

# Mountain West Women's Basketball Championship

Sunday, March 5, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

**San Jose State Spartans**

**Coach April Phillips**

**Jada Holland**

**Aarion Nichols**

Postgame Press Conference

San Jose State 62, Air Force 51

THE MODERATOR: First for San Jose state, like to welcome up Coach Phillips along with student-athletes Aarion Nichols and Jada Holland. At this time I'll turn it over to Coach Phillips for some remarks about tonight's game.

APRIL PHILLIPS: All season we've just talked about the process and the journey and not worrying about so much what the score looks like, but what our progress is, and I'm just really proud of our ladies for sticking through the type of season that we've had.

It's not an easy season to continue to fight and show up and work every single day, and I couldn't be more proud of just their effort and their intentionality in building this culture and continuing to stick with the process.

They saw the fruits of their labor a little bit tonight, so really proud of the ladies.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. I cover Air Force. I've seen them all season long. Kind of turned it on in the fourth quarter because teams tend to wear down. How did you guys combat that tonight in a game that looked like it was pretty well max energy from both sides?**

AARION NICHOLS: Just sticking with the game plan, knowing that the game, there's a lot of highs and lows, so just sticking with it and knowing if we stick with it, we'll come out with it, so...

JADA HOLLAND: I think our biggest thing was we knew



they were going to go and run, try to pressure us, so being where our feet is and being in the moment. What's done is done. If they get a steal or a layup, all we can do is respond, and I think we did that really well in the fourth quarter.

**Q. Did you watch those games again, or what were kind of the thought process for the players?**

JADA HOLLAND: Yeah, I think especially Air Force, they play similar pressure defense like us. I think we just used it to our advantage watching film, watching how aggressive they were, but how open the paint was.

So that was really the game plan, just get past them, get a layup, draw a foul, or drive and kick. So I think we executed that really well today.

**Q. When the point guard went down, how did that change what they did, and how did that change how you approached them?**

JADA HOLLAND: Yeah, I mean, they lost a big piece. The point guard is, like, the heart of the team. It's the quarterback. It's their motor. So I think in that moment we just wanted to stay on top of them.

You lose a big piece of your team and that kind of sucks, and I hope she's okay. We had to use that to our advantage today.

THE MODERATOR: One question here for the student-athletes if you can both answer. Heading into the tournament, you won your last two, what kind of confidence did that give you and the momentum coming into the tournament?

JADA HOLLAND: We're playing our best basketball at the end of this season. For us it was just stacking days. Coach A.P. told us five people on one string while we're out there and one heartbeat, so I think that's our mentality, and that's what we were trying to do. We were trying to move all as one, stick to the game plan, be aggressive as possible, and play for each other.



So, yeah.

AARION NICHOLS: Yeah. We definitely had a lot of momentum coming in winning them last two games, so I think just sticking with it and letting our culture shine, like Coach say, and just knowing that if we do that, then the outcome will be great.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thank you.

AARION NICHOLS: Thank you.

JADA HOLLAND: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with Coach Phillips.

**Q. Did the space concern you at all, just knowing, again, what Air Force does, how they're built, and that they play at altitude? Were you confident you guys could maintain the pace you had set?**

APRIL PHILLIPS: 100%. We were a little bit hesitant to trap them in the full court, which is kind of what we do most times. Like, that's how we get turnovers and obviously it turns into offense for us, but they do a really good job of picking apart our press and our scramble action a little bit.

So we were a little bit hesitant to do that with them, but I will say that we knew that in that fourth quarter we were going to see pressure, and we were prepared for that moment.

It was obviously a part of the preparation and the game plan and just keeping the composure I think for us more than not, but I also think that down the stretch we were able to kind of toughen up and meet some of those passes, right?

Like you saw a couple of deflections early and then we tightened up and began meeting those passes, and it turned into fouls for them rather than deflections.

So I think we were ready for that pressure. We worked pretty hard all year, and that's what I told the young ladies actually this morning in shoot-around, that those mornings on the track early way, way back in June, this is when it pays off in March.

**Q. The start, you know, hitting the three threes in the first quarter, how much did that help mentally, especially coming in as an underdog with nothing to lose to then be able to play with a lead?**

APRIL PHILLIPS: That was the emphasis going out into that game. The first three minutes were so important and

we did not want to play behind. I kept emphasizing, do not play from behind. It's hard when you dig yourself into a hole and you try to fight back for the rest of the game.

So I think we did a really good job of jumping out and just being ready to go.

**Q. How about you when the point guard goes down, how did that change the way you approach anything? Did you change any strategy or do anything else?**

APRIL PHILLIPS: Yeah, definitely hope she's okay for sure. I do think that it enabled us to begin to trap more in the full court. If you noticed, we picked up our trapping in the full court a little bit just because at that point you have guards that aren't typically in that position, right, trying to handle traps and bring the ball up the court.

So we did kind of try to take advantage of it a little bit and turn up our defensive pressure.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, on the rebounds are, 45-27 margin. Was that something you were expecting coming in? What was that approach considering what your rebound margin in was during the season?

APRIL PHILLIPS: It didn't feel like it. It felt like we were down on boards. Last game we won the rebounding war, and so I felt that it would be an emphasis for Air Force to attempt to battle back in that area, right, and so we truly emphasized winning the rebounding more both offensively and defensively.

And rebounding to me, it's literally an intangible. It's effort, right? It's not skill. It's literally just effort and heart. So those are the things, like I said, that we focus on. So I think that's why we won that rebounding war like that because tonight was about heart.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much.

APRIL PHILLIPS: Thank you.

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