

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Michigan vs Kansas

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Los Angeles, California, USA

Galen Center

Kansas Jayhawks

Brandon Schneider

Zakiah Franklin

S'Mya Nichols

Media Conference

Kansas - 81, Michigan - 72

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to NCAA March Madness first round post-game press conference.

We are joined by Kansas Head Coach Brandon Schneider and athletes S'Mya Nichols and Zakiah Franklin.

We will begin with an opening statement from Coach.

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: Give Michigan a lot of credit. I thought they were by far the best team for three quarters. Williams, in particular, did some things to us that typically players don't have success with, and that's being very aggressive and attacking Jackson.

But I couldn't be prouder of our team's resilience. They never fragmented. They just stayed the course and obviously made some really, really big plays offensively that were preceded by key stop after key stop.

Made a lot of big threes tonight, but none bigger than fifth year senior Zakiah Franklin. I couldn't be prouder of her.

Q. Coach, how do you keep your team composed and keep them ready to get back in the game when you go down by ten points with that little time on the clock?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: I think that's experience and leadership, and then you have a freshman in S'Mya that's just beyond her years in terms of her poise and composure.

I think our team believes in each other. They're very proud



of what they've become. I just think that there's a great level of trust.

Q. Zakiah, you had that huge three at the end of the game. Walk me through, what was the play design, how did it end up in your hands? Then just kind of the emotions going through and taking that into overtime.

ZAKYAH FRANKLIN: Pretty much we run this play all the time when it's late clock. We kind of ran it, and they took away the main two options that we had. It's just one option that's pretty always open, and it actually was. So I kind of just shot the ball.

From that, the emotions were still high. We felt like we were still having time to play. As you can see, like everyone was excited, but it was still more to be done.

Q. Can you talk about what it means to have a leader like this step up not only in that play, but kind of throughout the game, had over 20 points, played really well today.

S'MYA NICHOLS: 100 percent. KB is, I feel like, a one-of-a-kind player. She can do many things that I know I can't do. Just the trust that everyone on the team has for her. We trust her to get to the rack. We know that she can provide on offense and defense for this team, and I feel like she played great on both sides of the ball.

Q. Zakiah, that shot, the game-tying shot, when it bounced off the rim, what was going through your mind? Did you know it was going to roll in? What was going through your mind?

ZAKYAH FRANKLIN: Like Coach said today, you must be living right. I'm thinking, okay, I shot the ball from there, it hit the rim a couple times, so I'm like it has to go in. We lived with the results, and we survived and we advance.

Q. For S'Mya, this was your first NCAA Tournament game. Did it live up to the hype of March Madness? What was going through your head playing this first game?



S'MYA NICHOLS: Yes, I think March is honestly about getting everyone's best basketball, and I feel like Michigan definitely delivered, like he said, for three quarters. They played great the whole game, for real.

I think they lived up to it. It was exciting back and forth, not easy, and that's what we play for.

Q. For S'Mya, you sort of struggled for about three quarters of the game, and then you found yourself in that fourth quarter. What did you have to change about your game to sort of get going and get those shots going in the fourth quarter and especially in overtime?

S'MYA NICHOLS: I feel like at that point I was just going to need to make the right play, whether that's hitting my teammate for an open shot, whether that is boxing out -- that's the play I always target -- but an aggressive box-out, just pressuring the ball. I had to contribute in some way, and I feel like I definitely made that switch. Then just knocking down the free throws.

THE MODERATOR: We can move on to questions for Coach.

Q. Coach, you guys kind of started out slow to begin the game but obviously picked it up towards the end. What was sort of the turning point in your mind as the game went on?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: I thought there was multiple turning points. Michigan came out and played zone on all makes, which threw us off a little bit. That was not something that we had practiced, hadn't seen them do that much at all this year. Finally got into a little bit of a rhythm and made some threes.

I thought Ryan Cobbins came off the bench and made some big plays.

But ultimately, we just played too timid defensively. We got in a little bit of foul trouble, and we weren't near as assertive as we needed to be. So I thought the fourth quarter we really picked up our defensive intensity and were able to feed off of that.

Q. When the game went into overtime, I'm curious what you told your team, like what the biggest goals were for play and overtime?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: Just keep getting stops, number one. I think that's what really got us back in the game. Then we were in the bonus, so challenged everyone to just don't leave the offensive end without a paint touch and an

opportunity to get to the free-throw line.

Q. Kind of the same question I had for S'Mya. What did you think of Zakiyah Franklin's performance today and how she just stepped up?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: The kid's a winner, and that's why we recruited her. Our program came from the very, very bottom of the Power 5, and we needed a kid like that that was used to winning that, quite frankly, if you came up short, was going to be pissed off when you got on the bus or the plane.

That's all she's done is help change our program around. I think it's very, very fitting that may be one of the bigger plays in Kansas women's basketball history.

Q. You guys are a very experienced group this year and last year won the NIT and looking to really cement yourselves as an NCAA Tournament team. You get the win. What's that mean to be able to move on to this second round?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: It means a lot, especially playing a team as good as Michigan and a program as established, I think six straight NCAA Tournament appearances.

We're just trying to be a real program and one that can advance in the NCAA Tournament and hopefully one day compete for Big 12 titles.

Q. There's been a couple of big comebacks in the tournament this year. Obviously, Iowa State, Middle Tennessee. When you're down nine in the fourth quarter, is that something you tell your team about, or is it rally just --

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: No, we wouldn't talk about that in game. But I was part of a game where we were down six with 2.6 seconds left and we won. So we do talk about nothing is outside of -- you know, you play till the buzzer goes off. You compete hard.

Obviously we talked about at dinner last night just Audi's performance and Iowa State's comeback. That's a program that we respect a great deal. So there was some conversations about that performance.

Q. We know that you know what these girls were capable of, but seeing them put it together, especially down the stretch, how vindicating is that for you knowing all the work that you've put in?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: I'm just proud of them. They've



been a really resilient group. The sense of urgency that they played with in February to position themselves to be a tournament team, it doesn't surprise me that they are not fazed being down ten, I think, in the fourth quarter.

It's an experienced group, a confident group. Just proud of them.

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