

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Kansas vs USC

Monday, March 25, 2024

Los Angeles, California, USA

Galen Center

Kansas Jayhawks

Brandon Schneider

S'Mya Nichols

Zakiyah Franklin

Media Conference

USC - 73, Kansas - 55

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: Yeah, I'm really proud of what this group has become and the development of our team this year, but also proud of the progress that our program has made over the last three years. Tonight we played an exceptionally good team. I thought the difference in the game was points off turnovers. Uncharacteristically, we turned the ball over quite a bit in the first 15 minutes of the game and enabled them to get off to a fast start.

And then I really thought in the second half their bigs did a really good job protecting the rim and blocking shots and altering shots. Give them credit. When we cut it to one, they responded with a 9-0 run as a really, really good team does.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Zakiyah, you played more minutes than any player in the history of this program. This was your final game. What are the best memories you can take away from playing at Kansas?

ZAKIYAH FRANKLIN: It's really a lot right now, especially at this moment. I would just have to say, piggyback off what Coach Brandon said, the last three years, just the growth of the program, the people who were here that aren't here right now, and the other two seniors, Holly and Taiyanna Jackson, who kind of stuck it out here as well. I



would have to say they have just been a part of this and just the growth of the program. So I would have to say just that overall big picture.

Q. S'Mya, you guys worked really hard to get it down to one there, then they took off on you again. Just how demoralizing was that in terms of Clarice coming in and blocking shots for them and just not really being able to kind of recharge again?

S'MYA NICHOLS: I feel like as a team we really left each other back up, so block shot, turnover. I mean, it's a next play mentality. I wouldn't say we were just down the whole game. I wouldn't say we felt terrible or bad for ourselves. We genuinely went out there and played, and the fourth quarter they got ahead, and I feel like that's the end of it. That's, honestly, just what happened.

Q. Can you talk to me just about Taiyanna Jackson, especially her rebounding during this game in the second and third quarter and how effective that was for you guys.

S'MYA NICHOLS: Yes, Taiyanna Jackson, correct? It's okay. No, yeah, she's very much needed on both ends and she is dominant on the rebounds and we really needed that today. Of course they were animals on glass and so they were and (laughing). They were. And she got some great rebounds that we really needed, helped with our momentum, and she does that every single time, so that's nothing new to us. We still praise her on that and she just -- she did great today.

Q. Depending upon the decision of why that may vary, S'Mya, you'll either be the lone returning senior -- or the lone returning starter or one of two returning starters for the team next year. What do you have to do next season to carry this torch and keep it going forward, keep this progress going forward for Kansas?

S'MYA NICHOLS: I feel like it's a team sport, so I wouldn't say me individually on what I would have to do. It's what we have to do as a team to get back here and advance from here. You got to get back in the lab, work on ourselves, things that we need to improve on, and then



come together as a team and display it on the court.

Q. Zakiyah, you've played in a lot of different places. What was this atmosphere and this environment like tonight?

ZAKIYAH FRANKLIN: It was a great atmosphere, I would have to say. Credit to them, just bringing out all their fans. It was pretty cool to play in front of. I would just have to say, like you said, I've played in a lot of places in the Big-12, similar atmospheres as well, so this was a pretty great atmosphere.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you. We'll take questions for Coach.

Q. Similar question. What was the atmosphere like tonight? How loud was this building compared to some other ones you played in this year?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: It was a great atmosphere. I think we do play in some really good venues and atmospheres in the Big-12. I think I want to credit the USC and the community, because I'm not sure that people would have anticipated it. A lot going on in L.A., and I thought that it was very much a college atmosphere that sometimes typically you see more in the Midwest, in college towns. So, credit USC and their fan base for coming out, because I thought it was exceptional for both games.

Q. I know we talked before the season began and you talked about what this group could do and obviously you made it to the tournament, that was one of your biggest goals from last year. Now with a lot of those seniors heading out the door, how do you just continue to build the program? You mentioned in your opening statement, what are those goals, what are those keys that you want to continue to build with this program with the players that you have coming in and also who might stay?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: Well, our goal, goals will always be to compete for a Big-12 championship and advance in the NCAA tournament. We have to, I think it needs to be a goal to get out of this 8-9 game and play in a 1 seed in the second round. I think that would be one that surely would be beneficial in trying to advance.

Q. You were led again as you have been many times this year by S'Mya Nichols. She scored 22 points. What can you say, now we're looking back at the whole season, of her impact coming into this program in year one?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: I would probably say she exceeded expectations. We're very aware of what her skill set and her versatility of her game that she was going to bring to the table. But I think what we learned was that her poise and composure and her ability to lead even veteran players was far beyond her years of experience.

Q. You've done a really good job rebuilding the Kansas program. Lindsay Gottlieb and USC, this is year three for her, they're a one seed, she's done a nice job rebuilding the program as well. Maybe you have, maybe you haven't, have you given much thought to the USC rebuild and what are your thoughts on it overall?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: Well, I've known Lindsay for a long time, and I told her during introductions how happy I was to see her back in the game, because she's good for women's basketball. She's about the right things. She's about advancing and promoting our game, and she's about the players. That's something that I tremendously respect.

Q. You'll be competing next year in a very different looking Big-12. You're going to be competing with a very different looking team. What do you have to do as a coach to sort of adjust everything in the program to what's going to be a huge off-season of change?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: Well, I think it's just a typical off-season, you know, in college basketball now. We have some spots to fill. We'll be aggressive in particular in the portal now in the spring. But I think we're a very attractive place with a lot of opportunities to step in and compete and play right away.

Q. You mentioned their bigs were able to dominate. Clarice, when she came in, seemed like she kind of changed the tone. What did you see from her and what was different when she entered the game there in the fourth quarter?

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: I think physicality. I think when their two 5 players can both really split and play about 20 minutes apiece, and we're asking Jackson to play 35 plus, I thought their physicality, not only wore down Taiyanna, but wore down our team a little bit, because even when we could get to the rim it was tough to finish. I just thought they really impacted the game in a positive way.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you.

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