

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

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Los Angeles, California, USA

Galen Center

Michigan Wolverines

Kim Barnes Arico

Cameron Williams

Laila Phelia

Media Conference

Kansas - 81, Michigan - 72

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Michigan Head Coach Kim Barnes Arico and athletes Laila Phelia and Cameron Williams.

KIM BARNES ARICO: Congratulations to Kansas. They had a really big fourth quarter against us, and we had, I think it was a ten-point lead, and they were able to get downhill and really get to the free-throw line.

One of our game plans was to try to keep them off the line, and I thought we did an awesome job of that in the first half, but in the fourth quarter they were really able to go to the line. I think that hurt us a ton as well.

They made plays down the stretch when we had the lead. They had to make big buckets down the stretch, and they found a way to make those plays, so credit to them.

Q. You guys were able to get Taiyanna Jackson and S'Mya Nichols in foul trouble early, and that really opened up the game on offense. Can you talk about what was going well during those first three quarters when you guys maintained control?

CAMERON WILLIAMS: I thought we did a good job playing team defense as a whole. That was in our game plan to really build on No. 1 because she's a huge presence for them as well. I think we really locked into that the first half of the game.

Q. You led the team in points today and had a really great game. Can you talk about what it meant to get



the start and get those 18 points?

CAMERON WILLIAMS: It meant a lot. Just doing whatever I can to help my team be successful is where my head's at no matter what position I'm coming from. I think the biggest thing is going out there and playing with my team means the most.

Q. Zakiyah Jackson had a really strong game today, was able to drive in a big three in the fourth quarter. Can you talk about her performance and what was going well for her?

KIM BARNES ARICO: She killed us, even in the first half. We prepared all week for her crossover to go back to her left hand, and I felt we couldn't stop her, which is really unusual because we have great defenders. I thought we just let her get back to her left hand a ton.

Then obviously the last shot, she had the courage to take it, the courage to make a play down the stretch of the game. Yeah, she had a heck of a game, and she really caused us some problems for sure.

Q. Looking back at the season as a whole, it was a pretty inexperienced group with the program, a lot of transfers and freshmen. What would you say is the identity of this program as it comes to a close?

KIM BARNES ARICO: That's something we talked about in the locker room pregame before we went out tonight. We just talked about the staples of our program and kind of what we stand for and the effort and the intensity and our ability to defend.

I thought we really did a great job of that for a majority of the game, but we couldn't finish it off. Just proud of -- I said our seniors and our kids that transferred to go to grad school here for their fifth year, Elissa Brett and Lauren Hansen, and just the impact that they made on our program and our senior class and their legacy of going to four straight tournaments, going to a Sweet 16, an Elite Eight.

Coming into this year -- and I've talked to you guys about



this a number of times -- we didn't know what this season was going to hold because we did have a lot of graduation and a lot of inexperience. So for us to be in the positions we were so many times, I'm really proud of our group and proud of our program.

Q. Obviously one of those leaders that you're talking about, Cameron Williams, went out with a bang with 18 points. Can you talk about how effective she was on offense against Taiyanna Jackson?

KIM BARNES ARICO: All year long we've kind of gone back and forth with Cameron starting and Chyra starting. I think we're our best team when they both have the ability to be on the floor together. Obviously some of this stuff doesn't really mean anything. I have to go back and evaluate the film.

But if you look at Cameron Williams, even though we lost by nine, her plus-minus for the game is zero, and if you look at Chyra Evans, her plus-minus for the game is plus five. They both had a major impact, and they both were able to be out there together and help us be successful.

We knew Cameron was going to have a great matchup going into the game, and I think Cameron is a player who felt a lot of pressure coming into the season because of the strength of our post the last six, seven, eight years. So she was working on getting her feet wet.

I talked to her a lot about that through the course of this year. Emily Kiser was in a similar position her senior year to be our go-to person. I think there was a weight or a load that Cameron felt on her shoulders sometimes.

It even happened tonight. The first three or four minutes she was getting her feet wet, and she might have been 0 for 4, 0 for 5, and her teammates had the confidence in her. Cameron, take a deep breath. You're going to be fine. Just keep going, just keep working, just keep giving a great effort. We were able to find her. She did a great job for us.

The turning point too was when she picked up her fourth foul, and she's out of the game. Then they just really started to get downhill and go inside. So that just speaks to how much she impacted the game.

Proud coach for her. She's just been in a relentless pursuit of getting better. I mean, she's just been unbelievable, her effort, her lock in to try to be the best she can and to try to help our team be successful is second to none.

As a coach, to watch your players come in where they are as freshmen and to have a career like and the

improvement and the development like Cameron has is just phenomenal. I can't say enough about her and what she means to our program.

Q. In that fourth quarter in overtime, how did Kansas kind of get that ability to pick up and really overtake that lead and move on?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Cameron was on the bench for probably most of it with her fourth until like four minutes to go. They were just going high-low, and they were just trying to isolate us inside and really take away that.

Then they were getting downhill, and they got to the free-throw line, and we had our fifth foul on us with probably seven minutes to go in the fourth quarter, so that's dangerous. I don't have the book on me, but the number of times they went to the free-throw line in the fourth quarter was probably more than we went for the game.

So when you have the ability to draw those fouls and get to the line early in the quarter and you have a big like they have that doesn't take a lot of time off the clock to just flash, boom, throw it in there, it allowed them to come back in the game.

Q. I know it may be hard to look forward from this, but what are you looking forward to with five freshmen coming in and two really strong recruits and looking to build on this year?

KIM BARNES ARICO: We've talked about it a lot, and we've signed probably our best recruiting class ever. We have two All-Americans but a class of five that's phenomenal. We have a great core group returning, and just really excited about the future of our program and trying to take those next steps for sure.

Q. Could you talk a little more about what you were hoping would happen on the final play of regulation with that tie game.

KIM BARNES ARICO: We tried to get the ball in Laila's hands, and she's done it time and time again, and Laila and Cameron in a two-man game and trying to get downhill in a two-man game. She was able to, then they called a charge, right? Is that the one they called the charge?

(Comment off microphone.)

So we were trying to get the ball in Laila's hands, she's a tremendous playmaker, and have her and Cameron in a two-man game and make a play.

Even when we didn't get anything, I still felt like we were in good shape to get a stop, up three. So that's the bummer. I've got to go back. You guys are asking me. It's all a blur right now.

Q. Just looking at the senior class, the players who are leaving the program after this year, what's the impact that you've seen from them on the program, and what do you hope the rest of the team is learning from them?

KIM BARNES ARICO: I mean, the senior class is really special. First and foremost, the ones that have been with us for four years, which are three. They came in during an interesting time. Their first year on campus was COVID. They didn't even go to class in person. They've been through so much.

I remember Elise Stuck telling me midway through like in tears, I haven't made one friend. I'm in college, and I haven't even been able to leave my apartment.

It was definitely an interesting time for them. They supported each other. They rallied around, and they've just been phenomenal. They're Michigan women. They represent what this program stands for, and they left it all with our team. So I'm really proud of them.

The two transfers that will graduate -- Taylor Williams has another year, so she won't graduate -- but the other two as well, they're two players that scored 1,000 points at their last place and had one year left to play and had never been to the NCAA Tournament, and they believed that they could come and make a difference in one year at Michigan. I'm just really proud of the both of them.

In a short period of time, kind of what they meant to our program. They're two competitors, and they fit right in with our culture.

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