

# Big East Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 10, 2024

Uncasville, Connecticut, USA

Mohegan Sun Arena

**Georgetown Hoyas**  
**Coach Darnell Haney**  
**Graceann Bennett**  
**Kelsey Ransom**

Postgame Media Conference



Georgetown 55, Creighton 46

DARNELL HANEY: First off, to God be the glory for all of this. I mean, to be able to come out here, to be seeded sixth, to come out here and play in this championship game, that's nothing but God. I appreciate everything he's done for us, he's done for these young women.

I'm just so excited and happy for them because they work so darn hard. They work their tails off every single day.

I'm proud of them. I'm proud of our staff. Just shout-out to our administration, Lee Reed, Kelli Myers. They've just done a great job of supporting us and supporting this program.

I'm excited about the opportunity to play in the Big East championship game, first time ever.

**Q. With all you guys have been through this year, Georgetown had not had much success before this. What does it mean for the first time to be playing in the Big East championship tomorrow night?**

KELSEY RANSOM: I mean, never been here before, so we're excited about it, but this is something we've been preparing for and something that has been in our aspirations, and we've been wanting to make it a reality.

Even though it's unprecedented, it's something we've been looking forward to and preparing for, and it's been a very attainable reality for us since the preseason.

**Q. You're now one game away from the NCAA Tournament. How does that feel knowing that if you win tomorrow, you're in?**

GRACEANN BENNETT: It's really exciting. But like Kelsey said, we've had this in the forefront of our minds. Setting the tone for each practice is our shared goal of wanting to be in the tournament.

We've been envisioning this for months, and we're really excited for the opportunity to make it a reality.

**Q. Could you tell us what you were telling each other during the game in the huddles to keep your focus on the game until the very end?**

KELSEY RANSOM: We were repeating to each other that we were going to win this game because we were the toughest and tightest team in that gym, we were the hungriest team and we prepared for this, and to stick to our principles, play Georgetown defense and get stops.

There's things that we can control and things that we've controlled the entire season, and that's what's gotten us this far. We were just encouraging, getting on each other, expecting better things for each other for the last minute, playing through the buzzer.

It was just five on the floor, but everyone on the bench top to bottom was locked in, focused on the goal.

GRACEANN BENNETT: I would add that I felt like our huddles were extremely present and in the moment. We know Creighton is a very good team, and we needed to be locked in on our scout and on our defensive principles to get the job done. So it was every play, what just happened, what do we need to correct. Someone is taking accountability, if they miss something. We're encouraging each other when it went well and reminding each other, like Kelsey said, to be tough and tight and on the boards.

**Q. You made a statement about this was the goal during preseason. What did you guys say to each other before the season started that got you to where you're at right now? What was one of the goals?**

KELSEY RANSOM: Well, I think that -- everyone on our team, we've never been here, but we have a staff who are



winning. Our staff has been around winning. They're involved in winning, playing, coaching, friends with. They've just been around winning people.

We bought into what they were telling us and trusted that they knew what they were talking about. It was from them instilling winning principles, a winning mentality, winning attitude, and thank God that 13 of us decided to buy into that and give up ourselves for the sake of the team.

GRACEANN BENNETT: At the start of each of our practices -- well, at the start of one of the practices, Coach Haney pointed out that every single person on the staff had either competed in an NCAA Tournament and/or been a pro. So we were surrounded by people who knew how to get us to this point.

And when the goal was set that we wanted to be a tournament team -- and that's the language that we were using was to get to the tournament -- it was clear that we could lean on the expertise around us that was supporting us because they all had those experiences before.

**Q. If I could take you back to the death of Coach Butts and what you guys were thinking at that point in terms of what that was going to mean for your season, and then if you could discuss what Coach Haney has meant to you guys in terms of getting you here.**

GRACEANN BENNETT: That was a really shocking and difficult experience and has continued to be because of the nature of grief. But what I know is true is how important and impactful Coach Tasha was for us in the spring and in our fall practices and how clear it was that our next step was just to get back in the gym and work as hard as we could in her honor.

It's how she started the program, the foundation that she set, and it became our responsibility to do it moving forward and do it out of love for her, for each other, and love and respect for the game.

That was from Coach Haney's direction. He's been incredible. I don't know how he handled the situation the way that he did. I have nothing but just respect and gratitude for how he's led our program in a situation like that, and to get where we are is really amazing. He's been tremendous.

KELSEY RANSOM: Taking a group of women who really don't know what direction to look in when that happens and knowing that it could go really bad really fast, him being able to just get us together and put us on a path that is continuing to be difficult and hard and tiring, but so rewarding, has just been the path we've taken over the

past few months.

**Q. Graceann, you and your teammates held Emma Ronsiek scoreless from the field today. How did you lock her down the way you did, not letting her score a single shot?**

GRACEANN BENNETT: That was totally a group effort, and it comes a lot of the time with, like I said, owning the boards and making sure they don't get second-chance shots. Emma is a great player, so whoever was guarding her at the time, because we were switching some stuff, just did a great job in that first shot attempt, and we controlled the glass pretty well. Total team effort.

**Q. Part of your big thing this evening was your defense. You had three blocks and a few steals and then you were able to grab all the rebounds that you needed to. How did you limit their offense?**

DARNELL HANEY: Well, first off, like our young women talked about, Creighton is a tremendous team. High-powered offense. They do some things that can take you out of your principles, like traditional principles defensively, and that's what they're trying to do.

We just had a group of young women that locked in on the game plan. And it was a quick turnaround because I didn't get out of here until midnight or 1:00 in the morning last night, and I got a chance to look at some film. We looked at the things that we struggled with and the things that we did well in Game 1 in our game against them at our place, and then we watched them play -- I watched them play Seton Hall yesterday.

Credit to Mariya Moore. She had been prepping for Creighton the whole time. It was her scout during the season and she was prepping for them leading up to this. But one of the things we did a great job of was pressuring the basketball. We wanted to make sure we pressured the basketball so that they didn't get good looks at the basket, they didn't get good looks at passes.

A lot of times teams worry about them shooting, shooting, shooting, and we were worried about them passing. We didn't want them to pass it because if they can look to pass it, what they're doing is tough to guard.

We had to make sure we took away some of those passes and then challenge them. They got off too many threes. I wanted to limit them to under 20 threes getting off, but another thing, giving credit to our team, we just made them work for everything.

In a tournament style and in a tournament style like this,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

and they just played last night and then they had played maybe Sunday, so you're playing 30 games in the season. Those legs are going to wear on you, and you might not be able to hit those same shots as when you're fresh. So we wanted to make sure we made them work and work and work, and then in the fourth quarter, some of those shots won't fall.

We did a decent job keeping them off the free-throw line because they're a tremendous free-throw shooting team. Just the third and fourth quarter, we kind of got undisciplined a little bit and got some fouls.

But proud of our group for doing that. We just held the fort, played Georgetown defense, and like I said before, and I say it all the time, as long as I'm the coach at Georgetown, Chick-Fil-a sells chicken, Starbucks sells coffee, and Georgetown plays defense.

**Q. I was going to ask you, what is the status on Scott?**

DARNELL HANEY: We don't know the status yet. She's good. I don't know what it is, what's going on yet. When she fell, I had to run out to the floor because she was pretty scared, and I'm glad her mom was here to be able to be there with her. But we would have been there through and through.

Brianna Scott is a tough individual, tough kid. She's going to be just fine. She's going to be just fine.

**Q. I was talking to the Creighton coach and I asked him, you guys played them before, and anytime you play somebody in the conference, it's going to be a tough match. Were you surprised about the physicality because it got real physical out there at one point. It got really physical.**

DARNELL HANEY: Yeah, we're a physical team. That's what we are. That's what we do. We're going to try to make you -- we're going to try to irritate you. You know that gnat that's always around, just flying around your ear, always there, that pest? We don't want to make it easy on you. They understand they're getting ready for tournament play, as well, so they're trying to win.

So if they're going to match the physicality -- and I know their coach told them they need to make sure that they're physical with us because we're going to be physical with them.

Again, Creighton is a great team. They have a great coach. We're just excited and elated, and we feel blessed that we were able to get the win today.

**Q. I remember we were chatting on Big East media day and you said you guys would be all right. Today would have been Tasha's birthday --**

DARNELL HANEY: What?

**Q. March 10, 1982, was her birthday.**

DARNELL HANEY: Oh, my gosh.

**Q. Do you think she's smiling down at you guys today after getting one of the biggest wins in program history?**

DARNELL HANEY: So a little story. When Tasha got this job, I was trying to get my former assistant the assistant coach job here. I wasn't trying -- I'm a Florida boy, man. I don't like this cold, man. I get too cold in D.C.

She talked to my assistant, and she felt like it wasn't going to work. So two weeks later, she calls me back, and I'm like -- I look at the phone, and I'm like, you want to talk to my assistant again. I was probably going to do something in Florida, take an assistant job down there, one of the schools there.

She was like, no, I don't want to go that route with your assistant, but would you be interested in coming to help me? That woman put together a tremendous group of people that was what was needed for these young women.

With Coach Tasha's death, it was hard-hitting on them, but our young women had been through a lot before Coach Tasha even got there. They'd been through a whole lot. I'm not talking about basketball. There had been some death. There's been some grief. There's been a ton of things. They've been through a whole lot.

When I stepped foot on this campus, the love Coach Tasha showed me and my family, the opportunity to come here and just help her out, I'm incredibly indebted to Coach Tasha because she gave me a shot. Incredibly indebted. She gave me a shot. She gave me an opportunity to be who I was. I didn't have to do anything else. I was able to be who I was.

It's just tremendous that we were able to do this on her birthday, man. You know, like being a head coach -- I don't know what day it is. What's today? Like, I don't know what the date is. I don't know what day it is. We just know we're playing in the championship game tomorrow, whatever tomorrow is.

She just was a loving, tough-minded, high-spirited woman with a great family, and I'm just so proud of these young

women for honoring her the way they do.

**Q. One thing I wanted to ask you about is you've been a head coach before. You're a head coach in the Big East now. I'm curious how you would characterize the style of play in the Big East and what you've learned about yourself as a head coach in this conference?**

DARNELL HANEY: So I had this conversation with somebody before. The Big East has some great basketball coaches in it. One thing about me, I'm a forever learner. I'm always learning. I can go to an elementary school game or a travel ballgame or AAU basketball game, and I may be recruiting a kid at a high school game, and I see something that a coach does -- it may be Xs and Os, it may be how they deal with a player, how they deal with a situation. And a lot of times you can see -- you know how we get those books when we're out recruiting? You can look in my book and I have actions that they're running. I'm a forever learner.

It used to be called the Atlantic Sun but now it's the ASUN conference, the conference that I was in, has some of the best coaches in the country. I learned a lot.

Karl Smesko at Florida Gulf Coast kind of mirrors Creighton. You've got Lynn Bria at Stetson who does a tremendous job with a lesser level of talent. Some great coaches in here. But there's some great coaches down there.

A lot of times you've got to look at coaches not for what they -- sometimes you've got to look at coaches not for the results that they have, but you've got to look at what they're doing with what they have.

I was a high school coach. We had some kids that couldn't dribble. As a high school coach you don't get a chance to pick your kids. Those are the kids that go to school there.

Me being a college coach, I get an opportunity to pick my kids? Oh, it's amazing. So you've got to be able to recruit.

But one of the biggest things is if you have kids that have a will -- this is what I learned as a high school coach. If you have kids that have a will and that listen and are willing to do whatever it takes for the collective of the group, there's no limit to what you can do as a program.

Now, you need talent, no question. You need talent. We have that.

But a lot of these teams in the Big East have talent. We just have to make sure that we have something that everybody else don't have, and that's our will, I feel. I feel

that's our fight.

Again, another mantra, you've got to be an outside dog to play for us, and everybody knows that. You've got to be okay with getting your hands a little dirty. You've got to be okay with diving on a floor for a loose ball like Brianna Scott did. You've got to be okay with taking a charge like Kelsey Ransom did. You've got to be okay with if shots not falling, figuring out another way and being mentally tough to get through things that other teams aren't able and willing to get through. You'll be just fine.

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