks in transition and we just didn't get back. We didn't play our brand of basketball tonight."

"I put it right on the glass. I don't know what happened to it. But I guess I just should've just went up and tried to dunk it. That's on me though, I told the guy's that it was on me. It would have been a three point game at the time. It was just a blown play on me."

Tennessee State senior Robert Covington

"We jumped out on them in the beginning of the game. Then in the second half they just got rolling. We were playing behind so once we started playing our basketball and everything we started making it a game. We were just trading baskets with them; that's one thing you can't do with Belmont. It went back and forth. We would get it to four then the next thing you know it would jump up to seven or nine, and then we would still be trying to play catch up. We knew what we were getting into with Belmont. We knew what their specialty was; we just couldn't keep trading baskets with them."

Post-Game Notes

Belmont advances to the championship game in its first-ever OVC Tournament and will face either Murray State or Eastern Kentucky on Saturday at 6 p.m. The Bruins swept EKU this season with both games in a span of nine days and BU dropped its only meeting this year versus Murray State on the road.

Belmont senior Ian Clark finished with 26 points, hitting 6-of-10 from 3-point range. It marked the 100th career game in double figures for Clark and the 28th time in 31 games this season. It was also the 13th time this season he has scored 20-plus points and the 26th time in his career.

Clark has now made five or more 3-pointers in a game eight times this season and 15 times in his Belmont career.

Belmont senior Kerron Johnson netted 23 points with seven assists in the contest, his fifth 20-plus point game of the season and seventh of his career. He has now scored in double figures in 22 outings in 2012-13 and 69 times in his career. It marks the ninth game this season with six or more assists.

Tennessee State senior Kellen Thornton posted 22 points and 12 points in the contest, his ninth double-double of the season and 11th game with double-digit rebounds. It also marked the 24th outing this year with double figures in scoring. He scored 20-plus points in four of the last six games as well.

Tennessee State junior Patrick Miller handed out 12 assists to go with 17 points for the Tigers. It marked the third straight game with double-figure assists and sixth time this season he has recorded 10 or more assists in a game. Miller recorded double-digits in scoring in 27 contests this year as well.

Tennessee State senior Robert Covington netted 16 points in the game, his 20th outing this season with double-figure points. He played in just 22 contests this year because of injury.