

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Alabama vs Texas

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Austin, Texas, USA

Moody Center

Texas Longhorns

Vic Schaefer

Aaliyah Moore

DeYona Gaston

Madison Booker

Media Conference

Texas - 65, Alabama - 54

THE MODERATOR: Folks, we are here assembled with the University of Texas head coach Vic Schaefer and players Madison Booker, DeYona Gaston, Aaliyah Moore.

Coach, would you like to give us an opening statement.

VIC SCHAEFER: First I just want to commend Kristy Curry and her Alabama team. I think they're really, really good. Kristy does such a great job. I have so much respect and admiration for her and her program.

They've averaged 76 points a game in the SEC, and our kids went out today and really played so hard defensively. Did a great job on two kids that I just think are so good in Nye and Barker.

You don't do that without playing your heart out, and I just thought our kids from the jump played their heart out. I thought we opened the game right. I thought we opened the second half right. Certainly we missed a ton of layups and bunnies throughout the course of the game, but I thought defensively we were really locked in.

Elena had done a great job with the scout, and our kids really paid attention and were really focused on trying to limit them on what they wanted to do. Then offensively we made enough plays to -- Moore goes 7 for 13, Booker was 9 for 15. And again, we had so many really good looks.

But I think the aggressiveness that we had, we got to the



line 21 times. Our second chance points were 23. 34 points in the paint. I just think that shows our aggressiveness today and how we played the game.

Man, what this team continues to do and continues to accomplish is really quite amazing. We'll give God the glory for No. 32 and probably take tomorrow off and get ready to go out to Portland and play whoever we're going to play in the Sweet 16.

Really proud of them. They played their guts out today. What a great crowd, before I turn it loose, 9,700. What an incredible atmosphere for our game, for women's basketball. When we came here four years ago, part of building in a program is your fan base, and it was not good when we started. But to see that atmosphere for these kids today, I just think everybody that walks out of the arena today is talking about these kids and how hard they played.

Maybe not the buckets they missed or made, but just how hard they played the game, how they represent the University of Texas. Again, part of it, and I couldn't be more proud of them.

Q. Aaliyah, you had a great game inside, but I wanted to ask you about that three you made. You looked a little astonished. What was going through your head?

AALIYAH MOORE: Honestly, I just shot it. Book made a great pass. I had to shoot the ball. We had maybe four seconds on the shot clock. But it's something that I practiced, so it's not something I don't have in my bag. I just don't show it a lot. So I guess for moments like those, I'm ready.

When it went in, I was like, whew, that was nice.

Q. Aaliyah, it hasn't been easy for you with the tendinitis. You, I think, played one minute in the second half the other night and had ice packs. How were you able to get back in there and play like you did tonight?

AALIYAH MOORE: I mean I rested. I got treatment. I've



been doing rehab to do everything to get back on the court. I mean, my team needed me today.

It was kind of just a choice of being smart, knowing when I need to be out there and when I don't. I just made sure I got a good night's rest.

I came early today, got treatment, and was ready for the game.

Q. This is for all three of you. The whole game was intense. There was a point where it looked like it got personal. Was there a switch that got flipped somewhere, maybe around the third quarter? You were denying everything.

AALIYAH MOORE: I think the energy that we just had as a team. We were fired up. Every huddle, we were intentional, we were looking at each other. Maddie was saying great things. She was saying, who do you have? We made sure we were matched up.

So I think it just was we knew we had a chance to win the game. We just needed to lock down. Every possession mattered, and I think we did a great job of coming together.

When they started scoring, we were like, okay, slow down. Let's lock down. But I just think we came together as a team.

DEYONA GASTON: Just to piggy-back on her, we were locked in. I felt like we were locked in the whole game defensively. Whenever times do get a little rough, where it doesn't get rough, we're always together. We're always making sure we're here in the huddle -- sorry.

AALIYAH MOORE: She's a little sick.

DEYONA GASTON: Sorry. My bad, Coach. Yeah, just making sure we're together the whole game.

MADISON BOOKER: Yeah, that third quarter, I think we just came out with a lot of fire. The first five minutes, I think we just got in and stayed focused the entire five minutes, and it carried throughout the rest of the game.

Q. Aaliyah and DeYona, you guys owned the paint. You won the big girl stats, rebounds, 11 blocks. How important was that for you all to establish that kind of physicality inside against a really good team?

AALIYAH MOORE: Coach gave me the challenge of guarding No. 3, Barker, and she's tough. She's a great player. I got better tonight just guarding her. But it took my team around me to help me guard her.

But I think I took it personally, and I put it upon myself to be the best that I could on the defensive end tonight for my team.

DEYONA GASTON: Before the game, Coach was telling us that we have to be tough because this is an SEC team, and we are going to there next year. So we have to make sure we're tough and make sure we're ready for all these SEC teams.

Q. Madison, you and Aaliyah both combined for 42 tonight out of the 65. What was it like tonight to be able to just kind of play in front of that big of a crowd and have a really good performance in front of Kevin Durant?

MADISON BOOKER: It feels good. The fans, they definitely -- I love playing in front of our fans. They just bring a lot of energy every night they come out. Also, I guess I performed good today too.

Then Kevin Durant showed up, so I mean that was nice. He can give us some lessons too, if he hears this.

Q. I guess for DeYona and Aaliyah, maybe you can put it into more context, what it probably meant to have Kevin Durant sitting right behind your bench, especially with Maddie wearing No. 35 and whatnot. Can you all just talk about that?

AALIYAH MOORE: No, it's pretty cool. I don't think I noticed he was here until before halftime. Then I turned around and I was like, oh, hey, K.D. It was cool, I appreciate him coming out. We appreciate the support. We always appreciate the shoes and everything else, wink, wink. I'm playing, but no, it means a lot.

Women's basketball is growing, and to have support from an NBA player, someone of his status, it really does mean a lot. Hope he keeps coming out to support and watch, but we appreciate it a lot.

DEYONA GASTON: Same thing. We do appreciate it. I didn't even realize he was here until the end of the game, but I really do appreciate him coming out.

Q. Aaliyah, can you talk about getting through this round after what happened last year and how much that was on your mind?

AALIYAH MOORE: Yeah, I think for me it's a little personal just because I wasn't able to play last year. I had to sit on the bench and watch that happen and watch my team not play to the best of their ability that I know that they could.

To see how hard we worked to get to this point and to see us actually executing, I'm so proud of them. I'm proud of Booker, Shay, Shaylee, every single one of them, the leadership on this team, the leadership from Booker being a freshman. We're gelling at the right time. There's still so much we have to work on. I know with this group we're going to put our head down and do it.

I'm excited, four more man. I believe in this team, so I'm really excited.

Q. DeYona, this is women's history month. Do you guys as a team ever think about the impact that you have on women's sports, on women just in general? Yeah, will you talk about that a little.

DEYONA GASTON: Yes. We've been always together as women. Yeah, it's so important to think about being a woman all the time, and we always have sisters around us every day. So it's really important to talk about that, not even just being a woman, but also in women's sports. It's really important.

THE MODERATOR: I want to thank the players again for joining us.

Now we're going to turn it over to Coach Schaefer for questions.

Q. Vic, you got after DeYona early, and you brought in Hattie, and then you brought in Amina, and those girls came in and played well. Carolyn Peck said that you're the only team in the country with that kind of depth inside. How big of a luxury is that for you?

VIC SCHAEFER: We talk about it all the time. You win with guard play, but you win championships with guard play and size. We've certainly been blessed with some depth.

D missed -- we gave her a perfect lob on that bounce play, she one-handed it -- she missed the rebound one-handing it, and missed a bunny. I thought Hattie came in and did a really good job defensively for us. When I put D back in, she was really good.

Sometimes you can probably have a little jitters, but it's nice to have that luxury and that depth with Taylor and D and Hattie at 5. And they all three bring something different to the table. I think that's what's really nice about them. Each of them's a little different. So we're really fortunate, as you said, to have that kind of depth at 5.

Q. These three players, their stats jumped off the

charts today. Can you talk about both Shay Holle and Shaylee Gonzales and their impact? They only had 5 points, but what was their impact on the game?

VIC SCHAEFER: It's been this way all year, y'all. We won a ton of games with them going -- they went combined today 2 for 12. It's not the first time it's happened. But they lock up everybody that we throw at them defensively. They take great pride in that.

You look at Shaylee had three steals, two assists. Shay had three assists and one steal. But they fill up a stat sheet in a different way, and they get to the free throw -- Shay got to the free-throw line. This isn't the first time. Those kids just -- they help you win a different way. I don't have to worry if they're not scoring or they're not -- neither one of them are selfish. They're always going to do what the team needs to do.

Those two are so special, y'all. You have no idea how incredibly special those two are and what they meant to this team. I've never seen anything like it. I'm just telling you. When Rori went down, we went from being pretty athletic on the perimeter to not being very athletic, but you'd better not tell those two because they don't play that way. We didn't change how we play. We might not press, but we're still playing the same way we wanted to play. Those two just elevated their game.

You have to really tip your hat to those kids. Those two kids are nothing but winners. They're so tough. They're competitive. They're smart. I've learned a lot coaching those two, I can tell you. I'm really honored to have them on my team.

Q. You talk about the defense, and as a defensive coach, what were your impressions, the impact that Moore had running down that guard to block the shot? It would have cut the lead to six.

VIC SCHAEFER: We talked about before the game, you're playing against a really tough, physical, aggressive team that's very athletic, and that's the SEC. So you'd better play that way, and that was my challenge to them. You'd better play athletic. You'd better play in the air. You'd better block shots, alter shots, but you'd better play that way because that's the kind of team you're going against.

I thought our kids did that. I thought we contested -- I don't know how many jump shots we contested, got our hands on some. Some we didn't. How many blocked shots? We had 11 blocked shots, y'all. That's pretty good. But I'll bet we contested another 11.

Again, you have to give those guards credit. They're



contesting, but A. Mo drew the tough straw guarding Barker, who's an first-team all SEC player and holds her to 7 for 19. Nye, who I think is the key to their team, goes 6 for 18. That was Shay's assignment. Other than coming off of her in the corner twice, did an unbelievable job.

Again, those kids are helping us win in another way. Shaylee took the point guard, and we really did a good job there. I just, again, the athleticism of our kids is pretty good. A. Mo did a great job for us tonight. She was the difference. I talked to them at halftime. A. Mo's playing well. We've got to get A. Mo the ball. It was a big advantage for us, I thought.

Q. Vic, can you talk about what it meant to have Durant right behind your bench, especially to Maddie, who wears No. 35?

VIC SCHAEFER: Well, they'd told me he was coming. Last year this second game, we had quite a few people here, celebs. So when I found that out, I thought, okay, great, here we go because we didn't play well last year with everybody in the arena.

Just really appreciate him being here. Think about it, y'all. That guy could be anywhere. It's his day off. He's in the grind of his year, and he chooses to come here and support our kids. That says a lot about an individual like that.

Our kids, they know -- I didn't know he was behind my bench. I just knew he was going to be in the building. But our kids so much, they were -- once they realized it, I'm sure they were a little jacked up about it. Obviously Booker played pretty well wearing his number. Hopefully by the time she leaves here, it will be her number too.

Q. You talked about you wanted to see that edge and can you talk about that and avenging last year's round of 32?

VIC SCHAEFER: Again, everybody wants to bring up last year and a different team. We were so wounded and so hurt. We just didn't have any depth at all. We just were a different team. By the way, we got beat by a pretty good team.

But this year, again, with this team, I've just tried to convey to them you've got to keep an edge. We go through it all year. Everybody wants to beat Texas. They see that on your chest now you're Texas and you're a No. 1 seed. And if you can't handle that and if that's something that you cannot and are not prepared to deal with, it's going to be hard. It's going to be hard.

You know what, if you can't do that, you might need to find another place to play because it ain't going to change, and that's just who we are. Again, I think our kids embraced it. I think they embrace the fact that this is where they are, this is who we are. They've done it all year long. And I thought we had that edge today.

Again, how can you not have an edge? How can you not be motivated with that crowd out there? Really, incredible. How can you not be motivated when you've got such an incredible basketball player, incredible person like K.D. in the stands that takes time out of his busy life to come sit and watch your kids play. I mean, how can you not appreciate that?

I appreciate him doing that. Again, he's got a heck of a schedule. Then all those fans, I can't say thank you enough to everybody out there that came to the game, to Coach Huff for his buying the students tickets. But that was a great atmosphere for women's college basketball. You know what, that was a great atmosphere for a basketball game period.

It just really -- again, I'm awfully proud of our kids because they gave them something to holler about today.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you so much for your time. Congratulations again. Best of luck to you in Portland.

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