

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - UNLV vs Michigan

Friday, March 17, 2023

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Pete Maravich Assembly Center

UNLV Lady Rebels
Lindy La Rocque
Essence Booker
Desi-Rae Young

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from coach and then questions for the student-athletes.

LINDY LA ROCQUE: First off, just congrats to a really terrific Michigan team. They're good. They're really good. They're really well coached. They have got great post players and great guard play. Obviously, they challenged us on a number of levels tonight. Wish them well moving forward.

In regards to our team, I couldn't be more proud of the season that we've had. We don't know what this feels like because we haven't had to since December, for good reason, because we've got a heck of a team as well. Really proud of our fight and just being able to stay together through a lot of adversity since November, frankly. So obviously this one stings and it's going to be with us for a little bit, but we'll carry it with us and be better.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Essence, obviously, not the ending you might have imagined, but just kind of reflecting on your career at UNLV and everything you were able to achieve, I guess how does it feel to look back on that, even though it's kind of fresh?

ESSENCE BOOKER: I mean, I feel good. I don't think I would have chose any other university to come to and end my career in Las Vegas with my teammates and the coaching staff. Despite our loss today, it doesn't change anything or my decision coming here.



Q. It seems like you found a little bit of rhythm there in the second half. What was kind of working for you guys? And did you kind of feel like you had any momentum coming out of halftime?

ESSENCE BOOKER: That first half we kind of beat ourselves up. I felt like we played our worst basketball. It lacked like a practice that we came to off of vacation, it felt like, and we were only down by eight points.

So I feel in the second half that we just had to come out and we had to throw the first punch, and we did, but they continued to fight back and they just ended up winning that fight.

But I just knew for my teammates I had to stay aggressive and control the will so that they could follow, and I tried to do that the entire game. Why not? It could be my last game, right?

Q. Desi, do you feel like it was tough for you to get into a rhythm early on with foul trouble, maybe not being able to get the ball, just given that situation?

DESI-RAE YOUNG: Yeah, I do. It was tough. They're a great team down there. I think we played good, though, trying to not beat ourselves up as much. So I say, yeah.

Q. Obviously a great career at UNLV for you. What are you going to remember most about what this team was able to do this year?

DESI-RAE YOUNG: I think we were just able to execute all the time and just control our own destiny. I think we did a great job of just taking it one day at a time and not thinking so much ahead.

Q. When you left the court, you kept your head up high. You see those moments sometimes where people might be emotional, but you seemed kind of proud of what you guys have done this season. Can either one of you speak to that?

ESSENCE BOOKER: I shed a few tears, I'm not going to lie, as soon as I subbed my last substitution. But I am



going to hold my head high because I'm proud of what we've done and this loss doesn't dictate all things that we've done and made history in our program. So I'm going to hang my head high and I'm going to pick up my teammates and continue to do that, even if it was my last game today.

Q. Can you speak on the talent, the depth, and the young talent on your team that how you guys build off this year.

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Yeah, I think that's the message moving forward of -- you know, Essence has been our leader and now she's passing the torch. We've got great young players that have some big shoes to fill with her and Justice and Keyana, frankly. Keyana got minutes today, but what she does is she's made Desi a heck of a player in practice and just her leadership on our team.

So we've got a great senior group that there's going to be a lot of things that people are going to learn from them and kind of take the reins because we've got more ahead for our program and where we're going. We have great young talent that we believe in.

Q. Desi, I know you went back into the game after the fall, but just how are you feeling after that? And then secondly, what kind of coverages or schemes do you think they were playing against you?

DESI-RAE YOUNG: I feel pretty good after the fall. I think they were just doing a lot of chair pulling, trying to front, just baiting me into different things.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse the student-athletes and take questions for coach.

Q. Can you talk about how Michigan's post players challenged your team today?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Yeah. They're big and physical. I think they obviously keyed in on Desi, and post play is a big part of their game, so it wasn't something that they hadn't done. But they have some big bodies and they kind of bring 'em one after another after another.

So I think it was just -- she didn't walk down the court once without getting hit, and that takes a toll on a player. When you can bring two, three, four of 'em off the bench to keep doing that to one player, then that's what happened. But they're physical down there and they met her early and they did a great job.

Q. I think you knew going into this game that length, their defensive length, especially at the guard spots,

was going to be a challenge for you guys. How do you feel like that affected you, especially in that first half?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: I didn't think it really did, to be honest. I thought our guards, Justice, got to the rim a couple of times. I thought we had great looks. Man, in that first quarter, a couple of those shots, we had some wide open looks.

Essence had great pull-ups, the same pull-ups she's had all year. They were long, but I mean, to be honest, once I saw 'em in person, they weren't much bigger than players we play in our conference. I really don't think it affected us too much.

Q. What have the seniors on this team meant to you?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Man, everything, frankly. Keyana has been with me since day one, someone that bought in from the second -- the day I got hired, and there's probably not a better teammate in that locker room than Keyana Wilfred, a student, a student-athlete. She's a leader for us on and off the court.

Justice, obviously, I have known her kind of from afar since she was a playing in high school and in town. Same with Essence. Justice is consistent. She works really hard, she's extremely athletic, and she wants to win, and she knows how to win.

Essence, it's just been -- obviously, Essence and I have a really close relationship being the point guard and investing a lot of time into each other. Those three will forever be etched on my heart.

Q. What do you see as the next steps for this program that you've built?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: I mean, we are here. Last year, it was like, well, do we -- is it going to be a one-hit wonder? Are we going to be able to get back here? And here we are. Again, we're knocking on the door.

So we've got enough talent in our locker room to do this again and more. Obviously, there's going to be different roles, but we're really excited about the young players that we have, Kiara Jackson, you know, she's going to be our point guard next year and she knows it. She was a little timid today, I think, early. But she's going to be ready.

I think we expect to be here. We expected to win today. I think that was the biggest thing. We expected to win.

Q. It looked like you had went zone for a little bit and then the outside shooting, especially from Nolan, kind



of countered that. Can you talk about the impact of that shooting when you threw the zone out there?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Sure. Our press into our zone is a part of kind of who we are and what we do. I thought it did a great job of actually speeding 'em up. We lost her a couple of times. She's a terrific shooter and she made us pay. That was probably a little bit of some slippage on our end.

But I thought our press was good to us. But they're pretty good, so they kind of make you pay. Our zone is what we do, so we were going to try it.

Q. Michigan went to the Elite 8 last year and Sweet 16 before that. In what ways, if any, was their experience sort of noticeable out there today, if you felt it was?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Yeah, I mean, they're a really good team. Obviously, they have been here, but so have we. I think they have some veteran players, some fifth-year players, Brown and Kiser, you know, they have been there. They're just as experienced. I thought it was two experienced teams out there playing a really good basketball game. I didn't think we were -- we looked unexperienced. It just, you know, didn't go our way.

Q. You said you expected to win. It seemed like the fans that showed up expected you guys to win. Every time you were kind of giving the refs some noise, they were giving them even more. How much did it mean to come out on the court and see all that red directly across from your bench?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Yeah, we're however many miles away we are. We have great families on our team that support not just their daughters but our whole team, regardless, a great, you know, collective of fans that traveled across the country. They were loud. We heard them. It just means a lot. There's a good amount of red in there and they were loud and they were doing everything that they can to try to help swing momentum and score some points for our team, although they don't get any on the scoreboard.

We're really grateful for our fans and especially the ones that were able to travel and I know there was a watch party at home and I'm sure that bar was packed with people screaming at the TV too.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

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