

American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Sunday, March 10, 2024

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

East Carolina Pirates

Kim McNeill

Bobbi Smith

Tatyana Wyche

Postgame Press Conference



East Carolina - 65, Memphis - 63

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

KIM McNEILL: First of all, I'd like to give praise to Memphis. I thought they played extremely hard. Anytime you play a Memphis team you know it's going to be a fight. They always battle on the boards, they battle defensively, and they never give up, no matter what the score is.

Just extremely proud of my team, the relentless effort that we gave. When they beat us down in Greenville, they really exploited us in the high post, I thought Mi-Mi and Taty and all the post players came to play. We challenged them to protect that paint, to not allow them to expose us there. We challenged them to win the battle of the paint points, and we did that 38-22.

So the first half wasn't the half we were looking for, but we challenged 'em at halftime and they came out and they accepted the challenge. They played to win and not to lose. Just so proud of our effort. This whole season obviously didn't go the way that we had expected, but I knew even when we lost our two guards, that we had enough to really compete in this conference.

It has been an up-and-down year for us, but when you go into conference play, everybody's record is 0-0. It doesn't matter what you've done before. It's a new season. That's all we've been talking about, is a new season and a new opportunity.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Coach, you mentioned giving yourself a chance. That second half you cut it to two right out of the break and then you do stuff a coach loves, you hit free throws down the stretch, 19-22, you set the block record, you got 16 assists. How much was this just a team effort tonight of everyone kind of pulling together.

KIM McNEILL: Total team effort. Before we went out on the floor, I called 'em in tight and I told 'em, there's only a handful of people right now that believe that we can make a run in this tournament, and that's everybody in that huddle and a few people we had in the stands. I know some people have given up hope on us, but we have a quote that we say, "we all got, we all we need," and we really did that tonight.

I challenged Taty, Mi-Mi, and Taliyah all season long to be the best post group in this conference and when those three come to play, they definitely dominate and they make a huge difference. I think there's been two or three games now where Taty and Mi-Mi both have had double doubles and they're just a force to reckon with down in that paint, defensively and offensively.

Then Danae's out on the perimeter doing her thing. We're very young at the point guard spot. Karina and Bobbi are playing positions that they have never played before, and it's a lot on 'em. I know at times they want to tell me to shut up, Coach, but they have come up huge, Bobbi with the unbelievable steal right there with 3.3 seconds left to go. I just can't say enough about the total team effort that we had tonight.

Q. Can you walk me through the decision? I know you subbed Bobbi in, too, right before that play and then obviously she makes a great play with that steal at the end.

KIM McNEILL: She's done it before. There's been other games where she's right there at the end come up big for us. We always tell our team, our players, short memory. It doesn't matter what happened before, you can't control it. All you can control is what we got going ahead. The plan

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was to -- we had one foul to give, so we wanted to try to force them as far to half court as possible and then foul. So I'm yelling at her, foul, foul, and then she gets a steal, and I'm like, Go, Bobbi, go.

So just a really good job of her executing and being relentless and understanding what we were trying to do and getting the steal. At the end of the day, our identity is defense, and we don't want it any other way down the stretch but for us to be on the defensive end of the floor with an opportunity to win the game.

Q. At the beginning you talked about Memphis and their toughness. What is it about that Memphis program that's a challenge whenever you play them?

KIM McNEILL: I think Memphis is very similar to ECU. Nothing comes easy as a Pirate. Everything we get we got to work extremely hard for. We normally get kids that have chip on their shoulders, that maybe were overlooked in recruiting or whatever the case may be. We talk about not playing pretty basketball. You know, we don't play pretty, and if you want to play pretty, then ECU is not the place for you.

I think Memphis has a similar mindset. Being in Memphis, just undersized post players that want to prove that they can compete against bigger kids, they have always been very, very good on the offensive end of the floor. But I think at the end of the day, your team takes on the personality of your head coach. That's a head coach's dream is for your team to take on your personalities. I'm extremely feisty, their coach is feisty, they have always had feisty coaches. So you know whenever you're going to play a Memphis team, it's going to be a dog fight until the end.

Q. Tatyana, Coach talked about challenging the front-court players. Talk about the way you and your teammates accepted that challenge, obviously pulling down a career high 17 rebounds and also blocking six shots.

TATYANA WYCHE: Well, we know that we have to prepare, we knew what happened last game, we knew what we messed up on, so we made sure we harped on it and we got it done today. We knew we needed to get some boards because that was the problem last time, and also high post defense, so we made sure we got it done.

Q. Bobbi, I know you've been in this spot before. This team made a long run last year, so I guess I was curious about your guys' mindset. It's a close game, final seconds, you guys seem to be able to control that moment, maybe that experience helps. What do you

think?

BOBBI SMITH: Really, at this point it's do or die for us, so you just got to do what you got to do to get the win. So I'm just glad my coaches trusted me to put me in the game in that position. I just saw the opportunity to go get the steal, so it sealed the game. You know, just keep it simple.

KIM McNEILL: Keep it simple. I like it.

Q. I know you guys made no three-pointers tonight and still found a way to win. Is that how you play, that you guys can find different ways to win, and also the post players stepping up a controlling that game down low?

KIM McNEILL: I think in tournament play if you can defend, rebound, and share the ball, you can win games. Defense and rebounding travels. There are going to be nights where you're in a different -- that's a huge really nice arena in there. The depth perception is a little bit off. So we always talk about defending, rebounding, sharing the ball and then the offensive end making lay-ups and making free throws, and we did that tonight.

We shot 86 percent from the free-throw line, 19-22. That's really, really good. So that's why we harp so much on defense, because nobody can take that away from you. No matter where you are, you can play really good defense and you can rebound the ball.

Q. This feeds you into a quarterfinal matchup against Tulsa. Can you give us your thoughts on what you expect to see tomorrow?

KIM McNEILL: Yeah, a completely different team. You know, a completely different team, a team that wants to get up and down the floor, spread you out, shoot a lot of threes, try to penetrate, getting into the paint. I definitely think that we have the advantage inside, which I think we do every single night.

Once again, it's going to be a total team effort. It's going to be an up-tempo style of game. I think that our team is confident. We beat 'em earlier in the season, so we obviously know we can beat 'em. But we got to prepare for a completely different game. But we can't change who we are. We got to defend, rebound, and do a really good job of forcing them off the three-point line.

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