

# Mountain West Women's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

**UNLV Lady Rebels**

**Lindy La Rocque**

**Essence Booker**

**Desi-Rae Young**

Postgame Press Conference



**DESI-RAE YOUNG:** I feel like it doesn't change. I feel like if we have as much depth as we need. Like that's what gets us through the game, that's what helps us win, just focusing on everything that we need to focus on together.

**Q. Essence, you talked yesterday about Alyssa and Kiara kind of knowing their roles. Coach talked about your role. She said that she's said it all season, that you're the closer. Why does she, in your opinion why does she trust you so much in those moments?**

**ESSENCE BOOKER:** Well, I feel like the point guard and the head coach, you know the point guard kind of has to resemble the head coach on floor and I feel like she trusts me to do that. I feel like I've been consistent throughout the year and the season doing that even though it's my first year here and I feel like most importantly my teammates trust me and that matters.

**Q. You touched on it a little bit in your statement, but what, with just kind of the body of work Desi put forth this year, what in your mind made her the Mountain West Player the Year. Where did you see the most growth and what kind of impact has she had on the team during the course of the season?**

**LINDY LA ROCQUE:** Well, when you play us, I think Desi's probably the first thing that people have on their scouting report. And while she doesn't lead the league in scoring and rebounding, she's a handful. She's just been really, really consistent and has done it a number of different ways and she's just put the work in.

And, again, she's a post player so obviously she doesn't get any of those points without the help of her teammates and she knows that. So she's just been really, really consistent and I think that was recognized and respected by our opponents.

**Q. Essence, you and coach Lindy had a kind of heart-to-heart moment at had a half court towards the end of the fourth quarter. What was her message to you because it seems like you kind of sparked up after that conversation she had with you at half court.**

UNLV - 61, Air Force - 50

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

**LINDY LA ROCQUE:** First off, credit to Air Force, just a really tough physical team. They had a tremendous, tremendous year and season, first winning season for them in a long time, maybe ever. So they have a lot of really good talented veteran senior players over there, so they make you play a certain type of way and they did that to us tonight.

But we talked about, multiple times about winning three games in three days, and you don't get to the third unless you win the first two. So again, that's the best thing that happened tonight. It was physical, it was tough, and our players never backed down. We had a few too many turnovers, but that's all right. We stayed gritty, stuck with each other, and with two all-conference players sitting next to me they got the job done.

Desi showed why she's the Player of the Year in the league and Essence does what she does and puts the game away for us. So really proud of our whole group and the effort that we gave and we gave ourselves an opportunity to play in the championship tomorrow.

**THE MODERATOR:** Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Desi, you guys have talked all year about your depth but today you guys really needed you and Essence to step up and that's exactly what you did. Does that mindset ever change for you based on how much depth you guys have?**



ESSENCE BOOKER: At halftime?

**Q. In the fourth quarter.**

ESSENCE BOOKER: Fourth quarter. She just told me to continue to be aggressive. Sometimes I feel like they tell me and they remind me that I'm my biggest critic, so I tend to put my head down sometimes and I'm the leader so she has to remind me to pick it up. She just told me to go out there and play basketball.

**Q. What's it like running pick-and-rolls with Desi? How has that chemistry improved through out the course of the year?**

ESSENCE BOOKER: Actually, we just sparked that duo right there, but I feel like we've been working on it, especially recently. And that touch pass, I'm pretty sure you guys are familiar with that. That touch pass in the area Lindy's been pressing that on me in film so I'm glad I got that one out of the way.

**Q. Essence, you talk about trusting in your teammates trusting you and overall trust. Talk about the trust that coach has in Kiara and her being a freshman and coming in today and how that kind of helps you out a little bit as well.**

ESSENCE BOOKER: I think we continue to say that Kiara is not your average freshman, your typical freshman. At practice she's like a senior to me. She pushes me at practice. She pushes everyone else. So when she's on the court we trust her just like everyone trusts me.

And I just want to lead the way for her so when I do depart from UNLV that she continues to lead. So I feel like she trusts her the same way she trusts me.

**Q. Desi, I wouldn't say your last game was rough or anything, but how nice was it to really come out and have such a strong performance in the tournament, especially after winning conference Player of the Year?**

DESI-RAE YOUNG: It feels great. I can't give all the credit to myself. I have to give it to my teammates and my coaches because without them I wouldn't be who I am today.

Me and Coach Lindy, we talked about me just focusing on rebounding, rebounding, rebounding, because I can finish in the paint, but getting rebounds is something that we have all been stressing about and what needs to be focused on.

**Q. For both of you, looking at you three sitting on the table up here, you got Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Las Vegas. What do you think that says about Las Vegas women's basketball and how much talent that we have here?**

ESSENCE BOOKER: It's huge. I feel like in the majority of my interviews I emphasize that Las Vegas is underrated, especially for athletes. But I hope you see these three UNLV and Las Vegas signs tomorrow too.

DESI-RAE YOUNG: I agree.

**Q. Desi, just growing up here, playing ball here, you guys are headed to the championship game for the first time since 2002. Just kind of looking back at your journey and how Las Vegas raised you, are you proud to say Las Vegas is home and you guys are going on the biggest stage tomorrow?**

DESI-RAE YOUNG: Of course I'm proud. I'm trying to make a comeback from last year. We lost in the beginning and I just want to make it all the way through, even make it to the dance. That's something that I've been hoping for, just want to put the city on my back and show them that I represent for them.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. We will dismiss the student-athletes. Thank you, ladies. We'll take questions for coach.

**Q. Kind of to piggyback what I asked them. The fact that you came back here. You're from Las Vegas. Desi is from Las Vegas. Essence is from Las Vegas. Just the talent that you have and just to be doing it with local talent, getting to the championship game.**

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Well, to get to this kind of stage and the championship game it would mean a lot wherever you are, whoever you are, wherever you're from. But to be born and raised here in Las Vegas and to be doing it for UNLV, it definitely means a little bit more.

We carry that with us and on the hard days or when you want to take a play off, I think those are the things that they think about. And I'm really proud of them. Obviously they're the ones out there kind of bouncing the ball and putting it in the hoop. But to be here and represent our community is a privilege. It's a privilege. And I think the biggest thing that all of us want to do is make you all proud. So I think we're on our way to do that.

**Q. Two part question: Coach, last season you won Coach of the Year after leading this team to a No. 2 overall seed in this particular tournament. This season**

**15-3 in the conference, No. 1 overall seed. First part of the question was: Were you a little surprised that were you not awarded Coach of the Year? Second part of that question: Considering your record against the Coach of the Year's team, did this one feel any sweeter than any other one?**

LINDY LA ROCQUE: The awards really don't matter to me. Honestly, what I care most about is that our players get the awards and recognition and respect that they deserve. So I would give up my own award for more wins or a championship in a heartbeat and I know they would do the same.

As far as how the awards fell this year, I'm just glad Desi got player and, again, all of those player awards take care of themselves. As far as playing the game today, maybe the media kind of makes more of that than anyone, but Coach Gobrecht has had a fantastic year. She's very deserving for what they have been able to do. I really respect her for that and I think she's very deserving of that award.

**Q. We heard about that conversation had you with Essence from her point of view. I was just wondering what you saw, why you decided to pull her over in that moment, and what kind of things you guys talked about?**

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Well, I guess it just goes to show that the kids really have no, cannot remember anything that I tell them. Because what I told her, I said, Go win this game for us. And she did.

**Q. It's easy to say that you guys are No. 1 overall seed. You're at home, shouldn't have a problem. But tonight showed that even though you're at home it's still a tournament game and it's tough. You guys won big at the end but can you talk about how tough it was to actually get the victory tonight?**

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Air Force is a physical team. They're so physical and tough. They do what they do really, really well and they make the game play a certain style. And so a lot of credit really goes to them and their players and their coaching staff.

But you guys know it's March. It's just every game is a grind. It doesn't matter seeding. It doesn't matter what court you're on. We could be outside on the blacktop playing some no-name team and it would be a grind if there's a championship at stake.

So that's how the game kind of fell and we were able to play that style and still grit it out. So really proud of our

team.

**Q. You seem to be on such a high right now. You have the Mountain West conference No. 1 seed. You have the awards. What message do you send home with the team being so young not being on this stage? What message do you send home with them to keep them mentally focused throughout the night to be prepared for tomorrow?**

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Well, the biggest thing is our job's not done and that's just plain and simple. The job is not done. No one is satisfied just to be in the game, especially our players. They're greedy. We're from Vegas, remember? They're greedy. I'm greedy. And we have to give ourselves this opportunity first and we've done that.

So now they know the job's not done and it's going to, whatever it takes, whatever it takes, they're going to do it.

**Q. On the defensive end it seemed like you guys were very comfortable switching 1 through 5. What is it about the scheme or the players that allows you to have this comfort in switching a point guard and a center?**

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Well, that definitely wasn't the game plan, but it did happen a few times, and we, and again, we just have some great versatility. I mean, Desi is out there, can guard guards really well. She's so athletic. She's so long. She keeps her hands up.

Khayla got switched on to a guard a couple of times. That wasn't totally our game plan but when they're out there and their connected and they're talking, I tell them, as long as one of us on one of them, I trust you guys. I trust you guys to get the stop and do what you need to do to guard the play and get the job done.

So we got maybe a little too switchy there a couple of times, but I think the best thing that we did was rebound. Again, a few too many offensive rebounds, but some of those were just kind of tapped out of bounds, like those team offensive rebounds. We just got to grab the ball. So I thought we did a much better job rebounding tonight.

**Q. All year you've talked about your depth and how impressive your whole roster is but how important was it to see your two best players step up in the moment like they did today?**

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Well, to have the ability to go to the bench if and when we need is just, is so critical. And it's been crucial to our success.

But then, you know, again, it's just whatever the game is giving us and who is playing well. I mean, Nneka had such an awesome game yesterday. I thought she was spectacular in the first half. We aren't like where we are in first half without her and then the game just has flows and my job as a coach is try to make the very best decisions for our team to put us in a great position to win.

And sometimes that's really getting people rest and breaks and getting some different people in there and then sometimes it's just like riding with the dogs that brought you here. So we rode them a little bit, maybe too much tonight, so someone, some of them need to get back to the hotel and get so showered and lay down.

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