

# Big East Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 8, 2024

Uncasville, Connecticut, USA

Mohegan Sun Arena

**Seton Hall Pirates**

**Coach Anthony Bozzella**

**Azana Baines**

**Savannah Catalon**

**Amari Wright**

Postgame Media Conference



Seton Hall 71, DePaul 64

THE MODERATOR: Opening statement from Coach.

ANTHONY BOZZELLA: Congratulations to DePaul, especially their seniors. They're wonderful young women and wonderful young players. Obviously, I have the utmost respect for Coach Bruno and his staff, Hall of Famer and well-deserved Hall of Famer.

We knew they were going to come out with a lot of different wrinkles from when we played them a few days ago, and they did. They played multiple different zones and pressed us and a lot of things, but I was really proud of our young ladies.

They stayed the course. It's hard to win in the playoffs. It's really hard. We had some great senior leadership by Azana and Amari and some great freshmen play by Savannah. I just really wanted this team to experience at least one and hopefully many more victories in the tournament because I've said this numerous times. It's been my favorite group to coach in many, many years because they're great people, first and foremost. They're excellent basketball players, but they're great people.

I wanted them to have this experience of putting the name up there and doing that, but continuing to see how their hard work has benefited them. It's been a hard year. This is only the second or third time this year we've played with our full roster intact.

So it's been a difficult year, and these girls have never complained. They've all fought through a myriad of

injuries. They came out with a well-deserved, hard victory today, and I'm very proud of them.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Is there a moment during the game that you all felt that your team chemistry was completely in sync? Was there a time where you thought that you were kind of out of sync?**

AZANA BAINES: I would say coming out of the first time-out in the first half was when I feel like we were all together, when we were in sync and we knew what we wanted to do and what we were looking to accomplish on the floor. It was just a tight game pretty much the whole game.

So I don't think we ever were doubtful in our capabilities or whatever we were looking to do. It was just we have to persevere a lot of times.

**Q. Azana, Savannah, congratulations on All Conference selections. What was your reaction like when you heard the news?**

SAVANNAH CATALON: I was real grateful because I know it's hard to do as a freshman, so I'm just taking it all in.

AZANA BAINES: I was low-key surprised a little bit. That was something I was really looking forward to, so the fact that I was able to accomplish that meant a lot to me.

ANTHONY BOZZELLA: I wasn't surprised. She's one of the best players in the league, one of the best players in the country. She works really hard. She represents our country in the three-on-three, but she represents Seton Hall in a way that stats or words never can be measured. I mean, she's a tremendous student-athlete and even a better person. When she won First Team, it was super well deserved and more importantly earned by her.

**Q. Azana, just wondering how you feel you've developed as a leader in your two years at Seton Hall, especially this year with so many newcomers coming**



## in and taking that leadership role?

AZANA BAINES: Really having to step into this leadership role this year, it was very new for me and my coaches and my staff. They challenged me every day to be that vocal leader and be the one to get my team to come together so we can accomplish the things that we've accomplished and the things we're going to continue to accomplish.

But it's something that I took pride in. It wasn't a challenge that I shied away from or I didn't think I was capable of doing. I think it's just been preparing me for this next step, this next phase that I'm going to go into once the Season is over.

**Q. Question for the point guard, Amari. Running the zone you saw a lot of zone defense today, a little different look out of DePaul. Talk about the way you were able to distribute the basketball. Five assists for you, but we had three players in double figures, 25 points -- I'm sorry. Four players in double figures, 25 points off the bench. What does it look like when you face that zone?**

AMARI WRIGHT: Even though they really don't run zone, we prepare for it and practice it in shoot-around. We were comfortable. When the coaches were to call the play, we knew where we were supposed to be at in the zone. We just worked on it and you saw today it flowed really nicely.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thank you. Questions for coach.

**Q. Wondering if you could speak a little bit about tomorrow's Big East Legends ceremony and the school's decision to honor Jodi Brooks and what she meant for the program?**

TONY BOZZELLA: I've become good friends with Jodi Brooks. Not because I saw her at some event where she was honored or something like that. Not because of some event she was honored, but because she comes to our games and supports our program. When I first took over, she was at our press conference, and she was one of the first people that came up to me and said anything I can do, please do.

She's also a lover of animals on a side note, which I am as well, owning her own animal sanctuary.

I think Seton Hall has had some great players through the years from Robin Cunningham to Geraldine Saintilus. When you are going to start, you start at the top, and Jodi Brooks not only was a great player statistically, but she led us to the Sweet 16 and then the NCAA Tournament as

well.

She's spoken to our team -- not this team but other teams -- numerous teams and really been a great mentor for them. I'm really just thankful that Seton Hall, but more importantly the Big East, is honoring Jodi because it's a well-deserved honor. Thank you.

**Q. You guys drew what seemed like so many offensive fouls today, including a couple of big ones on Peoples. When you have so many talented defenders on your roster, is that something you work on in practice?**

TONY BOZZELLA: We have worked on defense a lot this year because that was a big mistake I made in the past few years with our talented team. We didn't stress defense enough. That was one of the adjustments we made this summer and the staff has done a great job of helping implement it.

I've made it a focus for our program, but then you have people like Savannah Catalon. You look at how A'Jah Davis stepped in. She's not had the year statistically that she wanted, but we don't win the game without A'Jah Davis. She made great rebounds, had three assists, she took a charge. That's a real team player.

She didn't pout because she didn't have the year she had. She helped us win. It was her defense that helped us win. Her rebounding and taking a charge. Savannah is the best I've ever coached at taking charges. Amari is the best on-ball defender I've coached.

The other kids really stepped up as a team, and it was really important. As you see we could foul Peoples out of the game on an offensive foul. That was huge.

**Q. You are facing Creighton tomorrow. What do you feel that your team is going to need to do to slow down their explosive offense?**

TONY BOZZELLA: Yeah, Creighton is a great team. It's kind of new for us. We haven't played them since, oh, yeah, last year. Oh, yeah, the year before. Oh, yeah, the year before. Oh, yeah, the year before that too. Jesus.

I mean, it's getting a little repetitive. But you know what it means? It means that we have a good basketball team too. Because Creighton is one of the best teams in the country. And it's ironic that we're playing the same team with basically the same players, so that makes it even different.

For these kids it's been a change. It's a testament to Creighton that they've evolved because we started this with

us being a better seed and now they are. We've had two all-time classic games the last two years. Even the year before they basically knocked us out of the NCAA Tournament.

We have so much respect for them. Coach Flanery is a brilliant coach, but his staff does a great job as well. Morgan and Ronsiek and Jensen and Mogenson, they all know how to win and know how to play. Fortunately, we just played them the other day.

From a scouting standpoint it's not that we forgot about them. We know it's a great challenge. We're going to have to play a game. Can we? Yes, because we have this year a few times, and we have in the past. But we know it's a tremendous challenge. For us just the experience of playing the 7 o'clock game on championship weekend, I mean, that's worth a lot.

I don't want to go off, but kids and people don't understand in the program how important a win this was. We have two tremendous young guards, Micah Gray and Savannah Catalon. We have great kids coming in. We have other kids still in this program that are going to experience walking on the court at 7 o'clock in the primetime spot in the Big East Playoffs.

You can't measure that for experience. You can't measure that for excitement. You can't measure that for anything.

That, as we continue to build and grow this program is important. This is a really good team. We have 17 wins. We've beaten some great teams. We've lost a lot of games, and we've played short-handed. For all these kids to finally be able to play together and step on that floor and feel like -- this is the varsity game. Tomorrow at 7:00 is a varsity game. It's going to be a great opportunity. I'm excited.

For me I'm old, but for them this is fun. This is how it's supposed to be, and I'm looking forward to seeing us. I will tell you, we will play very hard, and I do believe we will play well tomorrow. I do.

**Q. Micah Gray had a good performance. Started off hot in the first quarter and hit that huge buzzer beater three-pointer in the third to make it a nine-point game and had a couple of points in the fourth as well. Can you talk about her performance and getting back on track especially in a big game like this?**

TONY BOZZELLA: Our staff works very hard with her specifically. Dee Dee and Cassandra. She comes in every morning 7:30 a.m. and shoots. She shot terribly the past couple of games, and she didn't let it affect her. She's

a confident kid who works really hard who is going to be an All Conference player, high-end in this league for the next two years because of her work ethic.

I was really happy to see her make shots, yes, for the team and all that, but for her because it shows her coming in every day at 7:30. We had optional shooting yesterday. She was there. That's who she is. She's been raised the right way. She's raised amazingly by parents that make her be accountable, hold her accountable, and that's why I'm so excited for her. Not just for tomorrow. Hopefully other days this week. But also for the future.

**Q. Looking at the stats, Shailyn Pinkney hasn't had the year you probably hoped for. Can you describe her sophomore year? What do you hope maybe tomorrow, maybe as you go forward what you want to see from her? Even if you can talk about next season even though there's still a lot more to play.**

TONY BOZZELLA: I'm happy about Shay because I love her. And I had a good 30-minute conversation with her the other day about how important she is to this team. Yes, now, but in the future.

I said, I want you to know, you are a super important part of this program, and I want you to be here. She's, like, well, I want to be here too and I'm going to be here. That was really important.

She gave us three, four minutes today. I know it doesn't sound like much, but those were important minutes. She was dynamic, she got an offensive rebound, played hard. She's just behind a lot of seniors this year. In the past we didn't have someone to play a position that she played last year, so she stepped in and really helped us win, but this year's team had a couple of seniors at that position.

But I'll be honest, we're not recruiting that position. We're excited for her. I think she's going to have a huge impact.

We have a kid at Providence, Grace Efosa, who is a tremendous player, I think borderline All Conference player, and averages two points a game and plays similar to Shay her first two years. And I think Shay has had even a little more success than that, and I think you're going to see a dynamic player next year.

I will tell you, when we win a game next year, she'll be sitting here.

**Q. You always speak about you and your team being a family. So what is it like being a team on and off the court that prepared you for moments like this?**

TONY BOZZELLA: I will tell you -- and I said this before, it's a great team, and it is. We don't win today if we're not a team because look at what the bench support did. Iyanna Lops came in and played with tremendous energy. A'Jah Davis gave us tremendous energy. Brazil Harvey-Carr was fantastic for us both on the offensive and defensive end. Shay gave us those mid-minutes. It wasn't a day for Makannah, but I wouldn't be shocked if she played really well tomorrow.

It's a family because these kids are supporting each other. They want to play and they probably get upset with me at times, but they've stayed together as a family. If we didn't, we don't win this game today or win at Providence, which put us in an opportunity to play in the postseason.

And this team is a postseason team. I would love to see us obviously win and go to the NCAA Tournament, but we've earned our right now, especially with another win today against a top-100 team, of playing in the postseason. I was very proud of these kids.

**Q. 21 assists for the team today. Four players in double figures. How nice was it to see your team sharing the ball like that?**

TONY BOZZELLA: You know how I feel about WSOU Radio. I think it's the top student-run radio station in the country. I do. And I would say it if these young gentlemen weren't here, if John Fanta wasn't here. They're the best because they do their homework, and they ask intelligent, pertinent questions. That's a great question you asked because, yes, we worked this week on good shot, great shot. Good shot, great shot.

Coach Rebimbas did that drill the other day, and I turned to him and said, that's what we need. The 21 assists showed what? Good shot, but great shot. We made the extra pass. We shared the ball. All those things were a big feature this week, and we did it. And I'm so proud of the kids, and I'm so thankful you noticed that because 21 assists on 24 baskets if we're going to win tomorrow, we're going to need that type of sharing the ball. Thank you.

**Q. 44 rebounds today, outrebounded DePaul by seven. You talked about the importance of rebounding in the past and especially going into this Creighton game when you have so many talented rebounders in Creighton. What can you use in this game to kind of transfer over to tomorrow to outrebound them as well?**

TONY BOZZELLA: The effort was tremendous, and we were up, what, 24-13 at the half. I was disappointed that we really let Jorie Allen manhandle us. You have to understand Jorie Allen is a really good player. Like a lot of

times coaches were, like, you got to box her out, you got to do this, do that. Maybe she's just really good and it's really hard to box her out and hard to beat a senior who is putting her blood, sweat, and tears in for five years and came off a knee injury and just keeps playing and working and stuff. I have so much respect for her.

You know what, it was hard to box her out, but that's why -- this kid couldn't do it, this kid couldn't do it. A'Jah is, like, I got it. In the huddle she's, like, I got it. And she did.

That was the thing that we are going to have to get tomorrow, because if Creighton gets second and third chances, we all know they're getting after threes and it's going to be a big problem. And we have to get some offensive rebounds so they have to at least stay put and don't run to the other end.

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