

Big 12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 7, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Cincinnati Bearcats

Coach Katrina

Merriweather

Jillian Hayes

A'riel Jackson

Postgame Press Conference



Cincinnati - 67, UCF - 62

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Cincinnati Bearcats head coach Katrina Merriweather and student-athletes Jillian Hayes and A'riel Jackson. Coach?

KATRINA MERRIWEATHER: Incredibly proud of our team. Anytime that we have four people scoring in double digits, you know that we were far more locked in offensively than maybe we have been in some of our other games. I liked the way we rebounded the ball, but more importantly, I love the way we didn't quit. The way they kept battling and kept fighting. Going into halftime down 10, I think everyone was frustrated and then you saw a team in the third quarter that was determined not to play their last game today.

Q. Congratulations on your first Big 12 win in program history. Wanted to ask you all, lead got down to 6 in the fourth quarter and then you all hit back-to-back 3-pointers. What was said in that timeout and how were you able to get the W tonight?

KATRINA MERRIWEATHER: All of our timeouts are pretty much the same, stay up beat, stay confident, keep being aggressive and keep attacking, and most importantly, trust each other. And the way this team moves the ball the way that we did, especially in the third quarter and again when we were close to losing the lead, we have enough talent out there on the floor that anybody can make a shot. We just have to get it in a spot where they're the most confident and I felt like that was the difference in the second half for us offensively.

Q. Outstanding third quarter, 10 for 17 from the field compared to the 9 in 28 in the first half. What did you see that changed the outcome of the game?

KATRINA MERRIWEATHER: First of all, we do that sometimes. That's just the truth. We rebound the ball a lot and rebound it well and sometimes what comes along with that is we take quick shots. So oftentimes we may not have the best field goal percentage. When we start talking about what we do, it's always the players. Always. A'riel Jackson gets two fouls, gets out of rhythm and makes up her mind at halftime that she is going to come out and be more aggressive and attack, and I think that was the starting point. Nia Clark coming off the bench and guarding Kaitlin Peterson, despite her having 31 points, I think that those were a very tough 31 points and Nia had a lot to do with that and she turned around and made two really big 3's for us, too. Again, team effort, everybody just doing what they're good at, and I think that when we do that, we just play a lot better.

Q. Congratulations, ladies. Players, what did your coaching staff instill in you during halftime that made you come out and dominate as a unit?

JILLIAN HAYES: I would say their confidence in us, talking about how there is still 20 minutes left on the clock, a lot of time to do good and play through mistakes and mostly to come out hot in the third quarter. We can't come out down in the third quarter. We have to come out and have a good start and continue to build on that.

A'RIEL JACKSON: They told us can't nobody dictate how the game goes and nobody is in front of us but ourselves. So once we decide to get out of our own way, the game is going to fall right into our hands.

Q. Coach, Jillian had a good game tonight, 11 points, 12 rebounds, three steals and seven fouls drawn. What did you see from her?

KATRINA MERRIWEATHER: The same we see every day, one of the hardest workers if not the hardest worker on the floor, every time we get out there.

Every single second she plays she is running, you see her rebounding, finishing, defending, and she doesn't get enough credit for what she does defensively. You just see one of the best all-around players in the league. I think when she struggles like she did from the field today, when people make an emphasis to make her shots tough down there in the paint and they wall-up and she draws a couple of charges, you again saw somebody who said I trust my teammates and instead of continuing to shoot and shoot the ball 15 times, she just moved it, got it to the open person.

Didn't stop being aggressive, which is why she got fouled seven times and stepped up to the free throw line and shot 75% from there today. Anytime you can go 1 for 6 from the field and end with a double-double, I think it indicates that you're a really good player.

Q. Follow-up to that, you had four players in double digits, what does that tell you about your team?

KATRINA MERRIWEATHER: I think when we are locked in and focused, and I think everybody would agree, players included, that we have times where we panic. And when we panic we don't necessarily take care of the ball the way we should. And today the composure that this team showed in this type of environment with this big of a game, I was just really proud of them and the way they stepped up and played for each other and played together.

Q. Coach, anyone respond to this question. This was a really good game. If you described this game in one word, what would it be?

KATRINA MERRIWEATHER: That's a good question. I'm going to talk to Sytia at some point over the next couple of weeks at UCF, and I think she is going to say grit. This team had every reason to give up at halftime. This was a gritty win. Then when you have an offensive team that has the power that they do the octane of a Kaitlin Peterson, and then you can't forget Mya Burns, and Timia Ware comes out and didn't play against us the last two times.

I think they would say that was a surprise, and it was; the same way Nia Clark and Bri Byars were probably a surprise for them tonight. This was just gritty. This was a gritty win, and that's Cincinnati basketball.

JILLIAN HAYES: I would say tough. Everyone knows it's a UC/UCF rivalry and every time both teams are going to come out and compete to the best of their ability, so I would say tough.

A'RIEL JACKSON: The word I will say is basketball, like, so many highs and lows, you know, it's just who wants it

more. Like, who is going to step up and, you know, show up when it's time to show up.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much. Good luck tomorrow.

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