

# American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 7, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

## USF Bulls

## Coach Jose Fernandez

## Elena Tsineke

## Dulcy Fankam Mendjiadeu

### Postgame Press Conference

Wichita State 65, South Florida 53

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Well, we're definitely in a different situation. We're usually here -- this is our 10th year in the league, and we've played for the title six times, and three other times we've lost in the semifinals. It's unfortunate that we've played a lot of games this year, 31 previously before this one, and give Wichita State a lot of credit. They played well. They made shots. They defended. They played with a lot of energy and enthusiasm.

We couldn't get it going on either end of the floor. Uncharacteristic for us to shoot 31 percent. That hasn't been us all year.

We got it down to two, and they hit that three from that corner with one second on that shot clock, and then we came down and scored and they hit another shot from the top. It just felt like they made all the baskets late when they needed to from different guys.

But again, you've got to be playing your best basketball here, and I thought after Cincinnati, we came back, we had good practices. We had a good practice yesterday.

Our kids didn't come here satisfied that we already won the league. The kids came to win three games in three days. That didn't happen. Now we've got to regroup and find out where the committee is going to send us.

**Q. You mentioned you got it back to two. Outside of Dulcy's lay-up kind of midway through that stretch, you went the final five minutes with just two points in that third quarter. What did you see change from Wichita State defensively, or was it just something**



**where you couldn't get the lid off the basket?**

JOSE FERNANDEZ: I mean, we missed a lot of shots that we normally make. You know, Dulcy, El and Sammie have won a lot of games for us this year. There's not one thing or two things. We picked a bad night not to play well, all the way around.

I thought our passing was not good. It wasn't crisp. We didn't adjust to how they guarded us with pick-and-roll situations and going underneath screens and switching out, so that affected us a little bit.

They got point production from guys like Dean. Last time we played them, Dean didn't score. She had 14 today. Look at Duncan and McCarty's numbers; between both of them, they had 17. Look what happened last time we played them at their place.

We've had an X on our back all season long, and they played inspired. When you look at the stats, your two wings are 7 for 31. Well, that's a big number. Those are a lot of misses from guys that we rely on.

The one thing that we can always control was the defensive end and how we rebound. When you're not making shots, one thing you've got to do is defend. It seemed like they got everything they wanted at the high post and the low block, and their guards made shots.

**Q. Dulcy or El, obviously two seniors, wanted to come here and win and bring another championship back to Tampa. Just what's your emotions right now as you try and process this and move on towards a potential NCAA Tournament run?**

ELENA TSINEKE: I mean, it hurts today. We didn't do a great job today. We missed a lot of shots. But they were the better team, and they played with a lot of heart, so credit to them.

But we can't be so sad because we've got to keep going, and the season is not over.

DULCY FANKAM MENDJIADEU: We're disappointed.

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We wanted to win. We didn't get it; it was a day off for us. Coach Fernandez says sometimes we shouldn't take days off. We took it today I guess. Bad day to take it off, but we've got to just get it off our chest and just keep going.

**Q. El, when you hit that shot to cut it to two, did you think this was just going to be another sure win? Were you a little surprised they answered back the way they did?**

ELENA TSINEKE: I mean, I didn't lose faith in any moment. I know I missed so many shots, but I still believed that we could win that game. But slow starts always -- like we had a slow start, so that hurt us in the end. If we started better and earlier, it would be better.

**Q. Dulcy, it doesn't feel good right now, but do you think the way it happened here might motivate you guys even more strongly for the NCAA Tournament?**

DULCY FANKAM MENDJIADEU: Definitely. The season is not over, you know. We have lost. We need to move on from here and keep going.

**Q. Some of the younger players that you have on this roster, this being the first time suffering a major loss in a conference tournament environment, how important will it be for them to bounce back and kind of put it behind them with still some time left to play in the season?**

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Well, I mean, if you look at our roster and you look at our starting five, because we've got five freshmen, El was the only player -- we brought 10 here. El was the only player that experienced winning a championship two years ago. Maria Alvarez did, but Maria has been injured, in and out. Those were the only two guys that knew Dickies Arena and what it means to come here and prepare and play and win.

Then the team from last year that lost to UCF, we've replaced some folks. We've won 26 games for a reason. We're still a really good basketball team. We just didn't play well tonight.

All over the country, it happens on the women's side and on the men's side. That's what March is all about. I know bubble teams are not happy because somebody in this league stole a bid. But I don't want one loss to diminish the job that these two guys have done and the rest of the guys in that locker room because we've had a very, very good year. We had a very good November and December and over 16 nights we proved that we were the best team in this conference.

I know it's going to hurt because we wanted to come here and win three games in three days and cut the Nets down and bring another trophy back to Tampa. Well, it didn't happen. It's a life lesson.

When you're in college and you play sports, you learn a lot of life lessons. Well, now we've got to regroup.

There's a lot of teams that would like to be in the position that we're at, that we lost in a conference tournament and our season is not over. We still have basketball to play. Yeah, we lost, it sucks, but we've got to move on.

Losing a game here in a conference tournament, there's going to be a lot worse things that's going to happen in their lives and in my lifetime down the road, but I'm proud of this team. I'm proud of the season we've had. It's unfortunate that we didn't play well, and we got beat by a team that played very inspired. They were well-coached. They made shots.

We'll see how the rest of the tournament goes.

You've got to give Wichita State some credit, too, because they defended. They made shots. They played well. That's how the game goes in all sports.

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