

Big 12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 8, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

West Virginia Mountaineers

Coach Mark Kellogg

Jordan Harrison

JJ Quinerly

Kyah Watson

Postgame Press Conference

West Virginia - 70, Cincinnati - 55

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by West Virginia head coach Mark Kellogg, student-athletes Jordan Harrison, JJ Quinerly and Kyah Watson. Coach?

MARK KELLOGG: That first half after the first couple of minutes I thought we settled in quickly, got some perimeter shots to fall. So I thought that loosened us up just a little bit, got the rim a little bit bigger for us and then I thought our defense took over from there and really allowed us to get going on the offensive end. Proud of their efforts. I've been proud of their effort the entire season. We've really kind of done it with defense leading to offense and I thought we did that the first half. The second half, maybe not so much. Probably let off a little bit too much for my liking there in the third quarter. We did not play very well at all in the third quarter, I didn't think, but fortunately had the big lead to keep them at bay. Obviously our third time playing Cincinnati, they have a size advantage on us, kind of a lot of forwards out there with some length that might have bothered us a little bit and then I thought we started to settle in and did some really good stuff.

Proud of the effort, proud that we're moving on, glad we got one out of the way here. So maybe we can just settle in and start to play. We have a big challenge tomorrow in Kansas State and we had a close one with them earlier in the year. So I think we will be ready to go.

Q. For all the players, tomorrow you have Kansas State. Not the result you wanted last time out against them. Would you rather have this game today to kind of get back in the swing of playing or would you rather



have that extra bye and just start fresh right at them?

JORDAN HARRISON: Honestly, we wanted to get as much rest as we could, but I think having a game before we play Kansas State to get used to the rim, get used to the arena, I think it will be an advantage for us tomorrow.

KYAH WATSON: What she said, kind of getting used to playing on the court will be nice for us tomorrow.

JJ QUINERLY: (Away from mic.)

Q. You guys caused 23 turnovers tonight. Seems like every game you guys cause upwards of 20 turnovers. What do you do defensively that causes those turnovers?

JJ QUINERLY: I think just our rotations being in the right spot, and we have a lot of athletic girls on the team. So just that, our speed.

KYAH WATSON: I would say our ball pressure really dictates kind of our defense, and then getting those stops really helps us on offense.

JORDAN HARRISON: I think we enjoy playing in transition, playing fast. And like Kyah said, that helps us get our offense flowing, so yeah.

Q. Kyah, this was your ninth game this season playing 35 or more minutes. How do you prepare for that? Is there something special that you do during training or is it you just go out there and play?

KYAH WATSON: I would say I just go out there and play. I really don't notice it until Coach is probably like I'll get you out of here soon. Other than that, enjoy being out there.

Q. You guys hit four or five three's in a row early in the second quarter and went on a run and pulled away a little bit. There have been times you have done that this season but there have been games where the three point shooting was probably not where you wanted it to be. Do you think that hitting a couple early in the game really gets the tone set for you guys

or do you think that sometimes you're just missing open looks and the ball is just not falling your way and you need to do something different?

JORDAN HARRISON: We like to -- for some reason we always start games shooting a lot of three's, but seeing them going in gives us momentum and we feed off making three's at the beginning of the game.

Q. JJ, you also played 25 minutes tonight and you have the brace on your knee. How are you feeling? How did it feel to be out there after the TCU game with that injury?

JJ QUINERLY: It feels good honestly. I couldn't see myself not being on the court in this particular time period. My team being behind me helps out a lot.

Q. You guys went almost seven minutes in the third quarter without scoring. What do you think went wrong there?

KYAH WATSON: I would say probably just not -- obviously not making the shots that we took and then kinda led to them scoring, us not getting stops or fouling.

But we just got to stay aggressive because eventually they're going to fall.

Q. Coach, another dominate defensive performance again tonight. Size might be a little bit of a problem again tomorrow, but you guys were able to hang with them today, and with the guard play that you get you're able to do that a lot of the times. What do you think can be done different tomorrow to find a different result against K-State?

MARK KELLOGG: We have a size disadvantage every night in the Big 12. All year long -- so we're at, game, what, 30 in the year and most of those, especially, once Big 12 play started we had a disadvantage. So that's nothing new to us. We're accustomed to that. We have some other ways to make up for that, which you alluded to a little bit in the way we played defensively. We'll come up and start to work on that game plan. Obviously, Ayoka Lee is a special, special All American type player that presents a huge problem for us. But it's not just about her because of how good they are around here. Kansas State, I think, was ranked as high as 2 in the country at one point this year has a win over Iowa. Coach Mittie is a phenomenal basketball coach. We have our hands full, but obviously we got that game to overtime at their place. We didn't get them in Morgantown. So we will be excited for the opportunity to see what we can do on a neutral floor, but we will have to put together a game plan tonight and

tomorrow to kind of figure out what we want to do with Lee.

Q. Have you had a chance to sit down and game plan a little bit before the Cincinnati game at least for Kansas State or is that something you push off until you know the result of tonight's game?

MARK KELLOGG: No. I don't look a ton at them. We do have staff members that obviously they're prepared and ready. So we will go meet maybe briefly tonight and wake up tomorrow and figure out the rest. You can do that when you don't play until 8:00 again tomorrow night. We got all day long to sit around and try to stir and figure this one out. I don't look at it too much. I kind of need to focus on -- for me it was UCF and Cincinnati, going in to tomorrow night, and then it was quickly getting ready for Cincinnati and we just played Kansas State two weeks ago or something like that. So it's been fairly recent.

Q. Can you talk about Jayla Hemingway's impact and how she's embraced coming off the bench?

MARK KELLOGG: She has been fantastic here. Was really good early. Went through like a three-week slump, almost a month, where she was not her normal self, and since then she has started to -- she looks like a fifth year senior who knows her career is coming to an end and she is playing with a sense of urgency. I've said this all year. She's our toughness. There's so much wrapped into her. She'll rebound the basketball like she did tonight. She can shoot it, post up, put it on the floor. She's been really good for us and bought into that role from day one. She has never said a word about it and bought into it, and I'm happy for her because she is playing really well at the right time.

Q. It seemed tonight like you let your team figure it out on the floor. I don't know if you took a timeout. There were droughts of scoring in that game and runs against you, that sort of thing. How important is it for you to let the players figure it out on the floor? I know that you talked about it a lot this season, but tonight it really showed.

MARK KELLOGG: We have that team that early on I probably didn't let them figure it out or I kind of overreacted, but they just look at you. When I overreact they look at me, like what are you doing? Relax. We got you.

I'm not a huge timeout taker either, if that's appropriate or how you say that. I went the whole conference season one year never called one timeout at SSA. But if it calls for it and warrants it -- we had the big lead. And I will use that phrase, too, like I'm not bailing you out. Y'all have to figure it out. And I do want them to have to do that from time to

time, and that third quarter I was ready to take a couple. Had we not had that lead, probably would have a little bit. And if it had ever gotten under double digits I definitely would have taken one.

Q. A lot of time you play Tirzah Moore down low. On the roster she is listed as a guard, but you play her as a big a lot of the time. Tonight when you didn't have Danelle Arigbabu, how does she help out in that situation? And on top of that, is there any update on Danelle and how she's doing?

MARK KELLOGG: Tirzah shouldn't be listed as a guard. You can cross that and put an F next to that one; forward or something like that. Tirzah averaged a double-double at Oral Roberts. This is a kid that's really produced at the mid-major level. So we were excited to get her. She got hurt early in the preseason, played for a little bit, got hurt again and it set her back. So she missed three or four weeks of prime Big 12 basketball. So she is just now getting back to it. Without Danelle again, now we're even smaller. Danelle has size for us, and she wasn't available tonight, and I would call it day-to-day with Danelle. Hopefully sooner rather than later.

Q. Your daughter Kayli is playing in the West Virginia state tournament with Morgantown High School. What's this experience like for you to be here and game plan and how much time do you spend checking out the scores or watching her from afar?

MARK KELLOGG: It's brutal, if you want the honest truth. That hurt my dad heart strings today if I was being completely honest. I had to watch the state semi-final from my computer. My parents are here, so we got to watch it, but it's still not the same. When they called, my wife was so proud, and of course I was so proud, too. She finished with 18 and 12 and hit 4 big 'ol free throws, to seal the win today, so she'll play tomorrow for a state championship. That's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. You never know if she'll be back, so I keep telling her to enjoy the heck out of it.

If anybody's got a private jet and wants to come get me tomorrow and take me to to Charleston, West Virginia, tomorrow, I would love to be there, but I'm not sure that's going to happen. That's really hard for me.

I get one crack to raise my kids and be there for them, and I spend my time with everybody else's kids. And I knew this day was coming, but it hit me pretty good today that I wasn't there for that one and missed my daughter's semifinal game. I'm really proud of them and her. That team has battled through a lot. Go Mohigan's. Go get your back-to-back state titles.

Q. What have you thought of the set-up this year with the women having their own weekend and being in the T-Mobile Center for the first time?

MARK KELLOGG: This has been first class. I wasn't part of it at the Big 12 in Municipal, but I was in the MIAA at Northwest Missouri State and played in Municipal. I've been in that environment, and I've been in this one, and there is a different feel, if I'm being honest but, yeah, when we pulled up to the hotel, it felt different. We got a shoot-around in T-Mobile, and that felt different and, again, we got to watch the game last night and today, and Kansas had the faithful out for their game against BYU, and I imagine the crowds will get better as the tournament goes on.

Thankful that the women get the spotlight for a little bit, and a great venue, and I'm sure the basketball will continue to get better and better as this weekend goes, but it felt good. They've done a good job.

Q. Good luck tomorrow.

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