

Big 12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 8, 2024
Kansas City, Missouri, USA
T-Mobile Center

Baylor Lady Bears Coach Nicki Collen Aijha Blackwell Sarah Andrews

Postgame Press Conference

Baylor - 71, Texas Tech - 60

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Baylor Bears head coach Nicki Collen and student-athletes Sarah Andrews and Aijha Blackwell. Coach?

NICKI COLLEN: Yeah, thank you. Proud of our group, especially in the fourth quarter. I thought the third quarter we missed a bunch of easy ones and we just really didn't defend. So I thought our press, which we haven't run since maybe the third practice of the year in October, I thought that was really, really effective to change the energy of the game.

We got in passing lanes, we got turnovers. I thought Yaya was a big lift off the bench for us today. I thought, in general, we shot the ball and we took care of it.

Q. Aijha, what switch flipped for y'all in the fourth quarter there, especially defensively? What caused that switch?

AIJHA BLACKWELL: You said it. Defensively, I think our mindset just shifted. We weren't poor, but we could have picked it up, and I think we did in the fourth quarter, the ball screen coverage specifically. Excuse me, I'm stuttering so bad. We had to get back on the ball screen coverage, and I think we did better in the fourth.

Q. Sarah, I think you had, what, 13 points? What was working kind of for you as a team? It seemed like it was one of those games like Baylor has had so many of this year, where everyone was scoring evenly. What was working for you specifically today?

SARAH ANDREWS: I think normally I would have stuck to



three's, but I think this was the first game in a while where I attacked downhill and made them guard me going downhill. So I think that will open up the 3-point line for me, but I think this was the first game in a long time where I felt like this is the best I've played downhill in a while.

Q. I guess for either one of you, especially Sarah, in terms of shooting here first game, playing the Big 12 Tournament at the T-Mobile, are y'all comfortable here? What was it like first game here?

SARAH ANDREWS: We hadn't played since Sunday so we had to kind of knock some of that rust off and had to get a few minutes under our belt, and we came out in second half and played better. Once we knock the rust off, we'll be fine. It was our first game. They had played yesterday, so they saw the ball go in a few times yesterday, and I think tomorrow we'll come out ready to play because now we have a game under our belt.

Q. Compared to the men's poll from last year and years past, compared to playing in T-Mobile now, any change or difference or is it an improvement, you think?

NICKI COLLEN: The locker room.

SARAH ANDREWS: Yeah. The locker room is huge now. We were in a little box and there was like a pole right in the middle of us, but I think now we have an open locker room space, and the gym is just huge. I just be looking around counting chairs sometimes.

Q. Aijha, you came off the court and I heard you say "man, that was a dog fight".

AIJHA BLACKWELL: You heard me?

Q. This game specifically, but what needs to change looking forward to Iowa State? Obviously quick turnaround in tournament play, but what needs to change going into the Cyclones?

AIJHA BLACKWELL: I think starting off the game aggressive on defense. We didn't do that this game

starting off, but going into the game defensive minded, that wins games. And I think we need to take that part of the floor more seriously.

Q. For both players, what are you enjoying about this year in the bigger venue, a bigger set-up and having your own weekend of Big 12 women's basketball here celebrating in Kansas City?

SARAH ANDREWS: You know, it's amazing because I think women's basketball has grown tremendously in the last few months, and to get our own weekend, we love it. Our game deserves a lot of respect. This tournament, the Big 12 is a great league. So I think this is something we need, especially at a venue like this. This is a nice arena and everybody want to cut down that net for the first time in here.

AIJHA BLACKWELL: I just think this arena gives you that motivation, that big stage to go hard and, like Sarah said, fight to cut down that net.

Q. Sarah, when you get the call in that you're going to press for the first time in a while in the fourth quarter, are you ready for that? Is that something you look forward to or if you have not practiced it for a while are you ready to do it?

SARAH ANDREWS: I mean, basketball is about making in-game adjustments. So we were like, hey, we gonna press for the first time, okay, let's try it. And it worked. So, we might see it again tomorrow. You never know.

NICKI COLLEN: You never know.

Q. Ladies, were there any specific challenges posed by the opposing team that you felt like you had to overcome throughout the game?

SARAH ANDREWS: I think, you know, coming into this tournament, everybody is 0-0. And they were like, okay, now we're 1-0. They had won a game. Records don't matter at this time when you get in the tournament. Anybody can beat anybody on any given night. So we had to understand that they were ready to play and I think we came out lackadaisical because of what we did when we played them the first time. We underestimated them a little bit. We have to come out next game and be like, hey, it doesn't matter what the record is or what we did the first game. Everybody is 1-0 or 0-0, so it doesn't matter.

AIJHA BLACKWELL: I would second that.

NICKI COLLEN: I just think it was a hungry team. You know, they had lost nine in a row, they had a bunch of

injuries, some concussion protocol. Merritt was really, really good yesterday and presented some defensive challenges. I thought the last time we played Maupin and Shavers both really struggled and tonight, they just played downhill. They were aggressive. I thought we made a few ball screen mistake errors that gave 3's up, a baseline out-of-bounds that gave a 3 up to win. And in some ways I will disagree with them. I thought we started the game playing pretty aggressively. We built a lead in that first quarter. We weren't as good in the second. But still extended the lead. It really was about the third quarter, how we came out. You know, we just -- we turned it over early, and I felt like in the third, we're a team that assists on the majority of our baskets. We had seven assists at halftime and we ended with nine. Some of that was how they played us. I thought they played us really aggressively. Sarah talked about playing downhill, that's what she had to do a little bit. They did a good job of denying and taking away simple plays, so you had to play downhill and put pressure on the rim and make decisions in smaller spaces. So some of that was what they did, which was very different. The last time they played us, they played us probably 35 minutes a zone. Today they played us about four possessions a zone and we made 3's on the first two times they ran it. So we only saw it as a change of pace in the second half, but we did a good job and I thought our bench gave us a lot of energy there when we were pressing. And I think that third quarter would have looked a little different if we made a couple of layups. Yaya had a nice steal and had it stripped going in. Bella had a nice steal, took it coast-to-coast and missed the layup. So we could have given ourselves a little cushion on plays that were actually good plays, but I think it's -- I don't think they were unfocused. I don't think they were unprepared for Texas Tech and what they did. I just think Texas Tech was really, really hungry in the third and they hit us and we didn't respond quickly enough, but I thought it was a good adjustment by Coach Greene to get us in that press. Because it wasn't that we turned the ball over at 94 feet with it, but I thought it set the tempo. We got lined up with them early. We were pressuring them at half-court. We were up the line at half-court. We got some five-second calls. We got really aggressive in the passing lane. So I thought the press set the tone almost more for the half-court than it did that we just were turning them over in the full court.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much.

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