

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Villanova vs Texas Tech

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Pete Maravich Assembly Center

Villanova Wildcats

Jasmine Bascoe

Denae Carter

Coach Denise Dillon

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, welcome.

Before we get started, Jasmine, let me just ask you about the run in your season personally. If I read it correctly, you're only the fourth to score a thousand points in two seasons. Congratulations. Talk about the campaign and the road to getting to Baton Rouge.

JASMINE BASCOE: Yeah. It's been a great year. We really instilled this early. We really wanted to be here. Just working hard every game, playing every game with a purpose, every practice with a purpose. So, I mean, I'm not surprised that we're here. We're super excited to play and can't wait for the game tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Denae, since the end of January, you're 10-2. The two losses happened to be to a pretty good team, ranked No. 1 in the country. What's been working so well for you all since the end of January to make this big run that you've had?

DENAE CARTER: Just staying together, movement especially. We're a team, we like to get up and down. And then in the half court, we have many sets. We have a motion offense, so that really works for us, and just remaining confident in our abilities got us a really long way.

THE MODERATOR: It's great to have you here. Congratulations. We'll open it up to questions.

Q Both of you really, but especially Denae, you guys have quite a few newcomers this year. What was that like kind of integrating them into Villanova basketball and Philly basketball in general?



And Denae, you've been on multiple sides of that coin, as a transfer at one point. So what was that like for you and what was it like for you as a veteran this year?

DENAE CARTER: So growing up in Philly, Philly basketball is something very important to me. I've seen it firsthand. My uncle played. And then coming back home, it was really just a blessing. The team was amazing and they did a really good job of opening -- having -- opening arms, I'm sorry, as soon as I arrived on campus then being a veteran here with our newcomers. As soon as we met, the chemistry just hit it off. And from then, we got to see Unrivaled at Philly, go to the event at Love Park and kind of just showing them what it means to play basketball in Philly. We got to meet Natasha Cloud and things like that.

Just kind of integrating them into that culture, and with that, the chemistry just grew a lot. We love being around each other, hanging out and I think it's easy to be seen on the court.

JASMINE BASCOE: I would still say I'm relatively new, but I mean, Denae being here my two years so far just really helped me just integrate. And then with our freshmen and transfers this year, it was kind of the same thing. We have a special chemistry and bond here at Villanova. We're lucky to have that. We're great friends on and off the court. As soon as our freshmen and transfers came in this year they joined that, and I think that's a testament to why we've been playing so well this year.

Q You've both taken on big leadership roles this season. How are you both handling that pressure now that Villanova's in the tournament and there's a lot more eyes on you heading into March Madness?

JASMINE BASCOE: We're ready. This is a big stage. It's super cool, but we've prepared for this all season, not getting too high or low, just trying to stay steady and we'll be successful.

DENAE CARTER: We do have a few vets on our team and kind of relaying that message to the underclassmen, remaining composed in this situation and that these games



are bigger than the other games we've played, especially being win or go home going into each game with that mentality all 40 minutes playing strong.

Q What have your roles been in relaying that message, especially since you have prior NCAA Tournament experience?

DENAE CARTER: I think, honestly, it starts in practice. You know, we go over a lot of situations, but obviously, not many things can be exactly the same. Bringing it in in huddles. You know, coming together and taking a deep breath at times when things may be going not in our favor, many distractions, just keeping everybody calm but still competitive and driven. I think that's been probably the biggest thing, the message we try to relay over and over.

JASMINE BASCOE: I've been fortunate to play on a couple of big stages so far, and just trying to bring what that felt like to the team and bring it to the girls. Like Denae said, there's no way to really script it. This is a big stage, but if we can give them tidbits and help them, I think that will help it go smoother.

Q It's been a couple years since Villanova was in the NCAA Tournament. What do y'all need to do this weekend and maybe even beyond to make Villanova a perennial tournament team?

JASMINE BASCOE: As of now, our one focus is our game tomorrow, not trying to think too far in advance. But I think if we can instill something good this year, that will obviously help carry over to the next couple years. So our main focus is just our game tomorrow for sure, though.

DENAE CARTER: I think it's a great experience for our underclassmen being able to have this time as a freshman and, you know, building, setting those stepping stones. I think that will help. Like Jas said, just being really focused on what we have to do tomorrow night.

Q How do you guys plan to approach Texas Tech as underdogs when you're given what some might say was an unexpected 10-seed in the tournament?

JASMINE BASCOE: I'll go.

We're just going to play Villanova basketball, simple as that. We know what we can do, we know our strength. So obviously we've never played this team before. Different conference, different, you know. We're lucky to play UConn, but other than that, we haven't really played a team this caliber, really. So we're ready. Believing in ourselves and playing Villanova basketball, we'll be successful.

Q When Texas Tech was in here, they mentioned how y'all share the ball sticking out to them and that's, like, a theme I've noticed from teams across the Big Five. How important is that to Big Five basketball?

DENAE CARTER: Yeah, I think obviously just playing in the Big Five for so long and a couple years now playing against opponents who also share the ball can be really hard, but I think it's to an advantage. You know, it's just something we love to do. We love creating opportunities for our teammates and then receiving it on the other end. It's just a lot, it's more fun, I think, that way. I think I can say, and Jasmine say, anybody can go off either night. And I think that's a big testament to our team and how we know each other's spots and things like that.

THE MODERATOR: Denae, let me ask you, senior year take on a different aspect of this tournament for you personally?

DENAE CARTER: Yeah, definitely. I talked about this with my family plenty of times. I am really grateful to be here in my last year, as well, and having this team behind me. The confidence I have in them and they have in me is immeasurable. To be here today and go into this tournament with them, I'm really excited.

THE MODERATOR: Jasmine, last year wasn't the NCAA Tournament, but you were in a tournament. Made it all the way to the semifinals. What do you take from the postseason experience a year ago that you can help carry over for the team?

JASMINE BASCOE: Just knowing that every game can be your last. I say it all the time, we don't want this season to end. We don't want to not be able to play with our seniors again. Just so many things. We want to play for our coaches.

And so, you know, tournament style is crazy. It's competitive, but I think that's what makes it really fun. And so we're excited to play tomorrow and we don't want our season to end yet.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on your season to this point. Good luck tomorrow.

Coach, welcome. Congratulations. Before we get started, just maybe your thoughts and overview of your path here.

DENISE DILLON: I'm excited to be here. We did what was necessary to put ourselves in the best spot possible. Competing for a Big East Championship is always our standard and expectation of our group. A non-conference

schedule put us in play to do just that. Took care of business during the regular season of play, and came up a tough one with UConn there in February and then March with the Big East Tournament.

But really pleased with our team's growth and effort this season. So, excited that we got the nod for March Madness. And, you know, we have a lot -- every day getting better, but a lot to prove and excited to see our group get out on the floor and compete again.

Q You mentioned doing what you had to do this season and surely that started before. I notice that every single transfer on your roster has prior NCAA Tournament experience. How intentional was that when you were building this year's...

DENISE DILLON: Every player on our roster, I would say with the exception of Kelsey Joens, we recruited and we were familiar with. It worked in our favor, I'd like to think theirs as well, coming back to where we originally felt they could excel and become the best players possible and get a great education at Villanova and earn their degree.

So you look at Denae Carter and just her growth throughout her career. Sadly, injury took a toll on her. Her time at Mississippi State and then with us her first year. You know, everything happens as it's supposed to. You know, Ryanne Allen getting here. Kylee Watson, I just think, that career, is such a great addition to our program on and off the court. Kelsey Joens, you go back to who you know and what you know. Maddie Siegrist played with her sister for a stretch there with the Wings. It's funny how things connect you. It's great to have Kelsey Joens here, as well.

I think that experience certainly can help, but it was about us, you know, just finding the right people for our culture and, you know, continuing to add on the program, as well.

Q Coach Gerlich was obviously very complimentary of Jasmine. As someone who gets to see her all the time, what would you say makes her special?

DENISE DILLON: I would say her joy, her love of the game. She just, every day, she doesn't tire. She's excited about being at practice, about extra workouts, whatever it may be. So when you have that true genuine love for what you do and the people around you, your teammates, good things happen. And that has been Jasmine from Day 1 on campus. Wanting more, wanting to get better, wanting to be a great teammate, just continuing to learn the game. I do, I feel that is the full package of a great athlete, great person, great athlete. She's got it and continues to get better each and every time she steps on the floor.

Q This is Villanova's first time back in March Madness in a couple years. You have a lot of, it's also a new experience for a lot of your players. What are you telling them right now heading into your first game?

DENISE DILLON: Telling them they get an opportunity to play another game together. That has been our message from the beginning. Every day you step on the floor, every day you guys are together, it's about getting better together. You know, individually, if you're working on it, good things happen for you and it becomes a collective piece, as well.

But for this group, they put themselves in position to achieve the opportunity to play postseason. Here we are. So they're going to be on the floor, another practice today before playing another game together tomorrow night.

Q You mentioned bringing in players who, like, embodied, like, your ideals and style of play. For people who don't know, how would you describe that?

DENISE DILLON: We play a continuity offense, a five-out offense, a read-and-react. So you need players who are comfortable in all areas. It's not a post player with their back to the basket. They gotta be comfortable at the perimeter facing up, shooting the ball or taking it off the dribble. Your guards, they're responsible on both ends of the floor. As much as we want that versatility on the offensive end, we want it on the defensive end, as well. They know they're going to be switching a lot. They gotta guard post players. Our posts have to guard perimeter players. So just that all-around versatile player.

I would say so often for the young ones, it can be a lot because they're used to be positioned players in a sense. Kennedy Henry is probably the best definition, you know, of a Villanova player for us, especially at her -- in a freshman year realizing how she can really impact on both sides of the floor. You ask her what position she is and she'll be like, "I'm a P4." She handles the ball. She'll post up, she'll back people down, whatever it takes. I do feel it's the all-around part of the game. You want everyone to feel that. Be able to dribble, pass, and shoot sounds elementary, but that is an ideal piece of a game.

I would say on the defense especially. We're undersized. You gotta work a little bit harder, and that's what we want. There's just players that feel that full commitment to whatever it takes on the floor to make it happen.

Q Texas Tech mentioned that a lot of that fluidity, sharing the ball. In talking to other coaches throughout the Big Five that's something they focus on, too. Is that just what

part of Philly basketball is?

DENISE DILLON: I feel it. Obviously it's what I know, so I can speak to it. You look around, the coaches in Philly, majority, if not all, are a part of that upbringing, whether they played or coached in the area from high school to college, continue to advance it. It is. It's just a game of you try to be a bit of the opposite. You know, you don't want players to feel that they're set in one area. You know, they're boxed into one space. So you look for the counter in each and every thing you do. So they take away something, you've got something else to do. So it just opens the game up, I think, again, gives that freedom.

I think another reason why it was so big recruiting some international players, and that's to Texas Tech, as well, having that fluidity, the way they play, that's how they are taught the game at a young age, and it works in their favor and fits the style of play that we run.

Q Does anything specific stand out to you about Texas Tech's game play?

DENISE DILLON: I think they're extremely mobile. Their defense is aggressive. They're all over the floor. They're flying around being very disruptive. So on the defensive end especially, and then you look at it on the offensive end, they have really, really great players in every position, and they're deep. So they can do a lot of damage from the perimeter at the three-point line, but then taking it off the bounce, as well, and have some slashers. They play really good basketball. I think it's a match-up that you're familiar because we try and implement the same. So having that idea, so it comes out who can disrupt the other team more than they are to you. So back and forth.

Q So when you're playing a team like Texas Tech that has a lot of senior leadership, or potentially LSU and Jacksonville, which also have a lot of veterans, how important is it to have players who have been here before both in playing a lot of college basketball and specifically in the NCAA Tournament?

DENISE DILLON: It's mentioned. Our players have great relationships and have that understanding. However, you know, it's, again, the postseason. You're playing, you've played however many games, and we always talk to our players. Once they hit the break, Christmas break there into January, they're no longer in that previous year. So we try and advance it with their understanding and experience. So you can't put down, oh, this freshman is going against this senior. You know, you're out there, you gotta do what you do together. As long ago you're working it out together, good things happen. But if you feel an advantage, disadvantage because of some years under

your belt, yeah, you're overthinking way too much.

Q The fourth quarter has been a discussion for Texas Tech recently. How do you feel your team does in the fourth quarter?

DENISE DILLON: This is the world of basketball athletics that we're in with all those metrics and numbers. So it's broken down. Again, I think we try and simplify it for our group, but there are no guarantees from one game to the next. Some teams have that consistency. They come out as a force then fade off. Others, it's the opposite. So, you know, we don't put a lot of weight into what other teams have done. We're trying to remain focused on what we do, and our hope is you start strong, but you've got to finish stronger.

So just keeping on point with who we are and what we do as opposed to getting caught up in some of the other actions. So fourth quarter, I think the year, you know you've had some ups and downs, but the consistency, as we talked, like those last eight or last ten games, we found ourselves finishing stronger than we even started. So we need a lot more of that this weekend for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, good luck tomorrow night.