

American Athletic Conference Women's Basketball Championship

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Dickies Arena

USF Bulls

Jose Fernandez

Vittoria Blasigh

L'or Mputu

Postgame Press Conference



the NCAA tournament. How do you feel about your team getting to this point?

JOSE FERNANDEZ: I feel good. I think our kids understand we really challenged them in November and December. I think we would be having a different conversation now if we finished the year beating Tulsa and East Carolina and we're in the championship game, right? And we should be in position to get an at-large bid, but losing those two games got us out of that.

But when you look at the people that we played in non-conference, right? Well, we beat the ACC champ. We lost to the Big-12 champ in TCU. We lost to the Big East champ, right? And lost to the SEC champ. So we went out and really challenged ourselves. I was proud when North Texas went on that run, and we had to call a timeout, how we came out of the timeout and we answered, and our guys just -- so that was the most thing. When you look at timeouts and before I'm in there, they're already talking about both ends of the floor and coverages and what we need to do. That's what you need.

So, yeah, we're 40 minutes away from going to the NCAA tournament. That's the most important thing, right? Because you can win a regular season conference championship and not go to the NCAA tournament. And we're 40 minutes away from doing that.

Q. Can you just talk about Vicki the fourth quarter to secure the win first.

JOSE FERNANDEZ: I thought she hit a really nice pullup jumper from mid-range. The shot at the end of the shot clock, she's hit a bunch of those before. But to want to take those shots, right? You got to want to take that shot. And that's a thing that I've been really, really hard on her for two years, right? Because she's a very, very good basketball player. She's a very good offensive basketball player. She can get to the rim. She can score at three levels.

The one thing is Vicki doesn't like to shoot it all the time. So when she wants to shoot it all the time, then we'll take it

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

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Like I said yesterday, game on what we expected, I think Jason is a marvelous coach. I told our kids at half when we were up 15 the way that they can get back in this is by us turning the ball over and us giving them second and third opportunities. And they came at us -- I didn't like the way -- I mean, we played east and west instead of getting downhill and getting to the basket.

But I thought we did a good job defending. That's what it came down to. I thought we did a good job taking care of the basketball. We had four turnovers in the first half and we finished with 11. But the rebounding was a big one, especially in the second opportunities.

So proud of this group. North Texas is a very good basketball team. I'm sure their season's not over. They deserve to continue to play in the WBIT. Same as the job that Karen did as well at UTSA. So we play a Rice team that they're familiar with us, we're familiar with them. They have had very, very good success in the conference tournament. Their kids play hard. So we'll treat everything the same way tomorrow, get ready for them, and it will be a great championship game for one team to go to the NCAA tournament.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach. Questions, please.

Q. With all the ups and downs of this season, certainly the frustrations at times, you are 40 minutes away from

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to the next level, because she passes up a lot of shots, and that's something that we talk about. But I'm really proud of her, and I'm proud of the one next to her that won the Most Improved Player of the Year. And the reason why she's playing so well because she had such a great off-season.

She spent the entire summer in the Muma center, and she worked with Dulcy Fankam Mendjiadeu all summer, and she doesn't do the stat line that she did if she doesn't invest and work, and that's what she did. She got 21 boards today. That's a really, really good night.

Q. For Vicki, can you just talk about the feeling in the fourth quarter for you.

VITTORIA BLASIGH: It was amazing. We had the feeling that we have plenty of energy all the game. It doesn't matter if they came back, we feel like we stayed together the whole game, and that was the most important thing. So I'm just so proud of my team and we're going to get ready for tomorrow.

Q. Hearing Coach talk about you just now being the most improved player, how does that feel to you, especially going into the championship?

L'OR MPUTU: I mean, it make me feel well, like, spending the whole summer working, how you see the results, like, make me pretty confident, also because he also trusts me on the court.

Q. What was your message to the team when UNT went on that 1-point difference run?

JOSE FERNANDEZ: In the timeout, I said, You know what? Here's the thing. We just got to answer. We got to respond. That's what we talked about in the timeout, and they responded. I go, Listen, man, we just got to be loose. Let's just play. But we need to attack them. I thought we were really stagnant in what we started to do. And they came out of the timeout and we responded. I thought we came out of that timeout, and Sammie hit that big shot off a special situation. I thought we did really good job out of timeouts and that's what good teams do. So I was really proud of that.

Q. North Texas in this league was one of the better offensive teams out there. What did you guys do so well to shut them down today?

JOSE FERNANDEZ: We wanted to keep their guards in front of us, keep the guards in front of us. And they're so good in transition. You got to really stop the ball early. They only had one guy in double figures and that was Lampkin. We threw bodies at Lampkin, right? L'or, Fatou,

Carla. So I think that we made it difficult for them to get the ball inside.

The second-chance points, that was a big thing too. They only had three points off of second chances. So I think rebounding and containing the dribble and keeping them in front of us.

Q. Lampkin has been one of the more effective offensive players this year. You held her without any point in the second half. Was that a big focus?

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Well, you remember the game in Denton, she lit us up like a Christmas tree. How much did she have? She had like 30. It was a pretty good night. So we contained her a little bit better in Tampa and today we did a really, really good job.

Q. With all the things that have happened this season, great moments, not so great moments, now you have one game for what you've been playing all season for. Could you speak about how hard it was to get here and how excited you are for this opportunity tomorrow.

VITTORIA BLASIGH: Yeah, I think we worked really hard the whole season, and as Coach say, we play a really tough schedule before the season start, so we're going to get ready for tomorrow. I feel like the vibes are good, so we're going to win.

L'OR MPUTU: I think we really well prepared, so we will win the championship tomorrow.

Q. For both of you ladies, the shots aren't dropping, but is it a good feeling knowing that you can defend well enough to win a game when the ball isn't going in the basket?

L'OR MPUTU: I think we was really good on defense and the offense like will come no matter what, so we was really focused on defense first.

Q. Coach, you basically, it looked like your game plan was to run 'em off the three-point line. They only took 10 and three of them in the last minute, and only made one. Was that the game plan to make sure you held them off the three?

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Well, yeah, just because Wooten can shoot the three and so could Kyla Deck, right. So the one they hit was with a minute left. I was more concerned with dribble penetration and them fielding the post and second shot opportunities and live ball turnovers. So that's, those were the biggest concerns for me.

Q. When you look at tomorrow night, you got a chance to punch your ticket and not sit around and wait as an at large. How important is that?

JOSE FERNANDEZ: Yeah, you control your own destiny, right. So next 40 minutes will decide that. There's been a lot of times - we've been in the NCAA tournament a lot, we've been on that wrong side of the bubble a lot as well. So tomorrow night one team will go dancing. Hopefully tomorrow we can defend and rebound like we did today. Lindsay does a really, really good job with the Rice ball club, there's a reason why they're in the championship game, right. They play really, really hard, they're connected, they don't take bad shots. So it will be a fun game tomorrow night.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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