

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Purdue Boilermakers

Katie Gearlds

Rashunda Jones

Abbey Ellis

Postgame Press Conference

Purdue - 78, Northwestern - 72

THE MODERATOR: We're ready for the Purdue press conference. We will go straight into questions for the student-athletes. First question for student-athletes.

Q. To Rashunda and to Abbey, the game had its ebbs and flows throughout the night, but what really clinched it for you in terms of getting the game under control and you were able to win?

RASHUNDA JONES: So for I think for both of us, for the whole team honestly, when we came out in that second half and we were just like -- Coach Katie told us, like, we're hanging our heads, like we lost. If we are going to keep playing like that and acting like that, there's no chance. So I think that really clicked for us.

Us getting out there, it started with defense and flowed into our offense, and it got us going.

THE MODERATOR: Abbey, you want to answer that question as well?

ABBEY ELLIS: I think, in terms of basketball, we kind of locked down our ball screen coverage, and we were able to get stops. We blocked out, and we were able to get out in transition, a couple of and-ones and threes. Just getting stops at the defensive end.

Q. Just for either of you, both of you, big second halves, just scoring-wise, what allowed you all to get going on that end?

ABBEY ELLIS: I think transition offense. We like to run the floor, nice and speedy, and I think Jeanae did a great



job pushing the ball up and crossing the floor, and we were able to space out. And then attacking.

We spaced out on the three, which allowed Rashunda to go in and be strong, and also have spot-up shooters. So just pushing that ball but we got stops to do that.

RASHUNDA JONES: Just to piggy-back off of what Abbey was saying, the defense really is what triggered everything in transition. We were able to find our shooters and get downhill, get a couple of and-ones, and take the lead.

Q. How do you guys prepare for such a quick turnaround? Obviously tomorrow in about 17 hours you guys will be doing this again. What's the mindset? Like enjoy tonight, but let's get going tomorrow.

RASHUNDA JONES: I would just say take the win in because it's a good win. I would also say we have to focus on what's next. We won, but what's next? Nebraska's next. Not worry about what happens after Nebraska. Not worry about anything. Just winning quarter by quarter, every five minutes, the first five minutes, just winning, locking in.

Q. For either of you, what do you feel like you need to do against Nebraska? You met them a few times in the regular season. What needs to change this time around?

ABBEY ELLIS: They have a dominant post, Markowski. She's so dominant in there, just right-handed and loves to use the glass. So we've got to shut her down. Without Caitlyn, it's going to be tough for us. But we can do it. We have an active team.

Not letting their shooters get hot. They have a lot of shooters. They can light it up from the arc. We've got to contain and contest. But we have nothing to lose here. We're just going to run it for their money.

RASHUNDA JONES: I would say, for me, I would say their toughness. We need to match their toughness. I feel like the last few games that we played them, that they've kind of outworked us, and I don't think anybody on our team



liked that.

I think being mentally tougher than them and physically tougher than them on the court, that can lead us into a win.

Q. Coach, what does it say about your team? Obviously your point in the first night, but to come back in the third quarter like that, you just heard one of your players say, kind of just playing with house money basically. What does it say about your team?

KATIE GEARLDS: We got a lot of fighters on our team. I think Rashunda really hit it on the nose. There was a 4:55 media timeout, 12-point game. Like we had a sub, we were untucking our jerseys, our heads were hanging. We were kind of looking undefeated, almost like we were trying to do it all by ourself and it wasn't working, and our heads were hanging.

That was the message. If that's the way we're going to go down, we're not going to win. We might as well fight and fight together. Abbey hits a three out of the timeout. We get a couple of stops. Rashunda gets out in transition and get some and-ones. Rashunda hit a huge three. Mads hit a huge three, and we were able to capitalize off some offensive rebounds.

Defensively down the stretch, Alaina, Mila, Mary Ashley, their hands are full without Caitlyn on the floor for us and only having two games.

We made an adjustment. We put J.T. in ball screen coverages, and she did a really good job and she responded. She untucked her shirt, and we kind of looked at her like, not now, let's go be special. 16 rebounds is very J.T. like.

But on defense, number 10 was very special for us the last ten minutes of the game.

Q. I mean, just what did it mean to see Rashunda specifically have that type of performance obviously? Been a contributor this year and getting postseason play like that.

KATIE GEARLDS: She's a special kid. She hit some rough spots in Big Ten play this season. She was really great in the nonconference. Had some games throughout the Big Ten Conference where she was special, and then kind of hit that wall, that freshman wall where the season is a little bit longer. We rely on her a lot, same with Mary Ashley, same with Sophie. Just, hey, let's hit the refresh button. Brand new start.

She obviously changes the game for us with her speed and

her ability to pressure the full court. She's a fighter. She's a believer and a big-time gamer, and I hope she's even more special for everybody tomorrow.

Q. In the first half, you were outrebounded 21-16, and then you just came out --

KATIE GEARLDS: Just pounded it.

Q. Getting them all in the second half, 27-15.

KATIE GEARLDS: They were shooting 50 percent at halftime, so they weren't missing a lot of shots. And we were shooting 35 percent, so we were missing them. I think we had 8 offensive rebounds at halftime, and we finished with 20. Just hungry going to the offensive glass.

There was a time I was putting J.T. in, I was like, hey, go be special, I need you to have 20 rebounds, and she fought. She was able to come up with 16.

Abbey, all 5'6" of her, whatever, 7 of her, whatever, she's going to be mad at me, she finished with double digits. Mads got her hands on some balls.

There was a different "want to" down the last stretch, a different belief the last few minutes of the game. Nobody rebounds the ball better than Nebraska. So we've got to be even more special tomorrow.

Q. You just reiterated, I was just going to ask, but Abbey, we all know what she can do on the offensive end, but to have ten rebounds, first game all year she even had more than six. What does that say about her on that end?

KATIE GEARLDS: Just wants to win. Doesn't want her college career to be over with. Do whatever it takes, and I think in that timeout with 4:55, it was like, hey, J.T., Mary Ashley, go rebound. Abbey, go chase some down. I think she ends up with 6 offensive rebounds on the stat sheet. I'm not sure.

Just a different kind of hunger, different kind of "want to," just a "I'm not losing." And I'm glad 23 put us on her back and finished the game for us.

Q. You mentioned the rebounding, but what else does your team kind of need to do well tomorrow against Nebraska?

KATIE GEARLDS: A lot of things. Obviously Markowski is as good as any big in our league. She's given us fits for two games. Jaz Shelley is elite as elite gets in our league. They've got all capable shooters, straight line drivers.

They dominate the glass.

We've got to be able to knock down some open shots.
We've got to make sure we're taking care of the basketball
and not turning the ball over at a high rate.

Then for us, Nebraska's a very, very good basketball team.
Hopefully first game for them, they come out and shoot it
like we did in the first half and we can jump on them.

Our hands are full, and like Abbey said, we're playing with
house money. We've got nothing to lose, so we'll go out
there and fight as hard as we can.

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