

# American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 8, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

## Houston Cougars Coach Ronald Hughey Tiara Young Laila Blair

Postgame Press Conference

Houston 72, Wichita State 64

RONALD HUGHEY: First, I want to give the honor to God. Without him, none of this is possible.

The next thing, Keitha Adams and Wichita State Shockers, much, much improved team. Again, I keep saying it over and over, people don't know how tough the American is. It's an extremely tough conference. You can just check our record outside of the conference, and man, when we get a chance to play against each other, it's always a war. So hats off to Keitha and what she's doing with that program. Much improved.

Today we just wanted to come out and really establish who we are on the defensive end. Like I told the young ladies all the time, they're training. They're training for all the adversity. We're the most resilient team in the country. Nobody has been through all the adversity we've been through with all the overtime games and all the one-possession losses, so we learned a lot from those things to be able to get to these moments and get through.

I told them in the locker room, when Wichita State took the lead and we had our four back-to-back stops and then four scores to be able to go up by 10 and that was the turning point in the game, we were locked in. I just can't think enough of our team and each and every person, just from being locked in and bringing that energy and that passion and doing what we do, defend, and the rest will fall in place.

I can't say enough about these two up here, Tiara and Laila, just allowing them opportunities to play through the offense and then have some freedom itself. It just says a



lot about who they are, because again, they're two players outstanding that can be able to take over games, but they still choose to play within the team, and that's what makes us great. And I'm really appreciative of them for that.

**Q. You all have talked for a while about getting to March 9. Well, you've reached that goal. What's it going to take to win on March 9?**

TIARA YOUNG: It's exciting. We've just got to go back, rest, refocus, and lock in for tomorrow. But I think we're all pretty excited. This is what we've been waiting for. This was one of our biggest goals, and to come out and reach this goal, I think we're all excited, and just got to go back and lock in.

LAILA BLAIR: I agree with what T said. Definitely we spoke this into existence. And as we continue to manifest what we spoke into the atmosphere, March 9 is not just the stopping point. We want to complete that day all the way through. We want to win the day, we want to be champions. That's what we came here for. We're thankful just to have the opportunity to play in a championship game, but we know what God has planned for us, and we're going to see it through and have faith that we can come out victorious.

**Q. Can you put into words what this means to you to have this group one win away from the NCAA Tournament?**

RONALD HUGHEY: I can try to put it into words. It's a long time coming. When I got the job at the University of Houston, the first two seasons we won six games the first year, six games the second year. Then we went -- we were okay, and then we got up to where we were top 5 and top 3 in the conference, but we couldn't get over the hump.

Again, just trying to put it into words now, I think it'll hit me later. Just having the opportunity to experience the NCAA Tournament before I took the job at Houston for seven straight years. And now to understand what our young ladies have in front of them, to go and take care of things tomorrow so they can have the opportunity to experience that is just tremendous.

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

But it's hard trying to put into words what it means. I'm just so excited and delighted, and the faith that the university, Ms. Chizer, Chris Pezman and everybody always continue to have within everything that we do in women's basketball is just tremendous, and without them and their faith, we wouldn't be here right now.

**Q. You have about 26 or so hours until you play. Will you be able to sleep tonight, and what will that be like for you personally?**

RONALD HUGHEY: Well, it won't involve any sleep, I'll tell you that. Again, it'll be a lot of film, a lot of Red Bulls, trying to do everything we can. Start by watching the game and then seeing what we can do to put our kids to the best opportunity to be successful.

That's the thing as a coach, you want to do the number one thing and have your team prepared. If you don't have your team prepared, you feel like you let them down.

Again, if it takes for me not to get any sleep and my staff not to sleep tonight for a good 12, 14 hours, that'll be fine. It'll be well worth it to be prepared for tomorrow.

**Q. This team has built its identity around what you guys do defensively. To have a team that plays defense the way that you play, does that make y'all even more dangerous in March?**

RONALD HUGHEY: I think you said about the way we play defense. You know, it's the dictating thing for us, because again, we have people on a short day trying to prepare for what we do is extremely hard. Wichita today had been playing really well, not turning the ball over or anything like that. Today we forced them into 21 turnovers. They've been out-rebounding everybody, and on the offensive rebounds, we beat them on the offensive boards, as well.

Not allowing people to run their offense is something that we are predicated on, dictated on. And you think about who we are, it's getting each and every person to do what we do, and then when we add the press to that, it's another element of it. But yeah, it makes us really hard to play against, when you're talking about the defense that we do.

**Q. What's happening inside you that we can't see?**

RONALD HUGHEY: Pure joy and excitement. I want to jump and scream to the rafters, but the job is not done. The job is not done at all.

Again, like Tiara said, we want to rest and refocus and

come back and take care of business because the job is not done, and I think once we take care of business and do that, all those emotions will come out, but right now, the job is not done, so we'll rest up and refocus.

**Q. Tiara, you were down two and I think you scored six points pretty quickly, and they called time-out. What was the message in that time-out? Was that kind of the pivotal point where you felt like this was your chance to put this thing away?**

TIARA YOUNG: Yeah. With the confidence coming from my teammates, them believing in me, I just wanted to step up and do whatever I could for them. Whatever it took, I was down to do it.

**Q. Laila, this is your third straight trip to the semifinals of this tournament and now the first time that Houston has been in the championship final. How does that feel to get over that hump? I know you said the job is not done, but how do you feel having been through this step a couple times?**

LAILA BLAIR: Man, it's nothing but a blessing. We've been progressing each year since I've been at the university, and it's like this is what I prayed for. This is why I committed to this university, because I was down for the process and growing with the team and the program.

Just to see us continue to progress and continue to fight through adversity that we've been through, it's amazing. Because even though we went through all the ups and downs leading up to this point, it only made the story better for this moment that we're about to experience, even now and tomorrow.

Man, I'm thankful. I'm grateful just to have the opportunity to share this moment with my teammates and my coaches.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.

