

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Michigan State vs NC State

Monday, March 24, 2025

Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Reynolds Coliseum

NC State Wolfpack Coach Wes Moore

Aziaha James

Madison Hayes

Media Conference

North Carolina State 83, Michigan State 49

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach Wes Moore?

WES MOORE: It was one of those days. I've said it a million times. Some days you're the windshield. Some days you're the bug. I thought we came out ready to play.

If you had seen practice yesterday, you probably would have probably not come to the game. Again, we've got some veterans that are very talented and step up. When the lights are the brightest is when they really step up and play.

I just thought, again, we shot the heck out of it. 15 out of 30 from three, 50% from the field. We did a pretty good job taking care of it. I know that sounds funny having 11 turnovers, but with their press and their pressure, that was probably the biggest concern coming into the game.

Again, we did a decent job taking care of the ball. Like I said, they hit a lot of shots. Saniya is not here, but 11 assists for her I thought was -- and she was just two rebounds away from a triple-double.

Again, we're trying to figure out a way to get these kids another year of eligibility, so if you have any ideas, please let me know.

THE MODERATOR: Next we'll feature our student-athletes.

Q. Your last game in Reynolds Coliseum, and you set



the program record for margin of victory in an NCAA Tournament game. To go out with such a bang like that, what does that mean to you for this program?

AZIAHA JAMES: It means so much. I've been here all my four years, and just to do that for my last game and show Wolfpack Nation love from off the court, you know, it means a lot to me and Madison and Saniya.

MADISON HAYES: Obviously our defense made this game for us. Obviously being at Reynolds and being with the fans, this is, like you said, me, Zaza and Saniya's last go-round in Reynolds. It's bittersweet, but we're not done yet. They'll be able to travel with us to Spokane.

Q. I saw the press conference transcript yesterday. Michigan State was pretty confident about their defense. You guys put a hurting on them pretty bad. Was any of that a motivating factor?

MADISON HAYES: I didn't even see the press conference honestly. I think for us we're worried about our team and what we need to do on the floor. Our game will speak for itself, and it showed tonight.

They're a pretty great team. They obviously got to the NCAA Tournament for a reason. You know, we just, like you said, shot the crap out the ball. That helped us and our defense as well. We just have to continue to do those things in the tournament.

AZIAHA JAMES: Madison hit all the points. We are definitely told to stay away from the media, worry about ourselves. I think our inner circle within the team is very bright, and it brings on to the court. I'm so proud of these girls. You know, we play all 40 minutes. We touch every base on the court. We're going to keep going.

Q. Aziaha, as you were leaving the court there was an extra special ovation, and I saw you kind of stop to compose yourself a little bit. What was going through your mind?

AZIAHA JAMES: Wolfpack Nation has been behind my back since I came here. Just the love that they bring. You



know, they're not just fans. They're our family. They take care of us.

I keep going back to last year when we came back from Portland, like, 3:00 a.m. in the morning. They was here for us. It just showed the support they have for us. Without them, we can't be us.

Q. A similar question for you, Madison. I kind of saw towards the end someone was handing you a baby like you're running for office. What has Wolfpack Nation meant to you where there's that level of trust and just camaraderie and love between the fan base and the players? What has that meant to you?

MADISON HAYES: I mean, it's just obviously the relationships that you build with each and every one of them, and you notice their faces. They come to the lobby, talking to you after the game. It's just amazing how far they go. Especially at a noon game on a Monday, it's pretty hard. You think, like, Oh, we're not going to have a lot of students, but they showed up and showed out for us, and we did the same for them, so...

Q. The two of y'all and Saniya combined either scored or assisted on 71 of the first 76 points. Can you just speak on the chemistry you all have? I feel like it's something very rare, especially in college sports.

MADISON HAYES: Me and Zaza have been here for four years even though I didn't start here.

WES MOORE: That's okay.

MADISON HAYES: Even though I didn't start here. Then obviously Nyah came in a year after. We just spend so much time with each other and talking about the goals that we have as a team. We is greater than me. That's what we always try to instill into the younger ones when we leave, which is not yet, but just trying to make sure that we give them that confidence that they have to basically pick up where we left off and where we leave off is definitely going to be a national championship, so yeah.

AZIAHA JAMES: Definitely the three of us, our chemistry is strong on and off the court. We always hang out with each other off the court. On the court, you know, we always know where each other is at. Y'all can see Nyah knows where everybody is at. She passes from anywhere.

Just to see us hit that court one more time at Reynolds, it felt good. It really felt good.

Q. When we were in here yesterday, we talked about how you didn't want it to get to be a physical game like

the Duke loss. Then right away you hit those two three-pointers from virtually the same spot. How much did that open up the game? On those two particular three-pointers, was that just the way the play developed, or did you guys see a spot to attack?

MADISON HAYES: Like Zaza said, they tried to find me. I feel like I'm a pretty good shooter, and I try to make myself available.

They just know where I'm at on the floor and just making sure, you know -- Michigan State's defense is really good. We've obviously watched film a lot. Just making sure that we're not stand and watching. That was the biggest emphasis as well on offense, making sure we stay moving, keep them moving. They found me a lot, and so yeah.

Q. In the fourth quarter y'all didn't play. What is it like to see Zam and Devyn and all of them just take over almost as like a passing of the torch?

MADISON HAYES: Obviously just how from summer to now just, like, the growth that we've seen and just obviously building relationships with them individually and as a team. It's obviously so great to see they're building that chemistry as well while they're on the floor.

I just think it's just really special, but we're not passing the torch yet, so I wouldn't worry about that yet, but when it comes to that point, I feel like they'll be ready.

AZIAHA JAMES: Just to see them out there take control of the game. It don't even seem like it's a second five that's going out there. It's the same moment ideal going out there. They're still staying on top of them, staying on top of defense, still scoring the ball.

Just to see what we instilled in them since the summer, like Madison says, it feels good. It's a relief on Coach Moore to not having to worry about anybody coming in and not doing the same thing. We're still staying at this type pace. We're proud of them.

Q. Y'all get another cross-country trip as a reward. Y'all obviously just did it last year, and it turned out okay with some extra weirdness with the three-pointers. Is there anything you're looking forward to and kind of telling the younger kids about?

AZIAHA JAMES: Just being ready. I love Coach Moore saying, You better be some McDonald's fries, hot and ready. Just being hot and ready. Don't matter what circumstances come to you. You just got to be ready.

WES MOORE: Yes, you listened to one thing. That's

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

good, yes. It worked.

MADISON HAYES: Can you repeat the question? I was busy laughing. I'm sorry.

Q. Out West again and then some stuff you'll tell the younger players to get them ready for the time zone in the far corner?

MADISON HAYES: I would just say definitely the rest because it's going to be a six-hour flight. We're going to be doing a lot of things there obviously. Just a treatment, making sure recovery, especially after practices. And just like she said, just stay ready for the moment.

THE MODERATOR: Appreciate your time. Questions for Coach Wes Moore.

Q. Wes, when the ball is going in in the first quarter from three, were you thinking keep doing, it says or let's slow down, maybe we've already made enough?

WES MOORE: Like I said, this year I've learned there are times for me just to get out of the way and let them play. Yeah, it was nice to see it because, I'll be honest, we hadn't really been shooting the ball as well.

Like I said, yesterday's practice wasn't real pretty. Then we come out, and they're confident, they're hitting shots, and getting a lot of momentum.

Like I said, our defense holding them to nine points in the first quarter really set the tone. So, yeah, like I said, there are times where you're saying no, no, no, oh, yes, good job, you know, when a shot is going up. Let them play.

Q. Obviously these two had a great shooting day, but I thought Saniya all-around play, not only the assists, but a couple of blocks early in the game set the tone. She had that crossover, the no-look pass. It just seemed like she was able to do kind of whatever she wanted.

WES MOORE: She's special. Yeah, I gave her a hard time. She had eight rebounds, so two away from a triple-double. She only had one rebound at halftime from what I understand. I told her, if you would have started in the first half going to the boards, you would have had a triple-double.

Yeah, 11 assists, pretty awesome. Then, as you mentioned, she can elevate and get her shot off. I know she hit one or two threes out there. Yeah, when she's on, we take it to another level without a doubt.

Q. Like we have said, y'all got off to a 27-9 lead in the first quarter, but how important was it to keep your foot on the gas for the second and the third and be able to stave off a comeback?

WES MOORE: That's one thing we talked about especially at halftime. Michigan State is No. 1 in the Big Ten for scoring in the second half. They average 42 points a game in the second game, so we stressed that let's win the third quarter. Let's win the third quarter.

I thought they did a really nice job. We got a stop on the first possession, and then we scored first. That, again, gave us a little more momentum heading out of it.

Yeah, again, I got to reiterate, that's a really good team over there. They had a rough day shooting it at times, and I'll give our defense some credit. Our kids did a good job. Then, you know, we were hitting shots.

When we hit shots and we bring an attitude about our defense, we can be a pretty good team. We just have to make sure we stay humble and stay hungry.

Q. You mentioned it's a really good team. I saw you chatting with Robyn just for a moment there after the game. What did you tell her?

WES MOORE: Yeah, basically that. It was one of those days where we were hitting some tough shots, and everything -- you know, even though it might be an awkward bounce or something, the ball was going in. Just that you have days like that.

So we were fortunate. Like I said, we needed that. We needed to see the ball go through the net a few times, so we were fortunate to do that early, and I think it's contagious. Somebody gets hot; somebody else gets hot. We were able to roll from there.

She's done a heck of a job. I mentioned yesterday she played at Davidson when I was coaching at Chattanooga, so we were in the same conference, so I remember her as a player. I thought, man, she sure went through the coaching ranks in a hurry to get to a Big Ten school like Michigan State. Then I started figuring it out. Oh, it's been 20 years. Makes you realize time flies.

Q. It's now been, I think, six Sweet 16s in the last seven NCAA tournaments. That's incredible consistency. What does that mean to you? How have you done it?

WES MOORE: It means a lot. It means a lot to me, and to be honest with you, I didn't know it until watching some of

the games yesterday or somebody mentioned it maybe or maybe in some notes. Yeah, and it just says a lot about, first of all, the support we get here with Boo and Stephanie and the rest of the administration. They put us in a position to give our student-athletes a great amount of resources.

Then it's about the players. Then our coaches too. Our coaches have done a heck of a job bringing some of these freshmen along this year. They do a lot of the work as far as position work and development. They've done a heck of a job.

Then just the players. You know, the wins are awesome. Don't get me wrong. That's what we're here for, but when you reflect on the players that were able to accomplish that six out of seven years, Sweet 16, it's pretty neat. Brings back a lot of good memories.

Q. During that stretch, you were winning a lot of games. At the same time you were putting up 70, 80 plus points a game. You had a lot to say about that. Now in the tournament you're allowing under 50. What were you seeing today, and how are you going to carry that momentum to the rest of the tournament?

WES MOORE: I've just been stressing since the ACC championship game we've got to defend better. I'll be honest. I was embarrassed. When I went back and watched the film, our defensive effort, our rebounding effort just wasn't what it needed to be.

So we spent a lot of time. That's the great thing about the way our schedule is. We actually have two weeks between ACC and the NCAA Tournament, and I love that. So we had a few days to focus on us and try to clean some things up, but a lot of it's about attitude and just them wanting to -- you've got to take pride in taking away someone's strength or taking a team's strength away. You've got to buy into all of that.

I've been doing this a long time. Sometimes I get frustrated when maybe the film and the scout doesn't get the attention it needs, but I think we're trending in the right direction. We just got to try to make sure we keep that at the forefront when we're preparing for people.

Q. Didn't seem like you were too pleased with Zam Jones' performance against Vermont. She didn't touch the second half court until the final minute, but she comes in today during the second half, and she scores 12 points in 12 1/2 minutes. Can you talk about her response between games as well as her optimizing her time on the court today?

WES MOORE: Yeah. And, again, you know, let's face it.

We got all these senior guards. I consider Madison a senior also. It's tough for those freshmen sometimes. It's a big difference from high school where in high school, you know, you're it, and if you miss a few shots or turn the ball over or whatever and give up a bucket or two in high school, there's really nobody else to put in. Here we have all these veterans, and I don't like taking them out too much.

Next year Z will be a veteran, but she showed what she can do in a hurry. You know, she did it at Louisville, did it today. She's a microwave. She can get a lot of points in a hurry. She's fine.

Like I said, it was just a matter of first half we were rolling, and we're rolling, I don't touch it a whole lot. We did put Devyn in there for a couple of minutes. We obviously subbed at the post, but when things are going good, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. So we let it ride.

But she was ready the second half and came in and gave us some good minutes.

Q. Hate to change the subject on you, but obviously you've been for a long time and had a lot of success. What advice might you give to the new men's basketball coach here about what he can expect and certainly you saw when this thing is rolling on both men's and women's last year.

WES MOORE: Yeah, last year was unbelievable. Hey, I don't have advice for him other than enjoy our fans. They're passionate. They're going to be there for you. Win or tie, they're going to be there for you.

But he's been here, done it before. I mean, he's got a great reputation as a coach. I'm looking forward to meeting him and all that. I know, again, he's won everywhere he's been, so I'm sure he'll find his way here as well.

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