

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 1, 2023

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Rutgers Scarlet Knights Coquese Washington Kaylene Smikle Chyna Cornwell

Postgame Press Conference

Rutgers - 63, Northwestern - 59

COQUESE WASHINGTON: It's really good to be here, being in this tournament and have the success on day one. I'm really proud of the team, our eight players. We've had eight all season long, and we've hung in there, been very resilient, worked.

And even this last week, we played three games in seven days. This is our fourth game in nine days, and not one person on this team was ready to fold because of the challenge. So to be here and be in a position to advance in the Big Ten Tournament, it's really a testament to the work and the belief and just the resilience that our team has shown all year.

So we're excited to be moving on and looking forward to playing against Illinois tomorrow.

Q. How was that today? You guys have played so many games, and to be able to stay alive and to play another day.

CHYNA CORNWELL: Physically, it was tough, but like it's just all about mental toughness and just pushing through games like that. Also just having support from your coaching staff and your team just to help you through games like that to guide you just makes it even easier.

Q. And how would you judge or kind of assess this season? I know you still have some games to go, but just overall what was this year like compared to last?

KAYLENE SMIKLE: I know what this year feels like. I feel like it's a process that every game we go out there, our goal isn't to win. I mean, it's good to win, but our goal is to



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get better every game. So I think that's good.

CHYNA CORNWELL: Same thing, yeah.

Q. Kaylene, you scored 21 points in the first half. What do you contribute the opening success to?

KAYLENE SMIKLE: My teammates, for like passing the ball, looking for me, and basically setting me up to be successful.

Q. And Chyna, you are a force to be reckoned with on the boards. What was working for you on the court in that category?

CHYNA CORNWELL: Just rebounding. It's an important key of the game, and just getting the boards. So for extra possessions for our team. I'll do anything for my team just to get those extra possessions.

Q. For both players, you guys relied so much this season on Kaylene scoring. What did it prove to the team to be able to finish the game out without her?

CHYNA CORNWELL: Kaylene was like, she was hype on the bench. Even when she fouled out, she was hype on the bench, supporting her teammates and keeping us going. That was really heartfelt for me. That was like, yeah, that was really good for me.

Just like everybody else on the team, just like hyping us up and keeping us going even though she fouled out. She's an important key to this team, very important. I'm really proud of everything she's accomplished this season. We still have more work to do, and she does as well.

Q. Kaylene, what were your emotions when the whistle called for the foul and for those final minutes?

KAYLENE SMIKLE: I was a little upset, but I knew that my teammates, like I had faith in my teammates without me being out there to finish the game off.

Q. Chyna, how would you sum up your performance today? You really seemed to dominate underneath



and take control at some pretty important times.

CHYNA CORNWELL: How could I put -- I just want us to like, from our team like I'll do anything for my team. If that has to come to a performance like that, then I will do it for my team just for us to pull out games like this. It's not really something I'll compliment myself on. It's just something I need to do for my team, so we can pull out games like this.

Q. Coach, what's it mean to have a player like Chyna, who she's not talking about herself? She's making it about the team in that moment.

COQUESE WASHINGTON: That's who Chyna is. She goes about her job with a very workmanlike attitude and a workmanlike approach. So she's so consistent in her attitude. She's so consistent in her effort. She's been a very consistent player all season. We know what we're going to get from her.

And we know she's going to play until -- as hard as she can until she has nothing else left to give. So it wasn't surprising that down the stretch of the game, that she was in there battling, getting big rebounds, blocking shots, defending very well, because that's who she is, she's just a worker. And you love to have those type of players that you can count on.

Q. Coach, how do you handle Kaylene Smikle committing four fouls early in --

COQUESE WASHINGTON: Nobody handles Kaylene Smikle. Let me just put that. Sorry, go ahead.

Q. How do you handle Kaylene Smikle committing four early fouls and getting kicked out of the game early in the fourth quarter?

COQUESE WASHINGTON: Well, it's a team game. So we just talked about what we had to do. We needed other people to step up. I thought Antonia Bates came on the floor, and she was really good for us defensively. She's long, and she's athletic. So she was able to hold us down on the defensive end, and I thought Kai and Awa and Chyna, of course, the three of those guys, they took turns getting to the free-throw line or getting a layup or getting an offensive rebound. I thought Kai got a big offensive rebound off of a free throw that gave us another possession.

So it wasn't one person that had to make plays on either end of the floor. It was really a team effort. And all the guys out there just made different plays at different times to make it something where we could come away as a win

and feel good about it as a team, not just one person, but as a team.

Q. Just your thoughts on tomorrow's game.

COQUESE WASHINGTON: Illinois is a really good team. They've been playing good basketball all season. So it's going to be a challenge for us to slow them down. They score a lot of points. So we've got to get back over to wherever we're staying. Where are we staying? The Hyatt. And try to figure out how we can slow them down a little bit.

But I'll take my chances with this crew that we have, the eight, our elite eight. We're going to give it our best shot tomorrow and see what happens.

Q. Just one more for Chyna: Reflecting on last year to this year, what's that transition been like, and how much has this team this year meant to you with the new coaching staff, newcomers, and Awa and Erica? Just the three of you sticking it out and staying together.

CHYNA CORNWELL: Personally the transition has been easy. The coaching staff made it -- they really just like, just them coming in, they made me feel great not only as a player, but as a person. It was a great transition.

It was like a blessing in disguise. It's just a huge blessing to have coaches like the coaches we have now. And most importantly the teammates that we have now. I know it's only eight of us, but I wouldn't want any other teammate, any other team. I will always choose my team over anybody.

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