

Big East Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Monday, March 11, 2024

Uncasville, Connecticut, USA

Mohegan Sun Arena

Georgetown Hoyas Coach Darnell Haney Graceann Bennett

Postgame Media Conference



UConn 78, Georgetown 42

GRACEANN BENNETT: I actually want to jump in here. We were just told in our locker room -- I'm going to get emotional -- that Georgetown is in discussion with Coach Haney on his contract as the official head coach of our basketball program. I am so elated and overjoyed for the future of the program and just so grateful that I had this opportunity to learn from him for the year.

I just wanted to start by saying that and just saying thank you. There's much more to come for Georgetown women's basketball with Coach Haney as head coach.

DARNELL HANEY: Thank you, Grace. Thank you.

I told our young women in the locker room, when we first got these devices called cell phones and when I first reached out to each one of them when I got the job as an assistant here, each one of them -- Grace interviewed me. I already got the job and I got interviewed by Grace. Kelsey gave me a full-length interview and she was asking about everything. I was ready for the interview. I knew they had questions.

But I didn't know how much of a -- how great of people they were. I think you can't make a run like this that we've made in this Big East Tournament and play this season if you don't have great people around you. And that starts at the top with our president, President DeGioia, and then it goes to Lee Reed, our AD, Kelli Myers, and then it goes down to the staff, Kelly Mazzante, great player but even better person. Great coach but even better person.

And then when you have Mariya Moore, who's a great player on her own, McDonald's All American, but better, she's a -- I don't know. What's bigger than McDonald's? Whatever is bigger than McDonald's, that's what kind of

person she is. Ruth's Chris person, right? She's a Ruth's Chris person.

One of the things that happens, when you've got people that are givers and people don't care about who gets the credit, magic happens, and it doesn't happen that much around the country because a lot of people are not givers. They're trying to see what they can get out of everything.

These young women and this staff, they just wanted to find a way to win. They wanted to see success, and they listened and they persevered, and they got to the next thing. They got to the next thing. When we would lose a game, I couldn't be mad at them because they just gave everything they got. What they had.

I'm so proud to be just associated with these people and associated with these young women that put their hearts and souls on the line for this university, for our staff, and for me.

I've got a daughter that she's a senior in high school, and I didn't want to move her out of -- I was in Jacksonville. I didn't want to move her out of Jacksonville. I didn't want to move my family out, and she's graduating. I didn't want to do that. My family has been great. My wife, Aaliyah, my daughter has been great. She texted me before the game -- there was like 30 minutes left in the game. She texts me every day to tell me she's driving all over the city now because I'm not there.

So she's driving all over the city, and she tells me, Dad, I made it to my game. She said, Dad, I made it to the -- she's playing beach volleyball right now. I made it to my game, I'll be home whenever she's doing it. But she don't even know I'm playing in the Big East championship game. She don't care nothing about it.

My other daughter Avery, she just wants to watch TV. She cares nothing about the Big East championship game. But when she gets a chance to see her father on TV and she comes around these young women, she just enjoys it so much because she feels the vibe of the people and she feels the love of the people that are in the room.



I'm so proud of our group for just persevering like we talked about and playing and their academics and everything they're doing. They do it through love. I'm proud of them for that.

Q. Can you explain what it means to you from a personal standpoint to go out by making history for your program, and if you can even go more into the job that Coach Haney has done to keep this team together when it would have been really easy to come apart with all you've been through.

GRACEANN BENNETT: Sure. I've been here for five years, and my decision to stay after I finished my undergrad degree was because I wanted to have a final season with teammates that I loved so much. That felt like it came to fruition, to a head, that I had contributed to leaving the program in a better place than when I got here.

We had had some steady growth, but it wasn't -- there was something missing, and it wasn't clicking the way that it needed to.

We're not done, by any means. To be here in this moment at the championship game is beyond what I was looking for, and part of it is because Coach Haney came in with Coach Tasha and the rest of the staff, putting words to goals we had never set. I didn't even label what success would mean to me because I would never have thought we would be in the Big East championship game. And they came in and said our goal as a unit is to be a tournament team and get a Big East championship and work toward playing on Monday night.

That specificity and directness and this is what we're going after to attain, this is how we're going to work at it, these are our expectations, this is our work ethic, this is what we're repeating to each other every single day. This is the culture building. We're going to have family fun day every single month instead of practice where we're going to invest in the bonds and relationships we have together. That was him and the staff.

So they were the vehicle to us getting to dreams and aspirations that we had never labeled before, and they also labeled them for us. I'm so grateful that I got to be here and I got to stretch in this way. And it took a lot of discomfort every day. A lot of discomfort every day, to get to this moment. But it was so worth it, and like I said, we're not done. There's more basketball to play.

Q. When did Coach start saying, hey, our goal is to get to Monday night? Was it October?

GRACEANN BENNETT: Way back when, yeah. It was in

preseason.

This is an unprecedented thing for the program to be playing here, but it was not unprecedented in our minds. We've been visualizing and speaking this into existence for quite some time now, knowing we broke this season up into chunks, we were going four games at a time. This is what we needed to do to have this record, to get to this position.

At the end of the day, though, when the seedings were set, we knew we had three games to win to get here, and that was going one at a time.

It's not new. That kind of long-term planning has been around this whole season.

Q. The play with your nose and Paige's nose, was that just elbows hitting?

GRACEANN BENNETT: I think it was actually separate plays. I had a bloody nose before halftime and she had got -- which has happened a lot of times this season. That's why he's laughing at me. She had it third quarter.

Q. It's been a very emotional week for everyone on your squad and your team spirit was never broken. As you and your teammates reflect back on the past few days, what do you take away from it?

GRACEANN BENNETT: That's a great question. We had an alumni group send us a video today before the game of past Hoya women's basketball players from years previous, just cheering us on and being in that moment with us. I think that was such a huge takeaway of the community that came together and the run that we made and how important it was for alumni to see the program winning and get to celebrate it with us.

That's something I know we're all so grateful for is to feel that energy and get to give that to them.

Q. In past seasons, playing past this tournament hasn't always been a guarantee. This year feels like it a lot more is. How does it feel to know your season probably isn't done tonight?

GRACEANN BENNETT: It is so different. Time went by so fast this season because we were coming in every day, competing, working our hardest, and it just felt like you were going into practice to invest and get better.

The days flew. We have a lot of juice left. That doesn't always happen when you're struggling and not winning a lot of games. Basketball in itself is a long season and goes



through many holidays. You miss your family. The year is coming to an end.

But right now it feels like we have a lot of basketball left to play. We're going to go one day at a time, and it's been a joy.

Q. Just after you left the podium yesterday, we found out that it was Tasha Butts' birthday. When did the team find that out, and can you describe what went on among the team when you realized that you had done that on her birthday?

GRACEANN BENNETT: We didn't know. I found out probably after you guys did. I think it speaks to truly her hand in this season. I'm a very spiritual person, and I have no doubt in my mind that the way that things happened for us and that energy was divine.

The team was definitely feeling that. We just had this feeling come over us, and then people are finding out one at a time, like oh, my goodness, it's her birthday? That is so like Tasha to do this, to be moving through us in this way on this day and to have us have no idea because we were truly just so locked in on preparation.

It was both unbelievable and believable because she was an energy force in and of itself.

Q. I know it's tough to put in perspective now, but what will you be thinking on the plane and trying to put these four days in perspective?

GRACEANN BENNETT: I plan to be relishing in gratitude, truly, that I've been healthy. Right now our prayers are with our teammate Bri Scott, supporting her in every way that we can. And just to have gotten to experience the four days and even beyond that, like the majority of my career healthy, I feel really grateful for.

I think that's what I'm going to be thinking about, and truly just grateful for the support of the university and for our fans and for the band who spent their spring break here with us and this group of girls and this staff. There are so many things to be grateful for, even though it didn't go the way we wanted it to at the end. I'll be probably making a list.

DARNELL HANEY: She makes a lot of lists. Sometimes it shows up on my phone, her lists. Graceann, you've done a great job in your career here. You've represented this university tremendously.

I told her in the locker room, guys, Graceann, you're a legend. You're legendary. This group is legendary. First

time ever to do it, right? You're on one of the best teams to ever do it at Georgetown. I'm proud of you. Great job.

GRACEANN BENNETT: Thanks.

Q. Can you talk about what this means to you to have the university wanting you as their full-time head coach and what this journey has meant for you personally?

DARNELL HANEY: It's been crazy, man, but I'm a believer. I see how things line up. And I know you just put your head down and work, and that's what we teach these girls every day. You put your head down and you roll your sleeves up and work every day, at the proper time, whatever is going to happen is going to happen. But you've got to do everything that you're doing through love.

I think a lot of people go into things like -- you know, when people hear that I'm in talks with getting this job, an opportunity to be the head coach here, I was getting it before, but people are trying to go after it and trying to be an assistant. They're going to call my phone, try to do all that. But what's for you is for you. All I needed to do was be me, and at the proper time, whatever happened was going to happen. I knew that. It always worked out like that.

I was a high school coach. Every day I just relished the ability to be able to -- and I'm grateful for the ability to be able to put my two feet on the floor and help these young women. I've got two daughters, man. I'm here to help them. I'm here to help them reach their goals and at the proper time -- if you try to help as many people as you can, at the proper time you're going to reap the harvest.

I'm just elated for that. I'm just so proud to be able to represent this university, and now I can recruit for real. I can really recruit. I already could recruit, but now I can recruit for real. I've got that G on my chest, and it means a lot. It means a lot more now.

They know that they can be in a program that's going to be something to reckon with in the Big East. They know they've got a coach that's going to care for them. They know they've got a coach that's going to put everything on the line for them. They know they've got a coach that can put them in position to be seen and be successful and grow, not just in basketball but in life. I'm excited about that, man. I'm excited about that.

My wife has been looking at houses all over the place. I've been in this one-bedroom bachelor pad for a minute. My wife is excited to get here. So I'm excited about that.

Q. You mentioned that the goal from the start of the season was to make the Big East tourney, even the title game. Was there also a goal of making the NCAA Tournament? And also, now that you're here and the resume that you've had, what do you think your chances are for getting called next Sunday?

DARNELL HANEY: So our goal was to be a tournament team. So in order to be a tournament team, you've got to walk like a tournament team. You've got to talk like a tournament team. You've got to play like a tournament team. It's every single day.

At the proper time -- again, I was a high school coach, and I said I wanted to coach college basketball. So as I was a high school coach, I was walking around the hallways like I was a college basketball coach. Like I was running practices like a college basketball coach.

Then I got an opportunity to be an assistant at Jacksonville, and then all of a sudden, boom, I'm a head college basketball coach four years later.

Then I said I'll be an assistant. I said, my ultimate goal is I wanted to be a Power Six head basketball coach, where I can really do some damage and recruit like I need to. Now here we go.

My ultimate goal, our ultimate goal was to be a tournament team, so we had to look like it. My plan was to show them how you do that.

When you've got young people, you can't do it like, Hey, we're going to be a tournament team and we just need to win all these games and we just -- no. You have to strategically show them and show them how to do it, why we're doing this, and what we're going to do.

Now, in order for us to be a tournament team -- you're not going to be a tournament team if you don't have 20 wins. It's not going to happen. So what do you got to do? You've got to get 20 wins. You've got to figure out a way.

So every four games we get three wins, you play 28 games in a season, you've got a chance to get 20 wins.

Now, you want to be a tournament team and your NET may not be that good? You've got to beat some teams in the Big East Tournament. You have to beat, what do they call it, a quad 1 team? I think Creighton is a quad 1 team, quad 2 maybe. They're a quad 1 team. So you beat a quad 1 team, you've got a chance. I think we were 0-2 or 0-3 in quad 1. Now we're 1-3 in quad 1. So we got a quad 1 tournament seed. They're still, like, if they put us on TV, we can perform against another tournament team, a quad

1 team.

I see that. But then the other thing I see is the brand. Georgetown is a brand. Like Starbucks, Chick-Fil-a.

The NCAA Tournament wants to see a brand. So I think we've got a good chance because of who we are, because of what we've done, because of just our grit and everything we've done this season. I think we've got a chance.

We should have a chance.

Q. You mentioned the school being a brand and thinking about some of the legends, Kris was honored, Rebekkah Brunson, Monica McNutt. As you think about the legacy of Graceann and Kelsey, how do they fit into broader legacy and what have they left behind?

DARNELL HANEY: Graceann Bennett is great. I told her she's starting to fit into that legacy. She's going to be on the wall. She got two sportsmanship awards two years in a row. She's knocking people down out there on the floor and then helping them up. Great sportsmanship.

Then you've got Kelsey Ransom, Defensive Player of the Year. You're on the wall, baby. First-team All-Conference in the Big East, you're on the wall. You're legendary. Ain't a lot of people that's doing that.

Proud of them, man. There's going to be some kids, there's going to be some people that come into this program that are going to -- five, ten years from now, they're going to be like, I want to be Kelsey Ransom. I want to be Graceann Bennett. I want to be that good. I want to make that legacy on this program. Proud of them. They did a great job.

Q. They hit you right away with a run. Were you concerned that this was your first time they've been here? They're here every year, 34 out of 36 times. What did you want to do, and what did they do that it got away?

DARNELL HANEY: Well, I think one of the biggest things is we messed up with some -- when you go into these games, sometimes you get so -- you've got the crowd, you've got everything in it. And then they might hit a shot, crowd goes crazy, and now we forget a defensive principle or we forget something we're supposed to be doing on the floor.

Once that happens, sometimes that thing starts to keep going ahead of you. I was going to get a time-out at 7 -- it was 7-0. I tried to get a time-out. They got another foul call, got to the free-throw line, made another shot. Like I

had to get a time-out just to calm them down.

I just think them hitting shots and us not being in position and us some finishing some plays, I think we got a little rattled. Just the stage. We had never been here before, so I think we got a little rattled.

But I'm proud of their fight, man. We fought.

Q. On that note of how you fought, most teams would have rolled over a little bit when UConn jumped on them like that, and you played about even with them second and third quarter. What did you think of the response after that initial run?

DARNELL HANEY: I think it's who we've been all year. It's who I am. We're not going to wither. We're not going to crumble. We're going to go at them every single day. You get punched in the mouth, you get knocked down, you're going to get back up. Let's go.

I'm proud of them for doing that. I made sure that we continue to fight. Proud of them.

Q. You have talked about how important it is for everyone on the team to buy into this vision, and at this tournament we've seen different contributors step up at different times. Today Bemby had a very efficient shooting night, got a lot of rebounds. We've seen obviously Kelsey Ransom and Graceann Bennett. But Mya Bemby, Jada Claude and others stepped up in those crucial moments. How important is that for you to see everyone on the team shine when it is necessary, and ultimately what do you want your team to take away from this game, this tournament?

DARNELL HANEY: I think it's important that you have -- when you don't have a, quote-unquote, superstar, like superstar that's going to consistently give you 20 every night, or a couple of superstars that's going to consistently give you 20 every night, you have to have pieces. Sometimes those pieces are taken away. So somebody else has to do something with what they do.

I felt like we could have done a little bit more damage inside, especially if we had like a Brianna Scott. That would have helped us a lot.

Maya Bemby was somebody that had been rolling last game, so we tried to get her back rolling. And they kind of wasn't guarding her because they feel she can't shoot threes, so she has to be ready to attack and make plays. And she's been doing that all year, man, stepping up when we need her, so I was proud of her for that.

Q. You talked about having the G on your chest. You're going to have the title Georgetown head basketball coach, which is a title that John Thompson once had. Can you talk about what that means to you?

DARNELL HANEY: I was a little boy. I'll never forget, and I saw those Georgetown teams, Allen Iversons, the Victor Pages, the John Thompsons, the Jerome Williams. They were just some outside dogs. They were outside dogs. They just fought every possession, and they knew when you came -- people knew when they came into Georgetown, they had to bring everything they had.

These young women brought everything they had every game, and teams know when they play us and they knew when they played us, you've got to bring everything you've got.

Just to know that I'm going to be the head coach and in a situation to even walk the halls as the great John Thompson, I'm just so thankful and so proud to be able to do that.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.