

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Vanderbilt vs Baylor

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

Cassell Coliseum

Vanderbilt Commodores

Coach Shea Ralph

Iyana Moore

Sacha Washington

Jordyn Cambridge

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by student-athletes Jordyn Cambridge, Sacha Washington, Iyana Moore. Floor is now open to questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Sacha, congratulations on reaching a thousand career points last night. Can you talk about what that milestone means to you?

SACHA WASHINGTON: It's really great, but I told someone yesterday, it's just a small victory because I'm just really focused on the tournament and things that we have planned for us ahead.

Q. Iyana, first of all, how good was it for you guys to kind of get your first win in March Madness to build confidence ahead of that matchup with Baylor?

IYANA MOORE: I think it was really great for us to play yesterday. Kind of get familiar with the court, get our wind back. We haven't played in a while. Get familiar with the gym, get to know each other a little bit better. Playing on a big stage like this, of course we had nerves, so we got them out of the way.

Q. How important has it been for you and Jordyn, just your perimeter defense and being able to lock down opposing guards offensively?

IYANA MOORE: I think we really feed off of Jordyn. Naismith player right there. We just pick off of her. If she's playing really good defense, we all play really good defense. If she's intentional with everything she's doing,



getting steals and in people's grill, we feed off of that. So just continuing to feed off of our vet over there.

Q. Winning the rebounding battle last night, especially on the offensive glass, when you look at those second chances against a taller team like Baylor, how crucial is that against a team that is taller than you, a similar-type team that you faced in SEC play?

JORDYN CAMBRIDGE: I think it just goes to our physicality and how willing we are to be physical with them and put bodies on them and box them out. Obviously we watched a little bit of film from yesterday's game, and we're going to clean some stuff up.

And we know that they are a little bit bigger than we played yesterday, but we know -- we play in the SEC, so we know how physical it can get. It's not going to be anything that we're not used to.

We're going to have to go in and be physical tomorrow.

SACHA WASHINGTON: Yeah, just knowing that rebounding is something that you have to want to do, and just getting early position, boxing out, make sure we get them out of the lane and make sure our team comes up with the rebound as many times as we can.

Q. Sacha, when you look at their post players, what stands out to you about what they can do inside, especially with the depth they play with?

SACHA WASHINGTON: I think they have some great post players. But I also think that we are doing a good job preparing for that, just knowing their personnel. And I know that we've done a good job just around like post skill work, stuff like that.

So I think we'll be pretty prepared for what they have for us.

Q. Baylor has a few transfers that have played in the SEC, with Dre'Una and Aijah. Does that help you guys at all? Maybe you, Sacha, banging inside with some of those players, having seen them before?



SACHA WASHINGTON: I mean, yeah, just being familiar, that they came from our league, but knowing that, you know, we just need to be prepared at the end of the day for anything that's thrown at us.

IYANA MOORE: Yeah, to piggyback off what Sacha said, it's good to know familiar faces, but just focusing on what we control, knowing our personnel, knowing scout, just the biggest thing we can focus on going into tomorrow's game.

JORDYN CAMBRIDGE: Yeah, they really hit it on the head. We've played against them, but just like any player, I'm sure they've gotten a lot better. They probably changed their game a lot, just like we have in our time here.

So it's really just focusing on what we do, what we bring and staying true to who Vanderbilt is, and I think we'll be okay.

THE MODERATOR: We'll dismiss the student-athletes.

We're joined by Vanderbilt head Coach Shea Ralph, and we are opening the floor to questions for Coach Ralph.

Q. Do you think that playing yesterday probably helped get some of the nerves out or get used to it? Do you see that as an advantage, you already have a game under your belt before tomorrow?

SHEA RALPH: I do. I do think it -- for our team, I think it's an advantage. I think the quick turnaround from Selection Sunday to just having to walk right in and play was good for us.

And if we didn't play, I would tell you that's good for us too. I think you just -- it's the way I spin it for our players. But I do think, you know, having this being our first NCAA game with this team, with this program since I've been here, there were some nerves. And I think they understand that while we treat it like we treat every game, it's still special. It's the NCAA Tournament, and it's March.

So I'm glad we were able to get out on the court yesterday and compete. It felt good. I know they're feeling great today. So we're excited to keep playing.

Q. You're no stranger to March Madness, but this being most of your players' first time, is there anything you've done with them or they've done to kind of take this all in?

SHEA RALPH: Yeah, I think the thing that I'm encouraging them to do is to enjoy the time together. I mean, this team

is only going to be this team for, you know, hopefully as long as we can, for the next couple of weeks, but not for much longer.

And there's a lot of downtime. We have a lot of time to rest and recover. Our game yesterday was really late. And one of the things I've learned, being to so many tournaments, is what to do with that downtime. Sometimes they need it to spend on their own resting. We have a table of games in our team room where they can come down and play games. We took a little walk around our hotel yesterday, utilized the pool.

I think there's things that we can do together that don't feel forced but that also teach them how to enjoy being together and it doesn't always have to be we're preparing, we're preparing, we're preparing. It's just enjoying being together as a group because this group will only be together for so much longer.

And that I think also encourages them to stay in the moment. And that's really important too. You don't want to look too far behind, you don't want to look too far ahead. You just want to stay in the moment.

And that's what's so special about being with this group right now here at the NCAA Tournament.

Q. What is the game of choice is for the team right now?

SHEA RALPH: It depends on who you ask. There's a lot of games on their phone that they'll put on the TV. I don't know if you've heard of Overcooked. Yeah, I don't understand it at all. They like that one. There's some classics. We played Twister the other day. Uno is down there, Bop It. Bop It is really fun. The old people tried to bring in some vintage games as well.

Q. During your time at UConn, you're probably familiar with Baylor, and they were known for rebounding during that time. Do you see any similarities to this Baylor team now in Collen's third season where they're started to get back to being a dominant rebounding team, and how does that affect the way you're preparing for tomorrow's game?

SHEA RALPH: I definitely see that they are trending towards being a dominant rebounding team. But honestly, and we talked about this the last couple of days, that affects our preparation not one bit because we face a dominant rebounding team in the section just about every game.

We're not as big as some of the other teams, we don't

have as much size. So luckily I think we're really prepared. I wasn't happy with how we performed on the boards yesterday though. I will say that. I think we have to be a little bit more disciplined of going and meeting people where they, boxing them out, getting a body on people, and then rebounding out of our area.

It's going to be really important tomorrow because that is something that Baylor does really well.

Q. Shea, obviously there's a lot of SEC teams here, and historically the SEC has done very well in March Madness. And Ole Miss women's coach has talked a lot about how she's rooting for other SEC's in March Madness as well. Is that something you're doing too, you're paying attention to the other SEC teams that are here and looking at the success of the league?

SHEA RALPH: Absolutely. I think the thing I remember last year, there was a chat thread that started with the head coaches. And it was really neat to see that level of support. There is a high level of competition during the season as well. But I thought it was really cool that the head coaches did that and came together. And I'm excited to be part, you know, of that representation this year.

I've gotten text messages from every coach. There's been messages in the thread. Coach Yo has put stuff out on social media. I've had the opportunity to do the same for them. I think it means a lot. Especially for me as a first-time head coach. But to feel that support, even knowing how competitive we are, I think it shows a lot, tells you a lot about where the SEC is and where we want to go, the support that we show for each other.

Q. Iyana Moore was amazing last night. That dagger she hit was huge. I think this story with this team is so unique with Moore and Cambridge and what they dealt with last year with their injuries. Can you shed a little more light on how they rehabbed, did they lean on each other a lot during those that process? I commented to Moore, it's very rare you see a player come back and look better than she was preinjury. Can you talk more about that.

SHEA RALPH: Certainly. I think you -- there's been a couple of things that we've done in house, and like videos showing how -- their injuries were very close together, like within a couple weeks of each other. Their surgeries were different, but, again, the process was kind of similar because they were on that timeline together.

And they probably needed each other for different reasons. Jordyn having gone through it before, and thinking that last year was going to be her last year of basketball, and

then Iyana having never gone through it. And I think they provided a level of support that they each really needed in the moments that they needed them.

And that's not something you can really fabricate for a kid going through -- I mean, I rehabbed five ACLs, but they don't know that. They weren't even alive when I had my last injury.

So it's so different now. And when you have a partner to go through that with, some days Jordyn has a bad day and Iyana is able to lift her up, vice versa other days.

You develop a deep bond. And you can see that they pushed each other when they needed to be pushed. And there's not sometimes a way for a coach or a trainer to do that. Sometimes it has to be a teammate.

And I'm so happy for them because they're both enjoying things that they've never had before, this being Jordyn's first and last NCAA Tournament because this is her last year of basketball. Iyana is becoming the player that I think she's always dreamed that she would become, and probably a lot quicker after her injury. Because I think there were definitely moments, I've had them myself when I injured my knee, you're not even sure if you're going to be able to play again.

So being in this moment now for them and watching them enjoy it and have so much success is for me -- this is why we do what we do. It's hard and there's lots of challenging moments, but watching my team now realize some of their dreams, both individually and as a group, makes this one of the most rewarding years I've ever had as a coach.

Q. You tore your ACL five times?

SHEA RALPH: I did. I did. I did. I know. That tells you how stubborn I am. I was determined to play.

Q. I would have been done after one.

SHEA RALPH: I told Iyana Moore I wasn't an All-American until after my second one. So there you go.

Q. You just talked about enjoying the moment. I'm curious, is it different for the players versus the head coach? Like how quickly do you have to turn the page to Baylor? Probably when you're done with the handshake line, whereas you do want the players to enjoy a win in the NCAA Tournament, or do you want them turning the page just as quickly?

SHEA RALPH: I want them to turn the page, but not too quickly. Last night was about enjoying the win and

celebrating for them. And for us as well. But we had already, you know, like you said, as coaches, we had already turned the page.

One of the things that I understand about my position is it's not about me. So it's not. And I had my time as a player. It's about the enjoyment of my team, their improvement. I've been to -- this is my 20th NCAA Tournament. And I've won championships, and I've been to Final Fours. So me getting to another one or winning another one doesn't do for me what it will do for the players that will win their first or that are going to their first.

That's something that you never forget for the rest of your life, and I want to be part of that journey with them.

So I continuously remind myself. Because I am pretty intense. That's just the competitor in me. I remind myself that I have to show up the way that I want them to show up because my energy seeps into my team.

So I am remembering myself to enjoy the moment. But it's also not about me. So I'm trying to do everything I can to make sure that I set them up for the success that they've earned and that they deserve.

Q. I know you hate when I ask about this, but on the topic of injuries, you guys have stayed relatively healthy throughout SEC play this year and throughout the tournament. So is there anything you have done differently or that you've done that you think has led to that success in staying healthy this season?

SHEA RALPH: I wish I could tell you that there was an answer that I could say this is what we did and take ownership of that. I think a lot of it is luck. And I'm not saying all of it is. I think we did take a really serious look, like what are we doing, where can we make improvements.

I have a top-notch staff. I mean, we're at Vanderbilt in the SEC, Candice has infused our program with high-level resources in terms of people and skill levels of what they do.

So we were able to fine tune a few things. I'm not certain there was a reason that we had as many injuries as we had, but it did give us the opportunity to reflect and look at what is our process, how can we change some things up.

And I think even some of those small tweaks have been able to help our players feel strong for longer periods of time. I don't know if it helps with injuries, but I know that they're feeling good right now, which is really important in March because you can feel worn down. You can feel fatigued, mentally, physically, emotionally. Some of that is

up to me. Most of it is up to how are we resting and recovering, what kind of fuel are we giving them. And I think that the injuries gave us an opportunity to look at that.

Fingers crossed. You know, it's not over yet. But this was a good year, and we'll continue hopefully on that path in the next few years as well.

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