

Mountain West Women's Basketball Championship

Monday, March 7, 2022

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

UNLV Lady Rebels

Lindy La Rocque

Essence Booker

Khayla Rooks

Postgame Press Conference

UNLV - 82, Utah State - 69

LINDY LA ROCQUE: We won the game and that's how you have to continue to advance at this point in the season.

In terms of our play, I thought we had a great second quart defensively. Second half we kind of built a lead, got a little lackadaisical there. The things that we're definitely going to have to kind of clean up on are rebounding and just being sharp.

Offensively it just, maybe we just had some jitters. We've had a lot of players, young players, that haven't played kind of with the bright lights and on this tournament stage, so we missed some layups I think that everyone in the crowd wanted us to make too. And I know the young women did, they're not missing any of those on purpose.

But we had some people really step up. Nneka gave us huge points and minutes off the bench. I thought Kiara Jackson, our freshman point guard, was just awesome for us helping to handle the ball with Essence. And then just the leadership of these two to my left, Kayla and E. They're steady. They grind it out, whatever we need.

Really proud of our team. We have some things that we're going to definitely talk about and look to improve on for our next game, whoever we play, but the best thing is that we have another game. So excited for that.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for our student-athletes.

Q. Khayla, they mentioned Nneka's play for sure, but what's it like to really watch her go to work and put the ball in the basket like she did today?



KHAYLA ROOKS: It's a big-time spark, especially her coming off the bench. We really need that on the court and we love her coming in and scoring right away. So she's definitely a big piece to our offense.

Q. Essence, you guys had two freshmen really kind of show up big today, Alyssa and Kiara. What's it been like to watch them develop to this point where they can contribute on this time?

ESSENCE BOOKER: It's awesome. I feel like they know their role and they come in and play hard and they know what we're after and we're all after the same thing and that's a championship.

So they're coming in and doing whatever they have to do in order for us to get that.

Q. Essence, how proud are you to get the first Mountain West win here in front home crowd?

ESSENCE BOOKER: I'm very proud, but I guess I can't celebrate too much right now, just because I want to take that, to take down that net. Lindy continues to emphasize that we want to take the net down, so I feel like I can't get too excited yet.

Q. Khayla, how early did the team kind of know and kind of realize that Utah State's game plan, to kind of slow Desi down on offense was to make her work on defense. How quickly did you guys realize that?

KHAYLA ROOKS: We kind of knew that their bigs were going to come at our bigs hard. They did last game and we kind of expected it. So I think we knew early. It was just a matter of -- honestly, it was rebounds that we really struggled with, so it was a matter of getting rebounds and stopping the bigs. I think Desi did a pretty good job.

Q. Essence, what did you feel changed in that second quarter?

ESSENCE BOOKER: We just had to make adjustments. As Khayla said, we knew that they were going to come for



our bigs. We knew that it was going to be a party down there, but we were going to continue to do what we do and that's feed Desi, that's feed the post, that's go inside, and we just make adjustments off of that.

And I feel like Desi and Khayla and Nneka made good reads off of that today.

Q. When Desi got in foul trouble what did you see on the court that opened up the lanes for you to take over in the second half?

KHAYLA ROOKS: I am more of like a spot-up shooter, so I know that I can't just sit there and shoot. I got to be more aggressive, especially when she's not in the game.

Also having Nneka coming off the bench and replacing Desi is a big help. So I think her energy and just me making reads and finding the open gaps and the open person definitely helped.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, ladies. We appreciate it. Questions for coach, please.

Q. You missed some early, but it looked like you were getting the shots you wanted. So were you happy with that, when you were getting the shots and I assume eventually you knew they were going to starting going in?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Yeah. For the most part I don't really always, I don't really worry about our offense too much. I think we've done a pretty good job offensively. And when we get the shots that we want, like you said, if they don't go in then that's just the outcome.

But I think taking the right shots is the biggest thing for us. So I was pleased with our offense. I mean, we missed a few layups, of course, that we would want to get back. It's just kind of tightening up a little bit defensively.

Q. We have seen this team hop into a press whether they're up a few, down a few, whether it's the first quarter, second quarter. Talk a little bit about the decision to not hop into the press until the second quarter? Because it seems as if once you guys did turnovers started happening and the flow of the game changed.

LINDY LA ROCQUE: You want me to give away all my trade secrets? No. I mean, it just kind of goes with the flow of the game. We like to stick with our player-to-player defense early and just really kind of see what they're doing, what they're running, and then let some lineups change, get some substitutions in, see kind of how we're playing.

But I thought our press was really good. Obviously we do it a lot off of free throws so if we're not getting to the free-throw line then we don't really have an opportunity. But that's the best time for us to set it up, and it created some turnovers and some momentum, especially in that second quarter that I think that really fueled our offense and then kind of really got us clicking offensively.

Q. Tomorrow at 5 p.m. there's going to be fireworks one way or another, whether UNR has another matchup against UNLV or whether UNLV is obviously entertaining Air Force for a third time. Obviously that locker room wants to just play the next game, wants to just play the next person in front of them, but how lucky are you kind of in this mode that you don't really kind of have to prep the next game understanding that it, either way this team's going to be excited to play, either one?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Well, you do your work all year to put yourself in this position as the No. 1 seed and then you get extra time on the court before games. You get to sit and watch the rest of the games and get some extra rest. And so it would behoove us to take advantage of those things. We're going to watch, our team's going to watch the first half of this next game and kind of see what -- but then we're back to us.

We're really just sitting so we can eat our lunch and then we're getting back to the hotel and on a recovery. We can watch the game from there and rest up and be ready to go for tomorrow.

But like you said, we'll be ready. At this point it really doesn't matter the opponent. I mean, it doesn't. It's about us and our team and continuing to improve and staying connected and together and I'm confident that we'll find a way.

Q. The last time we talked we kind of talked about what your guys' tournaments experience was last year. Does this kind of expel some ghosts for you as a coaching staff?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Well, it was funny, someone asked me that before the game. I didn't realize honestly when the last UNLV tournament win is. You guys tell me all these funny things that I don't know about.

But we didn't -- I mean, as our team, we didn't talk about it because there's only three of them that even experienced it. For me it was mainly just trying to prepare our young players and our team collectively for the intensity and the excitement of what is tournament basketball. Tournaments

are awesome and this is March and it's the madness. So sure, I guess. I just want to win.

Q. I know Nneka goes out and scores off the bench every game for you guys. Obviously Sixth Player of the Year in conference, but what particularly impressed you about her performance today?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Well Nneka, she's just, I mean, she's so many of people's favorite player because she plays with a smile on her face. She just keeps after it. She's the first one to miss a layup most of the time, but she's also the first one to get her own rebound and put it back in and just battle and battle and battle and she looks at me and she's like, oh, I know. I'm like, I know.

So she's just so fun to coach. She knows no better than to just play super hard. As a coach, when you don't have to coach effort and those things, it just, it makes the coaching part easy and then I can help her, look at this, slow down a little bit. Half the time I'm trying to get her to calm down. I think that might help her a little bit.

But she was huge for us. And you look up and then all of a sudden she's got 20 points and it's like, oh, my gosh, when did that happen? But she's down there and she's a bruiser for us.

Q. I know one of your players was quoted about having to win three in three days. Is that something you even address with them, about you probably need to win three in three days?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. They're fully aware of that. We, like Essence said, we had some shoot-around yesterday and my message is the same message that my coaches told me, Look at those nets. That's what we want. To get those you have to win three in three days.

And we checked off the first step today and we've got two more to go and it's going to take everyone at their best doing whatever we need at any time and I know this team will do it.

Q. I was wondering what it's like for you, what you think and feel being from here, being kind of fond of basketball, as you are, and to have, in a city with 10 conference tournaments going on at the same time.

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Well, all I know is for a Monday at noon and the crowd that we had, UNLV hasn't had that in a while. I'm extremely proud of that. It's a credit to our players and the product. I mean, sorry for all the bosses that had people that skipped a little bit of their lunch break

or their work today because that was awesome because those fans out there love this team. We've given them something really exciting to cheer for and have a pride in and so that's what, I mean, you said it, yes, there's a million tournaments going on right now. Obviously this is the most important one to me and our team, but I looked up in the crowd and saw so much red in obviously what is a big gym at noon on a Monday.

It's really special and I think it just goes to show a little bit of what we're building and we're just kind of scratching the surface.

Q. In the third quarter there was, like Utah State was making a run and Essence and Des went to the bench, and the bench players sparked a run and you guys gained a bigger gap. How much trust do you have in the depth of your team and what can you say about those players?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: The depth, the talent on our team, it just, again, it just puts me in such a good situation as a coach to where I know I trust them. I trust all of them, not just Desi and not just Essence, but I trust all of them that when they're put in the situation and they need to make a play they can do it.

We say all the time our go-to player is the open player and we have players that are our go-to players on the bench, whether it's Nneka or Kiara. It just, you know, it gives me a lot of flexibility. It gives our team just a lot of composure. When we go to our bench we don't have to panic. We have great players coming off the bench. It gives our starters some of our major players time to rest.

I mean, the nice thing is, Justice played the most minutes with 33 minutes. I mean, not many people else in the league can say that. That's pretty cool. That was good.

Q. I know slow starts have kind of been a theme for you guys all year. Do they get any easier for you as a coach or do you just have total faith that they will always turn it around?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Well you're never going to win the game in the first five minutes and for the most part you're never going to lost the game in the first five minutes. So I think it comes back to the trust. Another question -- we got the shots that we wanted, we missed like three layups in the first three minutes. You know, I can't go crazy, you just got to make a layup. So we talk -- of course we don't, we want to come out and we want to play well and we make those layups and those little adjustments and it feels different. So I think the best thing that I can do for them in those situations is for me to stay calm, so that they can get

settled in. And again maybe just some tournament jitters from the get-go that we had to get out. And then we settled right in and we were just fine.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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