

American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Monday, March 11, 2024

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

East Carolina Pirates

Kim McNeill

Amiya Joyner

Danae McNeal

Postgame Press Conference

East Carolina - 75, Tulsa - 71

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: Words can't express how proud I am of this team. Back in December when we lost Micah Dennis and Synia Johnson, I know everybody counted us out, felt like we didn't have enough Willpower to make a run in this league. But we never stopped believing. As a coaching staff we never stopped believing in this team. We've got two of the best players in the conference right here with Danae McNeal and Amiya Joyner, so I know when they're own the court, we have an opportunity to win.

But Tulsa's a tough team they create a different type of matchup with five kids on the floor that can shoot the 3. We beat 'em back in February, which gave us confidence to come into this game that we could beat 'em again. They make you change everything you want to do. We matchup and we play probably 75 percent man, which is really not what we do, so once again, that just shows the resiliency of our team and the willingness to really execute the game plan. The game plan was to run 'em off the three-point line and make 'em take tough twos. They hit nine tonight. Back at Greenville they only hit three. But at the end of the day, we had big stops when we needed to make big stops, we executed on the offensive end of the floor whether they were in man or zone, and just a total team effort, with Danae what she did on the defensive end, also scoring 29, Mi-Mi getting another double double.

And not only that, Taty and Mi-Mi together combining for 26 points, they're a force in the paint, they will continue to



be a force in the paint, and I'm just extremely happy we're advancing to see another day.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. (No microphone.)

DANAE McNEAL: I feel like we have a completely different team, so we try not to harp on last year too much, but it's just to do it again and repeat. That's the plan.

AMIYA JOYNER: Yeah, what she said.

Q. When you guys reach this tournament time, March, you guys are playing good ball, can you guys kind of feel that something is different, like a switch is flipped? I know you guys don't like to think like, hey, now it's tournament time and we're going to play hard, but it seems like you guys can really lock down and really get into teams with some great consistency. What's it like playing in these tournaments?

KIM McNEILL: We talked about, when you go into tournament play, it doesn't matter what you've done before, everybody's record is 0-0. I don't think our seeding in this tournament really justifies who we are as a team. I think we're better than the ninth team in this league. We just had kind of an up-and-down season and there's a lot more parity in this league, there are a lot of good teams now, there's a lot of great coaches, as you can see. A lot of people tie for different places, so I think going in, anybody feel like they have a chance to win this, but we do have the experience. I do feel like one thing that we do well is rebound and defend and when you're in tournament play, you need to defend and rebound. That travels. Defense travels, rebounding travels. So that's what we've been harping on, is defending and rebounding the ball and sharing it on the offensive end of the floor.

Q. Danae, this is for you. You've handled the scoring load a lot, but recently, maybe in the past month or so, Amiya, basically all the post players have really stepped up their game. How has that helped out your game, just having them really take it to another level?

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DANAE McNEAL: It feels great. It's something that I always knew that they could do. They just had to do it, honestly. I feel like them scoring more starts to open up the floor for me as well, so it's really good that they're starting to pick that up.

Q. Those steal numbers are great. Do you just have to be in the right position for that and just have that balance of being aggressive, but also still playing some sound defense?

DANAE McNEAL: Yeah, and you have to read their eyes. Nine times out of ten they're looking directly at where they're about to go.

Q. Danae, piggybacking off that question, once again, you proved why you've been the Defensive Player of the Year in the American for the last two seasons. Today the career high 10 steals to go along with those 29 points. Tell us about the film study, the game planning, the anticipation like you were just mentioning, everything that goes into making you the player that you are defensively.

DANAE McNEAL: We just always harp about defense wins games. Like I said before, reading their eyes, and I'm always on like the right side of the floor because that's where people love to pass first.

Q. With this win today, you guys knocked off the top seed. I know Coach kind of talked about it. Just it's been a really tight conference, but still knocking off the top seed is huge. How do you just -- I mean, obviously, you can celebrate it, but this tournament, you got to play again. I mean, how do you just kind of wipe that and kind of refocus?

KIM McNEILL: You want me or them to answer that?

Q. You can answer it, Coach. That's fine.

KIM McNEILL: Okay. In the locker room, we say we got about 10 or 15 minutes to celebrate this, and I want 'em to celebrate it because it is a big deal, a 9 seed beating a No. 1 seed. But, no, you got to move on to the next. It's about surviving and advancing, you don't have too much time to celebrate. You got to prepare for the next team, not a lot of time for preparation.

But the good thing about us is that we don't change what we do regardless of who we're playing. We're going to do your matchup, play some man, whatever, so it's not like we got to go in and scheme a lot against people's offense. So, that helps. I think the most important thing right now is us to get some rest. These two have logged a lot of minutes

over the last month or so, averaging 38, 39 minutes a game. So just want to get 'em off their feet, get some food in 'em, fuel 'em up, and just get ready to win another game tomorrow.

Q. You kind of touched on it a bit, but just to follow-up on that point on the conference, the 1 seed is out, the 14 seed has won two games, so now you're going to be at least one of four still standing. Does that change your approach at all going into the next matchup? Does your style change? Does your approach change?

KIM McNEILL: No, we do what we do. East Carolina is who we are. At this time of the season you can't change things. You don't have time. 24-hour turnaround and you're playing a totally different team. If it's South Florida, we've played them twice. If it's UT San Antonio, we saw them early in the season, I think early January, so that will be a little bit different look. But we are who we are. We're going to win the way we win, we're going to try to make the game ugly. If it's a pretty game, then we probably won't win. If it's an ugly game, we got great chance of winning the game. So we'll continue to defend and rebound and share the ball on the offensive end of the floor.

Q. Amiya, I know you've been here for two years, obviously a great run last year and you guys are in it again here. Basically, I just want to ask, is this kind of everything you dreamed of coming to East Carolina, just really being able to turn the program around, and just have a shot at doing something great here?

AMIYA JOYNER: I can't.

KIM McNEILL: It's a dream come true for her. To stay at home and be able to put her home school on the map -- I remember last year sitting up here after we won -- and Amiya tell me if I'm right or wrong -- I heard her say, I'm so glad I came to ECU. Do you remember that?

AMIYA JOYNER: You're right.

KIM McNEILL: So glad. She's getting emotional right now because she could have went to bigger schools she could have went Power Five but she chose to stay home and put her home school on the map. If more athletes did that, it would probably be even more parity in the game but she's done tremendous things, she's been here for two years, Danae has too. They have put ECU on the map. We will continue to grow this program, we'll continue to move forward and just thankful that she chose us.

Q. Danae, going off of that, how does Mi-Mi make you better, how do the two of you really just compliment

each other, and that really should out here today.

DANAE McNEAL: Mi-Mi's a great passer, so when I cut to the glass, she's always going to see me. Yeah, she's a good teammate.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you.

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