

# American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 10, 2022

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

**USF Bulls**

**Jose Fernandez**

**Elena Tsineke**

**Bethy Mununga**

Postgame Press Conference

UCF 53, South Florida 45

JOSE FERNANDEZ: You know, it's tough because usually when we lead at halftime or we're going into the fourth quarter, we close out these type of games. But you've got to give Central Florida a lot of credit. It was a one-possession, two-possession game. And you know what, they made plays. They made plays in the fourth quarter and we didn't.

You know, we only had six turnovers at half. I thought it was really good. But then you finish with 17. We had a lot of costly ones. We had a lot of costly ones in the second half, especially in that fourth quarter.

But I thought the difference was the offensive rebounds. That hurt us in the fourth. We go 2-for-11 in the fourth quarter, lose by 8. It's tough. But you know what? A lot of credit goes to them. You know what? When we win, we win with class. If we get beat, you know, we're doing it the same way. So that's who we are and that's what our program is all about.

**Q. Coach, the first two matchups against UCF, you guys lose by an average of 18 1/2. Then today played them a lot closer. What was working through those first three quarters?**

JOSE FERNANDEZ: I thought we did a really good job taking care of the basketball, not turning it over and I thought we defended really, really well. You know, we held them to 30 percent shooting. But they go 16-of-20 from the free-throw line. That was a big difference there.



I thought we were solid defensively. We shot 34 percent. You need to shoot a lot better than that against them to beat them. They're a good basketball team. They've had a good year. How many wins do they have?

**Q. 27.**

JOSE FERNANDEZ: They got 27. They've won a lot of games. They're good. I think we're really good too, so just got to, hey, get back to Tampa, rest up, get ready for the NCAA Tournament.

**Q. Coach you mentioned the turnovers, six at halftime and then you lose 11 to 5 in the second half. Were they doing anything different defensively or was it just rushed offense?**

JOSE FERNANDEZ: You know what? Well, they make you take the ball to different places where they want to get you to go to trap you. I just think we got in a hurry at times. We got a 10 second back-court count. We turned it over on a baseline out of bounds.

So got to learn from it. Learn from it and you know, it's tough. Tough to get to the -- it's tough to get to the championship game and play as well as we did and not close it out.

**Q. And then looking ahead to the NCAA tournament, what does the preparation for that look like for you guys going forward?**

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Well, we played three games in three days, so need to get back, rest up a little bit. Right? And then find out who we play. Find out who we play on Sunday. Right? Bring the guys in to shoot, shoot some free throws. But the preparation will start on who we play Sunday night.

**Q. El, sorry about the loss but you had 8 in the third quarter. You were up to 14 and then they hold you scoreless in the fourth. What were they doing differently on you defensively in that final quarter?**

ELENA TSINEKE: What they were doing differently? I



think they were just -- it's obvious that we both wanted it a lot. But they wanted to take advantage from last year. They did it. Credit to them. They knocked me down. We fought hard and I'm proud of my team. And there's a lot more to do. We've got the NCAA tournament so this is our last chance to do better.

**Q. I asked Coach, but losing this game, how do you guys kind of regroup mentally to go into that NCAA Tournament, you know, a week from now?**

BETHY MUNUNGA: I mean, I think tonight we just need to digest what happened. Our season isn't over. We're going to the NCAA tournament, so we have to regroup. We'll be fine.

**Q. Coach, Pinzan and Tsineke had to go 40 minutes, is this the night you really miss Maria Alvarez?**

JOSE FERNANDEZ: I mean, this group, you know, this group last year, right, that played today, primarily played the bulk of the minutes in the championship game last year. It's a credit to the type of conditioning, the shape we're in, and our medical and training staff have done with these guys. Right? They also -- I mean, they played -- what they played seven guys too? So we played primarily six. So those were the guys that we went -- decided to go through and that can play in this type of environment, this type of game. Bottom line.

**Q. Coach, as physical a game as it was, were you surprised you only shot eight free throws?**

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Yeah, but you know what? Here is the deal, we can't control that. We can only control what we can control. Right? Could some 50/50 calls have gone our way? Possibly. But you know what, they didn't. It's not the reason why we lost the game. But we go 50 percent from the free-throw line. That's not us. Right? So that's four points there. We missed two last night out of how many we shot.

So what hurt us was the glass hurt us, turnovers. But I'm really, really proud of this group. I'm really proud of the two young ladies to the left of me. Again, defensively we held them to 30 percent. Right? The glass hurt us. I thought when we fouled, some of the fouls could have gone either way. Hey, we can't control that.

But, you know, usually like I said, we're up at half, we're up going into the fourth quarter, we usually close out these games. Been in these type games. That's us. Tonight it didn't happen. Guess what? The sun is going to come up tomorrow, we move on. That's it. You know.

**Q. For Bethy, just the way that Shae Leverett played in the first half in particular, probably one of her best stretches of basketball over these last two games. If you could just kind of talk about how important, especially that second quarter when she went on that individual 6-0 run, how important that was to keep you in the game at half?**

BETHY MUNUNGA: I mean, we won everything last year, so we just wanted to remake it, you know. This was our last chance and I remember after our timeout she just looked at me and said, Bethy, I'm not going home without a ring. So she was motivated to win this game and yes, she played hard. She made some good plays, all credit to her.

**Q. And then, Coach, you know, you said it twice that UCF has been waiting 365 days to win this night. What can you say about them and just kind of their resiliency to want to win this, especially for those fifth-year seniors that they've got?**

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Yeah. I think of a variety of their guys on their team had really good off-seasons. I think Diamond Battles had a really good off-season. She deserves the recognition that she's gotten, right. Down low they've got three guys in Kaba, Smith and Thomas that if you sit behind them, they're going to turn and score. Right? And they also go to the glass really hard.

So again our program and our team's not going to be defined by one basketball game. So, you know, a lot of people would like to be where we're at. We've won 24 games. We've got a good basketball team. Unfortunately, we got beat by one team three times.

**Q. You had mentioned that you had won the 24 games. We talked a bit about what didn't exactly work tonight. What do you think went best for your team and the ladies? I mean, heck this was a game for three and a half quarters-plus. So what do you feel like your team did best throughout the night?**

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Well, you know, I thought in a game like this, every possession, every trip down the floor on both ends of the floor matter. I thought when we really executed and we got the ball where we needed to get it to and we took high-percentage shots, ball went in the basket. So I was happy.

I was happy that there weren't the live turnovers that happened at UCF or at our plays where it was a live turnover and they come down and score. So that wasn't the case today.

We did a good job against their pressure and I thought in

the half-court we got the ball. Unfortunately, not as well as we could have in that fourth quarter to different areas against their 3-2 zone.

**Q. And this is for the student-athletes: Obviously, never fun to lose any game, but how much comfort is offered by the fact that you ladies will likely have another chance to suit up again in the dance?**

ELENA TSINEKE: I don't know if I would say it's a comfort. But it's really most -- it's mostly like motivating because we can do more things. It's time to prove more stuff. I don't know if it's more of a comfort, but just motivating. That's it.

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