

American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 7, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

UCF Knights

Sytia Messer

Taylor Gibson

Mya Burns

Postgame Press Conference

Memphis - 48, UCF - 46

SYTIA MESSER: Congratulations to Memphis for finding a way there at the end to pull it off. I was super proud of my players. I feel like for 38 minutes we won the game. We just didn't finish it there at the end.

We had a drought in the third quarter. When you look, they scored 12 points and we scored six. So I thought the third quarter was a rough quarter for us and we just didn't find a way to finish it.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions, please.

Q. Can you walk us through maybe the two timeouts there, coming out of the timeouts where you guys had the inbound in the half court, and what you were looking for and then what ended up occurring.

SYTIA MESSER: Well, we practice that all the time. It's a play we have called nothing where we put Ashton in who is one our better three-point shooters. We were just trying to get a quick shot, a three-point shot, or a foul. And we did end up with a foul, okay, and we intentionally tried to miss the second one there to get a rebound to go up.

Q. Coach has had as much success as she has and the character and I know it stings right now, but during the course of this game knowing that it was as close as it was and this was a game that you guys feel like you had, what kind of takeaways, especially with two ladies that are coming back next season.

TAYLOR GIBSON: I think that's obviously motivation for next year, and I think the later part of our season we



started to get better and better and we kept growing. So I think that's just more motivation for next year. We're going to come back stronger than this year and come with a chip on our shoulder.

MYA BURNS: I agree with what Taylor said. It's motivation for next year. Another thing to learn from the game is just like stay poised. It's never over until the buzzer go off. Like, it was like 1.2 seconds left and it's not looking good for us. We go back to the bench, Coach telling us we're good, we're good, we still got it. Just keeping your head and playing to the end.

Q. Can you comment on the way that this defense played in the first half where you hold two all-conference guards, one, I believe they're 2-15 shooting in that first half, really making life difficult for them.

SYTIA MESSER: Yeah. In scouting Memphis we talked about not letting them getting downhill, penetrate any part of the paint. If they get in the paint, we didn't do our job. I thought that our players did a great job of that overall, but specifically in the first half. So that was the game plan, try not to let 'em get open shots, try not to let them get in the paint, and we did a good job of that.

Q. Tough loss. Great effort so far. I'll say this though, going into this game, I guess is the question I have, you had all the adversity during the season, you hit the right stride. What positives do you take out of the opportunity? Like you almost upset a No. 2 team that's having the best performance in their program's history. I know there's no morale victories, but speak to kind of the adversity that you overcame to even get it that far.

SYTIA MESSER: Yeah. When you think about it, we've lost to Memphis twice by a total of four points. And that's the No. 2 team in our conference, which compliments to Memphis. But it shows you each step. I think our last eight games when we went to Cincinnati, this team turned a corner. And we have lost some close games there at the end. I played people a few times 37 minutes. But our philosophy is, "almost doesn't count."

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

So we're proud of the moments where I thought Destiny's been solid and really good against Memphis, her rebounding. I just think we have done a good job collectively, but we just didn't finish the deal.

Our rebounding with Destiny and Taylor was good. Our free throws, we stepped up and hit big free throws. So we were just right there. And it sucks for these players that we wasn't able to get over that hump, but it's so much motivation for next year. There's so much locker room material we can go for.

Like I said, you look at our last eight games and you throw out the South Florida games, we're right there against the No. 2 and No. 3 teams in our conference.

Q. Taylor, I wanted to go to you real quick obviously you would rather have it happen in a win, but you're on the tournament stage, you get the opportunity to take the shot for the three. Coach has been talking about versatility on the floor. How cool is that, how cool a moment was that for you guys when you dropped that and then added your ability to contribute over and above to what you do in the post?

TAYLOR GIBSON: Obviously it's really good to see it and I give my teammates hype, so that's obviously good. I work on my three-point shot, so getting into the game it's just a great feeling. But I do have areas to grow my game, so just keep working on that in the off-season.

Q. Mya, you coming in here doing what you do as an experienced player. Kind of passing some leadership. What would you say was the most positive experience from the season? I know I'm kind of putting you on the spot right after the game and all that, but what's kind of a positive, the most positive that you had from the season?

MYA BURNS: I'll probably say just these last few games, especially the last one that we played yesterday. So like towards the end of the season everything started to click for us a little bit better. People were starting to play better. We were starting to play better together. It just got real fun at the end. We started to have each other's back more, just playing more as a team, as a family. So just the end of the season.

Q. You mentioned obviously that drought in that third quarter. What did you see there that you just couldn't get the offense going? Was it what Memphis did or was it just the shot selection? What did you see there that kind of got you off to that bad start in the third quarter?

SYTIA MESSER: I just felt like we got in a little drought. There was some shots that went in and out. Rachel had a wide open three that went in and out. When you're competing for championships -- and our players, we talk to them a lot about this, is that every possession counts. And the drought that we went through without scoring and their scoring I thought that was the difference in the game.

Memphis came up with some great offensive boards. They had 18 offensive rebounds. That's big.

Q. Is that the one part that you're maybe disappointed defensively, because you got 'em really -- probably held 'em to a lot of good first shots, but just couldn't get that defensive rebound, especially in the second half.

SYTIA MESSER: That's exactly right. We just couldn't get those rebounds. Memphis had 14 second chance points and we lost by two. That's tough. But here's the thing, guys, we're playing with a young team. When you think about it, these two young ladies never played together before. Next year we get 'em back. And our team collectively, I thought at the end our last eight games, that's the UCF basketball that you can look forward to in the future. Tough and just being right there. Playing our opponents 37 minutes, but not quite being there. The more you play together with experience. The game before Sierra is a freshman point guard who had 10 assists and she played tonight, looking at Sierra's minutes, she played 37 minutes or 36 minutes. And she's a freshman.

So experience is the best teacher and that's what we are right now in our program and building this thing. But I feel good with the players that we have, the ones that we recruited to bring in and just to our players gave a great effort. These young ladies came together and had never really played together. To compete the way they have I'm super proud of this team. I'm proud of what they have done.

Of course we want to do better. You got to understand I'm used to winning and winning championships. But I understand that this is a process and we understand it's a process. We've celebrated small victories. We celebrated small victories. There's some things we can celebrate. We can celebrate our free throws. There have been games we missed free throws that cost us the game. And we got better tonight. And that's part of growing, that's part of us learning each other and getting and moving forward.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

SYTIA MESSER: Thank you, guys.

