

# Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA  
Target Center

## Rutgers Scarlet Knights Coquese Washington Postgame Press Conference

Illinois - 81, Rutgers - 55

**Q. Coach, you've talked all year about how this has been a discovery season and you've been in discovery mode. So what do you feel like you have discovered about your players this year?**

COQUESE WASHINGTON: This year has been a very interesting year for us. With eight players from the beginning, and just their resilience, their commitment, their determination to get through this year, discovered how much fight and how much toughness that they have.

We went through the whole year, we didn't have one player miss a game because of injury. We didn't even have one player miss a practice because of injury. The pros talk about load management and all that stuff, and our kids just night in and night out, they handled the schedule like champs.

So when you ask what have I discovered about this team, it's not so much what I discovered about them on the court in between the four lines, but what I've discovered about them in their chest and the heart that they have to get up and fight every day, when some nights just from a physical standpoint we might be outmanned.

But that fight and that resiliency is something that I've discovered about this team and I really appreciate about who they are.

**Q. As the season winded down, what are some improvements that you've noticed just from the team as a whole?**

COQUESE WASHINGTON: Well, a couple of things. Some individual growth. You know, Chyna Cornwell certainly grew into a dominant Big Ten player. She was one of the top players in the conference in terms of double-doubles over the course of the season, one of the



top rebounders. And just her presence on the court in the post for us. I mean, as we wound the season down, we found more teams double-teaming her and trying to keep the ball out of her hands because of her growth as a player.

Certainly Kaylene Smikle grew in terms of handling Big Ten defenses and being the focal point of our opposition's defensive strategy. She grew and learned how to handle that.

As a team, we grew in terms of learning how to handle pressure. We struggled with turnovers and presses early in the season, and we kind of figured our way out through that.

So those are just some areas that we grew in practically and individually and areas that I think we can build upon next year.

**Q. Seeing the turnaround Illinois has been able to have, have you talked to your players about that at all or being able to see a team do a turnaround like that? Do you feel that is motivating knowing that can be done?**

COQUESE WASHINGTON: We're fresh off this season, so we haven't really talked about next season and what that looks like. We're just focused on trying to build a strong foundation that we can build upon. But we haven't really talked about what that would look like moving forward.

**Q. And what is kind of the schedule from here once you get back into New Jersey?**

COQUESE WASHINGTON: Well, they have to have so much time off. So we'll take some time off to let our bodies heal before we start getting into spring and summer workouts.

**Q. One last one from me: What can you say about the three returners sticking it out, coming back, and what they've meant to the program this year?**



COQUESE WASHINGTON: I think it speaks a lot about the love that they have for Rutgers University, the love that they have for this team and this program and the pride that they have in wanting to be a part of the resurgence of Rutgers women's basketball.

I'll forever appreciate them for their commitment to the program and the commitment to the university. You don't often see that. We're in the era of free agency, right? So to see that level of commitment to the program and to the university means a ton to everybody affiliated with the university. So we thank them for that commitment.

**Q. A job opened up today; Lindsay stepped away from her position. The person that takes over will be taking over a program that needs to move up the Big Ten. You know, you've taken the same challenge on. Do you see that as -- from what you know about the Gophers program, you played them once, is it a desirable job, the kind of job that a coach would be interested in?**

COQUESE WASHINGTON: I think it absolutely will be. I think playing in the Big Ten in and of itself makes pretty much any job desirable. But Minnesota has shown in the past that it is a program that can be competitive in the conference and it can be competitive nationally.

So I definitely think that this is a program the athletic director will be able to go out and find somebody who's passionate about Minnesota women's basketball and will make the program very competitive in the conference and nationally.

**Q. What is something that you told your team after this loss to Illinois?**

COQUESE WASHINGTON: Well, I told them that, while this moment in time is disappointing, in the coming days we'll be able to reflect on what we accomplished as a program this year and how far we've grown from when we took over the program in late June to now, how far we've grown as a program, how much they've grown individually.

They'll be able to really reflect and I think be proud of the foundation that we laid for Rutgers women's basketball moving forward. So that's kind of what we talked about.

It's never easy when you finish your season to look at the things that went well and the things that you can be proud of. But that's certainly something that we'll reflect on and talk about in the days moving forward.

**Q. Obviously you've been a coach for many years now, but this was your first season at Rutgers, so what**

**is something that you've learned in your first inaugural season as the Rutgers head coach?**

COQUESE WASHINGTON: I would say one of the things that I've learned and most appreciated is the passion and the support from the Rutgers fan base. It's just the support that they've given myself and our staff from the time that we arrived has been nothing short of amazing.

And to watch them game in and game out, the fans grow, our attendance numbers grow, the number of people that are cheering us on, the media coverage grow, it's just something that from the outside you don't necessarily know until you're like really in it and you get a chance to experience it.

So I'm excited about giving our fan base more to cheer for moving forward, giving our fan base more great moments in Rutgers women's basketball history. Thank you.

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