

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 2, 2023
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA
Target Center

Illinois Fighting Illini

Shauna Green

Makira Cook

Genesis Bryant

Postgame Press Conference

Illinois - 81, Rutgers - 55

SHAUNA GREEN: Just really proud of these guys and how we came out and really executed the game plan from the start. I thought that that was key.

I think it was an advantage playing them just a few days ago. We made a couple adjustments in how we're going to guard, but they did another great job of execution.

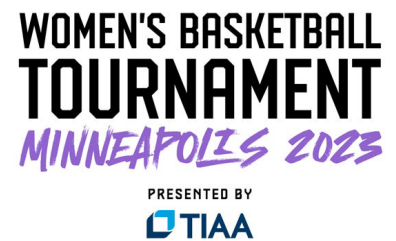
We talk right now in March, it's about execution, it's about effort. I thought we were elite in both of those.

Then these two right here, when they're shooting like that, it makes my job a lot easier, and it makes us a lot better team. So just really proud of the confidence that they played with, our entire team. So offensively, we got moving, but that starts with our defense and our rebounding, and then we got in a flow offensively.

Q. For either one, the zone has typically bothered you guys throughout the season, and it just seemed like you guys were comfortable just getting open shots tonight. What was different tonight facing a zone?

GENESIS BRYANT: I feel like confidence. I feel like we were just ready to shoot, ready to let it fly. Sometimes we overthink the zone sometimes. And I feel like we had a lot of reps in practice, just working our plays. We were just confident in the zone.

Q. So often when teams haven't been in this situation before where expectations are rather high, you guys have not had that in Illinois for a while. Were you at all concerned how you would come out for this game? Was that even on your mind?



MAKIRA COOK: No, I wouldn't say we were concerned, but I would say we were very focused and locked in on what we needed to do. That's attack today and go 1-0.

Q. Just knowing the team that you had to play today had to win yesterday to get to this point, how important was it to get a win under your belt and get confidence moving forward and build momentum?

GENESIS BRYANT: Really it was an advantage for us to watch the game and just kind of scout them. And we just played them, so I feel like both of those kind of were just hand in hand. We were just focused on ourselves. Not really putting pressure on anyone else, but just worried about us.

Q. Makira, you're obviously more known for your offense, but first quarter you took two charges. How has your defense kind of evolved throughout the year, and how have you tried to make an impact on that end?

MAKIRA COOK: I would say that I think that, when I'm locked in, I'm a really great defender. So I just have to continue to lock myself in to a point of where I'm defending at a high level all 40.

Q. How do you balance like celebrating a win like this and just moving on to the next round, also knowing that you play again tomorrow and have to focus on the task at hand?

SHAUNA GREEN: I think that we did a great job of that. It was, yeah, great job, but it's not like we're acting like we won anything. We won one game, and now we focus in on tomorrow.

So for us, it's always -- that's how it's been in the regular season too. Enjoy the win or look at the loss, whatever it is, and then tomorrow's a new day. In a tournament setting, you've just got to flip the script a little bit quicker.

When we leave this building, this game's over, and now we're on to Maryland and focusing in on the game plan for



that.

Q. Was shootaround as good as the way they opened the game? You've seen this team all year long. Has that been a tendency where you kind of know what I've got going in early on in the game?

SHAUNA GREEN: Yes, and we actually did shoot it really well in shootaround. But I think we have been shooting it really well. The last couple of weeks, even at Rutgers, we shot it well. We shot it well in shootaround there, and we shot it well before the game.

I think we're starting to get back into a groove offensively, and when you see the ball go in, which we have the last few games, it gives the players confidence. As a scorer, as a player, when you see that ball go through, the confidence level just raises.

I think, when we struggled a few weeks ago for a couple weeks offensively, a lot of that was the confidence. The shots were great shots, the same shots we're getting now, but now there's that just that when you're taking it and you think it's going in. That's the players and their mindset. We need that. In order to carry on and compete with Maryland, we have to make shots.

Q. I know you've been thinking about other things today, but there's now a job opening here at Minnesota. I was wondering if, as competitive as the Big Ten is, do you think a job like Minnesota's is an attractive one?

SHAUNA GREEN: Listen, I took a job that no one thought was attractive. So I'm probably not the right one to ask. I believe, if you believe in yourself and if you have great administration and you have people that are going to put the resources into it, I think you can win anywhere if you bet on yourself.

So, yeah, probably not the best person to ask, but I think it's a great job. I thought Lindsay did a great job through her tenure.

Q. With what you're going to see tomorrow with Maryland, the press and guarding you 94 feet, is there -- how important was it with 6:30 to go to have all of your starters sitting next to you?

SHAUNA GREEN: It was really important. For a team like us that we're not deep, especially now you add injuries in there, we're playing six or seven and we're not deep at all in the guard position. It was really, really important for us to get that rest.

So I felt comfortable with it, and I went to the bench early. I'm really proud of our bench because there's been a couple other games I've tried to do that, and we haven't been able to sustain, and they did a really good job of doing their job and being ready. 1 through 13 was locked in today and just really proud of them. The bench was huge.

Q. Perhaps you're sick of being asked about milestones so often because it seems you just keep collecting them as this year goes on. It's been 23 years since Illinois has had more than 22 wins in a season. Do you allow yourself the space to think about how special this year is getting with each new win you stack up, and just how fun is it to coach this team?

SHAUNA GREEN: I'll answer the last one. I love this team. Absolutely love this team. I've been coaching 20 years, and every team has their own story, their own journey, but from day one, this team has just -- they've just believed. They believed that they could win probably even before I thought that they could win, to tell you the truth.

Just like -- I just absolutely love them. You see them, they're great people. They're hard workers. They do things the right way on and off the floor. They're absolutely a joy to coach.

So I could not be more proud of them, and I'm just happy for them. I'm happy for the guys that have been on the other side of this and won one game last year, whatever it was. Like I don't know how -- I couldn't have handled that. I don't know how they did it. To come back and to believe in what we're doing and to see them, see the reward of their hard work and their loyalty and being able to win.

Then our guys that came in joined us that -- you know, really, like why did they come? They came, kind of a leap of faith. They believed. There was a relationship there. It was more than basketball. It's not like they were coming to this program that had success. So they were coming for the right reasons because the people and a vision and belief.

Again, that's why I answered his question like that, right? You never know. You can win wherever you are if you have the right people there and you do things and you get really good people around you.

No, I have not had time to reflect, and I don't want to because my mind is about trying to go 1-0, 1-0, 1-0. We'll have time after the season to look back, but I don't want this season to end. I love being around these guys, and I don't want this season to end.

Q. Couldn't help but notice tonight that Brynn's not in a boot anymore, just sneakers. Is there optimism you could get her back before you're done this year?

SHAUNA GREEN: Yeah, I was shocked too. I said, you're not in a boot. Are you ready to play tonight or what?

There is. We're going to see. They're doing -- she's nonstop rehabbing. We're not going to see her tomorrow and probably won't see her in this Big Ten Tournament, but hopefully in postseason play, maybe there's a chance, and that would be great. Because we need some more size.

Q. Do you feel like Adalia plays with any kind of chip on her shoulder, any kind of edge just being back at home? She had her family in the crowd. Do you feel like she plays with any kind of edge?

SHAUNA GREEN: I feel like she always plays with edge and a chip whether it's in Minnesota or in Champaign. That's her. She's energy. She's just a hard-nosed, blue-collar kid. I'm sure she probably feels a little bit more being back home and having so many people in the stands.

But we need her to keep playing with that chip and continue to be that energizer for us.

Q. Looking at Maryland, you go back to three quarters at Maryland that you thought were pretty good. Is there an optimism that you can put a plan together that they have played well for 75 percent of the game against Maryland?

SHAUNA GREEN: Maryland's really, really good. I mean, call it what it is. They've got just unbelievable players, and they're deep. They press. Yeah, we did play well. We played well for three quarters, and we didn't have Jen that game. But now we don't have Brynn and Jayla, and they had good games. So it is what it is.

We know we have to handle the pressure. We did not do a good job last time in the third quarter of handling their pressure. We've worked on it literally almost every day since then against our practice guys, and I've just let our practice guys, the tallest, fastest ones, I have Coach Cat out there. He's 6'7" and long. I'm like pressure the crap out of us.

So we will hopefully now -- we'll see tomorrow if it helped at all, but I feel like we're more confident against pressure now than we even were a couple of weeks ago. We're going to have to play extremely well, and we're going to have to handle the pressure, and we're going to have to hit

shots, like we did tonight.

Q. Having been through some program struggles yourself and kind of watching that rebuild, what are your thoughts on what Coquese Washington has been able to do this season with just eight players and no returning starters?

SHAUNA GREEN: I think she's done an unbelievable job. For them to get the wins that they got and finish like they did, I mean, I think she's done a tremendous job, and I've said that multiple times this year.

They're going to be -- she knows this league. She knows how to win in this league. I have a ton of respect for her and for how she runs her program. And they did that with, what, eight players? So when they get more players, they're going to be a really, really tough team.

Again, a ton of respect, and I thought she's done an amazing job this year.

Q. Coach, good win tonight. How would you say Rutgers performed in the tournament against Northwestern, also against you guys tonight?

SHAUNA GREEN: That was a great game yesterday, and I thought that they played really well. Smikle is so good. Like she's so good. That was -- she can just beat you in so many ways. So we had to send multiple people on her. She has great size. And she still scored 22 tonight, and I thought we did a pretty good job on her. We fouled her a lot. She's a really tough guard.

Then with Cornwell, just her ability to get rebounds, I mean, it's like we could not keep her off the boards. So those two players are really, really tough, and once they get a couple more shooters around them, they're going to be really, really good.

Again, ton of respect for them and how hard they play and how they compete.

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