

Big 12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 7, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

UCF Knights

Coach Sytia Messer

Kaitlin Peterson

Timia Ware

Postgame Press Conference

Cincinnati - 67, UCF - 62

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by UCF head Coach Sytia Messer, student-athletes Kaitlin Peterson and Timia Ware. Coach, if you could open with a statement.

SYTIA MESSER: Yes, um, you know, I thought we played very well up until the third quarter. We came out slow. If you look at the 29-10 score in the third quarter and that has been our Achilles across the board this season, is having a second gear in the third quarter in the second half. With four of the five starters coming back next season there is something we can build on. We gotta get better. I told my players and my staff and everyone, our record doesn't indicate how good this team is.

This team has fought and battled all season. Again, close games, close games, close games. But until we get to the point of those close games and cutting them and winning, you know, that's where we gotta grow.

Q. Coach, they're not up here now, but what do the seniors on this team mean to you?

SYTIA MESSER: The seniors on the team mean so much to me. One thing I'm proud about with my seniors is all of them are graduated, right, and working on master's. Except for two, except for two. But they will graduate this summer. Possibly with the ability of coming back next season. But they're academics and what they have done for UCF in the two seasons I have been here. They played hard and they work hard for us. So thank you, great question.

Q. Kaitlin, the leading scorer of the game with half your team's points. I saw your fight turn on in the first



half and it seemed like as the game went on you showed levels to yourself and hit another gear. What was going through your head? What turned on for you?

KAITLIN PETERSON: I just didn't want to lose. I had that mentality like we're gonna win, we're gonna win. So I tried to play like we're gonna win. That's every game.

SYTIA MESSER: Kaitlin to me, I have been blessed to coach a lot of elite players, WNBA players. And Kaitlin to me, her heart and her fight and competitiveness is second to none.

I'm so proud of her and what she's done this season. She has put us in every single game, every single game. Once again, tonight she did the same thing.

Q. Coach, talk about not only coaching them on the court but off the court. You have nine transfers. Talk about bringing them in and being part of the UCF program.

SYTIA MESSER: We are blessed to be at UCF. I will say, going to the Big 12 we got the best city. Orlando, come on! But the respect and our administration and how supportive they are of us. We brought those seniors in quickly. Okay? So the transition for me to get in was in April. I took the job in April, that summer. We had people in. We had a team, we had a roster. You know, I'm just proud. I'm proud of, like you said, with the nine players that we brought in, they're fighting and they're learning and that's part of it.

You're going to have your battles, which is what we had this season, but because of the chemistry. We hadn't had a chance to bring in -- when you look at Achol and Khyala, those are two freshman. I want to see in four years what they look like and we look like. Those are freshmen that, hey, I will take against any other freshmen in our league. We're building this thing and we're excited about the future.

Q. Coach, what have you learned as a head basketball coach in the Big 12? I know you coached at Baylor for many years as an assistant, but as a head coach what

have you learned?

SYTIA MESSER: The one I think I will say, in the Big 12 there are no nights off. So you have to have a quick turnaround and you have to pay attention to the details. As a head coach, the details matter. Okay? And the quick transition for preparation.

I would say those are the things, but the competition in the Big 12 to me is second to none. It's every night you're going to go against the best and that's what I love and that's why I was so eager to get back to the Big 12 and be a part of this special conference.

Q. Coach, I asked Cincinnati this question. Y'all can respond. This was a really good game. In one word describe this game.

SYTIA MESSER: In one word? I would say emotional. When you look at the battles we have had with Cincinnati, typically it's one possession. So it's emotional. You're ready to get that one win to get it over 'em. It's a great question, but for me it was the emotion for our players and the emotion to win this game, because I wanted to advance. I wanted to prepare and play West Virginia tomorrow, so that's what I would say.

TIMIA WARE: One word I would use to describe the game is aggressive. At Cincinnati we came from the American Conference together, and we came out and fought against each other to show we deserved to be in the Big 12.

KAITLIN PETERSON: I would say competitive, feel like we both fought hard to win, too.

SYTIA MESSER: Good question.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports