

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 1 Semifinal - LSU vs NC State

Friday, March 28, 2025

Spokane, Washington, USA

Spokane Arena

NC State Wolfpack

Wes Moore

Madison Hayes

Aziaha James

Saniya Rivers

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

LSU - 80, NC State - 73

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

WES MOORE: Yeah, just tip your hat to LSU and Coach Mulkey. Same problem we had back with them in November. We just couldn't keep 'em off the boards. Morrow, in particular, we knew she was going to be a handful, and she was. And we just had a hard time, like I said, guarding her down there, keeping her off the glass. And then even Smith had an unbelievable day as well. We've got two freshmen playing the post position, and they had -- Smith really, you know, had a great game as well.

So, yeah, I mean, it's disappointing. These young ladies led us to the Final Four a year ago, and so it's hard when your expectations and all are really lofty. But at the same time it doesn't diminish what they accomplished this year. Again, I've said it several times. We started the year 4-3, and then we went 24-3 before we got here. So it's pretty amazing the turnaround they were able to make happen. And all they have done not only this year, but Madison four years, Aziaha, four years, and Saniya three years have represented this program unbelievably, both on the court and off.

So couldn't be prouder of 'em. Love 'em. We're going to miss 'em. We're still trying to get an attorney and see if we can get fifth years for 'em, but, yeah.



THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. I don't really want to focus on the sad, but for you guys, it is your last game for NC State. Wondering how you are feeling after this game and maybe what you're going to take away from your time at NC State into whatever you do in the future.

AZIAHA JAMES: (Laughing). Oh, man, just I guess narrow it down, I think I've learned patience. Playing for Coach Moore is not easy, but -- it's not an easy task.

WES MOORE: Next question (laughing).

AZIAHA JAMES: No, this is my chance. I'm just kidding.

But no, playing for him isn't easy, but it's only because he cares, especially when he has high standards and high expectations that we set. Like, he mentioned, we went to Final four last year, and we had an opportunity to lead a team there. And he knows that, so he expected that from us this year, of course. And even though we didn't get there, this game doesn't define our season. We had a great season. We're undefeated at home. Lost to some tough teams, but I really think we held our own, especially having freshmen, just bringing them along. It was tough, but they gave us all they could. They were ready when their numbers were called.

And for all of us, hopefully, we're going to the WNBA. That's the next chapter for us, so we're not done yet. It's time to retire these jerseys, but, you know, one day we have to grow up and move on. But I wouldn't want to play with anybody else, play for anybody else, and I know he said three years, so I'm just glad he gave me a second chance to come in to play for this university.

SANIYA RIVERS: Just like she said, I been here for four years and since freshman year, Coach Moore pushed me. I became a sponge my freshman year. I soaked up all information from all my upperclassmen, which made me the person who I am today. It sucks that that was my last game, but like she said, I wouldn't pick any group of girls to play with or another coach to play with.

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So I'm glad I stayed here for all my four years. I'm glad I grew as a person, as a woman. I love these girls, and we're league-bound, and I can't wait to see what's going to happen next.

MADISON HAYES: I'm just kind of glad that he gave me that second chance as well. I didn't start here, but I'm just really glad he gave me that second chance to be a part of this culture, a part of this program with these special girls, special coaching staff. So I just love everybody, and I wouldn't want to play for any other team in the nation. And I love these girls as well, and I can't wait to see all of us in the league somewhere (laughing).

Q. Madison and Saniya, it seemed like Kim Mulkey had some extended words for you in the handshake lane, and she mentioned she's been through a lot of those and knows how difficult a situation it is. What did it mean to you to hear that from her?

SANIYA RIVERS: Obviously, I looked into going to LSU my first go around and also when I looked in -- I mean, when I entered the transfer portal. A lot of respect for Coach Kim Mulkey. She's been great to me. She tried to give me a second opportunity as well. In the handshake line, she said she loved watching me play and she was proud of me, and it just made me happy to hear.

And like you said, they played. That's a tough coach, that's a tough program. They did what they had to do tonight and yeah, I don't know, yeah, it's a respect between us too, a mutual respect.

MADISON HAYES: She just basically said that somebody's got to lose and it's hard to go through that moment. I mean, obviously, I was emotional just thinking of everything, not even just the bad stuff, but good stuff that I'll leave here. But that's all she pretty much said. And much respect for her. She's one of the best college coaches in the nation for a reason, and she's here for a reason and her team is, so congrats to them.

Q. Aziaha, it feels like there's still such a positive vibe around this team right now. So much smiles and good energy. What does that say about this team's culture and how you guys have gelled together throughout this season and your careers at NC State?

AZIAHA JAMES: Yeah, it says a lot. It says the strength we have, no matter lose or win, we're still sticking together. In the locker room, Saniya told us to keep our heads up and that win -- I mean, that loss hurt. It doesn't matter. It doesn't define us, it doesn't define our season. We worked so hard since the summer and just because a loss, it don't

take away what we did all year.

Q. Your two leading scorer's tonight were a sophomore and freshman. Obviously, you're not going to be with the program anymore, but looking at those performances, what do you think that says about the future of this program and what Wolfpack fans can look forward to?

AZIAHA JAMES: Yeah, I think us leaving is big shoes to fill, but the way they played tonight and the way they played all season, they're definitely not going to have a problem filling those shoes. I think they have to be a little more vocal, obviously, being leaders when we leave, because we're very vocal, all three of us. So, I think that's all they're really going to have to focus on. They're smaller, so I think they just have to lock in on the defensive side, rebounding, all aspects, keeping the margin of error slim. And I just hope they know they can always reach out to us at any time, even though we'll be going on with our lives, they just know that we're a call away and really care for them. They had an amazing game tonight. Zam literally, as soon as she came in, I was like, Okay, this is the time to be Zam Jones. If there was no other time you had this season, this is the time. Next thing you know, back to back threes, and-one, whatever the case may be. And I was like, Show us that energy. And she flipped the script for us tonight.

Zoe was just being Zoe, the Zoe she's been all season. I definitely think she's been more aggressive as far as scoring and looking for her shot this season and she definitely showed tonight as well.

SANIYA RIVERS: Definitely just to piggyback off that one, Maddie Cox, she came in here and busted down two threes, she was handling the paint with Morrow, and that's hard to do. Ups to Maddie, she was being really strong tonight.

And like she says, Zam came in here and knocking down those threes and giving us the energy in the second quarter. So we love them for that and we can't wait to see what they can do next year.

MADISON HAYES: I agree with all of them. That's it. (Laughing).

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the student-athletes and direct questions to Coach.

Q. What do those three girls just mean to you and your program?

WES MOORE: Yeah, like I said, it's not, I mean, obviously



they won a whole lot of games, and Aziaha, Madison, they were part of an Elite 8, a Final Four, and now a Sweet 16. Saniya, Final Four here, and then tonight. So obviously they made an unbelievable impact on the court as far as our ability to win, and won an ACC regular season championship this year, so a lot of great accomplishments. But just off the court, too. I mean they're unbelievable, interacting with our fans and with kids and just, they represent our program, they're ambassadors for our program in an unbelievable way. So, very blessed, it makes the journey a lot more fun when you have players and people like that.

Q. Partially this same question that I asked your players about your young players performing today in Zoe Brooks and Zam Jones, but also you knew that your very young post players going up against Aneesah Morrow was going to be a difficult task. How would you sort of think about the performance that your young players put on in this game?

WES MOORE: Yeah, I mean, again, we don't want to base too much on one game. I think Zoe's been unbelievable all year. Zamareya has been great, and as a freshman this year she had a dislocated thumb or whatever on her shooting hand in the middle of the season, and it really hampered her a good while. But obviously those two are very talented, I agree, Maddie Cox had a great day today. We got several freshmen, of course the two post players, Tilda and Lorena, it was a rough day for them today, it's tough matchup. Like I said, Smith had an unbelievable game today, a double double. They just, again, were, we knew coming in that was going to be the key to the game, keeping them off the boards, and we still couldn't do it. So, but, yeah, it's tough right now seeing them walk out the door, it's a lot of talent, but it's happened, we've done it before. And culture doesn't graduate. So hopefully we can keep it going.

Q. You sort of mentioned this with Sa'Myah and everything, but what does it say about LSU that a night where Flau'Jae doesn't really have it going offensively that Morrow can kind of carry them for three and a half quarters, and then Mikayla Williams and Smith can make good plays down the stretch?

WES MOORE: Yeah, they got the big three. And again, not all three of 'em are going to be clicking every night, but when you got three that are that talented, somebody's going to pick up the slack. And like I said, Smith had a great game stepping in there for 'em, giving 'em that third scorer tonight. But Morrow is just, you know, she's a dog. We just didn't have an answer for her. We were trying to get around and front her some, we were trying to double her some. But the problem was it was a lot of it was off

offensive rebounds and just being aggressive down there. Like I said, she had 19 rebounds, 30 points. I mean, there's your game right there. I think they scored 22 second-chance points, we had 11. So that's 11 points right there. So, I mean, again, that's a big swing in the outcome.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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