

Mountain West Women's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

UNLV Lady Rebels

Lindy La Rocque

Essence Booker

Khayla Rooks

Desi-Rae Young

Postgame Press Conference



right decisions. When the ball's in Desi's hands they trust for her to make the right decision. And so it's just about trusting and trusting what Lindy's telling us to do out there. So, yeah, we got a good group.

Q. Khayla, as you stepped on the ladder, you said you've been waiting a long time for this. What did it feel like? And I know you have the net now, so how does that feel?

KHAYLA ROOKS: Man, I can't even begin to put into words how it feels. Just the past four years has been a struggle bus at my last school. So just coming here and playing alongside these amazing women and getting the W and going to the dance, I couldn't ask for anything else. I talked about it with my mom last night. It's a dream come true.

Q. Essence, what did you guys talk about in that huddle before the big three-pointer?

ESSENCE BOOKER: Okay. So they gave us like two plays, right, and none of us in the huddle kind of answered, so our assistant coach, Coach Owens, he just said, we're going to run this. And they ended up running it for me, but it's normally for someone else, Alyssa Durazo-Frescas, so I was like, All right, I'm going to make this.

Walking to the line Khayla tapped me on my shoulder and she was like, Make this shot. Like, you're going to make this shot.

And I kept telling myself, I'm going to make it, and they ended up doing something defensively that left me wide open and I knocked it down.

KHAYLA ROOKS: Butter.

Q. Essence, are you able to appreciate the history of the moment? 20 years since the team's made the tournament. 28 since you won a conference title game. That is in your case literally a lifetime.

ESSENCE BOOKER: Yeah. (Laughing) yeah. We knew coming into this game what we wanted to do. We wanted

UNLV - 75, Colorado State - 65

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

LINDY LA ROCQUE: First off, just what a great women's basketball game. Credit Colorado State, playing four games in four days. They gave everything that they had in their gas tank, a really good team, really well-coached, really respect those guys over there. So congratulations to them on finishing a strong year.

I'm just extremely proud. I don't know, honestly, if it's totally set in yet. I'm really, really proud of not just these three, but all of the young women in our locker room. And I don't even know if I remember anything from the game, to be honest. I'll have to go back and watch the film.

But it just, they did whatever we needed to do and we talked about that at the beginning of the week, of whatever it takes, and they did it. So just really, really proud.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for our student-athletes.

Q. Essence, coach has said all season long that the team's motto has kind of been you guys's go to player it the open player. Can you talk a little bit about 22 assists on 30 made field goals in the biggest game of the season so far?

ESSENCE BOOKER: I feel like we just trust each other. Like she said, the open person is our best offense. I feel like when the ball's in my hands they trust me to make the



to make history. We wanted to go to the dance. We knew that this was our way getting there and I feel like every single one of us had so much determination to win this game tonight.

It came from the coaching staff, putting that trust in us, putting that determination, that confidence, so we wanted to make history. We knew that we could do it, so we did that. We showed up today and we did that.

Q. Desi, I think they had something like four points in the paint in the entire first half. What was really working for you guys on that interior defense?

DESI-RAE YOUNG: Just we always work inside out and even if I get doubled just making the extra pass. You know, had a few turnovers, and Coach Lindy was just like, You just got to back it out. You know, back it out, then look, and if you don't have anything, get it back out there, and then we're going to run some other plays to come to you. Just making the right pass, looking for everyone, everyone is diving, Essence is diving, Justice is diving, post players are diving, just making the right pass.

Q. Being that you guys are both transfers, when you were going through the portal process, what did Lindy communicate to you two about her plan for this program and how you were going to fit into it?

ESSENCE BOOKER: I remember my first phone call with Lindy. She immediately answered phone and she got right to it. Like, it wasn't no, hi, my name is Lindy La Rocque. It was, we're trying to win a championship. Like, what are you doing?

So I was like, I'm trying to win a championship too. She just stated what we were trying to do from the jump, so coming in I expected for to us work hard. I knew nothing was going to be given to us. Me and her were after the same goal and it was up to us. Resembling as a point guard you got to resemble the head coach to put that into our freshmen and give them the encouragement and confidence that they need for us to get here.

DESI-RAE YOUNG: She had reached out and she had seen me play because she was obviously at Stanford. And she wanted a championship. I wanted a championship. I wanted at least just a winning season, to be honest.

But definitely set our sites on winning the Mountain West and going to the big dance and that's exactly what we accomplished, so I can't say anything other than I'm blessed. Happy that I came here.

Q. Your face during the, when they handed you the

tournament MVP, it's all over the news. So you're looking good. But what does that mean to you? You've been all over the country trying to chase your dreams. What does that mean to you to win tournament MVP tonight?

ESSENCE BOOKER: To be honest, I didn't strive for getting tournament MVP. Coming into the tournament I was just trying to win and I wanted to win with this group. So I felt like Lindy kept emphasizing that we have to do whatever it takes, whatever it takes to win, and I felt like with us doing that like, those points came, those assists came, those rebounds came. It just came naturally.

But winning MVP was definitely a blessing, but I wouldn't be able to do it without them.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you, ladies. We'll take questions for coach.

Q. Two-part question: First, when you took over, obviously winning was part of the plan, but how much, I guess first off, that first season how did you kind of implement what you wanted to do how and much of it was going through that first season and seeing, okay, you need certain personnel in order to play the way you want to play, and now you have multiple ball handlers, a stretch big, like very much a modern basketball roster? How much of your plan were you able to execute year one and how much did you need to go through a year to kind of see what you wanted to do this year?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Yeah, well, obviously last year, the first year, there was like a number of crazy things, pandemic, all of that, and then for me as a first year head coach, a brand new staff that is working together. We went through a lot of growing pains. We had a lot of good ideas and we were just trying to see exactly what we had, the pieces that we had, what would work.

I think the biggest thing is that we just believed. Even last year, the belief started, like, the second I got the job. That's when it really started of like you have to believe you can do it before really you can ever do it.

So then it's just kind of trusting that and having, like you said, really good people around you, great administration, awesome assistant coaches. And then you do need some talented players. So to be able to get them in recruiting, our freshman class has been critical. Obviously the transfers were really huge, and having a little bit of success last year, I think, helped us get the right ones because they could already kind of feel what was going on here.

Q. We talked earlier this season about this team relishing playing in the big moment. Three wins in the Thomas & Mack during the regular season, three wins in three days in the same building. Why does this team like relishing in that big moment?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: I think, they say it a lot and maybe they're just really good at regurgitating everything I say, but it's just the trust and belief in each other. They love playing with each other. They love each other. They do crazy things off the court, and half the time I'm trying to get them to calm down and stop being goofy.

But they love being around each other. Whether it's a big moment, they believe in each other. They trust each other. And so even when, Colorado State made a heck of a run and like, what, did they cut it to one point? And obviously we had a lot to lose and the outcome could have been totally different if we don't have great leadership and great players to kind of look at each other and be like, all right, like, we're good, we're good.

So I think it's just they're belief and love and trust for each other.

Q. What did you think about Justice's performance all tournament long? I feel like sometimes she goes under the radar but she looked really strong and really like always on it and I wanted to get your thoughts on her and her performance.

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Yeah. I think you are like spot-on. She's kind of an under the radar type of player. She does a lot of her work on defensive end. I mean, No. 5 for them had 10 points again, who is averaging nearly 20. And then she's just not flashy. She kind of does the dirty work. She flies in there for rebounds. She guards the best player. She doesn't totally wear a ton of emotion on her face, but she gets huge buckets and she's just a gamer.

Really, really proud of her. And tonight I kept thinking every shot was going in, but credit to her of just staying aggressive and willing and listening to us and just picking and choosing her spots and staying committed defensively.

Q. Last time we asked Essence what happened in the timeout she didn't totally have the most accurate account so I was hoping we could get your account of what happened in that timeout and what you guys, what you kind of told Essence before that shot?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Yeah. Well, we had two seconds. We knew we had to get a quick shot. We put in this out-of-bounds play. Roman and our assistant coaches were always just watching games. So I'll like give the

credit where it's due. We actually stole that from Adia Barnes at Arizona. I saw it in one of her games and I was like, I'm going to save this one for the very end, so we put it in actually this week, and I thought just getting a perimeter shot was going to be our best chance because you can't rely on expecting a foul call or anything at the rim. And so we drew it up and they went out there and executed it perfectly, Desi set a great screen, they kind of switched out, Kiara made a perfect pass and Essence, you know, put the dagger in 'em.

Q. There's been a lot of great teams and great players to come through here and fall short. 20 years and then 28 years for the conference title. How much meaning does that have to you to be the one who does it?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: It really means a lot and if anything the outpouring of support from our alumni has just been so cool really, really cool. Former lady Rebels that we had a great alumni event this year but Linda Frohlich texted me last night like, If I didn't have five kid I would be there, you know I'm going to be watching. And she brought a crew on Monday and they drove from California, because one of her teammates from Sweden was in town and it just, you know, there's a great history and tradition of Lady Rebel basketball here that we are re-igniting. A win like this, I think the biggest thing, it makes them really proud, proud to say that they're Lady Rebels, I think that's the best thing that we can do and they can do for us. It really means a lot. I think especially for our alumni group and then the group that we have, we want them to feel the same in five, 10 years of whoever's still playing here.

Q. Now that you guys are in, what are the next few days look like for this team?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Wow, I haven't even thought about that. Well we're definitely going to have tomorrow off. We have spring break next week, so they have class tomorrow and Thursday I told 'em, Don't worry about practice. We've obviously missed these first three days of the week, so they're going pack to class -- they better -- doing their homework, finishing up their assignments and so then we can really have fun next week they don't have school it will be a great spring break. And then -- my boss is over there -- we better be throwing a rocking party on Sunday, all right, for the Selection Show. And so we'll get back to practice probably on Saturday, give them an couple days break, mainly to get their academics situated and taken care of, and then we'll practice Saturday, figure out what time everything is on Sunday, and see where we're going and get back to work.

Q. For the last three days all you talked about and the players as well was cutting down the nets. Tonight

you achieved that. What was going through your mind when you cut that final net off?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Yeah, it was really, really cool. Really surreal. I've cut a few nets in my day. With this group it just, I would do anything for them because I know they would do anything for me. And to say it is one thing, to believe it is another thing, and then to go out there and get the job done is something on a whole another level. And that's what they did. So it was, it's really special.

Q. Talk about the players kind of having each other, looking at each other, saying you got this. Is that, when they're on that run late in the third quarter is that just you trusting the players to figure it out themselves and they've been there before, they kind of understand, instead of panicking and calling a timeout there?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Yeah, well, I think especially in those moments, like I have to stay calm so they can stay calm. If it got a little dicey there I knew like a media timeout or something was coming, so I was going to be ready to use a timeout to really kind of settle them down and just kind of get back collected together. But again I just, I trust them, so like we're all looking at each other -- they know what's going on in the game too -- so it's like, Okay, let's catch our breath and now we got to like change the tide. And you've got to go out there and get rebounds and execute and defend. And they did. So I think it's like I don't just like let them go willy-nilly, obviously we give them some good feedback, positive -- I think it was about keeping it really positive, keeping it really calm and just reassuring them of like you're fine, we're good, it's all good. You just took their best shot. Now go back at them.

Q. You hold a lot of Durango High School records, Nevada high school state records, and you played for Stanford, but how does this win compare to like your most memorable basketball highlights of your career?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: This is definitely, way, way, way up there for sure. It feels different, obviously, on this side, because it's more about like serving and providing this experience for our young people. And so when you can help them achieve their goals that just, it just, it's better than anything you can do on your own. So this one will be way up there probably forever.

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