

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 3 Semifinal - NC State vs Texas

Friday, March 29, 2024

Portland, Oregon, USA

Moda Center

NC State Wolfpack
Coach Wes Moore
Saniya Rivers
Aziaha James

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

NC State 77, Stanford 67

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by NC State.

Coach, congratulations on the win. Open with your opening statement.

WES MOORE: Yeah, just obviously really proud of these young ladies. Down 10 at halftime, we were in some foul trouble. They just came out in the third quarter. I think we outscored them, what, 25 to 10 maybe. Oh, wow, 28 to 10. Just really turned the game around. Great defense.

Of course, Aziaha was really clicking on the offensive end. Kept going to her. She kept making big shots. Saniya running the show, handling the ball, again making plays on both ends of the floor.

Really proud of the whole team. A great win against a Stanford team, and a Tara VanDerveer coach that I have great respect for, that's obviously one of the legends in our game.

Anytime you can get a win against them, it's special. Really proud of 'em.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Aziaha, what was it that you saw in the third quarter defensively that changed or did you just feel momentum?

AZIAHA JAMES: Definitely we felt momentum. We kept coming in a huddle and just saying just keep your head up,



keep going, don't worry about our missed shots, foul calls, just keep going, just play our game. I think we handled that very well.

Q. How much momentum were you feeling off of their foul trouble?

SANIYA RIVERS: I think watching their game against Iowa State, we knew that it was possible to get their bigs in foul trouble. Coming in we knew we needed to attack their bigs. Once we saw we got her out of there and Kiki in foul trouble, it definitely gave us some momentum.

Q. Saniya, when you took Stanford off the dribble, the great one-on-one play at the end of the third quarter, I thought I've been waiting for the NC State to do this all game. Did you feel like you were also waiting to do that, you maybe remembered how good you are?

SANIYA RIVERS: I mean, it definitely clicked (smiling). I saw it was going down. He called a play for me, six seconds left. I saw I had an opportunity. First half he called it again. It was so cluttered down there, I lost a little bit of confidence.

Going into that one, I knew I was going to score it. I knew my teammates were confident in me. They spread the floor. I just went in confident.

Q. Was there a moment this season where it really set in for you that you guys could be capable of getting to this level, especially after starting unranked in the season... When did it really dawn on you?

SANIYA RIVERS: When we beat UConn for me. I felt really confident after that game. We came into the season with a chip on our shoulder. We weren't ranked at all. For UConn to come into our place, our fans were there, we beat them on our home court. It gave me a lot of confidence in this team.

I don't know when it clicked for you.

AZIAHA JAMES: I'd say when we went to the Virgin Islands. Three games back to back, I think our team



handled those three games very well. Against Colorado, we did our job.

SANIYA RIVERS: For sure.

Q. You've both talked this season about how you're a player-led team. How important is that when adversity hits like it did in the first half today?

SANIYA RIVERS: I didn't quite hear the second part. Sorry.

Q. How important is it to have a player-led team when adversity hits like it did tonight?

SANIYA RIVERS: It's really important, especially in tight games like that one. Sometimes it's hard to hear Coach Moore. It's loud in there. Sometimes we just have to take it upon ourselves to call a play or calm each other down. I think we do a really good job at that. We definitely did a good job with it tonight. We've done a good job with it all season long.

Q. Your men won too again. Are you going to make some sort of plea to TV execs so your games don't tip off at the same time?

SANIYA RIVERS: That would be nice.

AZIAHA JAMES: I think it was good they had it at the same time. Back at home, they had both TVs up. The whole Hillsborough is packed right now, the Belltower. Our Belltower lights up red. So many fans are out there cheering us on. It feels good to have both of our teams win at the same time.

SANIYA RIVERS: We watched the highlights here (laughter).

Q. Obviously Stanford is the West Coast team. Cameron Brink, their star, lives 20 minutes away from here. Did today feel like a true road game for you?

SANIYA RIVERS: I think we always know NC State fans are going to be in the building. That shows their loyalty. They're not just our fans, they're friends, our family. They're always going to show up across the country. There's always going to be a couple Wolfpack red fans in there, so...

Q. Aziaha, when you pulled up for the logo three, most people in their lives will never shoot like that, what is going through your head?

AZIAHA JAMES: I practice that all the time in practice, see

me practice it in warm-up. Being game ready. The time came this game.

SANIYA RIVERS: I knew she was going to hit that. I knew it (smiling).

Q. Aziaha, do you know what's the most amount of points you've ever scored in a half?

AZIAHA JAMES: I want to say 17 against Virginia Tech. I'm not sure. Something. I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

SANIYA RIVERS: A game where you didn't have any points in the second half? That was recent. What game was that? You finished with like 20 something.

AZIAHA JAMES: Yeah. I don't know.

SANIYA RIVERS: There was a couple of 'em.

AZIAHA JAMES: Yeah, there was a couple of 'em.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much for your time. Congratulations. We'll continue with questions for Coach Moore.

Q. Getting Brink and Iriafe in foul trouble, how much can you game plan that? How much is it circumstances falling your way?

WES MOORE: Don't forget, we were in foul trouble the first half ourselves. That probably contributed us to having a 10-point deficit at halftime with River Baldwin and Mimi Collins both sitting with two fouls.

Again, we were fortunate. We were able to attack some off the bounce. Especially Aziaha was able to go off the bounce and make their posts have to help, get them involved. That always helps.

She hit 10 out of 11 free throws. That was big as well.

Yeah, I mean, we watched enough film, we knew she was a very physical player. Talking about Cameron Brink. We knew that was a possibility, if you could maybe get her involved in some pick on the ball, some attacks off the dribble by her guards. We were fortunate that it worked out that way.

Q. The gym felt really dead for stretches. Did you feel that? I know you were in foul trouble. Things were kind of blah. Did you feel that lack of energy? Did you try to get them to ignore that?

WES MOORE: Well, I mean, you're talking about us, we

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

were blah? They?

Q. (No microphone.)

WES MOORE: Yeah, I mean, that's the thing. We traveled all the way across the country. We can only bring so many.

I was talking with Tara and Geno both. That's part of the problem they have with the new format of only having two locations. You have a lot of teams traveling all the way across the country. That's hard for their fans, family to get there. It probably does hurt the environment some.

I thought it got real nice and rowdy in the second half. I mean...

Q. What was the halftime message? Was it more of an emphasis to try to get Brink and Iriafen out on the perimeter in the third quarter?

WES MOORE: I'm not that smart. It was more about, Hey, we're down 10, we've been there. We know a few possessions we'll be right back in it. Obviously we've got to go out and get some stops, get downhill, attack mode, try to get to the rim. I thought they did a great job of that.

But it wasn't really anything. I'm probably not the most rah-rah coach in the world. I just made it clear, Hey, we've been here before, it's halftime, we got plenty of time. We have people that are in foul trouble, they're rested, they're ready to go.

Again, let's get a few stops a few buckets, we're right there again.

Q. You've talked previously about how much the loss to UConn in the Elite 8 hurt. How much does it mean to you personally to be back only this stage?

WES MOORE: Okay, yeah, what he's referring to, a few years ago we were in the Elite 8 and we lost in double overtime to UConn to go to the Final Four.

Yeah, it's great to have another opportunity. You don't always get those. So obviously we're excited to maybe get a second chance here. We know it's going to be whoever we play. At this point it's going to be somebody really, really good. We're going to have to play really well.

It's definitely nice to get a second shot at it. As a coach, this is your goal from the first practice, to try to get to the Final Four and see what you can do there.

It's nice to be in this position, but we still got work to do,

obviously.

Q. Was there a moment for you where it dawned on you that this team could be capable of getting the program back to its second Elite 8 in three years and maybe even further?

WES MOORE: Yeah, I don't know if I dreamed that big. When you beat Connecticut, let's face it, they're one of the elite programs in the country. We beat them. Then as was mentioned, The Virgin Islands was probably one of the best trips I've ever been on. We just had a great time over there, great energy. We had River Baldwin, kind of her coming out party. She was the MVP over there. When you have River Baldwin playing at a high level, Mimi Collins playing well, you have these guards here doing what they do, you know you can be pretty special.

Like I said, I don't know if I ever looked this far ahead. As a coach, you're just preparing next game, the process, all that. You don't get caught up in too much.

But definitely it's exciting to be here. These players are amazing. What they've done... They're just so close. I think that's been a big part of our success. The chemistry, the culture. They genuinely care about each other, pull for each other to do well.

I see people over there that didn't get to play as much, whatever. They're just as excited and happy for the team. That's pretty awesome.

Q. Are you ever surprised at what Ziah-Ziah can do?

WES MOORE: She was pretty special tonight. We got where we were just running for her. Every possession down, let's try it again, get the post involved so we'll set a pick on the ball, make the post have to maybe help, switch, whatever.

Yeah, when you realize the player is on a roll like that. For instance, the shot she hit from the logo or whatever, you just have to keep going to her. That's what we did.

It wasn't anything great, draw-up play. It's let's get it in her hands, a two-man game with somebody, here we go.

Q. Lizzy scored for the first time since February 11th. What can you say about her stepping up when her name was called today?

WES MOORE: Yeah, you always tell players, You got to stay ready. You never know. With our foul trouble, with River and Mimi both in foul trouble there in the first half, we had to have some length to try to match up a little bit.



Threw her into a tough situation. Her and Maddie Cox both had to go in there and kind of put a finger in the dike, whatever, to keep it from going over us.

Yeah, Lizzy, I reminded her before the Tennessee game, I told her, You got to be ready 'cause we may have to have that length at some point.

Yeah, she did a good job, held it together.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

WES MOORE: Thank you. Thanks for being here.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports