

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

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Austin, Texas, USA

Moody Center

Texas Longhorns

Coach Vic Schaefer

Madison Booker

Shay Holle

Aaliyah Moore

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are set to begin our press conference with our University of Texas players. We are now joined by freshman guard Madison Booker, senior guard Shay Holle, and junior forward Aaliyah Moore.

Q. A-Mo, do you sleep easier this time of year knowing you don't have to try and stop Madison Booker?

AALIYAH MOORE: It's definitely a plus having her on my team. I told Coach when she won MVP of the Big 12 Tournament, I said, Hey, she won it, and she's on our team. I don't care. As long as she's on our team, we're good.

I love playing with Book. I know she's going to be ready to go.

Q. Shay, same question for you.

SHAY HOLLE: Yeah, I think we're all super lucky to have Book on our team. I've said since the summer, since she got here, she's cool, calm, and collected. You'd never guess that she's a freshman. And then she got thrown into the point guard role, and she stayed the same way.

Yeah, super lucky to be a part of what she's got going right now.

Q. Book, do you take pride in allowing your teammates to sleep easier knowing they don't have to guard you?



MADISON BOOKER: Yeah, I guess. No, I mean these are people that kind of help me become who I am right now. Just the confidence they've had in me since day one has helped me be who I am.

Q. Madison, there seemed to be a dispute earlier in the year whether you had played point guard before. You kind of said no, Vic said yes. I think the Baylor coach said you were a power forward on the national team. How much had you played or sort of just running an offense?

MADISON BOOKER: I mean, I might have back in my younger days kind of like took the ball up the court here and there. I mean, when I think of a point guard, I think it's somebody to run the team. Coach saw me doing that, I don't remember doing that. So, I mean, I guess I have a little experience doing it.

Q. Shay, this one is for you. I wonder after the season ended here last season, how did that impact at all how you guys came into the start of this regular season and now coming into the start of this postseason?

SHAY HOLLE: Yeah, I think definitely over the summer we had constant reminders of it. We had scores posted all over the gym and everything. Definitely used it to fuel our work since, honestly, June, yeah.

But now I think, I mean, obviously it's a new season, we learned from it. And you don't want the same thing to happen, but I think we have learned from it. And we watched the film, it wasn't fun. But got to do what you've got to do.

So, yeah, I definitely think it helped fuel us, especially after it happened. And we feel good, playing on our home court. We've played good at home all season. So just keep doing the same thing.

Q. Shay, you mentioned Sunday night that you guys all had to work hard on your conditioning and endurance to take up defensively Rori. Were there actually extra work or extra drills, or was there a meeting?

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SHAY HOLLE: Yeah, I think when you lose Rori, who obviously she affects so much on both ends of the court, but her defense is next to none. And, yeah, I think there was not necessarily like a direct meeting about that, but we definitely picked up our defensive drills in practice, we focused a lot more on it.

And then like personally, I think like knowing I would have to guard the ball a lot more, I tried to get as many reps and extra reps I could against our practice players, just putting myself in those situations. And I think everyone did the same, just kind of on their own they knew everyone needed to step up. So it was kind of collective and individual.

Q. The other night you seemed to send out a warning to opponents. What did you say? What was it you said to people, We're coming?

AALIYAH MOORE: No, I mean, I just said we're not scared of anyone. At the end of the day, I said we know the work that we put in. No one does but us. I've seen Shay putting in the work. I feel like everyone has stepped up in our roles.

When I say that, it's more we have confidence in ourselves and we're going to play every game like it's our last. Because it could be.

So I'm extremely proud of this team and the progress we've made, and I would put us up against anyone in the country.

Q. Madison, this one is for you. You know this whole past year it's been a huge season, and you had your star player go down early in Rori Harmon. This has been a very impactful year for you, Freshman Big 12 Player of the Year. Can you describe the impact of this past year and how the impact motivates you going into the tournament for the first time in your career, not only just going into the tournament, but going in as a 1 seed? Can you talk about that impact.

MADISON BOOKER: Yeah. Yeah, Rori went down early in the season and, like, beginning of conference play. And I think my confidence really wasn't -- it wasn't down, I would say, it was more of unsure what I'm doing.

But as the games continued and as the conference continued, I think my confidence grew. And I think as you all saw in tournament, I think I had a lot of confidence in myself and my game, and my teammates did, and like I had confidence in them too.

So just to continue this to the tournament, it's just a lot of

confidence with us. Especially with the 1 seed, we're happy we got it. So right now we're going to take this confidence and keep rolling with it.

Q. It's probably for all three of you. In late-game situations where it's tight and maybe to take some of the pressure off of Madison from feeling like she has to create all the time, like when you, Aaliyah, hit Shay with that pass with a minute left against K-State, can you just talk about that, the need to be able to take some of the pressure off of Madison when it's getting tight at crunch time?

AALIYAH MOORE: Well, I think for Coach, a lot of his -- his biggest thing is trust, trusting his players. And I think it's nice that we do have Madison as our point guard, but she's a freshman, but surrounding her we have Shay, who is a senior. I'm a junior. Shaylee Gonzales, who's a sixth year, been here two years. And at the 5 position you have Taylor and DeYona, who is also junior, senior.

So I feel like having that base of older people around Maddie helps. And so he does feel confident where it's like, okay, if they double team Maddie, put the ball in A-Mo's hands, she'll make a good decision with it, like I hit Shay, or put the ball in Shay's hands and she'll hit a shot.

So I think that trust is a big thing, but also getting in the gym has instilled that trust in him.

SHAY HOLLE: Yeah, to go off that, I think he always says like I have to -- you have to show me what you can do in practice for me to trust you in a game.

I think we've all done that day in and day out. We practice situations all the time in practice. And, yeah, just like the extra work we've put in, not just recently but from the whole season.

So he knows that, yeah, it's a trust thing at the end of the day, like when the game is close like that. I think the other teams also maybe expect Maddie -- the ball to be in Maddie's hands. So to be able to have players surround her that can help her out and make good decisions too is definitely helpful.

But, yeah, I think it's really a trust thing and just putting in the extra work.

MADISON BOOKER: They said everything.

Q. Maddie, your thoughts on having those veterans around you at crunch time?

MADISON BOOKER: That was definitely -- it's definitely



calming just to know that they're around. I mean, I have shooters in my corners, I have good post play around me.

And also they have experience on me. So just also going to them like during them hard times of the game, close-game situations, it's very calming and I can stay poised and not try to get sped up. So just having them helps me be a better player.

Q. For you all, can you just talk about what you think this team's identity is and what you're doing best right now?

AALIYAH MOORE: I feel like we say this a lot, but our identity is in our defense, that's what gets us going, the defensive stops, the rebounding, the communicating, the switching, all of that. I'm telling you right now, you watch probably the games we've played best, it started with us on the defensive end. And I think that's great, though.

So I'm really proud of this team because we have put in so much work with Rori going down and her being the forefront of our defense. Shay has stepped up tremendously. And I am really proud of her it's not easy to guard someone else's best player. Big kudos to her for doing that, and then everyone else that's worked on it. I've worked on my defense. Maddie, being a freshman, it's not easy coming in and adjusting to Coach Schaefer's defense.

So I think our identity is definitely with our defense, and I think that's what's going to carry us so far. That's why we try to hone in on that every day in practice.

SHAY HOLLE: Yeah, I agree. I think going along with that, we've also really embraced that. I think all of us have really -- I mean, we watch film and we can tell that when we're connected on defense and when we're locked in, everything else just falls into place. So really that just being our main focus. I mean, not to mention we're also all shooting the ball pretty well.

So if you take care of it, get a good look every time on offense, I think, yeah, we don't really need to stress that much. When we focus on defense, we know the offense will come when it needs to. Just really embracing that.

I think Coach Schaefer has really instilled that in all of us. And it definitely is adjustment just having that coming in. Especially like I know I -- coming in from high school and stuff, no one plays defense like Coach Schaefer does.

But I think we've all done a really good job of embracing it and working on it. So just keeping that going into the tournament.

Q. Aaliyah, you scored more in the season in that tournament. How are you feeling physically with the knee? Are you back to where you were or where you want to be?

AALIYAH MOORE: Yeah, I've had no problems with my ACL/knee you could say. It's honestly just about me feeling great, and I do. And just being able to perform at my max for my teammates. And I feel good. I know they have confidence in me. I have confidence in myself and my knee.

I'm just excited to do whatever I need to do to help the team win.

Q. Shay, you've been in the NCAA Tournament before, and I know that it's a big deal. You all treat every game the same, like it's an elimination game. So aside from how serious the game is, can you talk about the fun aspect of getting to play in March Madness and the positive vibes all around?

SHAY HOLLE: Yeah, I've been blessed to be in the tournament every year, and I know that's -- at Texas that's common, but I know that's not common everywhere else. And I don't take it for granted. And I push that to my teammates too that this is a really special time, not only to be in the tournament but to be able to host. Like, we can't play all tied up. Like it's fun. We got here for a reason because of the work we put in, we really should enjoy the moment.

And we're good enough, and we don't need to go into a game all nervous or anything. Obviously there's a lot at stake, and everyone knows that, but this is why you do it. It's so much fun to be in March Madness. It's such an exciting time. So I want everyone to enjoy the moment because it definitely goes quick.

Q. Along those lines, what does Vic say? Because you've put in the work, like you said, you're good enough. So how does he keep y'all loose?

AALIYAH MOORE: I guess just by telling us that we have put in the work. So he always says that big players make big moments. But it's out of habit. It's not just we just did it. We've been working on it all year.

So it's just confidence. He has confidence in us. We have confidence in him. And like she said, March Madness is a fun time.

I know I'm excited. I know my team is excited and ready to play.

SHAY HOLLE: Yeah, I think another thing is he always says you don't necessarily rise to the occasion, you fall back on your habits when it comes down to it.

And I think we've all done a really good job of creating good habits. And just preparation creates that confidence. We've definitely done the prep, and we'll continue to do so. So just one game at a time. But just be us. Just play our game, and we'll be all right.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us.

Coach, we want to welcome you. If you would like to give an opening statement, and then we'll open it up for questions.

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, for sure. Two things. First, just want to wish Coach Terry and the men's team success tonight and have a great game.

And then want to thank Coach Huff on our football staff here at the University of Texas. He's offered to buy every student a ticket to the game tonight. And Huff has always been great, been a big supporter of our program. And I just appreciate him so much. Our kids are -- we made a little video for him to thank him as well, and we just appreciate his continued support of our program.

That being said, it's a great day to be a Longhorn. Excited about the opportunity. So proud of our kids. Lots of hard work and commitment, dedication, all those words and things. But those are all actions. And so much goes into this day, and now you've got to go live it. And that's what we've talked about.

But I'm really excited for our players to be able to play in this great event, the greatest sporting event I believe in college athletics. To be able to host it here at the University of Texas is really, really special. And, again, our players, for them to be able to play in front of their fans makes it even sweeter.

So I'm excited for our kids. I'm excited for our team. And I'm excited for our fan base. 2:00 o'clock tomorrow afternoon, I've got a feeling we're going to have a lot of folks that are missing work tomorrow, and I'm excited about that, too. If you need an excuse, I'm glad to write it.

Q. As you've crammed, what have you learned about Drexel, and what do you expect to see from them tomorrow?

VIC SCHAEFER: I think the first thing that jumps out at you is defensively they've only given up 70 or more points one time this year. That's an impressive stat. They're

really diligent and disciplined offensively. They're hot.

And that's part of the NCAA Tournament. I've said this all the time. You've got to get hot, you've got to have a little luck. And they are hot, and they went and won their tournament as a 7 seed. They're well coached. You better get out and guard them, and you better guard them smartly because they're really good at reading your mistakes defensively.

We've had a lot of time to spend on them and work on them. And I feel like our kids have a pretty good understanding what's coming. Of course you've got to go execute when the lights come on.

But I'm really impressed with just how well coached they are and how they execute. I think even defensively, they can confuse you if you're not careful, if you haven't watched enough film and realize what they're trying to do and how they're doing it.

And, again, that's coaching. And I think those kids really play extremely hard. They play well. They're talented. They're skilled. And they play to their strengths.

And you know what, this time of year that's the kind of teams you run into every night, they're all those things. And they certainly have all that.

Q. Vic, do you sleep better this time of year knowing you don't have to prepare to guard Madison Booker?

VIC SCHAEFER: (Chuckling) Boy, I'd sure hate to have to guard her, that's for sure. It's a great question. But I am glad I don't have to guard her. She is -- she's really, you know -- obviously we've all got to watch her growth and maturation right in front of our eyes.

And I think the big thing with her is just how she's really developed throughout the course of our season. Especially in the last two and a half months. I mean, it's quite remarkable, her development and how far she's come.

And really, quite frankly, for me, I know how far she can still get. I know her ceiling is still way out there. That's what's exciting for me as a coach, and that's my challenge to get that out of her.

But I sleep pretty good knowing that if Booker knows when the bus is leaving and where we're leaving from and she's on it, I sleep pretty good knowing that she's got all that information.

Q. Vic, I was asking the players, in late-game, tight

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situations like you had at OU, against K-State in the Big 12 Tournament, how do you take the pressure off of Maddie from feeling like she's got to do everything? And, you know, you had that kickout from Aaliyah to Shay and the big three and the inbounds pass. You know, maybe it's just maybe more of a question for how do you keep Maddie from feeling like she has to do everything in a late-game, tight situation?

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, I don't think I have to work too hard at it because she's so unselfish. To a fault. Like sometimes I have to get on her a little bit for turning down, you know -- I tell her sometimes, hey, you turn down a 10-footer to throw it out there for a 25-footer, you know, and so that's one of the strengths that she has, is she's just so unselfish.

So I think that's something that we've worked on really hard is our late-game situations. And I think she feels really confident in her teammates. And I think Aaliyah Moore turned down a 12-footer to get Shay Holle that open three. And that's the confidence that she has in Shay.

And that's the confidence that Shay Holle has to take that shot in that moment. That was a huge, huge bucket. Huge. We probably don't win the game. You know? I mean, who knows, but it's a tie ball game at that moment. But I think that's the evolution of Shay Holle too, not afraid in that moment to take that shot.

And so I think our -- the thing about -- again, we are a team. We truly are a team. And the strength of our team is our chemistry and how well we play together.

And so, yes, we know that certain players have to do certain things both offensively and defensively. But, again, I think that's what makes a team so special.

Q. Forgive me for coming out of left field here. I was hoping you could give me your thoughts on Coach Johnnie Harris, who is consistent in mentioning your impact on her, making her first tournament appearance as a head coach with Auburn this year. Are you surprised at all by this? I would imagine probably not.

VIC SCHAEFER: Not at all. I couldn't be more proud for Johnnie. She's with me a long time, and we spent lots of great times together. This doesn't surprise me at all, her and her staff. Ketara played for me and was here on my staff here.

So I'm proud of Johnnie, and it doesn't surprise me. I know how hard she works. We used to sit around and talk all the time about this business. And unfortunately in our business, there's good things about it and there's some not

so good things about it, and we would just beat our head on the wall sometimes about how certain people go about their business. And we would just look at each other and go, you know what? We're going to do it the right way. Good things happen to good people.

Let me tell you, Johnnie Harris is good people. And she is special to me. She's my sister. So happy for her, proud of her, and it does not surprise me at all.

Q. What did you see in her as an assistant? You obviously retained her anywhere you went. What is it about her that this is who you want on your side?

VIC SCHAEFER: I think I just said it. She's good people. And that encompasses her in everything that she does. She's a great mom. She's a great grandma. She don't want me to probably bring that up. But she is a great grandmother as well.

But her communication skills, her ability to communicate in recruiting, with our players, she was someone -- she's a great Christian woman. We're just -- I mean, really we're just two people that are so much -- I would hope that I'm a lot like her.

But we just -- we always saw things in the same light. And we're both highly motivated. And she was always -- again, I don't need "yes" people, and she wasn't a "yes" person. She'd always keep it real with me and tell me what I needed to hear. Sometimes maybe not what I wanted to hear.

So, again, I just think that that's -- you're talking about an individual that I have the highest and the utmost respect for and admiration. When we were together, you know, as assistants together, we spent countless hours watching film and just talking the game. But, again, it was who she is that really separated her in my mind.

And, look, I wasn't going to Mississippi State without her. I told Scott Stricklin, I'll come, but Johnnie Harris has got to come; and if she ain't coming, I'm not either.

So she's a big part of our success there.

Q. We're checking in with coaches around the country. You talk about the good and the bad things that you like. Is it less fun with all the stuff, changes in college athletics these days? You've spoken about some of them before.

VIC SCHAEFER: Man, I'm having the time of my life. This is what I want to do. Being with kids, coaching, teaching, mentoring. That doesn't change. You know?

Certainly there's lots of clutter and outside distractions, more and more each and every day. But when I get in the gym, when I get in that classroom, when I get in the film room, when I'm able to eat dinner with these kids on the road and spend time -- we go get ice cream the night before when we're on the road. That's a tradition that we always have.

And that's -- ain't nobody got it better than me. And I just love what I do. I love where I'm doing it at, at a place where they, too, as an administration care deeply about our student-athletes.

It's just, you know, I know we've got all the other stuff, and we've got to figure that out, but at the root of all of it, the coaching and the teaching and the making a difference in young people's lives, man, I thank God every morning when I get up in my prayer time for the opportunity to be where I'm at, doing it where I'm at with the kids I have.

Q. A few of your players were talking about how over the summer they really used that Louisville loss as fuel and you guys as a coaching staff are constantly reminding them of it. Has that returned at all now that you're coming back into March Madness and you're playing and hosting here again?

VIC SCHAEFER: First, it's great to see you here from the Houston Chronicle, my hometown. Second, I haven't had to bring it up. It's still in their mind. They've brought it up. I've heard them mention it a time or two.

And so you want them to learn from experiences, and certainly that was a tough experience. But at the same time, you know, you have to give credit to your opponent too. Louisville played awfully well that day. We obviously didn't play very well.

But that's why you play the game. And that's always my message to our kids before every game. There's a reason why you play the game. Whether we're the favorite or the underdog, you still play the game. And you don't win the game on paper.

And so, you know, for us, we realize we have an opportunity here at home and in this event. But you got to take it one at a time. We certainly have goals, but you just have to know everybody is good at this stage of the year. And you got to bring your A game. And the night that you don't, you got a chance to get beat.

So that's been a constant message with our group here at Texas throughout the course of the season, and every season, really.

Q. Coach, how important are veteran players like Shay Lee and Shay to making a postseason run?

VIC SCHAEFER: Good to see you also from the Houston Chronicle, my hometown. Never seen anybody from the Chronicle here, so I'm excited about that.

You know, Shay and Shay Lee really provide a steady influence on our team. They're great kids. They've been to the wars. They know what it's all about. They're veterans, and they've seen just about everything.

And so I think both of those, especially when Rori went out, both of those have provided a real steadying influence in the locker room. They're great role models. They're great for our young kids to see what it looks like to be a pro, how they work, how they go about their daily lives, academically as well as basketball.

I think both of those young ladies bring so much to the table, stuff y'all don't even see, but because of who they are. Shay Lee's our resident grandma, and this is her sixth season of competition. And this is why she came here, and I know she's really wanting to keep playing.

And, again, Shay's one of those players that, as you've watched her throughout her career, she's what's right about college athletics: staying the course, staying in the picture, not giving up.

Easily after her first year, second year could have said, hey, let me transfer and go to somewhere elsewhere I can play a lot more, a lot faster. Nope. She just stayed in the picture, went to work. And it doesn't matter what happens, you can't keep her out of the lineup.

So both those kids bring a lot to the table and bring a real value to our team and our program, not just on the floor but off.

Q. Both because of the time and also NCAA rules, how much does your routine change tomorrow in the lead-up to the game?

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, it won't change a whole lot. We will -- our shoot-around goes 10 minutes longer than typically, 10 minutes deeper into your game -- approach before game time. So, in other words, typically we would be done with shoot-around four hours prior and go straight to pregame meal. Tomorrow we'll be done at 10:10, instead of 10:00 o'clock.

You know, getting on the floor. I believe the floor is available 90 minutes prior. We'd been getting on a little bit



earlier than that, just once -- y'all have heard me talk about some of the things we've done to change our pregame ritual, getting ready for games.

But other than that, it won't change a whole lot. We'll try to limit the distractions. We'll pick up telephones the night before from our kids. We'll do all those things that we normally do on the road.

And, again, just as I've told them, just really trying to be focused and not get -- look, we've got to go play, you can't be all tied up. It's another game. We're at home. You're going to play somebody really good. But we can't be all tied up. We've got to be able to function and go play.

So really haven't dwelled too much on the other stuff other than I did want them to get their tickets in on Wednesday because I don't want them dealing with it today and tomorrow morning, you know. We need to be locked in and ready to go, which I believe they will be.

So excited about the opportunity, y'all. Glad that we're here at home. And really, really proud of these kids. I know our local media has probably enjoyed the evolution of this team as much as I have. They are truly unique and special young ladies, and they have done a great job. I'm so proud of them, and I'm excited to see what they're going to do in the future.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you so much for your time, and the best of luck tomorrow in your first round game against Drexel.

VIC SCHAEFER: All right. Praise the lord, and hook 'em Horns.

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