

# Mountain West Women's Basketball Championship

Monday, March 7, 2022

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

**Nevada Wolf Pack**

**Amanda Levens**

**Amaya West**

**Da'Ja Hamilton**

Postgame Press Conference



Air Force - 75, Nevada - 60

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

AMANDA LEVENS: Just first of all, congratulations to Air Force. I thought they played unbelievably well. They shot the ball extremely well. Any loose ball that they came up with I felt like they hit a three and they just, they played unbelievably well today.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Was it a goal going into the game to hit the ground running knowing how slow Air Force is and get those fast-break points?**

AMAYA WEST: I think a point of emphasis definitely was to try and get some transition runs in our game, but also just making sure that we have a good flow on offense just in general.

DA'JA HAMILTON: She kind of said everything like on-point. I think just getting out in transition and kind of exploiting their defense when it came to that due to how aggressive they were, like whether it be them pressing us in the front court, like trying to press our guard and, yeah, that's pretty much it.

**Q. I'm wondering, when a team starts hot like that it's not lack of effort on your part. It's, I'm just wondering about the frustration level. Air Force could seem to do know wrong. You guys would chip away. They would come back. Could you walk us through what that felt like a little bit?**

DA'JA HAMILTON: I think for me I wasn't stressed. I was just playing basketball. Like, I knew this game was win or go home, so there was no time for frustration or getting disconnected with my teammates. I think for me it was just more so like we weren't doing the little things but how are we going to turn it around and myself individually like what could I have done to help my team or try to keep us in the game.

**Q. Do you think it hurt you guys not having Nia out there? Did it disrupt your rhythm a little bit today?**

AMAYA WEST: Definitely. That's like 10 points a game, probably like five or six rebounds a game. So, yeah, that definitely hurt us a lot.

Obviously I felt like I had to step up a little bit both in scoring and rebounding. I haven't done too well in that this season. But, yeah, it definitely hurt us and she was missed.

**Q. We talked last week and coach mentioned that there's no secrets this time of year. Everyone's played each other. Did you know going in, I mean, the last game I believe was 40-39 and all that, that it was going to be an every possession matters type of thing and was that the team's outlook?**

AMAYA WEST: Yeah, I definitely think it was. They are a really good defensive team in my opinion and obviously they can shoot when they're hot. I think our coach said they shot 51 percent from the three-point line which is -- oh, 56, and 51 from the field, I think.

So that's kind of hard to beat just in general. We got to make sure we either keep the pace or like just kind of defeat their confidence, I guess.

**Q. How tough was it, in the second half there, it seemed like things were starting to get rolling but then Air Force would continue to kind of find their momentum go, on their roll, just to be able to try and claw back because you guys have had a lot of fourth quarter comebacks this year but to just not find that**



**rhythm at all, really towards the end?**

DA'JA HAMILTON: It was obviously tough for us due to like how bad we were like losing and how far we were behind. So I think if we were to maybe like cut it down during halftime and kind of like in the, maybe like five- to seven-point range, like get back, I think we would be in a good position.

But I think since we were so far back and they kept getting like 50/50 balls or getting shots that obviously like at the end of every shot clock they would get six seconds and it would obviously get a rebound or just a layup that they threw up there, whether they make it or miss it. It was just something they had to attempt. So I feel like without those we would be in the game, for sure.

**Q. You guys have been on campus forever, been with the program for a long time, and have seen a lot, including the new coaching staff come in, a weird COVID season. Not everything, it's been ups and downs, not everything's been great. I'm wondering, I realize today's game is still on your mind, but I'm wondering if you can reflect back and think about the program's growth in the last four to five years, if you could speak on that and then Amaya.**

DA'JA HAMILTON: For me, I think we have grown tremendously. I know from my freshman year, like, the team was kind of like getting somewhere, and then I want to say our sophomore year we kind of made a step and I want to say my junior year that's when it turned around for sure.

I think the coaching staff, like obviously they were new too, and when we got there they were like a year in, for sure, but I know when we were there like our program changed around tremendously and I like wouldn't change it for anything, for sure.

AMAYA WEST: Yeah, kind of the same. I feel like it was kind of rocky at first just because in high school it's a lot different than college and I know with Amanda and her coaching staff she really pushes our conditioning and our mental capacity in basketball.

So for me it was a little bit of a struggle and then like learning to like get my confidence and learning like what my role is and maintaining that role or adjusting my role each year, yeah.

**Q. Just similar to the other question, but looking at this season as a whole and how far you guys came from the beginning of the year and then a lot of close games, but to be able to overcome a lot and get that**

**first round bye again this year, I know like he said, it hurts right now, but what do you take away from this year?**

DA'JA HAMILTON: We had a lot of learning lessons, whether we won, loss. Like, I think they were good. It was something to build on the program for sure for next year, even just people that are coming in, they see the type of program you are.

And obviously we didn't get the win today and we got chosen 8th, so I think coming in, tying it for third and obviously getting a fourth seed, but I think we still did our part this year.

AMAYA WEST: I think it's kind of like a stepping stone. Obviously we've been here for four years and we have dealt through a lot and we have had, we've grown a lot with the coaches and I feel like it's a good step in showing who Nevada is both in the south and up north.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for coach, please.

**Q. You guys went from 19 first half points to 19 third quarter point. What was the biggest adjustment you made at half?**

AMANDA LEVENS: Honestly, at halftime we didn't even talk about basketball. We talked about our responses and kind of our heart and toughness a little bit and just really challenged them about who we were and what got us to this point that allowed us to have success this year. I thought our team really responded in that third quarter.

We made a big push and cut it down and, again, you have to credit Air Force. Every time we got close they found a way to hit a big shot. But I thought our team's response and fight in the second half really is our identity. I thought they played like who we've been all season and I was really proud of them for that after halftime.

**Q. I'm wondering if, today's a little bit more high scoring and than that last one was 40-39. Is the difference so simple as their shooting or did you see other differences between those two nights?**

AMANDA LEVENS: Well, at their place it was a weird game, just we flew out after the UNLV game and it was an, I think a very emotional defeat for us at our place in Reno and I thought we played very tired at their place. It was just kind of a game where like Amaya dropped two rebounds out of bounds, Kenna dribbled off her foot. It was just like a weird game, and for them, they had some people out.

But it was just kind of a matter of who had the ball at the end was going to play less ugly, to be honest. And today they shot phenomenally well. I think you play a team in March that shoots 56 percent from the three and 50 percent from the floor, I mean, that's tough to beat.

But I thought early in the game our defense and our focus in terms of how we were trying to defend them with our scouting report defense was not very good. At halftime I just told them that's one of our biggest strengths. We're not a big team, and we do have limitations, and if we don't go out and take people's strengths away, we have a hard time winning.

And we had three days to prepare for this. So I didn't our start was very good. We weren't doing the things we had talked about. But after halftime I thought they really were much more locked in. Even in the second quarter. Actually after the first timeout I called it and we talked about that. I thought we were better from there on out.

You let people get going early. They see the ball go in. That can lead to a long night for you if they get confidence early.

**Q. Was it a surprise not having Nia out there today or just how did that affect do you think things overall?**

AMANDA LEVENS: Well, her injury happened on Saturday and she's been getting a little bit better each day and we were hopeful, fingers crossed, but it didn't look promising. And obviously she makes a big difference for our team. If she played today I don't know that we win the game, but it helps with rotations, Amaya had to play 36 minutes and do so much. Nia's a great leader for us and I think gives people confidence because she's a good scorer and she's a good defender and she's a sixth-year senior that's just meant so much to our program. So we definitely missed her, but we're hopeful to have her back I believe we're going to play in a post-season tournament still and so getting her back will help us be better than we were today.

**Q. You already heard the question once, but I wanted to get your thoughts too on -- I know today's still on your mind, but it's been five years and these were all your players and if you could reflect back on day one and today if you could compare those.**

AMANDA LEVENS: It's funny, you meet them when they're like 16, 17 years old and they're like kids. And then they leave, they get to graduation and they're like young women ready to go do amazing things. So for Amaya and Da'ja, just their growth and Da'Ja they have meant to our program, Da'Ja scored over a thousand points Amaya I think has over 500 points and has started over a hundred

games. We are so much better as a women's basketball program than we were before they got to campus. We've been able to consistently get better and we're on the right trajectory and because of those two and their play and their leadership we're going to be able to continue to recruit players that are going to keep making us better. But five years from now I hope they come back and talk to the team, because they started this. They bought in and came before there was anything to come play for. So just both of them I'm just so proud of, they're great people.

**Q. You said how you guys only, you didn't even talk about basketball at halftime. I mean that seems like kind of redundant to Da'Ja you normally would do. I mean just then to be able to come out and show that kind of effort, just Da'Ja does that say about the character of this group that they cut the deficit to single digits, just, they couldn't overcome it there?**

AMANDA LEVENS: Yeah, I just thought we were focused on the wrong things in the first half. I thought the stage, the moment kind of got to us. We were really trying to do a lot on our own and when it wasn't happening we were getting frustrated. And then that just compounded with stuff.

In a tournament setting too we have a lot of players' families in town and they want to play well. And so I think like we just got derailed a little bit because things weren't going our way. So I think getting them back into a great place and focused on the right things -- they know Da'Ja they're supposed to do at this time of year, they're all extremely talented and good basketball players, but if they're not in a great place like emotionally and mentally like none of that's going to be good. So our approach there was we have to get them back into a good place where they're believing in themselves and focused on the right things that we've done all year that's allowed us to be successful.

**Q. What's Alexander's injury?**

AMANDA LEVENS: It's, she's got a back issue. So like we're trying to get it calmed down. I don't think it's structural that is going to be something that's going to debilitates her for the remainder of the season, but anybody that's ever strained their back, you know how painful that is just moving around to start and she's in the early stages of that. So we need to get it calmed down where she can walk normally. I don't know if you saw her walking on the sideline, she's pretty limited just trying to walk and be straight up and down.

**Q. To clarify, the team will accept a post-season invitation?**

AMANDA LEVENS: Absolutely. I mean this team I feel like they have earned the right to continue to play in March and I'm excited for them to do that.

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