

American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

USF Bulls

Jose Fernandez

Elisa Pinzan

Bethy Mununga

Postgame Press Conference

USF 58, Houston 50

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Yeah. You know what? Our kids knew what was at stake. I think defensively we set the tone. We knew how important this game was for Houston, and our success that we had at their place and at our place, and we knew they were going to play with a lot of energy and a lot of enthusiasm. They got guys that can shoot the three and get downhill. So I thought we controlled tempo and got what we wanted offensively in the first half.

But I think when you look at the box score, we almost had six guys in double figures. I thought we shared it. Made great decisions. Pinzan was able to get us into what we needed to get to. Bethy and El got into a little bit of foul trouble but Bethy did a great job on the glass. So that's what I told our guys, this is nine years in this conference and tomorrow will be the sixth time that we're in the championship game. So it's a credit to what our program is and it's a credit to the type of players that we have at the University of South Florida

Q. Hey, Coach. Congratulations on the win. First half most of the game wasn't a great shooting performance. But you guys go 20-of-22 from the free throw line. How big is that when shots aren't falling to be able to drive and get to the line?

JOSE FERNANDEZ: It's huge. Especially against a team line Houston that's really aggressive man-to-man-wise, gets in the passing lanes. So if you're not shooting the ball well and you're in the bonus, you've got to step up and get to the line and make your free throws. So fundamentals.



Q. And then Laila Blair had half of Houston's points but the rest of the team combined for 25. What did you like that you guys did defensively on the rest of the team.

JOSE FERNANDEZ: She was 50 percent. She wasn't going to bet us by herself but she was getting too many -- she was very free from the very beginning. And I thought Young attacked and got to the rim. But I thought our help-side defense was really good for the most part in keeping them in front of us and making them shoot over us.

Q. And then Shae didn't start for the better part of two, three months there. But she came in today and gave you some good minutes. What can you say about her performance?

JOSE FERNANDEZ: I talked to Shae and Dulcy, bringing Dulcy off the bench now with not having Maria available, we need to have somebody off the bench that can give us points off the bench. But I thought Shae finished around the basket. She missed one layup but the other three, you know, she finished and went to the free-throw line, what was she, 2-for-4 I think.

So credit to Bethy and Shae. This is their last opportunity -- that's a big reason why they came back was to repeat. We didn't win the conference regular season title, we have an opportunity to play for a tournament championship tomorrow.

Q. Elisa, second game up here, you finished with 16 yesterday, 14 today what has been working for you? The three point shot has been falling nicely?

ELISA PINZAN: Just being confident and my teammates makes me confident as well, they share the ball, they give me the extra pass. And I just want to knock down the shots and that's what I did.

Q. Bethy, you guys get UCF for the third time this season. Had a rough going the first two times. Has that been the matchup you've been wanting to go out



on top, last tournament against UCF?

BETHY MUNUNGA: We're just excited to play them. We wanted to play them and we will tomorrow.

Q. And what's on your minds going into that matchup? It's your last AAC tournament. What are you looking forward to? What's on your mind?

BETHY MUNUNGA: We're looking forward to win. That's it. We're looking for a ring. That's why Shae and I came back. We have the opportunity tomorrow.

Q. Coach Fernandez, it's all about survive and advance now, isn't it?

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Yes, it is. Right now we're sitting at 24 wins. Like I said yesterday, you know, this team has been through a lot. We've been tested. We've been in tight ball games. We've won games on the road. So we got one more game tomorrow and we'll be playing in the NCAA Tournament. And then, you know, your next game in the NCAA Tournament could be your last one.

So I'm just thrilled that these guys get an opportunity to play for a conference championship. And tomorrow we'll get back, we'll start -- we'll talk UCF in the morning. We'll eat tonight, get some rest and they'll have a shootaround. We'll have a shootaround and we'll play tomorrow night

Q. Coach, no one's going to accuse you of backing into this one. You're going to have to beat the champs to get the trophy; correct?

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Yeah. You know, they handled their business at our place and at their place, so.

Q. One more question for both of the girls: You came back for this reason. You've got a team in front of you that you've lost two times. No need for extra motivation. Correct?

ELISA PINZAN: Yeah. I think we gave up the regular season championship that we won last year, and we're not going to give up the conference tournament championship, I'm sure. I know everybody's going to be ready. My teammates are going to be ready and we're just going to go out there and play our game, take care of the ball and we're going to be all right.

Q. Coach, shooting, outside shooting has obviously been a struggle all season with Central Florida using that zone primarily. Without giving away the game plan here, what are you guys going to have to do that you weren't able to do the first two games this year?

JOSE FERNANDEZ: I guess we'll find out tomorrow night.

Q. Fair enough, Coach. Fair enough. And for Bethy, for you, another run of the mill, what, 19 rebounds I think. You said growing up you were only good at one thing, and it seems like you really excelled at that in your collegiate career. It seemed like that was kind of the game plan for you, just crash the boards, get more rebounds and really help continue kind of get second-chance opportunities that really seemed to help early on when the shots weren't falling.

BETHY MUNUNGA: I mean, like you said, I was off of the floor. So I was just trying to make an impact on the court. And I take pride in rebounding the ball. If there's one thing I can help my teammates with, it's rebounding and I think it's what I did today.

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Thank you guys for being on, especially late back in Tampa. Appreciate you guys' support in following our group. Fernando, thanks for being here as well. Did you drive or fly? All right. Good. Thanks for being here, buddy. All right. Thank you.

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