

Mountain West Women's Basketball Championship

Sunday, March 10, 2024

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

Fresno State Bulldogs

JAIME WHITE

MIA JACOBS

TAIJA STA. MARIA

Postgame Press Conference

Fresno State 62, Air Force 44

THE MODERATOR: Ready to begin with Fresno State. We have student-athletes, Taija Sta. Maria, Mia Jacobs,

Coach Jaime White.

Coach, we can start with you and get some thoughts on today's game.

JAIME WHITE: Really proud of our kids. It is always hard to play against Air Force and to beat them three times in one year. I'm not sure if there's anybody that's done that. That might be a record of some kind. I don't know. They're so tough.

Chris does such a great job. I did think we had a great focus, took care of the ball. We got to the free-throw line in the first half, which was nice. Our kids just were resilient. We knew we would be pressed the entire game and just had to take care of the ball and then be able to refocus on the other end.

But proud of these two. Obviously Taija takes care of the ball the majority of the game, and Mia has been a force for our team all year long.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Mia, obviously not the kind of game you guys would have wanted from three. How were you guys able to not get frustrated with that and kind of stick to your principles, attack the paint where you outscored them 38-16?



MIA JACOBS: I think giving what the defense gave us. Obviously there were a few kick-outs, but making those extra passes and just staying confident that they were going to go in the next time.

Then obviously they weren't dropping today, so we decided we were going to drive, kick, trying to get a few more post sides and stuff like that instead.

Q. Air Force had a lot of foul trouble early. Sent three of their key players to the bench, and you went on an 18-4 run. Did you sense that important moment because they were short-handed to make that run at that time?

TAIJA STA. MARIA: I think we stuck to our game plan the whole way through. We were able to get stops during that time, which were huge for us, and we just got buckets in a row, and that really gave us the momentum that we needed.

Q. Because Air Force relies heavily on the defense with the quick whistle, did you sense they played a little differently after getting into foul trouble early and maybe you were able to capitalize on that?

MIA JACOBS: Yeah. I think I would drive a lot easier with the little hand fouls that they were calling and then the fouls as we shot, so being able to get to the basket and trying to finish through contact. So obviously noticing who has foul trouble and trying to expose that, that was what we were trying to do.

Q. Scoring 21 points on 17 turnovers, what was working for you on the defensive end?

TAIJA STA. MARIA: I think having good ball pressure. We got a lot of steals in our press I think, and that was very important. Then again it just gives us the momentum that we need to kind of score off of them.

Q. Then as a player, it can be exciting to get to challenge a team like UNLV. How are you going to approach that in the next however many hours?



MIA JACOBS: I think we're going to give it our best crack. Obviously it's a new game. It's a new season. It's 0-0.

We lost in the first time, but I think it was a really good game. Both styles of play match up pretty well. Obviously they're going to come in thinking they've got the win, so I think that's an advantage we can take, kind of push and not give up.

THE MODERATOR: We'll dismiss the players at this time. Questions for Coach.

Q. Coaches often talk about how difficult it is to beat a team three times in a row in a season, and you kind of touched on that. What was your message to your team going in with that in mind?

JAIME WHITE: We have an extremely young team, as does Air Force, so I knew we would -- we would match in kind of the same ways. There would be turnovers. There would be chaos, and it might be a little bit ugly, especially both teams can press.

So once the regular season was over and the Mountain West Tournament starts, we really try to refocus. Well, we were disappointed in our loss against New Mexico, and I think all of our players were ready to turn around and work hard and start new. So our last three days of practice have been great.

I do think some of our upper classmen, Syd, Kylee, some of those players really took it to heart like, hey, we have an opportunity to go in. We have not won in the first round in a couple of years, so that was another thing we wanted to do.

So really just reset our goals and obviously look at it as Air Force, and we have to attack them and beat the team in front of us, but at the same time, our goals are we're set, and I think our kids were very determined.

Q. Defensively you kept Air Force from getting back in the game. They made a little run at the end of the half. What was the key in the second half to keep them from getting on track?

JAIME WHITE: Yeah. I thought we had a great second quarter and third quarter, and I'm not sure how many times we've put those two quarters together. You finish well. You start well.

Then one thing -- as you all know, I've been in the Mountain West for a minute, and we've had some epic games. One thing as I reflected was in these games, you

can't put the brakes on. You can't stall. It's win or go home, so one of the things was, okay, take care of the ball, rebound, and defend. At the same time we have to keep going.

You saw Ja get that turnover. She needed to take that layup. When we had those opportunities to score, we can't pause because especially a young team, you start to pause, and all of a sudden, the other team kind of steps up on you.

So I thought our kids just did a good job, keep pushing, take care of the ball. Taija is a huge part of that. I can't say enough about Ja Harvey, Deajanae Harvey. I thought she came in in the first half and was great, but she also was able to take care of the ball.

She got steals. She was part of that transition to scoring. That really helped us, especially against such a defensive presence as Air Force is.

Q. How critical was that second quarter run when Air Force was so short-handed because of the foul trouble?

JAIME WHITE: Yeah, I think it's great to hear our kids maybe not know that, so they just keep playing hard. I did have about three coaches in my ear saying, keep going, keep going. Their kids are not out there.

I just thought the focus was there. Again, sometimes when it's too focused on the other team, they don't do as well. I was proud of them to just keep moving.

Q. What did you like about your team's discipline, not forcing threes when they weren't going and just sticking to what was working in the paint?

JAIME WHITE: Oh, gosh. Those threes too, I really felt like we got good looks and from the right players. Mia, Kylee, Tamia can hit those.

In my mind, I'm like, okay, it's the first game of the tournament. We're a little bit nervous. Those are going to fall.

At the same time when Ja came in and started to drive and see the backside and see the kick-outs and see the post-slides, and I thought Syd Dethman started really well inside. I do think we had a little bit of a height advantage. In our last couple of games, we were able to attack the basket. So we felt comfortable in that.

The other thing is when you steal the ball, obviously you have an opportunity for layups, so that was great for our

players to understand that.

Q. How do you take some of those things and apply it to a team like UNLV that you get to challenge tomorrow?

JAIME WHITE: Here's the thing, we did not come here and play UNLV this year. Then the other thing is when we played them at our place, we felt like we played well against them.

We know their players. We know how they play. We've played every team better the second time we've played them, so the chances are we'll play better, and if we keep it close, I think we give ourselves a chance to win.

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