

Big 12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Sunday, March 13, 2022

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Baylor Lady Bears

Coach Nicki Collen

NaLyssa Smith

Postgame Press Conference



Texas - 67, Baylor - 58

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by the Baylor Bears, Coach Nicki Collen and player NaLyssa Smith. Coach.

COACH COLLEN: I think we have played incredibly well for the last two months. I think we didn't play well tonight. I credit a lot of that to Texas. Texas' ball pressure frazzled us all night long, kept us out of good ball movement, good player movement, separating off screens. We just didn't get many clean attacks and when they congested, we just had a hard time finding the open person. So that combination of turnovers, after you have two yesterday, 16 feels like a monumental number even though there are a lot of teams that average well over 16 a game. I think for us, when we got shots on goal we weren't ineffective but I thought Rori Harmon not only set kind of the head of the snake, I thought Joanne Allen-Taylor was really good as well on the ball with pressure and then both those kids really made shots. Aaliyah Moore had a huge first half for them, energy, offensive rebounding and scoring around the rim so I thought their freshmen were big-time tonight.

Q. NaLyssa, the charge call and then looked like a knee situation when you went down, what was the problem with the knee? Would you have maybe come back in the game in the first half if it hadn't been for the third foul?

COACH COLLEN: She wasn't even back out on the court yet.

NALYSSA SMITH: No, I wouldn't have come back in and I had three fouls so it wouldn't have been smart to get back into the game. When I came you down I felt like I hyperextended my knee. That was it.

Q. NaLyssa, you picked up two quick fouls on Gaston

within the first 5 minutes, but they just kept throwing bodies at you. It seemed like they were roughing you up every time. Did you sense that, did that throw you out of your game?

NALYSSA SMITH: No, I feel like, you know, they play aggressive every single time and you can't wait on getting a foul call. That's why I shot so many free throws because I was being aggressive back. I don't think it threw me off.

Q. You mentioned how well you've been playing for the last couple of months. Can you think of silver linings, of refocusing out of the tournament?

COACH COLLEN: This is a game I told the team in the locker room, some times you just have to throw games in the trash. And to me this is a game we have to throw in the trash. We didn't play good basketball. That wasn't how we got to this point. Once again give credit to Texas I thought they did a great job of playing with incredible energy and attacking us and Kudos to them, they deserve to be cutting down the net today. But you don't necessarily think silver lining. I'm just happy her injury isn't more significant because obviously that's the scary part going into the NCAA Tournament. I think this team has really gelled down the stretch.

We've played really, really good basketball and put ourselves in a position to receive a good seed and we've got to move forward. We've got to get back to doing what we do and these games happen. Everybody has an off game now and again and you don't want them in the wrong moments. I thought even to battle to this point I have so much pride in that locker room, you talk about them bringing bodies, we don't even have bodies to bring.

So it comes down to us just regrouping, refocusing, we know we will get to play at home and do what we do well.

Q. NaLyssa, three games in three days. Did you sense that there was any fatigue or exhaustion from the team?

NALYSSA SMITH: Well, yeah, I would probably say we came out a little slower than we have been, I feel like we

have been starting quarters off a lot more faster. But like you said three games in three days it does catch up with you and at the end of the day it's about who wants it more. I feel like we could have come out stronger.

Q. Coach, does that make you nervous heading into the NCAA Tournament? How do you think you can handle the wear and tear throughout the tournament?

COACH COLLEN: That's totally different. Three games in three days is totally different to me than a game, a day off, another game, then five more days. So you have a lot more time to rest and, you know, the advantage of a higher seed is early rounds being at home, so getting to play at home, I think, helps a lot as well.

We talk about fatigue, it's like -- I don't know if anyone realizes that Rori and Joanne Allen-Taylor who led them in scoring played 40 minute today and 45 minutes yesterday. If anybody should be tired it's them because we were able to rest players against Oklahoma State. We had a decent rotation even today, some of that foul-driven so outside of Jordan. We have been able to keep these guys as fresh as we can given our situation, so today came down to -- part of our slow start was the free throw line. And we have either been great from the free throw line or when one person goes 0-2 to start then it's just like this Cascade.

You look at a game that we lost by 9 points and we were 11 for 20 from the foul line.

I don't necessarily expect us to go 20 for 20 but we stay in that game, keep pressure on them, we're not heaving shots up at the end of the game if we're in 1 or 2-possession games. It makes your ability to play with your playbook totally different when you are down 4 instead of down 9 late. So we have to be able to make free throws, we have to step up in big moments in big games and make free throws because everyone who missed one is more than capable of making free throws.

Q. NaLyssa, I was just wondering for you personally after a game like this do you throw it away, try to forget about it or would you rather sit in it and use it as motivation?

NALYSSA SMITH: I don't like to lose so it's going to stick with me a little bit but I know we have to move on to the Tournament but it's bigger than this game. But I'm going to go back and watch and see things we could have did better.

Q. NaLyssa, I'm sure you made the decision with your trainers and Coach, did you think at all about not playing in the second half? Were you in pain at all?

Coach, 60% of the teams in the league are still going to the NCAA Tournament. In your first year in the Big XII can you talk about the League and how it prepared you for the tournament?

NALYSSA SMITH: I never thought about not coming back into the game. I knew I was going to come back into the game. My knee did hurt but it's bigger than an injury. An injury is what you make it so I feel like I was able to go back out there and compete with my team.

COACH COLLEN: I think the goal with her was to see how it felt and we would have pulled her very, very quickly had she said she didn't wanting to or felt -- because it is bigger than this one game. She is a competitor, obviously. She went and got a double-double again. It may be playing on one wheel. When it comes to the Big XII, I think back, long before I realized how good it was going to be and I have a lot of respect, I've been around the game for a long time. I knew the coaches in this league and I knew there was really good coaching in this league and I knew the new coaches in this league were going to bring different energies and styles. It's very different from what I coached in the SEC and I have a ton of respect for all those coaches in the SEC as well. The Big XII you have a lot of different styles. It's not the same night in and night out. It's not big, strong, athletic, certainly going to pound it inside kinda teams. You get a mixture. Kansas runs a lot of really good actions.

And they're really solid offensively and defensively. Oklahoma is going to spread you out and give you what you're going to get if you face Iowa or a team like that in the tournament that can shoot and stretch you out. Obviously Iowa has a more dominant low post player but Texas is your heavy, heavy ball pressure, deny one pass away, physical, you've got to be poised and tough to play against Texas. I can go down the line, we faced zones and Ayoka Lee had an unbelievable year but they played us all 2-3 zone. I feel like one, I'm proud of the coaches and the players in this league for having this kind of season, having marquis, out-of-conference wins, having great battles in league.

You've got to show up and compete in the Big XII. Nothing was handed to us and I think we went out and won it and that's what I'm most proud of. Now it becomes I'm a fan of every team in this league. They're our rival for three months and now we're just going to cheer everybody on because it's about the bigger picture here on the men's and the women's side. To prove that the numbers we have put up, the wins that we have had, they weren't just a blip on the radar, this league is for real and I know a lot of teams that -- I coached at FTCU and they're notoriously under-seeded in the NCAA tournament. I'm going to say

this, I'm going to jinx this because they're going to end up in our bracket, you know no one wants to see them. Because they're so much better than an 8 or 9 seed but it's style, it's style driven. The NCAA Tournament is about can you compete against every style. Can you line yours up against theirs and be better than them night in and night out. But it becomes about match-ups. So whether we are a 1, a 2, a 12, it's always going to come down -- I will lose my mind if we're a 12 but, you know, it comes down to match-ups.

Q. NaLyssa, you guys get to host next week, it will be your final games in the Ferrell Center, what is it going to be like to play in front of fans one nor time?

NALYSSA SMITH: It's great. Senior night wasn't my last night there so it's going to feel good to be on the rims and in our environment. The crowd helps us a lot so it's going to be good for us.

COACH COLLEN: Let's sell out the Ferrell this weekend. These guys deserve it.

Q. Nicki, you talk a lot about the standard that's set here at Baylor. After losing this game, is there any feeling of a let down or how do you respond to people who understand that the expectation here is championships?

COACH COLLEN: We tried to win the basketball game tonight. We've beat ten Texas two times this season. I don't think anyone in that locker room didn't want to may their best basketball and be out there right now celebrating.

It hurts. It doesn't hurt because some people think we didn't do a good enough job or I'm not good enough or whatever. It hurts because we wanted to be out there celebrating. We wanted to finish it the same way we did the regular season. The season has been tough, everyone who knows me knows this wasn't an easy job to take.

I just love this team so much. It's always been about not letting them down. Hey, all season long I've never done this. So, yeah, did I want to put a feather in our cap and win today and meet the expectation? Yeah, but for these guys. I wanted NaLyssa to beat Texas one more time. I think that was it more than anything. We were only - 2 when Lyss was on the floor, so you know her getting in foul trouble and then that injury obviously impacted us when your best player is back in the locker.

Q. Nicki, now in three or four hours you will be watching the Selection Show. Will this linger or will you be in that Selection Show mode?

COACH COLLEN: I've never been in this mode before, so I can tell you later. I'm going to be proud to see our name up on that board. Of course I'm disappointed we lost. I want to out coach my opponent every time I step out on the court. Like I want to out coach the opposite coach, I want our team to outplay the team. So, of course, I'm disappointed. I'm going to look back at it and think of 100 different ways that I could have been better, whether it was calling different plays or saying something different or emphasizing something differently because if you want to be great at what you do, you have to be more critical of yourself than anyone in the media or fans or peers or whoever. It comes down to wanting to be the best, because I don't want to leave any stone unturned.

So there will be a little of both. We have to be so proud of what we've done this season and be excited about what's next.

Q. Coach, match-ups make everything. Do you feel like you guys have made a good case for a No. 1 seed regardless of what happened today?

COACH COLLEN: I don't know that anyone has played better basketball down the stretch than us. That's how I feel. We have played against every style, and we have done it being in foul trouble and people saying we don't have enough size or enough depth, we're small on the perimeter, which we are. And we have found ways to win against every team in this league. So do I think we deserve a number one seed? Yes, I do. I'm not on the -- the Committee has probably already decided anyway, and I wasn't in the room deciding the Quad 1 and Quad 2, so we will take whatever seed, and if they give us a 2 we will prove that we deserved the one.

THE MODERATOR: Good luck, Coach. Thank you.

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