

American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

UCF Knights

Katie

Abrahamson-Henderson

Brittney Smith

Diamond Battles

Postgame Press Conference

UCF 61, SMU 28

KATIE ABRAHAMSON-HENDERSON: We're just very excited to make it to this point now. Sorry. I'm touching the mike. That, you know, this is one of our biggest goals is to get to the championship game. And we hadn't played SMU all year long. They hadn't played us. So it wasn't as easy of a game plan as that I thought it was going to be just because we hadn't played them, so I didn't know how they were going to play but I thought our team really came out focused.

We held their go-to players to single digits, which is big for our team. And I feel like we did a great job of balanced scoring and just really stepping up as a team and playing great defense and holding this team to 28 points. You know, that's a great feat that our team did

Q. First of all, welcome back ladies to the American Athletic Conference final. Coach, let me ask you this first: 68 to 28 final score. Do you feel like this was the team's most complete effort to date?

KATIE ABRAHAMSON-HENDERSON: Well, not just this one, no. I think that we've had several. I mean, this is the way we like to play. I mean, defensively we had three single-digit quarters against them. We're always try to focus on single-digit quarters. I thought our press was okay. Not as great as always. But we did make them turn the ball over 22 times. They hadn't played us yet. So it's really hard to prepare two in one day for our press, our defense and just how we play. But we just did a really good job of those single-digit quarters



Q. Brittney, let me ask you this: Another double-digit game there in the post spot there one more time, you know, doing the whole Brittney buckets thing you do with the turnaround jumper and all that. What was different in this particular game that SMU brought where you got a few extra openings there?

BRITTNEY SMITH: I feel like I come into every game with the same mentality, with the same idea of what I'm going to do. I don't really let like the opponents determine my game. So I came in and did what I do best.

Q. Last question from me, for the student-athletes both Diamond and Brittney there, when I talked to you ladies back in November, met you for the first time, the goal was clearly the conference championship. Now that it's this close, what's going on in your mind, what's the feeling?

DIAMOND BATTLES: This is our moment. I mean, we've got to stay locked in, stay UCF. We can't let other things or other people determine our plan, our game plan, our mental. So just being locked in and being captains, we've got to make sure our team is locked in and ready to go

Q. So Diamond, congratulations to you guys, every one of you, you guys made it. I know this was a goal for you. Kind of going off of what Kyle was saying, I want to go to you, Diamond. Last season, championship game you go down, this is a big goal for you guys to get back to the championship game. What's different about your mind set this year versus last year heading into the championship game?

DIAMOND BATTLES: Well, we have a chip on our shoulder, if that makes sense. We know the feeling when we lost and we're going to do everything in our gut to play hard and play how we play, to not feel that feeling again.

So just, you know, we've gotten better with our defense with our playing together with our balanced scoring. So just playing how we've been playing for the season is big. So just coming in tomorrow, playing how we play and that's it.



Q. And Coach Abe, I want to focus on the first quarter a little bit. I know the team forced 7 of their 22 turnovers of the game in the first quarter. How important was it to get a good start heading into the game?

KATIE ABRAHAMSON-HENDERSON: The tone? I mean, that was important. Setting the tone for a team that hasn't played us yet. I think that was big and that was one of our messages at the start. I said it's not the end of the game it's the first 4 minutes of the game, we're going to set the tone right away. And our starters did that.

Q. For Diamond and then Brittney, when you're playing as well as you are defensively, I think you held SMU into a long droughts throughout the game, do you feel like you're locked in, kind of in this different air? Do you know what you're playing at the highest level defensively what's it like?

DIAMOND BATTLES: It's a good feeling. Our defense creates our offense, that's how we play. When we're locked in as a team, it's really hard to score against us. I'm not going to lie. When we're locked in everybody's on the same page, we all have energy, we're pressuring the ball. We have me being loco and it gives energy to Mass, it gives energy to Brittney and Desto. It's just really a fun atmosphere.

So when we have defensively pressure and we are playing defense like UCF plays defense, it creates our offense and we just go like that.

BRITTNEY SMITH: I mean, I've said it a thousand times, defense is our mentality, it's our identity. When we get stops, we're doing what we've got to do, the game is just so much more fun. We give each other energy and it's a really good time.

Q. Meertens played well and you were able to show your depth in this game. What did you see to call her number?

KATIE ABRAHAMSON-HENDERSON: I actually talked to her before the game and I knew that the style of defense that this team plays is the style that she likes to play against. So I knew she could get to the basket. I knew she could do a lot of rejecting. I knew in transition she could score a little bit. So obviously trying to run some sets for her to get her some layups and stuff, and then they just gave her some more confidence to knock down some catch-and-shoot jumpers.

She really starts us off in the press. That way Tay can

start in the back and she doesn't have to play the front of the press the whole game. That's a lot. Shania really starts us off with that energy in the front of the press and her and Diamond were trapping people, and her and Tay were trapping people. And after they got a trap or a turnover, I could see in Shania's face she was really pumped up. She was starting that four minutes before a timeout to give everybody energy and get after it defensively.

So she's had several games like this. The last USF game she played really kind of the same way. She was getting to the rim and playing confident. Hopefully she can keep that for tomorrow.

Q. And then you go from playing team that you weren't familiar with, you hadn't played, to you're going to play a team regardless of who wins the next game that you're quite familiar with and have a lot of history with. Take me through that preparation now that you're going to face somebody that you're familiar with regardless of who wins the next game?

KATIE ABRAHAMSON-HENDERSON: I mean, we're just going to watch. We're going to enjoy and watch. We're going to lock in. Our team will be super locked in. It's great having these super seniors and mature people watching. A lot of them went through some things last year that they didn't really like and it didn't sit well for them. Obviously we're just going to prepare for whoever we have to play and that's the part of being familiar with teams, you know.

So there's a lot at stake for whoever makes it tomorrow. And a lot at stake for us and a lot at stake for the other team.

Q. Coach, you talked about defense driving the offense. 22 turnovers and you score 24 points off of those turnovers. You're really showing that you mean that, the defense drives the offense.

KATIE ABRAHAMSON-HENDERSON: I mean, I know the way we play defensively, I think that everybody really thinks that it's just that's all we concentrate on. But every really good team in the country, doesn't matter who it is, men's or women's basketball defense is their staple. You have to play great defense to be a really good team. I mean, you can't just let the other team score 100 points and you score 101. That's super dangerous, right.

So defensively I think it just -- we've kept it super consistent. A lot of teams play zone, a lot of teams play man, a lot of people do different things in their zone and mix it up. I think why our defense is so good is we've kept

it really the same for all six years we've been here. Five or six years -- six years that we've been here, we've kept it the same. We're so confident in it. We make little tweaks here and there and SMU did a couple things that were new today for us. So we really just took it as a challenge and found a way to guard it. Actually we went in halftime the team said, can we do this against that? I said, yeah sure, but nobody foul.

I think because our defense has just stayed consistent the whole time, they're super confident in it. They're not going out there and playing some completely new defense in this championship setting. They're playing the defense they've known how to play, both of these have played this defense for four years. I mean, that makes you super confident.

Q. You want to be playing your best ball in March. How can you play better than giving up 28 points?

KATIE ABRAHAMSON-HENDERSON: I don't know. I don't know. That's a question for them. We've got to play really good defense all the time. I didn't think against Tulsa we played exceptionally great defense against them. But I just think every new team we play, it's a new challenge. So whoever wins tomorrow, those coaches are really good coaches, they're going to come up with something new, and we're going to have to adjust to either their press break against our press or in the half-court setting what new play, new set, new whatever they're going to do against it. We've just got to be able to adjust.

Q. And then for Brittney and Diamond that same question. You've given up 28 points here. How can you play better in that championship game than you showed tonight?

BRITTNEY SMITH: I mean, we could hold somebody lower than 28.

DIAMOND BATTLES: I think we just have to come in with the same mentality. No matter who our opponent is, just playing our basketball. I mean, we say it all the time, when we play UCF basketball, it's amazing. So there's no such thing as playing better, just playing UCF basketball

Q. And for both of you, your confidence is as high as it's ever been right now, right?

BRITTNEY SMITH: Of course. We've earned that for ourselves, though.

Q. Coach Abe, I want to go back to the play before halftime. There was a heads-up play where Tay Sanders, she had a steal and then she passed it off to Meertens for a quick buzzer-beating layup. What can

you say about the discipline Tay had to get the pass off as the shot clock was going down?

KATIE ABRAHAMSON-HENDERSON: Tay is really having fun with this "I got the top assist" thing. So I think she knows that a lot of people aren't going to let her drive to the basket, so she's been working on jump-stopping and making good passes. So after the game we do some really cute things. We always talk about her assists. Lish is known to be an assist person and Diamond and even Shania, but Tay is not known to be a really good assist person.

So it's really cute after the game, even these last two games, she's had a lot of top assists. She's just getting really good at making better decisions and passing to the open people.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports