

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Four - Vanderbilt vs Columbia

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

Cassell Coliseum

Columbia Lions

Megan Griffith

Abbey Hsu

Kitty Henderson

Media Conference

Vanderbilt 72, Columbia 68

SHEA RALPH: I just wanted to say thank you to our fan base. I thought we had phenomenal people in the stands today from our administration to our families. It's just random people, to the Ivy League administration. I'm really grateful that we have so much support. There's so much blue in this gym. That really made my heart full battling today for you all.

I don't think we played that well tonight, unfortunately. And I thought Vanderbilt played well. I thought they set the tone early for us. I think Shea did a great job with her team. I told her that before the game. I told her that after the game.

You know, again, although it wasn't our best, this is definitely not the last time we'll be in this tournament, I can tell you all that. You know, it takes time to build something and like I said before, I think we've done it the right way. And I know the selection committee made the right decision by putting us in this tournament.

I'm proud we fought hard at the end there but I'll let everybody hear from our players now. So thank you very much.

Q. Abbey, for both of you, kind of same question I asked you during the Ivy Tournament, can you wake me through how you're feeling right now and what are you proud of looking at what you've done this season as a whole?

ABBEY HSU: Yeah, it's tough. I mean, like Coach G.



Said, I don't think we played our complete game but I think something to be proud of is, you know, the community that we brought with us, and you know, we made it to the tournament.

There's no doubt in my mind that the team will be back next year. I mean, we'll learn from this and we'll be back.

KITTY HENDERSON: Echoing that, I think I have a lot of gratitude in me right now, especially playing alongside Abbey and Page and Nic.

But yeah like Abbey said, feeling a little disappointed in us. I don't think we gave them our best. But yeah, we'll be back like Abbey said.

Q. Kitty, you talked yesterday about how important it was for you guys to respond well to mistakes, and I know you had some turnovers, but you also had some big shots down the stretch. Can you talk about how you felt like you approached that?

KITTY HENDERSON: Yeah, I think, you know, I had turnovers that I shouldn't have had. That's where I definitely could have improved but I think my teammates had my back in those moments a lot. I know a lot of those turn into like baseline out-of-bounds or other people getting their hands on the ball so that was really good for my teammates and I was really proud of them in that moment.

Yeah, I think I did a good job of just keeping my head a couple times, but like I said, that can't happen and I'm going to take that one and improve on that.

Q. Can you talk about the resiliency that the team had in fighting to the end and what role you had as captains?

KITTY HENDERSON: Yeah, I think we just had to stay together and go back to the game plan. That's what we kept going. We kept going away from the game plan, throwing easy turnovers like I was doing.

So it was super simple, just staying together, and just fighting to the end. We knew that we could get stops,



score, stop, and you just have to go one possession at a time, and I think that's what we were doing.

ABBEY HSU: Yeah. Basically what Kitty said. I think you're always going to get a fight from this team. I think we have some of the toughest players in the country, and especially from our young kids, the maturity that they have to not only just play hard all the time but also think the game.

So yeah, I'm very excited to see where they go next year.

Q. Looked like you came down hard on the ankle in the third quarter, and how are you feeling and did that have limits for you in the fourth quarter?

ABBEY HSU: I'm fine. It's part of the game. You tweak your ankle all the time. I'm fine, to answer your question.

Q. What adjustments did you all make at halftime to stem the tide?

ABBEY HSU: I think we were letting out posts go one-on-one with their posts a little too much and not playing all together on defense. We were a little bit in our own heads and in our own matchups instead of playing as a whole unit.

Yeah, like Kitty said, just too many easy turnovers on the offensive end that we probably could have limited and some easy layups we could have finished.

Q. You faced a lot of really good defenses this year. What was unique about what Vanderbilt did tonight?

KITTY HENDERSON: Yeah, I think that their defense is different to what we've seen before. I think they make you second-guess yourself, and then obviously the press, it's important that we all want the ball and make good decisions and I think that didn't happen all the time. So yeah.

Q. As your time at Columbia comes to an end now, today you were able to get the single season leading score record and also got your All-American honorable mention. As you look back on your time at Columbia, how do you see your legacy with this program?

ABBEY HSU: I always say this, I'm sure I'll look back in a few weeks. Right now, it's kind of like, soaking this moment in with my teammates. You know, looking back at the game and just making sure I'm in this moment with my teammates and enjoying their presence.

But I think all my accolades or whatever that you've

mentioned, it's just a reflection of this program, the way Coach G. coaches us every single day to make us better players, and the teammates that I'm surrounded with, it's -- like that's all of our accolades. I kind of see it like that, yeah.

Q. Kitty, curious what it's been like sharing this NCAA Tournament experience with Fliss and playing alongside her today on the stage.

KITTY HENDERSON: I'm definitely a proud big sister for sure. I love playing with Fliss. She's extremely smart and we are very lucky that we have players like that, all the freshmen to be honest coming back next year. I think we have a really bright future and I'm very grateful that I get to play with my sister every day.

Q. Your players talked about the residency but your team was able to come back from a 10-point deficit and bring it to a 2-point deficit twice in this game. What does that say about this team's mentality and their grit?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: Well, it's definitely something that I can say if you've watched us play before, which I'm not sure if you have or not, but we don't give up. And I think that's a reflection of my staff.

I'm surrounded by four incredibly strong coaches, women and our staff, and I think they are great role models for our players and that's not to shy on the men on our staff at all but you know, I would just say they model -- my staff models the behavior that we want our players to have every day and I think our players go out there and they have emulated that. That's when the culture is in a good place is when they are breeding that within themselves and modeling it for each other.

Yeah, I'm not surprised that we did that. Unfortunately we had a really bad second quarter, and that's kind of what did us in there.

Q. For the team, is that the key; that in a game like this and a tournament like this, the five-minute stretches is enough to make an insurmountable situation?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: No. I don't think it was insurmountable, right, to bring it within two and to be in those positions. If it was insurmountable, I don't think we would have brought it back to that closeness. It was just about finishing those plays, making plays.

In that second quarter, you know, I think it was kitty that said this, or Abbey, I can't remember now, but to let Sacha Washington just get really comfortable was hard for us.



She had a monster game, 16 points, 15 boards. She had four offensive rebounds I think in the first quarter. So it was tough. That was a tone setter.

And then we are throwing the ball around the gym early in that game which also got Vanderbilt to feel really comfortable with their pressure. I think that rattled us.

So I don't think it was insurmountable. I kind of talked around a little bit there, but it definitely set a tone for the rest of the game, and then we were able to throw some punches in that second half and we just couldn't deliver that last one.

Q. Bad choice of words on my end. I know Abbey was saying that that's kind of like a normal tweak of an ankle, and it happens, but seems like she wasn't able to get the ball off as easily in the fourth quarter. Was that a problem heading into the late part of the game?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: No. You know, I mean, I love Abbey more than anybody probably in this world other than her mother. But I don't think she played well tonight. You know, we talked about that. I said to her, I'm like, hey -- and it's not a knock to her at all. Like we all have games, right. I think, did she play fine? Yeah. She played fine tonight. But I think she knows it; she was the first person to admit it. You know she went 2-for-11 from three. She had some great looks that she usually hits coming off the long weekend. You know, and I think that she wished she could have take some of those plays back.

But here we are. You have to to make your free throws down the stretch all of us. We only went 7 for 23. Four-point game, right. That's tough. That's a tough one to swallow. So yeah, I mean, I think she was fine after that. Like she said, you roll your ankle every other day. She's a pretty sturdy kid. So I don't think that had anything to do with it.

Q. I know after Saturday night's game, the comment that Kitty, Abbey and you made was you were not playing Colombia basketball, and that really upset all of you. I know the results certainly weren't there tonight but do you at leave feel a little bit better about that performance compared to that evening?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: That's a tough question. Very different game. Very, very different game.

I think for about 25 minutes maybe, I would say that we played Colombia basketball tonight. That second quarter just sticks out like a sore thumb in my mind right now. So that was a really rough stretch for us, but I do think that they did play with toughness and great tonight and a

resilience that I did not see on Saturday.

Q. If I can start with the last three seconds of the game, CC it's hits the jumper to bring you guys within two and then you called time-out. Can you walk me through what you were thinking there while you burn the time-out there?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: Well, I'll take complete ownership of it. I wish I didn't do that now but in the moment, I wanted to set up pressure and make sure that we were ready. Because you know in that situation, you know, whether -- obviously she could call a time-out and advance it you about I just wanted to make sure that we were organized as much as possible, and I just felt like at that point it was really critical for our team to get organized on both sides of the ball.

Q. I asked Kitty about her performance, but 20 points, seven boards, what you saw from her and Fliss as well tonight.

MEGAN GRIFFITH: Yeah, you know, I think the world -- I thought everybody was watch this game saw how good Fliss Henderson is. When she came to Columbia and we got to see her this fall in the first time in the flesh with our team, it was no surprise. She plays so smart. She's tough.

Unfortunately she got in foul trouble today, but if you look at the stat sheet, she was plus eight in 23 minutes and she's a force to be reckoned with. She's smart. She can score. She's tough. She can defend. I mean, she does a lot of great things for us and she's going to have a very bright future here at Columbia.

And Then kitty is just -- I mean, tough in a very different way. They are a dynamic duo to have together but Kitty will just lay everything out for her, our team, and she plays so dang hard all the time, and she's just so fun to coach. And I think Kitty is going to learn a lot from this. I think she is going to take the space that Abbey left for us in this program and become the player that we need her to be and the leader we need her to be next year.

Q. You led me right into my last one which is, you know, I believe you when you say this is kind of the appetizer, right, and you're going to be back but at the same time people can look at this and say, well, you're graduating the best player in program history. So can you talk a little bit more about how you see this sustaining as you talked about the past couple days?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: It's almost like we talk every week. I think I knew you were going to ask me that.

So this is what I'll say. This is the cycle and this is the mortality of college sports is you graduate, right. You graduate great players and you coach great players, and Abbey is a great player in college basketball.

I'm so happy that she got to play on this stage. She's going to go have a long pro career wherever she is. I hope she gets drafted high. And she did so much. She left the jersey in a better place. That's all we can ask our players to do. All of the seniors did: Nicole Stephens, Page, Abbey Hsu.

But just like last year when we graduated seven seniors, and lost all of our scoring and rebounding, everybody said, "Meg, how are you going to do it?"

And I just said, "We're going to do it."

So I have a phenomenal staff. We recruit with the best of them. And we make sure that we develop our players, and I can tell you that we are going to develop every single one of those players that's sitting in that locker room right now and we are going to go out and get some great players as well to play alongside them.

THE MODERATOR: In the last press conference, Coach Ralph talked about, you go through the SEC to be successful. You went toe-to-toe with an SEC team tonight. Didn't go the way you wanted it to. What does that say about the quality of mid-majors, quality of the Ivy League to get to this stage, have this type of opportunity going forward?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: I'm just really proud of our league right now. I know Princeton has got a big matchup this weekend, too, and to have both of us in the tournament with a lot of hungry teams in our league. There's only eight of us, but I can tell that you we've got great coaches. There's a lot of great players in our league, and there's a lot of other mid-major conferences that can say the same thing.

And for us to be able to show that tonight, you know, I have great respect for Shea and vice versa, and you know, I'm not surprised we went toe-to-toe tonight. I told everybody that last weekend when I believed that we should be in the tournament.

Again, I was happy that we did that, and like I said, we battled, but it wasn't our best, and I know we will bring our best the next time we are in this tournament.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

