

# American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Monday, March 6, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

## Cincinnati Bearcats Coach Michelle Clark-Heard Mya Jackson Jillian Hayes

Postgame Press Conference



Tulane 61, Cincinnati 52

MICHELLE CLARK-HEARD: I thought we battled and played hard. But I think when it got to the third and fourth quarter, they made some big shots. I was changing up our defenses and adjusting, but we took some quick shots. I think the momentum kind of shifted in a way when they made a basket.

But I'm just proud of our effort. I know I said this in the locker room to the team. We've been fighting and we've been grinding all season, and I just hate that we couldn't pull it out.

**Q. Obviously not the expectation you were expecting tonight, but just talk about the performance tonight. You finished with a season-high 11 blocks on defense. Malea had five. Talk about her play a little bit. She had five blocks there and 12 points. Your thoughts on her performance tonight.**

MICHELLE CLARK-HEARD: I feel like that was something that throughout the season, the helping and being able to get blocks was something that I felt like on the defensive end was good for us at times. But you know, again, you can get blocks, but then you've got to sit down and get stops.

I think that's what we talked about collectively is finishing.

**Q. Talk about the play of Malea Williams and what she brings to the table on the defensive aspect. Your thoughts on what she brings to the table? She obviously leads the conference in blocks, five tonight. How special of a player has she been for this team?**

MICHELLE CLARK-HEARD: I just think her heart, her desire to want to win. She talks to all the coaches all the time, asking questions about how she can get better or where she needs to be at. She just plays super hard.

She has allowed us -- she did during the season allow us to have the opportunity to change up defenses and do a lot of different things. So just really proud of her.

**Q. Mya, just talk about the growth of this team over the season. Obviously started out hot there in conference play, but how have you been able to see this growth from this team all the way from the start to finish of the season?**

MYA JACKSON: Yeah, I would say it's been a lot of growth for sure. We did start off hot. You have some rough patches, but I think everybody stayed with it. Everybody stayed confident. We all stayed together. Each and every day we just came in and we worked to continue to get better and better.

I think that our growth was tremendous, and I'm so proud of this team even though it wasn't the outcome that we wanted.

**Q. Coach, the game finished plus 16 at the free-throw line for Tulane and plus 13 on rebounding. Was it too simple to say that was the difference in the game today?**

MICHELLE CLARK-HEARD: Definitely. That's what we talked about in the locker room. Making free throws for us, we shot 50 percent. But then putting them at the line continuously on fouls and understanding and knowing how to adjust the game to the referees and how the refs are calling the game, and then rebounding. That was something that we talked about ahead of time, just being able to get the basketball and pursue the ball.

Again, I echo what Mya said. I think just super proud of how we continued to keep grinding. We was up at halftime, and then we came out, and again, we had some miscues on defense and the rebounding and the fouling as

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we talked about. And when you're playing great teams, hats off to Tulane and making shots and doing the things that they needed to.

**Q. Jillian, as a top scorer on a day when maybe the ball wasn't going through the basket, you still contribute across four steals, a couple blocks, six rebounds, drew five fouls. Can you talk about how that can keep you in the game on a day when maybe the shots aren't falling as quickly as you'd like?**

JILLIAN HAYES: Yeah, obviously not every day the ball is going to go in how I might want it to. But my teammates helped pick me up and remind I do other things and just to keep pushing, whether it be on the rebounds or on defense or giving a good pass. To keep pushing throughout the game.

**Q. Coach, 11 of the 12 players that played tonight all contributed and each scored a basket. What seemed to be the key there? The ball seemed to be moving very well here tonight. What was the key, and what led to that success there in the ball movement to get everybody involved in the offense tonight?**

MICHELLE CLARK-HEARD: I think that's something that we talked about. We're at the end of the season right now, and being able to adjust, I want to take my hat off to my staff, too. I have a brand new staff this season, and they did tremendous with game planning coming in and helping our players get better. I think that's a credit to not only just the coaching staff but the players and listening and taking the game plan to the floor.

We always tried to make sure we broke it down and gave them the simple answers to what there would be and how a team was playing us. I felt like as Jillian said, sometimes the ball just doesn't go in the hole. But we've got to control the things that we can control, and that's rebounding, that's not fouling, and that's making sure we take care of the basketball also, too.

**Q. You really fought hard tonight, especially to close out the game. What is something that you can take from tonight and utilize moving into next season?**

MICHELLE CLARK-HEARD: You know, the great thing is that all these games and everything that we've put in place, you grow. So we've got to go back as a staff and we've got to look -- they'll get their break and we'll go back and look how we can get better and what that looks like. My job as a head coach is to look in the mirror and make sure I'm doing everything I can to lead this program so we can get better.

Again, I'm going to go back and say I am proud of their effort. We've just got to clean up a lot of things. We talked about this a lot. We've got to become more disciplined in the moments when things really count. And I think that those things kind of came back and really hurt us some in a lot of the games.

In conference we were in basically all the games, a lot of them, first, second quarter, third quarter. And I think that's what I learned and we've got to make sure we go back and clean up, putting them in situations. That's what we talked about, fighting to the end, and that's what we did.

**Q. Coach, I know you guys are out of the tournament, and I know that was not the ultimate goal, but as you look at this tournament and what teams are left, who would you say your favorite is to win this tournament?**

MICHELLE CLARK-HEARD: I think that's a good question. I think this league has been unbelievable this year. The talent level has risen. We've got great coaches. I think it's going to be very interesting.

Of course we all know that South Florida is really good and do a lot of great things, but you have to look at Memphis and how they've played this year. East Carolina has played well. There's a lot of teams. I feel like when you talk about favorite, I feel like I don't have a favorite; I'm just excited to see what will happen when we get to the championship.

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