

American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Sunday, March 10, 2024

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

UAB Blazers

Randy Norton

Denim DeShields

Postgame Press Conference



Rice - 71, UAB - 56

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

RANDY NORTON: Congratulations to Rice. I thought they played extremely well tonight. But I'm really proud of our team. I thought our second half, I thought our kids battled until the final horn, and that's all we can ask of them. This young lady to my left, Denim DeShields, is just a warrior. She came out and gave everything she had. And she's done that for us all year long, and I think a lot of times people forget she's just a sophomore. She's been a two-year starter for us and she just continues to get better day by day, game by game.

But just with our entire team, we didn't shoot the ball well tonight, and Rice shot it extremely well. Down nine at halftime, I challenged our kids to come out and just knew we could get back in the game, and we shoot 47 percent and Rice comes out and shoots like 62.5, and those shots were all in the paint. They just came out and were just ramming it down our throats in the paint, in the post play, and credit to them for making some adjustments and going after us in the paint.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please?

Q. During the second quarter that's pretty much what happened when Rice went to the big lineup right behind each other, had three bigs that they could put in at any time, and they just waited to get on the block and just disrupt. How do you go about, when you call timeouts and keep encouraging and say, Look, just go with it?

RANDY NORTON: Well, I'm not making excuses for our team, but our two 5s are sitting on the bench with us. So Jade Weathersby, I thought she stepped up and gave everything she had. She's just a freshman. Typically she was rotating in at the 4 with Maddie Walsh. But, you know, sometimes you just got to deal with the cards you've been dealt and the most important thing for me as the coach is the effort. I didn't feel like we played very well the first half.

I wasn't pleased, but I was very pleased with the effort and the fight that our team played with the second half, and I thought our kids really adjusted and tried to do what we wanted offensively.

Defensively, though, you're right, their bigs are strong and we tried some zone, we tried fronting, we tried several different things. They're a hard team to guard, though, because they have got good bigs and they're surrounded by some outstanding three-point shooters. So they're a hard guard.

Q. Denim, you're one of the leaders of this squad. At halftime, what did you talk to the team about as a player, not as a coach, but as a player, to keep pushing, keep pushing?

DENIM DeSHIELDS: I feel like one of the main things is to control what you can control, and that was the main message. Obviously, like Coach said, you have to do what you can with the cards that you're dealt. So kind of just encouraging everybody to keep their heads up and just keep fighting until the last buzzer.

Q. Fourth quarter it was back and forth. You made a little run, but like you said, dealing with the cards you have, they were able to finish and y'all weren't.

RANDY NORTON: Right. It's just part of the way the game goes, as we all know that have been around sports our whole lives, that on any given night, anybody's capable of winning in our league. Showed that this season. You've got three teams that tied for first with five losses. That does not happen very often. Our league was so balanced, at every game, whoever played the best was capable of winning. There wasn't like a dominant team that ran away



with the conference title.

So it's a credit to our conference. I'm excited about our team. A lot of people don't know, we're extremely young, we have one senior, we've had five kids -- we've got five kids out currently, and I'm excited about this team. The future's bright for them. And the reason I can say that -- because it's one thing if your kids lay down and quit, but as you saw, there was no quit in this team and they fought until the end, so I'm really proud of our team.

Q. Lastly, just talk about this league in general. You're right, from top to bottom, if you didn't show up that particular night, you were going to get beat, whether at home or on the road.

RANDY NORTON: Oh, yeah, home or away, did not matter. If you go through the league, there were some of the top teams that lost at home against teams probably they shouldn't have. But, again, that's how balanced our league is and, you know, we finish right now with 18 wins, we're hoping to get some more games in post season, we'll have to wait and see how that goes. The way I feel is that, if we can keep playing, when you have a young team, that experience is invaluable playing in post-season. Just for them playing in a new arena today is, it's all about the experience that these kids go through, not just for basketball, but just preparation for life, and going through adversities and ups and downs and having to work through it. So, it's, to me, that's what I love about coaching. I hate losing, as she knows, she hates losing, just like I do, but at the end of the day you got to go out and you give your best effort and dust yourself off and get ready for the next one.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you very much.

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