

# American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 7, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

## Memphis Tigers Katrina Merriweather Madison Griggs Jamirah Shutes

Postgame Press Conference



Memphis - 48, UCF - 46

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from coach and then take questions.

KATRINA MERRIWEATHER: I really enjoy coaching this team because all we've talked about since the pre-season is being tougher, stronger, longer. So these wins that we get that are a scratching and clawing and fighting because we don't shoot the ball well, but then you look at our box scores and we have 48 rebounds. It means that all the work that this team has put in is coming to fruition and that's really exciting. No matter how ugly it is, the goal is to survive and advance. I'm proud of them for doing that.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions, please.

**Q. First and foremost, what did you tell your team in that second half after being down 12 at halftime?**

KATRINA MERRIWEATHER: A few things. One, they were just challenged, challenged to step up and to play harder consistently. But what I love about halftime is we had an assistant in there talking to 'em, but when she walked out, we could hear the team talking. And I think that that is the reason for the turnaround is they got together and they got on the same page because they know more than anyone what they're capable of.

We needed to follow the game plan better. We needed to be more aggressive at halftime. We had shot two free throws. And of course we ended the game having shot 18. That was the team that we're used to seeing.

**Q. I was going to pose this at first just to you, but then**

you also mentioned the players talking at halftime too, so if there's anything they could weigh in as well, please do. But towards the end of the game UCF goes four and a half minute scoring drought. What was it that you figured out to shut 'em down?

KATRINA MERRIWEATHER: We did a couple of things differently. We went with four guards, which really helped us offensively and surprisingly helped us defensively because Jamirah Shutes played a little bit of the 4, and she was able to rebound really well and that allowed us to be small and that helped us be able to run our offense a little more fluently because they had decided to not guard our 4 player.

So I think that when we started to get a little more motion offensively then it impacted our defense and we started to feel like ourselves.

MADISON GRIGGS: We just had to come in and rebound. We knew we had to defend and get stops and we couldn't trade buckets. So we just came in and got stops and we got offensive rebounds and got put backs and fouls and that helped us get back into the game.

JAMIRAH SHUTES: Also, we had to really rely on our defense. Me and Madi together only hit I see six shots from the field, so I guess that was another reason why it was a close one.

But relying on our defense and that's just what we do. So that was the reason.

**Q. One characteristic that this program has shown since you've gotten to Memphis is having great poise. Talk about the poise of tonight. You only scored 16 points in the first half. Talk about this game specifically and that question is for all three.**

KATRINA MERRIWEATHER: The poise that, in my mind, just comes from the way that these young women respond to us when we make practice very, very tough. We create adversity. We do three-minute segments. So when we're in that huddle, we go back to the times that we're in practice and we say, Hey, we're down six, there's three

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minutes left.

So I think that they have a lot of reps at having some poise and some composure, but you got to turn to the leadership of these two. You have a fifth year senior and a fourth year senior who have played a lot of basketball games and they have made some big plays and big shots and big stops, not only this year, but throughout their career, and you have to give them credit. And I would also say Destyne Jackson. That's a very calming force out there for us.

Those three have been in this spot plenty of times and I rely heavily on them in those moments.

MADISON GRIGGS: Yeah, we've been here before, plenty of times, this year. So as a team it's, we're getting more comfortable with staying poised and calm so we can get through the game and get a win at the end of the game.

**Q. For the players, knowing what you guys have kind of had to go through as far as adversity, I just wanted to follow up on that. You had the game winner, Madi, at SMU. Did that game, does this game, rather, feel any similar to that or some of those experiences? And then Coach, they talked a lot about you coming it from Wright State and bringing some of those players over. Destyne and Emani in particular played really, really strong basketball as a couple of those transfers. So just wanted your thoughts on bringing them over and them performing on this stage.**

MADISON GRIGGS: Every game feels the same. I go out with the same aggression, the same mindset, to do whatever my teams need me to do. So fortunately, I was just in that position to make that shot at SMU. But every game is the same for me. I come out as the same mindset and I'm just ready to play and ready to win.

KATRINA MERRIWEATHER: In regards to the players, and I will throw Jada right in there because in those moments where I feel like we need experience, Jada's been playing for a long time in some high-level basketball having come from West Virginia and Trinity Valley Community College. So she knows what playing under a lot of duress looks like because they were champions in junior college, so they had people coming at them all the time.

I think so. I think that when we took a look at the team and the players who were already here we simply supplemented, and I think that that's what the portal has been for is you take a look at your team, you evaluate it, and you say what do you need.

And the reality was there were plenty of players on that team that could have helped us, but when you take a look at what Jamirah and Madi brought, we knew that we needed a few pieces that would help them continue to grow and help them develop as well. And I love this group together and what it looks like with these two being in the forefront.

**Q. You talked about at the very beginning how much this team has meant to you. Both as an African American basketball coach and women's basketball, but also as a woman, what has this season meant to you on a personal level?**

KATRINA MERRIWEATHER: I think the representation matters. We talk about it plenty. We talk about how much good people matter. But we do want them to see people professionally that look like them.

And I had the same example coming up with Coach Stringer and now they have that example with Coach Staley and there's plenty of coaches all around the country that are making their mark. I think that what we're trying to do is really be good people at the end of the day. So it is important. I don't minimize it at all being the first African American women's coach at Memphis. I think it's phenomenal and I'll even be more excited when hopefully they get my age and we're not talking about first anymore. There's been equal opportunity for people in every profession all over the country, not just in sports or basketball, but everywhere.

**Q. Have you had a chance to process the tournament so far, meaning South Florida has been eliminated, the first time that a No. 1 seed lost a game in this tournament, let alone the championship? There will be a first-time champion in this tournament this year. Have you thought about it in those terms yet as the highest remaining seed and what's in front of you potentially?**

KATRINA MERRIWEATHER: Yeah, I think it's, for lack of a better term, it's cool that we're the highest seed remaining, but it doesn't mean anything. If the seeds meant something, then the upset wouldn't have happened to begin with, and we surely wouldn't be in a tight game with Central Florida because of their seed.

But the reality is that you've got coaches who are showing up giving their best, players that are showing up giving their best. So, no, we haven't paid any attention as much as possible. Of course we know. I wish that I could sequester them and them have no idea, but of course they want to watch the next game. I don't even want them doing that. I would like for us to go back and get as much

treatment as they need and rest as they need and allow us to feed them the information, but they have phones, so they're going to know anyway. So we're going to go watch a little bit.

But we're just trying to do what we've always done. Like, one day, one game at a time. We've never got caught up in what anybody else is doing. We try to stay locked in to what our journey is.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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