

Big 12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 12, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Texas Longhorns

Coach Vic Schaefer

Shaylee Gonzales

Shay Holle

Aaliyah Moore

Madison Booker

Postgame Press Conference

Texas - 70, Iowa State - 53

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the Big 12 Champs, Head Coach Vic Schaefer. Student-athletes Shaylee Gonzales, Shay Holle, Aaliyah Moore and Madison Booker. Coach?

VIC SCHAEFER: I'm glad to see we're going to do that, thank you very much. Oh, man, giving God the glory for an amazing group of young ladies. They have just been remarkable. They're just tough, they have been -- we've had so many things, so much adversity throughout the course of the season with Taylor being out, Gaston being out, Booker missed the Cincinnati game and obviously the whole thing with Rori and these kids said, okay, tell us how to do it and we'll do it. What did you want us to do? Shay Holle said okay I'll be your best defender. Let's go to work and help me to do that.

I'm telling you, it's God's team. I believe it with all my heart. I believe it. I've seen Him working in them, I see His spirit in these kids every day. That's a heck of a team Bill Fennelly's got. Obviously that's a team of the future. Those kids are all young, they're freshmen. I won't miss being in the league just having to deal with those kids. They're really good. Obviously he's a Hall of Fame Coach. They played really well. I just thought we played well defensively tonight and our defense was outstanding in the first half, short of a couple, two, three. Lack of focus left a couple shooters open. We were spectacular the first half, held them to 20 points, maybe 21. It was an 8-point quarter until they made the three at the buzzer. To play



like we played. We had some steals that resulted in some break-aways and some layups and you're going against one of the best point guards in the country. In my mind, I've watched her. I won't miss having to go against her, either. A warrior.

Like I said, Emily Ryan is as good as they come in my mind. It took all of us. It took everybody on our bench. It took all of our team to get this done.

And, again, you all have no idea the investment and how hard these kids work. When things weren't going well or when things happened that went against us, how they respond. We always talk about responding. Things happen in life. Hey, we woke up this morning to Aaliyah Moore has been puking all night. Shay Holle puked all night the night before. Shay came out and made a couple big shots for us and went on an 8-0 run. A-Mo, I didn't know she'd play. She didn't come to shootaround. I told her to go back to her room and go to bed. She said she had three or four hours of sleep. Doctor put some concoction together. I don't know what it is, but they gave her IVs and she played well tonight, played well throughout the tournament. So our entire team -- I've never seen anything like it, y'all, I'm just telling you. To see what they have had to go through and see how we have had to manage this group the whole year.

Some of you heard me liken it to the Apollo 13 capsule. When Rori went down, we're that capsule. We're spinning out of control and my job as the coach is to try to get them home. You're trying to figure out how to rewire this team, rewire that capsule to get 'em back to earth and to get 'em home. That's been my challenge and our challenge as a team all year, is let's figure out how to get home. To me, tonight, Mission Control, we're home.

I couldn't be more proud of our group of kids and we're not done playing, but just to go win a championship in this league against the teams we just went through, it's pretty special.

Obviously Booker. You know, this is a special freshman. There have been two player MVPs of the tournament as freshman. We've got both of them; Rori Harmon and

Madison Booker. PG1 and PG1A. I think that speaks to those kids and who they are and also speaks to their teammates and how good the players are around them. Special group. I couldn't be more proud of 'em and we beat a hell of a team tonight, one of the greatest coaches in the game. As I told him, I respect him so much, the job he and his staff do and the way his kids play.

Just their fans, Hilton Coliseum is always a tough venue. I've been fortunate to go in there and win some but I've come out of there limping, too, a lot. I won't miss having to go in there, but if I take my team there on the road sometime it's because I know they will be challenged and it's a chance for us to play a good team and get better. I'm not against that, I told him. That's how much respect I have for him.

So, again, hard to do what these young ladies did on with a healthy team. They have done it and had to manage things that have happened throughout the course of this season.

Q. Shaylee, can you take us through the defensive effort through the second quarter and how that helped you separate yourself from Iowa State?

SHAYLEE GONZALES: Obviously that's what we focus on here at Texas is our defense. We guarded our practice players during practice and we were very prepared and obviously that is where it started was our defense. That's what made us win the game. So I think everyone just being locked in and ready for that.

Q. Aaliyah, can you take us through your day and how you were able to play today?

AALIYAH MOORE: It's been one. I mean, at the end of the day we're tough at Texas. I play for my teammates, I play for my coaches, my fans, everyone that was supporting us today. At the end of the day, it's bigger than me. So, yeah, I didn't feel great but we had business to take care of and we took care of it. So even though my stomach may be hurting, I'm a Big 12 Champ, okay? So it's worth it.

Q. Madison, I wonder if you could put this season into perspective, what you thought your role was going to be, what it had to become and where you are right now.

MADISON BOOKER: I mean, coming to Austin I just thought I would be on a wing beside Rori Harmon. I was there for a little bit. So conference came and my role changed a lot. Like I tell people, I never saw myself winning Freshman of the Year, Co-Big 12 Player of the

Year, even Most Outstanding Player of the Tournament. I never saw that coming, but it's a God-given blessing, for sure. Like I tell everybody, it's not just me. It's everybody around me, the staff, my teammates, for sure. They always kept my head up and told me to keep pushing and they always tell me, keep going.

Q. Aaliyah, what impressed you most about Madison's performance tonight?

AALIYAH MOORE: I mean, it's the same thing every night with Booker. She is so consistent so it's hard for me to, like, pinpoint one thing. She hits shots, she does it all the time. She leads our team, she does it all the time. She is a vocal leader as a freshman. She listens, which is nice because you don't want a teammate that doesn't listen. I love playing with Book and I know she loves playing with me, too. She is only a freshman. We have three more years with her. It's going to be good. Pay attention, y'all. It's going to be really good.

Q. Coach, how would you rate this freshmen class nationally when you look at who you have there, across the country, how many great freshmen there are. You've been doing this a long time. How would you rate how good this group of freshmen are and the impact they're going to have in the next couple of years.

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, we're talking about Book and her class or --

MADISON BOOKER: All my class.

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, those kids are all --

Q. (No microphone.)

VIC SCHAEFER: You're talking about the national class, yeah. Obviously there are some really good players across the country that are freshmen playing and making a big impact in our game. Again, no disrespect to anyone. I'm so glad I got the one I got. Book is just -- not only is she a great player but she is just a great kid, y'all. She wants to win. She invests in her game, but she is a great teammate. I can't speak to the others. We had a closed door scrimmage against USC with JuJu and I got to see her for a game in October in Vegas and obviously she is really special, and Hannah has been doing a great job for Notre Dame. You're talking about just those three, Book and those two. Good Lord. I think our game is in pretty good hands for the next foreseeable future. So, all those kids are helping their teams, which is so unusual. They're impacting their teams in such a big way.

Here is where I think Book is different. Madison has had to do -- be thrown into the fire at a different position and run her team as well as do Book. Do what Booker needs to do. Like she said, she came here to play with Rori and Shaylee and Shay and be on the wing and just learn that position. And on December 27th that all came to a screeching halt and in a three-day crash course she had to get ready for our conference opener and not only learn our offense and how to run it but make sure everybody else knew what to do, too. Obviously she didn't learn it in three days, but by March the -- whatever today is, she's learned it pretty well. Here is what she is pointing out right now: Zero turnovers. Zero turnovers today, 5 assists, she goes 12 for 22, 2 for 2 from the 3 and had six rebounds. Again, she doesn't just fill up one side of the stat sheet. She fills up the entire stat sheet and she impacts the game for so many others. She makes 12 shots and you got 5 shots for somebody else tonight.

So, you know, just -- they're special kids, I'm sure, across the country, but to me what Madison Booker has done for our team this year under these circumstances, it separates her. There is no question. It's just hard to do what she's done leading her team to what is now a Big 12 Tournament Championship. We are 30 and 4 and we are not here without her. We're not here without everybody up here, but we're not here without Madison Booker because when Rori went down, it was not let's see who can do it. It was Madison, you're going to do it. I know you don't like it. You're not comfortable, but it's the best option for us. She did it. And man, has she done it. Spectacular work. You have to take your hat off to the kid. I've not seen many in my career like her. And she is really special. But as good of a basketball as she is, y'all, like all these kids, she is just a great kid, man. I know Momma back there in the back, Momma did a great job with Madison Booker.

Q. Vic used the Apollo 13 reference a lot this season. Have any of y'all seen that movie? Is that an apt comparison?

SHAY HOLLE: Personally, I have not seen the movie, but from what I know it is a good comparison I would say. Just because, yeah, it was obviously a huge adjustment, something you never think of happening and even when it does happen you don't believe it for a couple weeks, honestly. So, yeah, just having to adjust and seeing how our team responded to it. Coach always says you can't control what happens but you can control how you respond to it and I think you saw today how we all chose to respond to it. Rori included. She continues to give value to our team even on the sideline doing everything she can. So, yeah, I think it's a good comparison. Our world kinda got flipped around, but it was how we responded and today showed that.

MADISON BOOKER: I mean, I have seen the movie, guys. I mean, that is the kind of first time I've heard him use that comparison, but I mean, it's completely right. It was just like in the air, out of control, and he had to help us, calm us down and get control of the team. And I mean, from there it's just -- we have control.

VIC SCHAEFER: A lot of growth. A lot of growth. Yeah. A lot of growth.

Q. Shaylee, all those years ago when you pulled your ACL at BYU before that transfer and to this moment tonight winning a championship and leading the team, has it been worth it?

SHAYLEE GONZALES: All six years, yeah. It definitely has. And it's super special and I feel special to be part of a great team and play for a great coach and a great staff. It's just a blessing. Last year, losing to Iowa State in the tournament, I thought to myself, I'm not satisfied. I want to win that. So obviously I came back for another year because I knew this team could go farther obviously in the NCAA Tournament, too. We're not done. We've got still a lot of work to put in and hopefully we will go to a Final Four and get that NATI.

Q. Aaliyah, you had 12 points, 5 rebounds a couple years ago when you guys won the championship and then you had to go through the injury and now you're back here. Put your journey into perspective because last year had to be emotionally tough for you, but here you are with another championship.

AALIYAH MOORE: Yeah, it's been -- I'm sorry. I'm trying not to cry, but it's been hard. You don't know it unless you go through it. Sorry. I'm just really proud of this team and I'm really proud of myself. Like I said, it was not easy, but I couldn't have got through it without my support system. And big shout out to my mom and grandma and my whole family. They're my everything and I couldn't have done it without them. But I'm so blessed, so thankful to be in this position. A lot of people don't come back from ACLs maybe the way they were before and it takes time and for coach to trust me again and for me to trust my knee and go out there and play, it's my freshman year all over again. I'm so thankful and so blessed. Yeah, this is -- this is why I came here.

Q. Is there anything quite like the belt that you've got and give us thoughts about having that as an MVP award?

MADISON BOOKER: I guess I do have a lot of trophies. This is a first, though, a belt. It's kind of heavy. It's cute, I

think, I'm going to hang this up on any room, low key. I like it.

Q. Vic, why would you say this team deserves a Number 1 seed in the tournament?

VIC SCHAEFER: Look what they've done. Look at the gauntlet we just went through, three of the last four days. Hey, Danny, every game we lost, I think they were all one-possession games. Again, our net going into tonight I think was a 3. When you win a league, when you win a championship in a league, you play the schedule these kids have played, I don't know what else we could do.

I think our body of work, they're 30-4 with a net of 3. Ain't nobody else got that. So, I mean, they've earned it in my mind. But you know what? I don't think this group -- they don't, I do, but they don't. They will say hey where are we playin', what time? They'll be there. We've got a sayin', when you're the coach, when you know you've got a really good team all you need to make sure is they know what time the bus is loading and where it's loading from, and as long as the right ones are on the bus, you got a good chance to win.

That's the thing with this team. As long as this team knows what time the bus is loadin' and where we're loadin' from, I fell really confident in this team. They've done nothing but show me that they can do it. To answer your question, Danny, I mean, I think they've earned it. They've done it, they've run the gauntlet. If we've got four losses they're all one-possession games and, you know, so -- I think we have more than earned it throughout the course of the season. Anybody else got 30 wins, Danny?

Q. (No microphone.)

VIC SCHAEFER: Maybe. Might be it. Michael, you know? Anybody else got 30 wins?

Q. (No microphone.)

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah. I think they're more than deserving. I don't even think it's close. I don't think they will be spending much time on it, if you ask me, I think they got other things to worry about in that room. So hopefully. We beat some good teams in Kansas City, and let me say this about the tournament, again, we are honored to have won this event.

As I said before, it deserved to be in this arena, our kids deserved to be in this arena. They did a great job with it. Our team -- we know we just went through a heck of a gauntlet and beat three really great teams, and we have nothing but respect and admiration for those teams, and

this league. And we won't be here next year, but we will always be fond of this league, I will be, and lots of good memories of the Big 12.

They will have them a heck of a league in the future. That team we just played tonight, they're going to be really, really good, really hard to deal with.

Q. (No microphone.)

VIC SCHAEFER: There you go. Yep. There you go. Again, I think they've more than earned it.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, champs. Thank you.

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