

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Marshall vs Virginia Tech

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

Cassell Coliseum

Marshall The Herd

Abby Beeman

Breanna Campbell

Aislynn Hayes

Coach Kim Caldwell

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome all of you to our Marshall news conference. The 13th seated of Thundering Herd, Champions of the Sunbelt Conference, winning a very interesting game over James Madison 95-92 on March 11th. We are joined on the dais by Aislynn Hayes, Breanna Campbell and Abby Beeman. We will open it up to the questions for the student-athletes.

Q. (Away from mic.)

BREANNA CAMPBELL: Our consistency, how we work. It's just a part of the system. We just try to keep up with that and, you know, continue to do that every game.

AISLYNN HAYES: I can say that all summer long we ran so much I feel like we're just in better shape than other teams, and I just feel like we go so hard.

Q. You guys are one of the better teams in the country in terms of making 3-pointers. Why is this team so good when it comes to shooting threes?

ABBY BEEMAN: It's getting in the gym on your own and repping it, so when you get in the game, you know, it's nothing different. It's the same thing we do in practice every day.

I wouldn't even say, as a team we don't shoot a ton of threes, but it's the extra work you put in outside of practice hours.

Q. Kitley is out for Virginia Tech, torn ACL. I know



you hate that for her. Does that change your game plan and if so how?

BREANNA CAMPBELL: It's unfortunate that she's out; you hate to hear that, you know, she had a season-ending injury. So that sucks. For us, though, we still have the same game plan. We still have to go at it the same way that we have been, you know, throughout the season and looking forward to this game. So I think it's the same.

Q. You guys have had some fun home environments this year. What are you looking forward to about playing in front of another big crowd, a sell-out here tomorrow?

AISLYNN HAYES: I can say it's exciting. I know, like, our crowds started getting a little bigger toward the end of our season. I feel like that motivates us more to play, and it's fun. It's fun playing against a big crowd.

Q. Aislynn, you mentioned "we ran a lot in the summer." With Coach Kim coming in with this style, I would love if you could give us maybe some honesty of when you're doing all that running, are you thinking, what is this style? Is it actually going to work?

AISLYNN HAYES: I mean, at first I was like what in the world, why are we doing all this running? But then as the season started and stuff, it was just like, it was so much easier, you know, doing the press. And at the end of the games, I can say, like, our legs were never tired. So I know we do a lot of running in practice, but it's just like we know now it's for our best at the end of the game, and Coach Kim knows what she's doing.

Q. Kind of going off of that, I think what makes you guys so special and so different is the way she subs you guys in and the chemistry of your team that you see on and off the floor. Can you speak to that a little bit?

BREANNA CAMPBELL: Our chemistry? I think our chemistry is pretty good this year, compared to a lot of other teams I've been on. We're pretty close on and off the court and throughout the season I think we started to trust



each other a little bit more, trust in Coach's process and it's like, okay, I can ease up a little bit, and we trust each other, we're all supportive of each other, and I think that for the most part we're a very close team.

ABBY BEEMAN: Yeah, I will just kind of piggyback off that. We are a close team on and off the court, and I think it did take us a little bit to buy into the system early on, and you can tell that with some of our early losses. But once we bought into it and trusted her and what she was doing, we were able to come out with some wins and build off that.

Q. Abby and Breanna, having spent a part of your career at Division II level, what allows you to make this jump seamlessly, and what were some of the biggest adjustments when you got to Marshall that you didn't face at the previous level?

ABBY BEEMAN: I was always confident in my abilities, and I'm a little shorter, you can tell that when you see me play, so I never got one of those DI opportunities. Then finally I went to Division II, performed pretty well, and got the to play at Marshall. It's been nothing short of amazing, and I'm confident in my abilities and what I am able to do, so that kind of helped me with the transition, and obviously putting great pieces around me, and a great coaching staff has helped me excel.

BREANNA CAMPBELL: I would say to piggyback, like, confidence. I've just -- you know this whole journey has always been just basketball. No matter what level you're at, you know, you can always go higher if you believe in yourself.

And God has always been there, a part of my life, and, you know, has been the reason that we're all here at this moment. The entire team. So confidence in him, confidence in myself and work that's been put in, confidence in, you know, my coaches and my teams that I've been on. So just everything has been a great part of being here today.

Q. You guys play a lot of people. What have you noticed this year about how that affects the other team?

AISLYNN HAYES: I can say that it makes the other team a lot tired, because we get to go out, and we trust each other teammates to do what they have to do on the court. I just feel like it tires the other team, because we're going at it hard every single time. We're giving it our all every single time we're on that court.

Q. I think you're one of the top teams in the country in

terms of scoring and in terms of points per game. What's the result of that? Why is this team so prolific?

BREANNA CAMPBELL: I think our depth. I think we have a lot of people that, you know, in a traditional style of play you probably wouldn't get to see them shine or they wouldn't have an opportunity, so just with this style of play we have many more people that you have to put on the scout, and that has an opportunity to perform and showcase what they are able to bring to the team, so I really think it's that.

Q. You don't have a lot of size. I would say even without Kitley, Tech has some tall people. How do you deal with that tomorrow?

ABBY BEEMAN: We can't grow overnight. We are who we are. Our size is what it is, so it's something we have dealt with all year, not just this game, but all the games we played. So we may not be consistently the same size as Virginia Tech has on the roster, but we have played taller players, guards, posts, whatever it may be, and that's something we have to deal with day in and day out, for the most part. So in that regard it's not too much different, but the talent level is definitely a little higher.

Q. A lot of talk about the style of play. I'm curious, when did you know this was Coach Kim's style of play? You mentioned the growing pains. Was there a surprise factor? Like, I didn't sign up for this? Because it certainly is a grueling style.

ABBY BEEMAN: Yeah, just kind of figured she would play that style. She has had so much success with it at the DII level, so why would she come in and change something up now. But like I said before, it did take a little bit to buy into it because it's new, it's not similar to anyone else in the country, from my understanding, so it's definitely something you have to buy into and trust her and her ability to lead us to some wins and trust that the style would work.

That's pretty much all I got.

BREANNA CAMPBELL: I played with her last year at Glensville so, you know, initially I was like, okay, this is a little different, you know, but, you get adjusted to it after a while. I used to think getting subbed out was a bad thing, like you're in trouble or something like that, like I like to play as long as I can.

But after a while you get adjusted to it, and you see what it does to the other team as far as wearing them down, and your teammates also having a chance to come in and contribute. So if you have -- you have to have a selfless kind of mentality with this playing style, but you see what it

does and you see the success that we've been having so far so, yeah.

AISLYNN HAYES: I can say at first it was very different for me. I wasn't used to the sub in, sub out, so at first I was like, why are you subbing me out? But then as the season got on, I adjusted and I trusted her process because we were winning and, you know, it's the best thing I ever did.

Q. Mark mentioned the size factor and getting Mahogany back after some of the games she missed in the middle stretch of the season. How much does that help you guys' on-court play and the ability to combat that size differential down low?

ABBY BEEMAN: Yeah, she's a big part of what we do. Especially on the defensive end. She is able to clean up a lot of our mistakes at the rim. She has a pretty good knack for blocking shots. We will see how that goes tomorrow. They have some girls that are a little taller than her, and the same size. She has experience playing in the ACC at a Power Five school, so I trust in her and her abilities, and sometimes there are things you can do to combat the size aspect of it.

AISLYNN HAYES: I agree with her. In practice she is blocking our shots and stuff, and always cleaning up our mess when, you know, our defender gets past us we trust her that she is going to clean it up for us at the end of the day.

Q. Abby, I'm curious, you mentioned how unique of a style this is, nobody else does it in the country. When you guys are on, what makes you guys so special? What makes this team so tough for other teams to beat?

ABBY BEEMAN: Yeah, I don't think I can give you too much on that. I will say when we're running in transition and playing at a fast pace, we're at our best for sure. Obviously with any team it helps when you're hitting shots. That's just kind of what gets us going, but also to keep a good mentality when you are not hitting shots and trust that the next one is going to go in. That's why we keep shooting them.

Q. To follow up on that, there are other teams that play up-tempo. For people coming to the game tomorrow that haven't seen you play what's different about your style of play compared to other teams in the country that you say this is kind of a little different, a little more unique?

ABBY BEEMAN: I would just say that most teams do -- they will play up-tempo, and there is a time and place

where they will slow it down and call their sets if the game is not going the way they want it to. That's not really us too much. If the game's going good, bad, we stay the same. We're going to play how we play, and that's getting up and down.

So I would say that's how we're a little different. We don't really get away from what we do too much, but you're right, there are other teams do play up-tempo, for sure, but I would say that's what separates us.

BREANNA CAMPBELL: I think she said it all. Also the amount of people that play, I think that's different. Some people stick to their, you know, maybe seven, eight, you know, depending on factors of fouls and different stuff like that. But I think that just our depth, we have a lot of people that you -- probably wouldn't meet the eye test that can come in and contribute to our team greatly.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time, best of luck tomorrow against Virginia Tech in your first-round game.

We are joined by Marshall Head Coach, Kim Caldwell, the 2024 Sunbelt Coach of the Year. We will open it up to questions for Coach.

Q. Coach Brooks announced that Kitley won't be playing. How does that go about how you approach this game?

KIM CALDWELL: Your heart breaks for her. You don't want that for anyone. That's tough for their program. Thinking about her, praying for her. But it doesn't really change anything, you know? You know, 6'6", well they got a girl that's 6'5", so it is what it is.

Q. Your first seen here at Marshall and you've gotten the team to the NCAAs for the first time in decades. What enabled this transformation to be so successful in year one at Marshall?

KIM CALDWELL: I think that I am blessed to have an incredible team. We have a great administration at Marshall that cares about winning and gives us the resources that we they'd. I have great players and they play incredibly hard, and they got off to a rough start, and they bought in and they played hard, and they are resilient, and they overcame, and they believed in each other, and here we are.

Q. Coach, congratulations to making it to the NCAA Tournament. I'm curious, with this unique style that has garnered so much attention, and it's deserved. Where did you learn it from? Did you take it from anywhere? Were there any doubts that it would work



at this level early in the season?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah. I played this way in college, and then I met a guy named Bill Baxter in California when I was at Sacramento State for three years, and he taught me this pace of play and the style of play, the run-and-jump defense, and there were questions early on in November, and I just really had to double down, and my husband and I had a conversation and he said, "Do what you do."

We went all in, and we weren't subbing quite as frequently early in the year, and we had to go back to that just to keep fresh. I knew it would work; that's why I took the job. I wasn't going to take the job if I didn't think it would work, but our November was rough, so obviously you're going to question yourself a little bit.

Q. Question on Meredith and her role. How has it grown throughout the season? Was there a specific game or a point where you could kinda feel her ascending a little bit?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah. Our whole entire team has grown quite a bit, and had he she has been a huge part of that. When we found out Mahogany Matthews was going to be out for six weeks, we found out right before we played ODU at home, and Meredith -- I asked her before the game, I said, you're going to have to step up. You're going to have to be a big, I am going to need a whole lot more out of you this game. And she took that to heart and I think she had her career high.

She had 20 points that game and played phenomenal, and she really hasn't looked back since. She was huge in that game against JMU for us, I mean huge for us, and she deserves every bit of it. She is fun to watch, a coach's dream, a great teammate, will give you everything she has, so I'm excited to see what she does tomorrow.

Q. Is the match-up as simplistic as saying it's your speed and ability going in transition against their height? How is that going to play out? I guess we'll see, but what do you think ahead of the game?

KIM CALDWELL: I guess we'll see. We have to do what we do and what got us here. It's easy to get into postseason play and think you need to change things up, but you gotta do what got you here. You've gotta trust your players, you've gotta trust your team, you gotta trust your bench, and we want to try to make it look chaotic. We want to try to make it look like our practice, I don't think there are any secrets to that. We want to play hard and represent Marshall well in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. The game has grown so much on the women's side

in the last few years. Obviously great crowds at Marshall this year, sell-out tomorrow. What does it mean to be coaching at this level when the game is expanding like that? What do you expect as far as environment goes tomorrow?

KIM CALDWELL: I think it's amazing. I think the women's game is definitely growing. Women's basketball is the move. It's the hot thing right now. At Division II you don't feel that as much, and I really feel it now being at the Division I NCAA Tournament. And it make you appreciate everyone, every player and every coach that kind of helped put us here.

And as a new coach to Division I, it's really cool to kind of just jump on now when it's hot. And a lot of people paid their dues beforehand. And I think tomorrow it going to be incredible. They're not going to be cheering for us, but it's still going to be incredible, and it's going to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our program.

Q. For people that will be going to the game tomorrow, watching it on TV, that have never seen you before, how would you describe the style of play? What makes it unique and different from typical teams they might be watching?

KIM CALDWELL: We're going to sub a lot, cross half-court a lot, we're going to press, make or miss, up and down. There is a lot of questions about why we sub the way we sub, so for people that haven't seen us play before is we want to play every minute of that basketball game like it's the last minute of a tie ball game.

We talk a lot about sense of urgency: We need the ball back, we need the ball back, we need the ball back. For forty minutes, that's how we play. In order to keep us fresh and not wear ourselves down, we sub frequently, and we're going to do that tomorrow, and that's just kind of the name of the game, and we shoot a lot of threes, and they're going to shoot a lot of threes, and it's going to be a very, very high-paced game.

Q. You mentioned run-and-jump defense. What did you mean?

KIM CALDWELL: We're going to press. We're going to press make; we're going to press miss. We're going to be up in your space trying to speed the game up.

Q. Coach, you lead the nation in three-point attempts. I love it. If you're going to get on one of your players for taking a "bad" three, what is a "bad" three to you?

KIM CALDWELL: A bad shot to me is if you don't have



... when all is said, we're done.®

rebounders in position. We want to try to get 50% of our offensive rebounds, and that's high. I'm usually good with 42 or 45, but we go for 50% of our offenses rebounds. So if you're shooting and there is nobody to go get the rebound, it's probably bad. Time and score situations is kind of a no-brainer, but we want to give people the confidence to shoot because your teammate is going to go get you another shot.

Q. In terms of Breanna and Abby making the jump from the Division II level, they've obviously done pretty well. What has allowed for that and what does it say for the top tier basketball with Breanna at Glenville and when Abby was at Shepherd.

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I love that. I think it's one of the better story lines. You have a DII head coach that moved up, and you have two DII players that moved up, and their numbers didn't really change. They maybe even got better at this level, and that just speaks to what type of athletes that they are. And they were both really, really good successful Division II players.

They love basketball. They're in the gym more than anyone. They're good leaders. When you have really passionate seniors, it makes your job easier as a coach, because they can coral people around them, but they've been great. I'm happy that they both get this moment. Brea and I talked about this moment. This is what she wanted. She wanted to go to the NCAA Tournament at her next school.

We always knew she was going to be at Glenville for one year, and then she was going to go Division I. It just worked out that we got to go together. She wanted to go somewhere where she could play in the national tournament, and she is a big reason why we're here.

Q. Coach, that James Madison game in the Sunbelt Championship was one of more interesting basketball games, period, across the country. What were the reactions that you heard about that game?

KIM CALDWELL: I think the 99 shots was up there and the fact that we shot so terribly. I think we -- I don't know, numbers aren't my thing at the box score, but we missed more shots than they took. So just a crazy, crazy game, not a pretty game by any means, but that happens sometimes.

In that arena, there was a giant Jumbotron that would put up the live stats of how many shots we're missing, and you just look at it as a coach, and at halftime we had taken 30 more shots than JMU, and I am thinking, well we've done everything we can. They're just not going in. It was

definitely a crazy game. It's not something you necessarily want to viral for, but at least we won.

Q. But an introduction to a proof of concept for what Marshall basketball is about, the pace you all play at, especially defensively?

KIM CALDWELL: Absolutely. It's a possession-based system and, again math is not my strong suit, but if you get 20 more shots up than your opponent, you've got a chance every night.

Q. Coach, everybody is talking about how unique of a style you guys play. When this team is on, from what you've seen this year, what makes you guys so special and so tough for other teams to face?

KIM CALDWELL: I think that threes are daggers. And, again, Virginia Tech, they make a lot of threes, too, so it's going to be an interesting game. But I think threes are a momentum changer, even though it's one extra point, they get everyone going, and we shoot a lot of them. And when we are on, we are usually on.

So it's just kind of a different way to play. And then we can score on the inside, too, at our own level when we're not going against super tall players, we can score on the inside and on the outside. So I think it's just kind of a unique style of play where you're going to have volume shots.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Caldwell, thank you for your time, best of luck tomorrow against Virginia Tech.

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