

American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Rice Owls

Lindsay Edmond

Sussy Ngulefac

Malia Fisher

Destiny Jackson

Postgame Press Conference

Rice - 61, East Carolina - 41

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

LINDSAY EDMONDS: I'm just really proud. We always break the season into three different seasons, non-conference, conference, and then tournament play. So when we started tournament season, we started breaking down huddles with our left hand because it was closest to our hearts. And I just feel like we played with so much heart, we played with so much toughness, we played with so much togetherness. It was just really special. We hung our hats on defense. We shared the basketball. But I just can't get over how close this group is, on and off the floor, and that's what makes us be so special.

And Malia said it, we might have been a 10 seed on paper, but we never believed that we were. So I think that's why we had something to prove and we did it for four straight days, which is really, really hard to do. But they were relentless and they knew that they wanted it and they weren't going to let anybody take that from them.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Coach, we'll take some questions.

Q. Four games in four days. Talk about how tough the American Athletic Conference is, when you get your 9 and 10 seeds playing, how that speaks to the strength of the league.



LINDSAY EDMONDS: Yeah, the league this year was really tough. It was really competitive. When you look at the schedule -- I mean the records of a lot of different teams, we were all right there grouped together. I think there was five teams that one game -- or maybe more than that, that one game separated them. I just think night-in, night-out anyone can beat anyone, so you have to show up prepared to give your best effort every single night because of how tough and competitive it is.

Like I said, again, East Carolina's a great team, we're a great team. I'm not sure either of us are 9 and 10 seeds, but that's what it was, and today those records were out the window, those seedings were out the window. It was just about playing -- who could play the best basketball, who could get the most stops, who could put the ball in the basket the most.

Q. Your summer outing down the road, how much of an impact did that have on just beginning the season?

LINDSAY EDMONDS: Yeah, our team retreats are special. I look forward to it every year. This summer was really fun. It was really special. It was where I was able to see how close this team truly was. We inserted Sussy and Emily to our team, and we went the first weekend of summer school and there was, like, no awkwardness, no weirdness, it was just togetherness right away. We cooked for each other, we cleaned up after one another, we do a beach workout, but it's just about the togetherness and that weekend I knew how special we were going to be.

Q. Best first quarter you all have had all season?

LINDSAY EDMONDS: We're putting our foot down. (Laughing.) No, I mean, seriously, we wanted this. We talked about our opponent was going to be hungry? We needed to be starving, we were starving to get this win.

Q. Also, y'all had some adversities toward the middle of the season before the conference play got started. You were out two bigs down and you figured out as a team, as a coaching staff, and got back on track.

LINDSAY EDMONDS: Yeah, this team's really deep. We



have a lot of players that can impact the game. You never want to face injuries, but when you do, you have to have next woman up mentality. The next one has to be ready to step up and carry a load. When someone goes down, no one has to replace that person, they just have to be a better version of themselves to pick up what we're missing.

So the team's done that all year long. We were built for this, we were deep. I talked about it all year long and I think it shows. You don't win four straight days without being a deep team.

Q. You talked all week about hanging your hat on defense. The 2018 team, the last one Rice took to the tournament. Allowed 53 points per game for the season. Y'all allowed 53 points per game in the tournament, 10 points better than the regular season. You knew you had another level, but how did you get a 10-point jump in just four days?

LINDSAY EDMONDS: It starts with our mentality and our mindset. We have been saying one more stop, one more rebound, being greedy for those rebounds, being greedy for stops. We calculate kills. So three stops in a row we count it as a kill. I know we had seven in the first half. So I'm not sure what we finished with. But it was just a mentality and I feel like everybody bought into it, everybody was locked into that, and it was tremendous, it was everything that we needed it to be.

Q. Sussy, you get a start last game in the regular season and start every game of this tournament, have your first career double double at Rice in the championship game. Can you paint a better way to end the season?

SUSSY NGULEFAC: No, not really (laughing).

LINDSAY EDMONDS: It ain't over yet.

Q. Regular season?

LINDSAY EDMONDS: Okay, okay, okay.

SUSSY NGULEFAC: No, it was awesome. Like Coach says, it's kind of like next woman up. When my number was called, I was ready and dealt with things all season, but I have stayed ready through all of that and when it was my turn, my teammates and my coaches believed in me and that's all that matters, we got the dubs.

Q. Destiny, I think back, you were on that 2019 team that had its -- a top team in the conference all year and had the tournament cancelled with COVID. NCAA Tournament bids are hard to come by. How sweet is it

after you went through that and you got so close to go through all this to have the chance to get to go to the Big Dance?

DESTINY JACKSON: Going through this year, it was really fun, actually, to go through that adversity, play all four days. Like, that 2019 team, I mean, it was nice but actually working for it, that was really fulfilling for me and my teammates and my coaches.

Q. To come into the American Athletic Conference and to debut as champions, just what can you say about this run, the strength of the American and obviously we're seeing not a 1 and 2 seed play in the championship, which speaks volumes to that, just what the conference has given to this team as far as competition and what it's like to debut as No. 1.

LINDSAY EDMONDS: Yeah, we were really excited about the opportunity to move into the American. We knew it was going to be competitive, we knew there was going to be challenges, new opponents, new destinations, new hotels. You have to figure out like all the things, right, new scheduling.

Conference USA we were very set. We knew we were playing Thursday and Saturday. We knew what our off day was. With the American, we played on Tuesday, we played on Wednesday, we played on Thursday, we played on Saturday, we played on Sunday. So that was another thing too for these young ladies who were in a very rigorous academic load at Rice University to also navigate.

So there were a lot of challenges that we were faced with, but we were ready to face them because we did it together. This league is tough, but we just proved how tough we are too.

Q. To each of the student-athletes, obviously this moment is special, but what is it about this Rice team that you saw in practices, in film study, and different things that were off the court this season that stuck out to you that showed you that you really could be champions? And I would love to hear from each of you on what are some of those championship moment that we didn't see on the road to here.

MALIA FISHER: I think it's having a different mantra every day. We came into the tournament with a 95 percent, meaning when you miss a shot, that's one second of the game, and you take 10 shots, that's 10 seconds out of a 40-minute game and there's another 95 percent that you can impact. I think we also have a really strong togetherness as a team and as a staff and just having our support staff and just being together, to say the least.



We're just a loving team and we remind each other of that every day.

DESTINY JACKSON: I'll just say we were hungry. We didn't play our best basketball in February, but I knew we were hungry. March brings blessings. We really wanted it and we got it. More to come.

SUSSY NGULEFAC: It just speaks volumes to the family and the culture that we built. As soon as I got here I felt it, and then we just continued to grow it. I think, even when we weren't playing our best basketball, like we talk about unwavering confidence and unwavering belief. Like, we believed we were going to step into this new season, conference tournament, we believed we were going to get a ring and that's what we did.

Q. Congrats to you on winning the title, but has it sunk in yet and what does it feel like -- every coach dreams of winning a conference championship and going to March Madness -- what does it feel like being in the moment?

LINDSAY EDMONDS: It's pretty surreal. I've had the blessings of being able to do it as an assistant coach, and I knew that I was dreaming of this moment, not for just myself, but for my team, for my young ladies, for the way that they compete, for the way that they carry themselves, for every single thing that they do on and off the court. So it's pretty surreal, it's amazing. My family's walking in right now, I'm going to try not to get emotional, but it's just, it's, I don't even know if it's completely all sunk in, but we're going dancing, and there's more to come for Rice women's basketball for this season.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you very much.

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