

American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Houston Cougars Coach Ronald Hughey Bria Patterson Tatyana Hill

Postgame Press Conference

East Carolina - 46, Houston - 44

THE MODERATOR: All right. We're joined by Houston coach, Ronald Hughey, and Bria Patterson, and Tatyana Hill. Coach, before we go to questions, would you please give us some comments on the game?

RONALD HUGHEY: Yeah, hats off to Kim McNeill and East Carolina, I know how hard she's worked to get her program established. I mean, being picked last and the last three years finishing in the bottom half of the conference, you know, it's a tremendous -- just tremendous effort from them to be where they are right now. So hats off to her and her program.

Yeah, we picked a day where shots didn't fall for us. You know, I never thought that would happen for us. I knew we were coming to defend and rebound and do what we needed to do on that end. Never thought that we would not make a three, you know. I don't think we had any game since I've been coaching here that we hadn't made a three, and that happened today, tonight, excuse me.

I think everything else, we just kind of rushed ourselves, and didn't take advantage of the opportunities that we had earlier. I thought in the second quarter we had an opportunity to be able to push the lead and take care of it, but we didn't. Then we got into a dog fight in the third quarter and fourth quarter, and, again, the ball just didn't fall for us.

But, hats off to these two young ladies up here and our team, because, again, to go and do what we've done this year when you start out non-Conference with a really, really tough schedule and don't accomplish the things you



want to accomplish in non-Conference and you get to Conference, and you know, we made up our mind right then and there to say March 9th was going to be the date we were going to get here for the championship game. And they saw that vision back then before our even Conference game even started, and we made it here. And that's the thing that makes these two different. Because, again, I wouldn't want to go to war with anybody except for those two, when you're talking about the perseverance and the resilience of our team, it starts with those two, Bria Patterson and Tatyana Hill, sitting right next to me. Because, again, they make everything we do happen.

Hats off to our staff and everybody who worked their tail off. Again, tell you what, had a hell of a year. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We have a question right here in front, on the right.

Q. Ron, how heartbreaking was this loss?

A. Tremendously heartbreaking. Speechless to the team in the locker room. Trying to find the words without rumbling and those kind of things. Just talk to them about, you know, the opportunity you had today was earned, you know. And there's 300 other schools that wish they were in your place right now, and we let it slip through our fingers. But, yeah, it's really, really difficult to swallow right now.

Q. Ron, I mean, how hard is that, you know, locker room scene that you have to address a team after, you know, coming so close and having this kind of run to get here?

RONALD HUGHEY: You know, you go to the Ace program, they teach you how to train to be a head coach, and then Nike has the Villa 7 to teach you how to become a head coach. They don't have any sessions to teach you how to go and address your team after the kind of loss like today. So, nothing that you could learn from being a head coach could prepare you for that. It's just something that has to come, and you have to experience it, and you have to try to find the words.

You know, the thing you have to do is be truthful, honest,

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and loving. Because, again, they worked their tails off and you can't take that from them. But nobody can teach you anything about going in the locker room after a tremendous, you know, disappointing two-point loss like that.

Q. Ron, just looking at the entire season, most games were pretty much a majority of them, does that sort of make this tough? You guys have been in these situations, but just not been able to get over that hump, like you said?

RONALD HUGHEY: Exactly, exactly. Started out non-Conference. We had the lead all the way up until, you know, probably the last two minutes of the game and not being able to close them out. I thought we kind of cracked that in conference some, where we won some close games and close to the end of non-Conference as well. So I thought we were over the hump, you know, going over some special situation things. Then dictating with our defense to where we wasn't in those positions just because, you know, we can turn it up and be able to turn people over and be able to create an advantage on that end.

But, yeah, it's the tell tale of our season, you know, close games have been Achilles heels for us.

Q. Bria and Tatyana, what are your emotions, and how would you describe the locker room mood after the game?

TATYANA HILL: Can you say that one more time?

Q. The players emotions in the locker room?

BRIA PATTERSON: It's kind of like a disbelief almost. I felt like our team came out, we fought hard to the end. So I feel like I could live with that part of it, but of course you want to win, so that's kind of a hard pill to swallow, like coach said.

TATYANA HILL: Yeah, like what Bria said, it's definitely a hard pill to swallow because I know how much we worked so hard during the season to get to this point. And, yeah, it's a lesson learned.

Q. For both of you ladies, as your coach said, it got away from you. How painful is it setting in that it got away for both of you ladies?

BRIA PATTERSON: Real painful, like you said, it slipped out of our hands. It was in our grasp, so letting it go like that it hurts a lot.

TATYANA HILL: Yeah, this hurt because I felt like we had control of the game, and we let it slip away.

Q. Ron, I know it's not the destination that you would prefer, but any thoughts or consideration on would you like to play in the NIT or do you feel like, you know, there would be some opportunities there if you want to continue your season?

RONALD HUGHEY: Yeah, we got a bunch of e-mails from, you know, other tournaments and things like that. But it's time to set the standard for NAAs around here. And that's the thing that we all get together as a team and talk about, and being able to make some headway that way.

Again, the standard that we've set, again, finishing in the top three or four, the last three or four years, maybe even five years, and getting so close, and 20 wins, and 18 wins, and Sweet Sixteens and WNITs and all that, just coming up short again, we'll sit down together as a group and be able to make a decision with that. Because, again, their word is just as important as mine. It's been a long year, and we want to make sure that we are all on board if we're going to do anything moving forward.

But one thing I want to say about this group is, you know, the resilience is just tremendous, just tremendous. When you come to work every single day when things are not happening your way, and you get in those close losses and things like that, and they still came to work. We never got blown out this year, no matter who we played. And we played the top 15 schedule in the country.

I had coached calling me like why y'all scheduled so hard? We had a team that was able to do that. Never got blown out. Never got blown out. And they came to work every single day. Every day. No matter if you asked them to play 10 minutes, 30 minutes, 40 minutes. Three overtime games, one overtime, no matter. But the thing we talked about in that locker room was bottling up this feeling.

This pain, this disappointment, this disbelief, and letting it fuel us for future steps every single day, starting with life itself. Because everything matters, and that's why we say it. We want to fight for 40 minutes like everything matters. And I can't say not one second that they didn't do that. And that's why you can hold your head up and put your chest up and put your shoulders back and walk around proud, because you know you did your job to the best of your ability. And that's the thing I'm so happy about with this team and these two.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Appreciate it.

