

Mountain West Women's Basketball Championship

Sunday, March 10, 2024

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

Air Force Falcons

Chris Gobrecht

Madison Smith

Milahnne Perry

Postgame Press Conference

Fresno State 62, Air Force 44

THE MODERATOR: Air Force, we have student-athletes Milahnne Perry, Madison Smith, Coach Chris Gobrecht. Coach, we'll start with you and get some thoughts on today's game.

CHRIS GOBRECHT: Sometimes when I look out on a game like that, and once again see our players dealing with the kinds of just challenges that we seem to have night after night after night, as I told the team, I think you all need to remember how impressive it is that you won 15 games, and that team -- you know, sometimes teams have your number.

Clearly Fresno had our number this year, but they also have a whole lot going for them. They are much more bigger than us. They are more experienced than us. They are more athletic than us.

There's a part of me that is kind of going, wow, how in the heck did we finish above them in the conference because they've got some -- maybe they just get really fired up for us. I don't know. But that's a good basketball team.

A ton of experience and a ton of size and skill to work with. They definitely outplayed us. They outplayed us today, and we certainly didn't play our best, but they had a lot to do with that. And I also think that, again, when we got in foul trouble early and we had to play all of our freshmen, that's when the lead got out of hand, and it's just all part of the learning curve.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Well, first, for both of you before we get into the



game stuff, you were first team all Mountain West, Milahnne, and all defensive team for Madison. Any thoughts on those honors? I realize you just had a heart-breaking loss, but that's a season-long award for both of you. Any thoughts on that recognition?

MADISON SMITH: I'm really glad that Air Force got the recognition this year. Three people honored on the Mountain West recognition is huge, and I think it's really good for our program, and I'm really happy about it.

MILAHNIE PERRY: I think we're all just thankful for it and just all proud of each other.

Q. How frustrating was that first half for both of you in particular? Just the quick whistle and then the foul trouble that put you guys on the bench?

MILAHNIE PERRY: Can you put it into words? I feel like a game like this, conference tournament, you wouldn't call stuff like they called. We didn't really expect that, and it really did hurt us, so that's just something we have to take into account next year.

MADISON SMITH: Yeah, I agree with that. It's really frustrating. Just like Coach said, especially me and Milahnne being on the bench in foul trouble, it's hard to watch the freshmen out there that don't have as much experience and know there's not much you can do about it until the second half.

Q. Coach was talking about just the inherent disadvantages that you guys generally have at Air Force, when you compound that with foul trouble early, does it make the mountain seem that much higher when you are trying to make a comeback in a game like this?

MILAHNIE PERRY: It definitely does because on top of the lack of experience, we have to continue to keep that energy high, and it can seem like the mountain does get higher with that, but we just try to keep the energy high and stay positive and push through.

Q. And you did make a run when you all came back in



late in the second quarter. What happened then to kind of keep that momentum from carrying into the third quarter?

MADISON SMITH: We all just kind of got together, and I don't think we did a very good job continuing it into the third quarter. We kind of dropped off after halftime, but we were very determined to get back in the game or try to get us somewhere close at half.

Q. Any thoughts on, again, overall the season, winning 15 games in a season when you didn't have a lot of key players back and played so many young players?

MILAHNIE PERRY: I'm just proud of us. Especially with the freshmen. I think they played like they were older than freshmen, and I'm very proud of them. I'm just proud of the team and happy that we had this year together.

MADISON SMITH: I'm excited for next year. We have a lot coming back. Me and Milahnies are coming back and then all the freshmen. I'm really looking forward to it. I think we can do a lot of damage next year.

CHRIS GOBRECHT: I think it's a testimony to the conference that that team is a ninth place team in the conference. I think this is certainly the strongest I've seen the conference with all of the teams that had so many players returning and so much depth and size.

I mean, you name it. It was a really good -- I just think the conference was as strong as I've ever seen it. Like I say, when you stand back and look at a good Fresno State team like that that was in ninth place, that tells you something about the conference.

THE MODERATOR: We'll dismiss the student-athletes at this time. Questions for Coach.

Q. How did the foul trouble have to change your approach because obviously they're on the bench, and then you can't be as aggressive as you generally are?

CHRIS GOBRECHT: How does it change? For us to have Jayda and Madison and Lahnies all in foul trouble, we've had some experience with one or two of them being in foul trouble and having to survive and that kind of thing, but in addition to it taking just the edge off of us, it was just a lot to ask those kids that didn't have a ton of experience to go out there and stop this fired-up Fresno State team and figure out a way to put the ball in the basket.

I think that any time you're struggling that much to score, it just takes the wind out of your sails a little bit. As I said, we

didn't play well. Maybe the layoff is not a good thing. I do think you lose your sharpness.

I think about the team that played against Boise State, needless to say, we were a little bit different then. Then you go and you just kind of deflate. We had people that were sick this week. I've seen that happen because all of a sudden your adrenaline drops, and you take a little break, and everybody just, whoa.

At least we can't blame it on Wednesday night today, though. Can't blame it on that. We just didn't play well. They played really well. Certainly, as I said, I think that's a good basketball team. I'm just happy we've had the year we've had. I wish it didn't have to end it this way, but I'm certainly happy we've had the year we've had.

Q. Do you feel like the shooting numbers and the turnovers were kind of a product of trying to do too much to get back into the game?

CHRIS GOBRECHT: I think it was a product of being too uptight. One thing I always remind them of, you don't want to close your eyes and pedal faster. Sometimes when you're really hyped and trying so doggone hard, that's what you end up doing. You end up closing your eyes and pedaling faster and then you just do goofy things.

It had nothing to do with their effort. It had nothing to do with how much they wanted to win or do well. It just had to do with understanding the environment and the challenge and being able to sort it out and keep your head clear and do the things that you know you can do.

There was just a little bit of losing our minds a little bit.

Q. Keelie O'Hallaren didn't play many minutes, didn't attempt a three-pointer in a game when you needed some points. What was the thinking behind that?

CHRIS GOBRECHT: She was sick the whole week. She didn't practice for three days, including -- she practiced a little bit yesterday, and that was it. So that was unfortunate, but they would have helped some. I don't know if she would have saved the day, but she certainly would have helped some.

Because so often when you see the ball go through the basket, it just makes everybody just feel a little bit better, and they're a very good rebounding team. I honestly thought we did a pretty good job of keeping them off the offensive glass. That was a point of emphasis all week. Darn if we didn't try our best to do that, and we did a good job on that.

It was just we had a hard time scoring. The turnovers were deadly, and No. 50, she's a really good player. I hope when I'm 26 -- when my kids are 26, they're good players too. So I thought she certainly impacts the game. That's for sure.

Q. As you look ahead, does it kind of -- because you have so many young players who will come back, I know you're excited about a recruiting class. Joe, I would assume is going to be healthy. Does that help deal with a loss like this I guess assuming you're coming back too?

CHRIS GOBRECHT: Well, the whole -- you know, the whole year has been such a great experience, and I think that's what's hard. You just hate to see when they have just -- they've really done a good job, and they have so much to be proud of.

I tried to remind them of that in the locker room. You just hate to have it end on -- maybe lose, but just to have it end in that way was hard, and I think -- I feel badly because it can make you forget how far you've come and what a great job you did, and I don't want them to forget that.

But it also needs to serve as fuel to get in the gym and figure out how to use -- we do an incredible amount of teaching every single day. So now all that teaching has to start turning into instincts and not just constantly having to review the whole thing.

So I think they're going to be -- gosh, I think a year or two from now, certainly -- next year will probably be the best team Air Force has had personnel-wise for sure, and then two years from now, wow, it's just -- they could be really good. Really be good. It's exciting for sure.

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