

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

Friday, March 22, 2024

Austin, Texas, USA

Moody Center

**Drexel Dragons**

**Amy Mallon**

**Grace O'Neill**

**Amaris Baker**

Media Conference

Texas-82, Drexel-42

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then we'll take questions for the student-athletes.

AMY MALLON: Obviously not the outcome we wanted in the game, but to play a team like Texas and play on their home court and just the environment, the experience we had today, I think that's what women's basketball is all about and we had an opportunity to play one of the best. I think when you're a competitor and you start playing when you're a little girl, Amaris and Grace, we talk about this, you have a dream of playing in the NCAA tournament. We had an opportunity to do that today and play one of the best teams in the nation.

So I think the challenge, obviously -- you talk about coming into a game and giving your best. I can't say I could be any prouder of this group. I think they gave their best. I knew they would. But so many messages from people saying how proud they are of this team and I can't tell them -- I said this before. This team made me a better coach this year in so many ways and I thanked them. Grateful for the experience.

Congratulations to Texas, great team, great defensive team. We take a lot of pride in our defense, so to play another team that does that so well. Just want to wish them luck, obviously, in the next round.

But back to our team. Great fight and I will take that any day with a loss. But just very proud of this group.



THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Amaris, Coach Schaefer said you caused trouble for the Texas team. What does it mean for you to hear that from a coach like him.**

AMARIS BAKER: It's pretty inspirational. I'm grateful just to have the opportunity to play against Texas. It definitely was the competition that I love. So I'm just very grateful for the experience.

**Q. Amaris, Grace, y'all have eligibility left. After playing on a stage like this, what does this do for you guys from a motivation standpoint coming back next year?**

GRACE O'NEILL: I think personally it just drives me to get back to the spot. Winning the championship this year, it was an unbelievable experience and the feeling was just so great. It was great to be able to compete today in such an amazing arena. So I think we're just really excited to get to work in the off-season and hopefully do it again next year.

AMARIS BAKER: Most definitely. We work really, really hard every single day, so we're just going to do whatever it takes to get back to this spot again.

**Q. The full court that they came out with, did that surprise y'all, how much pressure did it put on y'all, and did you feel like it just sped up?**

GRACE O'NEILL: I don't think I would use the word surprise. I think our coaches prepared us really well. Nothing in this game was a surprise at all. We knew exactly how physical they were going to be. We knew how well they were going to push the ball and their pressure in the full court. So would not say we were surprised. I think just like when we got there being able to handle it.

But I actually thought we did a good job breaking it. I think we might have had like two or three turnovers right from them throwing the ball inbounds. I don't know exactly. But I think their pressure down on the half court was really strong too.



AMARIS BAKER: It definitely wasn't a surprise. Again, our coaches prepared us very, very well. Now we just know what we need to do to up our game.

**Q. Can you guys talk about what has this whole week been like leading into this game and what is the one thing you can take away from this game going into next season?**

GRACE O'NEILL: This week, building up, our coaches did a really great job of preparing us for what we're going to see, the loudness of the arena. They were preparing us with hand signals and stuff like that. But it was really exciting to be a part of it. We were really happy to be here. It was great to be able to fly down here. I've never been to Texas. So just a great experience overall.

AMARIS BAKER: Second off of that. This is my first experience in Texas. I'm very, very grateful and blessed. I'm just very happy that we had this experience. We gave it our all and definitely next year we're going to do whatever it takes to get back here again.

**Q. How difficult is it as much size as they have down in the paint area, and then to have a girl like Shaylee popping threes from outside? Can you speak to that challenge?**

GRACE O'NEILL: I don't think we have seen that type of size -- I don't think I've actually ever seen that type of size played against in my entire life. So definitely a challenge. They did a great job on the boards. They're really a physical team. I would say being aware. I mean, we were prepared with the scout, but they're just really physical and a tall team.

**Q. What about Shaylee?**

GRACE O'NEILL: She did a great job on the outside. I think she got a first three off in their first quarter and it was miscommunication on our end. We knew what play it was. We just didn't call the shooter through fast enough. Then we made an adjustment in the second half. They had only made -- she only made one three the entire first half. She was the only one who made the three. So we decided to protect the paint and kind of opened up some shots for her and she was able to knock 'em down.

AMY MALLON: Can you tell she's our business major. She's got all the numbers down.

AMARIS BAKER: Most definitely. She was amazing popping all the threes. We made the adjustment in the second half protecting the paint and it just allowed her to

just make every single shot. So she did amazing. We weren't really surprised with the -- myself, I used to grow up playing against boys, so they have always been taller, physical. But, yeah, I mean, physicality, I've seen that before. I wasn't surprised by it at all. We just fell short well, yeah. (Laughing).

**Q. When they were able to cut off passing lanes to Amaris, when they were able to slow her down after a pretty good first quarter, what was kind of the strategy you guys wanted to get more points up and what were you able to take away from that experience of having your leading scorer kind of cut off that way?**

GRACE O'NEILL: I would say Amaris did a great job in transition and the first quarter leaking out, I think we were able to hit her pretty well. I think once they started taking passing lanes, we tried to do some backdoor plays and some curl plays that we were able to get her. I think we hit a couple -- I know we got two off of some pretty good cuts, so I think just capitalizing over them over playing.

AMARIS BAKER: Definitely allowed openings for the rest of my teammates. They all can shoot the ball as well. So it's a quick adjustment. We all can shoot, we're all a shooting threat, so, yeah.

**Q. Talking a lot about just the experience and how special this is. So have y'all been able to take a step back in the last couple days to realize what you're in or is that now the time to do so and just speak on how great is this moment?**

GRACE O'NEILL: I think it's just awesome to be able to play here. I would say definitely when we showed up to the arena yesterday for practice, we were like, wow, like, this is an amazing arena. Just really grateful to play in it. I got a couple text and calls this morning wishing me good luck from some coaches and family and telling me to soak it all in. So when I stepped out there today and the people started flooding in, I definitely was like, wow, like this is an amazing experience. Sometimes like only a once in a lifetime experience for some people. Hopefully, obviously, get back here next year and the following. That would be great.

AMARIS BAKER: Coach Amy always says to be where your feet are, so just being in the present, just enjoying this whole journey, walking into the arena, a big Jumbotron and all these seats and just the aura and atmosphere, it's definitely been awesome, an awesome experience.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse the student-athletes and take questions for Coach.

**Q. Did they look like a 1 seed to you?**

AMY MALLON: Yes. I'll definitely say that. (Laughing). I knew coming in. As soon as I saw that, I go the one thing -- I've said this before. I've always admired Texas and their defense because I'm a defensive-oriented coach. That's one of the reasons we've had success. So of course when I saw that, I was like, shoot, this is a team I know we're about to face and we're going to have to embrace it. But you know you're going to be challenged because I feel like defense is truly what keeps you in games, the amount of possessions a team's going to have.

So, yeah, I would say that, yeah. And I appreciate Coach Schaefer and just some of the words about our team. So I really appreciate his compliments of our group. So I take that as a coach, just another coach telling you that means a lot because that's something I do focus on as a coach.

**Q. Did you see a weakness?**

AMY MALLON: Did I see a weakness with this group? I said I think there's a couple. I think as long as they're playing defense and they rebound, I think that's how you win championships. I say that all the time. So I think if they continue to do that, they're going to be a tough team to beat.

**Q. Madison Booker had like 14 assists for Texas. Would you believe me if I told you that she never played point guard in high school? And what does that say about her vision?**

AMY MALLON: Obviously, I got to watch film on Madison and you saw what she was capable of doing. I thought she did a great good job of distributing the ball. I think when you have a player who is talented as they are -- one the things when you see great players, they're able to do a little bit of everything, and I think she showed that piece of her game as a facilitator on the team because she's someone people have to guard and they have to really zone in on. So that's just allowing her to even help her team continue to be successful. She's doing that as well.

So I would say no, but the way she played and what film I saw her, I knew she was capable of doing a lot of things.

**Q. What was the message you gave to your players following the game?**

AMY MALLON: I think the one thing you always talk about is you thank your seniors, you thank the people that were leading you throughout the season. This team, and I said this before, we were in a spot, we were 12-14, and one of the things -- we hit a rocky road getting there, and then we

won the seven games straight, and that's all leadership to me, because they very easily could have said, hey, you know what, this is who we are. But they believed in what we -- they fought us a little bit, but they believed in what we were about. So I think that's the first thing. We always talk about showing gratitude and how that can really -- it doesn't always change the circumstance, but it can change your mindset with how you approach things.

So we want our student-athletes to have an experience at Drexel that takes them beyond the court, and I think thanking them is the first thing you can do for everything they did for the program. And I think the next thing is just reminding them that we made our Drexel community, our administration, the city of Philadelphia so proud. The amount of messages we received throughout our time from Sunday to here, I couldn't even tell them enough how proud I am of them. I think that's really important they know that.

We'll have a chance to celebrate, we know that, but I think just to be able to tell them that. We count on each other and we believed in each other and that can go a long way in life. So just to remind them that this experience, yes, soak it all in, as Grace said. I love that she said that because you don't say that and say you don't want to win. I don't want to say that because I'm as competitive as anybody. But just understand that. In the end, not every team's going to end up with a win, but I think to me I have a lot of winners on my team, so I'm just really proud of what they did this year.

**Q. Second year in a row there's only been one team from Philadelphia to make the NCAA tournament. Do you feel like there was a little more pressure on you guys this year knowing you were the only team from Philly in the NCAA tournament?**

AMY MALLON: I think that piece of pressure, I think it just goes to show -- we talk about Philadelphia and Philadelphia basketball and these teams in Philadelphia, we root each other one and I think we felt the support from everybody else. So I don't think the pressure is -- I think we did what we needed to do to get here and that is an accomplishment in itself. So for us, it was just stepping up. And we said, we warmed up out on the floor, we did our warm-up, and I said, what was different about this warm-up than our last one? And they said, nothing. That's what it's about. We're not going to put too much pressure on this one game. We're going to show up and fight and make Philly proud. And I know the other teams and the city's going to be rooting for us.

So knowing you have that, I think it takes a little bit of the pressure off. And I go back to, Philadelphia's a great place

for basketball and I think this team just demonstrates the kind of fight Philadelphia basketball has and we were very proud to represent the city here in March Madness.

**Q. What does this experience do for you as a coach in terms of culture building and setting a standard on the recruiting trail?**

AMY MALLON: I said it in there to my team. We talked about it afterwards. I thanked them because I think they made me a much better coach this year, just the challenges I had a little bit different than my first three years or -- obviously this is my 20th year at Drexel, so just proud of the growth. I've been part of this program and the sustained success we've been able to have, but I think this team there was a piece -- I said to them, you made me a better coach because you challenged me in ways that -- we didn't have one All-Conference player this year. We did not get recognized, and to find a way to win -- and I say that because it's probably my first year we've had the experience and to find a way to win and do that and really have a team believe in what you're teaching them. We always said I could question some things I was doing but not doubting what we were about. I think it just reminded me that maybe the grass isn't greener. It's not like you always have -- you do have to find your next best player, like, recruiting is a big piece of that, but realize your culture. That goes a long way. Hetta Saatman is an example, someone who came back this year, fifth year, Erin Sweeney, people came back very end of their careers that didn't play a lot of minutes and they shined when they needed to.

To me that's what our program's about, so I'm hoping I can use that for momentum as I go out on the recruiting trail talking about what Drexel's about, but it just reminded me that I'm going to stay true to who we are and not really change because you start thinking about that when things aren't going your way and I think this team -- I said, you just proved to me again that what we do does work. And we're going to continue to evolve with recruiting, with everything that's going on, but continue to just stay true to who we are.

**Q. An on-court question to follow up. They obviously had that size advantage, they were kind of dominating on the offensive glass. What was the conversation like at halftime or in breaks about how to maybe kind of break through that a little bit?**

AMY MALLON: It's tough because when you play a team that physically just from a size-wise really dominates that piece and you have to try to tell your team, you have to embrace this piece and you can't avoid it, you really have to go into it and finding ways to either -- we said and I saw

it actually a couple times right towards the end said, If you can't get the ball, slap it out of bounds so they can't get it. And Hetta Saatman slapped it out of bounds and turned around and smiled at me and I said, Look, you're still learning, there's only about four minutes left in the game -- but it's one of those things where you continue to teach different things that you know, like things that you think that might help, but that piece obviously was really hard for us today, from a physicality standpoint. Just not having the ability to go right back at 'em on that piece. I think that obviously you look at the rebounding difference that was huge today. I think I say that to my team, rebounding is what really wins championships, and in this moment we weren't able to sustain that piece. But I think it's something you continue just as a reminder with the growth of our team moving forward that that's something we'll continue to focus on as a group.

**Q. When you're preparing your scouting report and game plan for Texas I don't guess you zeroed in on Shaylee Gonzalez with their size and Madison and everything. Is that kind of a luxury for this team?**

AMY MALLON: Yeah, well that was the one thing I said, well, she's going to shoot, so you have that piece of it. But obviously their guards are just so tough, they, when you talk about a player like that and both the Shayly and Shay, they play a lot of minutes, so I'm watching their film and saying, hey, you have to be ready to guard these kids for 40 minutes. So that's a big piece of it. You're doing that and then you're trying to contain the inside. That's when you play basketball you have inside outside game like that, that's part of what makes you successful as a team. I think they certainly showed that today.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you.

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