

Big 12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Monday, March 11, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Texas Longhorns

Coach Vic Schaefer

Shaylee Gonzales

Shay Holle

Aaliyah Moore

DeYona Gaston

Postgame Press Conference

Texas - 71, Kansas State - 64

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Texas Head Coach Vic Schaefer, student-athletes Shaylee Gonzales, Shay Holle, Aaliyah Moore and DeYona Gaston. Coach?

VIC SCHAEFER: Well, I think the first thing that -- I couldn't be more proud of a group of kids. This game was about making plays, especially down the stretch and, you know, probably wasn't our best night. We started out really well. Shay and Shaylee were good early. Shaylee got us off on a really good note and we did some really good things offensively in the first half. The second half was a little bit of a struggle but for us. Says we scored 33 points. I didn't think we did that, but I thought our kids were who they are, which is they're just tough, y'all. This group is unlike any team that I can remember in a long time. They're just gritty and tough.

They can make plays. Shay makes a big shot. Then Shaylee makes a great pass on that sidelines out-of-bounds play. Gaston was her old self today. She just really, I thought, battled Ayoka today. Ayoka had 18 at the half and only gets 7 in the second half. I thought we were really tough down there. We really competed with her. She is so good. She is an All-American. Sundell is so good. She is an All-American. They've got great, great players. We made plenty of mistakes. We let them back in it. But, again, the sign of a great team, y'all, when they tied it, we didn't flinch. Our kids just kept competing, kept fighting. Booker, again, for a freshman has 17, made some big free throws down the stretch. Wasn't her best



game, but I'm saying it wasn't her best game and she had 17. The standard she has set for herself is so high, that bar is so high.

So Jeff is such a great coach. He's got him a heck of a team, they're a veteran team, they're older. They're so hard to deal with. I knew they would make a run, but I thought our kids made some really big plays.

Like I said, I thought it was a game where kids made plays and especially when we needed to make them. Jeremy, is that 29? Giving God the glory for 29. I say this all the time, man, this is His team, man. These kids just keep fighting and clawing and finding a way and their toughness and resilience is just incredible.

You beat a heck of a team today and we'll have to -- this is now year four we've been coming here and I'm going to have to play Iowa State again. I've played them every year I've been here. So we'll be excited to be in that game tomorrow night.

These kids deserve it. They've had their fair share of trials and challenges throughout the season. To be where they are today is just remarkable and I couldn't be more proud of them. And I'm happy for them. These are great kids, y'all. If you knew each one of these kids, how great and special they are in their own right, like, it's just amazing. I'm kinda along for the ride at times and, again, senior, senior, grandma, junior. You know, I've got some veterans that have been to the wars, too. They're just special. I couldn't be more proud, and I'm happy for them because they certainly deserve the moment that they're in.

Q. Take me to those two plays in the fourth quarter where you set up Shaylee on the inbounds pass, Aaliyah, before the three.

SHAYLEE GONZALES: So it was obviously a sideline out-of-bounds play and you would think there would be defense back there sitting in the paint, but there was absolutely no one there. I see Shay wide open and just lob passed it to her, so perfect play.

AALIYAH MOORE: Really good play. We needed that.

Shay's three was big. It just happened to be my one assist for the game and so I'll take it. It's clutch people making clutch shots moments that we needed. She was open, I passed it to her and she made it. So, proud of her and glad I have someone that I can pass to that can make shots.

Q. Y'all are all vets, but it seems like, you know, when the Shays get going that the team hits another level. Is that the case for how long y'all have been together?

DEYONA GASTON: We have been together for so long. We have been through this before so we try to at least -- in the heat of the moment, we try to calm each other down and make sure we're still in this game and we don't hang our heads low. We've went in this situation multiple times.

I think we'll be good.

VIC SCHAEFER: I can tell you, as a coach it's a whole lot more fun coaching when they're making shots.

SHAY HOLLE: Me and Shaylee shoot together every single day. I don't know how many shots we have taken together before and after practice. I know Shaylee can make shots. She got us going early, which was so good to see. I think that's really what got a good spark, a good energy going just to start the game off. We have been together for a couple years now, but we're always getting extra reps. So I think it helps a lot, definitely have good chemistry on the floor.

Q. DeYona, what was your afternoon like having to bang around in the paint with Ayoka down there?

DEYONA GASTON: She is a tough player. Like he said, she is an All-American. It's pretty tough trying to bang with her the whole game, but I tried to stay calm and make sure I could, you know, push her up the lane a little bit. When she's up a little bit higher then it's kinda harder for her to, like, score. So I just try to try my best and make sure I'm going hard.

Q. For Shaylee, I believe you beat Iowa State by 21 during the regular season. I wonder if you can remember a little bit about that game and how you think tomorrow's game may play out.

SHAYLEE GONZALES: Well, obviously coming into the game we're going to prepare super well. Defense-wise we've got to lock in. Obviously focus on that post player, the freshman. She is a really good player. And obviously we're going to keep shooting, getting in the gym and getting our shots up.

Q. Shay, what do you think this performance says about the team as a whole? There are four of you up there and Madison is not one of them. So what does it say about your team playing the way y'all did tonight?

SHAY HOLLE: We have five people in double figures. Scoring-wise we have so many talented people on this team. It can be anyone's night, any given night. Like, Maddie still scores 17 and she probably would tell you she didn't have a good game. And, like he said, that's just the standard we set for ourselves. We have so many play makers on the floor at all times. It's really just finding -- being patient and finding the right person at the right time and that can be a different person any given night. So it's definitely nice. We have a lot of play-makers and a lot of confidence in each other.

Q. DeYona and Aaliyah, seems like the play was to clog the paint and get to Ayoka as soon as possible. What was that like trying to have them force the ball out to the perimeter and shutdown anything coming to the paint, as well.

AALIYAH MOORE: I mean, I'll say it again, like Coach said, she is a force, an All-American. She is really hard to guard, and I give kudos to all my bigs today, Maddie, Taylor and DeYona, because I wasn't down there doing it, but I know it was rough and it was hard to watch it from the outside. So, I am really extremely proud of them. But I mean, every team has a game plan. We had our game plan. I think we executed pretty well and I'm proud of them and I think we did a decent job.

DEYONA GASTON: Like she said, I think we did a pretty good job on her. Even though she is going to get hers every night, just like an All-American would. Just like she said, we followed the game plan and we get a W.

Q. Coach, obviously I think the crowd got going on both sides and when K-State made their run, the crowd was particularly in their favor. How impressive was it to see that kind of crowd tonight and what does it say about the growth of Big 12 basketball, women's basketball and the game as a whole for that crowd to be so supportive on both sides?

VIC SCHAEFER: Well, y'all don't know this. I've been at Texas four years and I've been fighting to get this tournament in this building ever since I took the job. It's so unjust for our kids to have to play over in Municipal all those years while the guys were over here. You want to say I get the credit, I don't care, but this is where our kids deserve to play. I can't tell you, two years ago my kids were like, Coach, why aren't we playing over there? A year ago, why aren't we playing over there? I get it, Municipal

had 10 NCAA Championships or Final Fours, but that was in the '60s. Our kids deserved to be in this building and playing in there. I don't think you can tell any difference in any atmosphere in that arena versus Municipal. I think our game, our conference, the Big 12, warrants that and our fans and our players deserve it. I think that atmosphere was fantastic! That's the way it's supposed to be.

But our league is so good, and I don't think it gets -- for whatever reason, it doesn't maybe get some of the credit that it deserves. I mean, you're talking about Hall of Fame coaches, future WNBA players, kids that play extremely hard. You can go up and down the list of all 14 teams in our league, but the mainstays like Bill Fennelly and like Jeff, those guys have been around for a long time and they're going to continue to be around and they're doing it consistently year in and year out. That atmosphere, I mean, we're obviously not far from K-State and tomorrow it will be another home game and we will have to be on the road again against Iowa State, but that's fine.

I lived in the SEC before I was here and had to play in South Carolina every year, five straight championship games in Greenville, South Carolina. Might as well be playing in their home gym. It is what it is, but at the end of the day, this is what our sport deserves and it's a great -- it's great for our kids. They might have had more people in there, but they weren't louder than my people. Because I heard my people. It was so good for our kids. But it's what our game deserves, it's what it warrants.

That was a great game. It was a great game. It was a great game for the fans, it was a great game for TV. You had two teams laying it on the line, but y'all, we get that every night in this league, 1-14. You get it every night.

This is a great league. It's full of so many great players and great coaches, and there's a part of me that will miss it. There is also a part of me that won't. Butting heads with some of the folks that are in this league night in and night out, you've got to be on your game every night, every night.

So credit to the -- I told the Commissioner, I said credit to him for moving it over here because you know what, it should have been done ten years ago. You haven't had an ice tub until you get in a horse trough. That's what the ice tubs were like over at the other place. That's not right. He's got it right. He's figured it out, and kudos for him doing that.

Q. Coach, how proud are you of it finally being in this arena and y'all make it all the way to the championship where you will be in prime time and on the big stage?

VIC SCHAEFER: Again, this is our third one in four years

that I've been at Texas and it's kinda what we do. At the same time, it's -- I'm extremely proud of my kids. Like, again, I've said this every press conference, some of y'all have been there, some of you haven't ever heard me speak, but on December 27th when you lose Rori Harmon, which is the best two-way guard in the country, I don't think anybody give us a snowball's chance in you know where that we would be where we are today playing for a Big 12 championship, tournament championship or that on February 29th, we would be ranked third in the country playing for a regular season championship. You have to give these kids so much credit. They are just phenomenal. Phenomenal kids, competitive, but you can't ever judge what is inside somebody's breastplate. And these kids deserve all the credit, man, they are tough.

We got another one tomorrow night against a really good team. You saw the way they played tonight. Holy smokes, I mean, it was quite impressive.

So we will have our work cutout for us, but you know what, our kids will be ready. They will be attentive tonight in film, they will be ready in the morning, they will have a good shootaround and they will be ready because that's who they are. That's all they know.

Q. Coach, another huge night from Shay, some more big, big shots. How important has she been for you guys in this tournament and everybody being able to set her up for those last two shots, particularly?

VIC SCHAEFER: Again, the kid is a winner. If I'm not mistaken, Danny will know this, I'm not sure she scored in either K-State game previously. So she obviously -- we get the out-of-bounds underneath where she makes the shot, we're on the sideline out-of-bounds play that she makes and the big three when the game is tied, they've made their run, we come down and she makes a huge shot on the left wing.

The growth of that young lady and her development is probably -- it's probably top-three in my career. You just -- in my mind, God rewards her because she is a great kid. That's first. Second, she just works. She stayed in the picture her whole career. Freshman year doesn't play a lot but stays in the picture, keeps working. It's that way every year, doesn't matter who I recruit. I can't -- she is gonna still play. She's just a winner, you know, but the kid works. Like, it's -- it's not like she is just lucky. Like, she is -- she comes in -- like they both said, they both come in early, they get shots. They've done it all year. It started in the summer with Rori, and this is what happens, y'all. When you invest in your game, you're going to get a return. She has invested in her game.

It's just like anything else, when you put -- the game is real fair. Here is the -- it's real fair to her because she has done nothing but work. She graduates from the school of business in three years at Texas. Now she is getting her master's. All she knows is excellence. She don't settle. She is not interested in just being good. She wants to be great. That's what makes -- to me, that's what makes her so special. Again, like I said, the game is real fair and she gets rewarded because she's invested in her game and I do believe the good Lord rewards her because she is a great kid. Like, she is a great kid.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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