

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Four - Auburn vs Arizona

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Storrs, Connecticut, USA

Gampel Pavilion

Auburn Tigers

Coach Johnnie Harris

Yakiya Milton

Taylen Collins

Media Conference

Arizona 69, Auburn 59

JOHNNIE HARRIS: Just really proud of this team for their resilience and toughness this year. I thought we battled a lot of adversity, but they continued to get better.

You know, I keep saying we had nine new pieces and it was a process getting those kids together, but they came in, bought into a vision, and played our style of play and worked their butts off to get here.

They continue to get better and better. Our future is really bright. It was really hard to say goodbye to those seniors who have meant so much and been so selfless in helping get this program back here.

But our future is really bright and I'm looking forward to it, and these two are a big part of that.

Q. I'm hoping you can both speak to Honesty, what she meant to the team, seeing her play these final minutes out there. What she has taught you?

TAYLEN COLLINS: Honesty was such a huge part of our program. A lot of the season she put us on her back, especially with how hard it was during the season.

We're so grateful for her and the things she's done for us. She completely laid everything out from start to finish on our season.

She's taught us how to play selflessly and how to leave everything out on the court, no matter the circumstances.



I feel like that's something that each and every one of us can continue to carry that with us through the rest of our careers.

YAKIYA MILTON: She was just a great person overall. On and off the court she was a leader, with her words and without them. Just what she did on the court, it just fed the whole team. We feed off her energy every day and continue to do that now.

She was just coming to me talking to me in my ear the whole time. Whether it was coaches saying something, if it wasn't them it was her. She was always in my ear telling me about not to swat and balling up and working on my defense, moving my feet.

She talked to me about everything. It was great to have her as an additional player on the team.

Q. Taylen, just talk about Arizona's defense a little bit. Coach said earlier this week that she felt like they kind of mirrored you guys. Did you guys kind of feel like, man, this is what we put teams through on any given night going against them tonight? What did that pressure do to disrupt your offense?

TAYLEN COLLINS: Yeah, definitely made it harder to run our offense. They played up the line, in the passing lanes. It definitely made it harder for us to get those first options.

Yeah, definitely similar to ours and what we do.

Q. Yakiya, you had some big blocks tonight. Tell me what's going through your head when you have these big moments like that?

YAKIYA MILTON: I didn't hear the end of the question.

Q. Do you want me to repeat it?

YAKIYA MILTON: Yes, please.

Q. You had some big blocks tonight. What's going through your head when you get those moments and how has that changed the momentum?



YAKIYA MILTON: Just trying to be patient and do what's best in the moment for my team. If it's clean, I know I can get up and get it, and that's just going to bring energy to my team, because they like when do you that, and I like when I do. It's my favorite thing to do.

Other than that, just trying to wall up and contest with the smaller guards because I know I can get into foul trouble early. Just trying to make the smart play and do what's best for my team.

Q. Taylen, first, were you aware that you scored your 1000th career point tonight?

TAYLEN COLLINS: No, I was not.

Q. You did. What does it mean to reach that milestone in the NCAA tournament?

TAYLEN COLLINS: I mean, that's great. It's like what you've been doing, what you've been working for all season long or all career long, all these four years.

So to hear that I made that milestone is amazing. It's a blessing.

Q. Yakiya, you scored a career high in your first NCAA tournament game, eight points. What does it mean -- first, what was the experience like playing in the NCAA tournament? What does it mean to have one of the best games in your career to this point in this tournament?

YAKIYA MILTON: To be honest, I wasn't even focused on myself. Like we got seniors on the team. I was just trying to do what I could do to play for them, as far as defensively and offensively.

So I give all the credit to them to the assists. They made the best passes to get me up and whatever it looks like, out there just playing as a team.

As my first time in the tournament I know it's not going to be my last. I'm ready to come back. I got a chip on my shoulder now. I'm just going to come back tougher next year.

Q. Yakiya, did you picture your freshmen year ending here, or getting to the NCAA tournament? Is that something you expected of yourself and this team?

YAKIYA MILTON: For sure. We always talked about it, so I knew we was going to get there. We spoke it into existence. Obviously expected to go further and we're

going to go further. Like I said, it's just the first step for me and for my teammates. We are going to carry that with us like I said. We are going to carry it with us every year. This is my first year and I'm going to remember this for the rest of my life. We got ya'll.

Q. Coach, I asked your players this, but what has Honesty meant to this program? I saw you give her a hug. You say anything to her at that point?

JOHNNIE HARRIS: Yeah. I mean, you know, just like they said, Honesty first of all, she came to me at the end of the season last year and she said she wanted to run this back. She wanted to make sure this team got back to the NCAA tournament.

She knew that that was a goal of mine, that that was a vision. She want to help do that. She had a chance to go to the next level last year. She loves Auburn. She loves this team. This program. She just really wanted to see -- wanted to be a part of helping Auburn get back to this level.

You know, like Taylen says, she put us on her back throughout the season. She takes a lot of hits out there. She's probably a little bit worn down, but she'll bounce back.

You know, she put us on her back. She means a lot. She absolutely loves Auburn and her name, I want to say she moved to tenth all-time in scoring in Auburn's history and Auburn's had some Final Four teams, some national runner-up teams, they have some really good players.

And she is one of them.

Q. Coach, you told me at the SEC tournament, Honesty said in past years there hasn't been as much buy-in from this team. This year you had a convo early in the season of like we're going to make this happen, we are going to go to the tournament. Can you confirm that conversation and also what role did she play in motivating the team?

JOHNNIE HARRIS: Absolutely. It started with the post season. We had several players to leave, but Honesty wanted to -- she really want to stay and make a difference with this team and with this program.

And she just told me she was going to bring everything she could. Like I said it started with those kids that stayed. They went to work. Then they -- when the new kids came in, they showed them the way.

And they were all connected. They were bought in. It just

-- you know, it just continued to get better and better throughout the year.

Q. Coach, just to echo the one I asked the players, you knew that this Arizona team was going to throw some junk at you defensively and kind of run things similar to how you guys like to. What did they do on the defensive end and obviously the turnovers were a little uncharacteristic for you guys tonight?

JOHNNIE HARRIS: Yeah, I thought they sped us up. We had a lot of very unforced turnovers. We worked on attacking the hedge, and when we did attack the hedge we got a foul or we would get to the free throw line.

But we were coming off with one dribble trying to throw it to the roll on the first side, and that wasn't working. We wanted to flip the floor and then attack the hedge.

I think they get us sped up and caused some unforced turnovers. Some of them were forced. They were up in the passing lane. They were up in us.

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