

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Arkansas State vs UConn

Friday, March 21, 2025

Storrs, Connecticut, USA

Gampel Pavilion

Arkansas State Red Wolves

Destinee Rogers

Crislyn Rose

Kennedie Montue

Wynter Rogers

Media Conference



CRISLYN ROSE: Honestly, it was a good feeling. I felt like, like Wyn said, to watch all the hard work pay off from the beginning of the season until now, and to be able to punch a ticket in the tournament, that's huge, especially for our school to never have done it before.

So, I feel like it was a great experience, and at the end of the day, it was one basketball game for us, and that's how we treated it. And through the ups and downs through that game, it was still one possession at a time. That's how we played.

Q. What's it been like to play for Destinee on this team? How has it been? Is it amazing? Does she treat you just like everybody else?

WYNTER ROGERS: Yeah, I would say sometimes she even treats me a little harder than everybody else, which I'm cool with it. But it's just amazing just to be able to experience all this. The school being here for the first time with your sister, that's something special, and I'm just going to cherish this for the rest of my life.

Q. You talked about treating this like any other game. When you're a big underdog like you guys are in this game, what gives you confidence that you can come out and win this game?

WYNTER ROGERS: Just what we've done all season. We're a team of firsts, first team at our school to be here, first team to win a Sun Belt conference at our school. So we've just got to keep that trend going for this game and just keep pushing.

Q. Kennedie, with the long layoff since the James Madison game, it's been almost two weeks now, how do you refocus after that long layoff and get ready to go tomorrow against a top opponent?

KENNEDIE MONTUE: Just keep doing what we're doing, just play our game, do what we have to do, and this entire week, we just focus on being us and keep being us, and do what we do to win this game.

CRISLYN ROSE: I feel like coming back after being off

Q. For any of you guys, what does it mean to you to be appearing in your first NCAA Tournament? What has it meant being here and having the tournament experience for the last 24 hours or so?

KENNEDIE MONTUE: It's been exciting. We're ready to play, and we've just been working hard and just happy to be here, honestly, to be the first to do it.

WYNTER ROGERS: We've just worked so hard this whole season. We've had so many trials and tribulations, so many ups and downs, and to see it finally pay off in the end and finally being here, it just means the world to us.

Q. Wynter, what's it like facing a new opponent, especially one that has a lot of history in the tournament?

WYNTER ROGERS: It's actually exciting, like I said, just being here, because UConn is a historical program. But at the end of the day, we're just going to treat it like any other game. We can't let the names and the faces get to us. We've just got to go out there and play like we always play, and that's just our goal for this game.

Q. Crislyn, what was it like to get that -- what will you always remember from winning that tournament title to earn the first NCAA berth in history? You guys came back in that game. The team you were playing was undefeated in the conference. What was the feeling when you won that game?



after James Madison, we were right back, ready to go. I don't feel like we have no down slow coming into this game. I feel like we have great preparation this week, and definitely ready to play tomorrow.

DESTINEE ROGERS: What an opportunity we have in front of us. Obviously, we battled a lot of adversity throughout our season, and to see the things that our players went through and to be able to come out on top with a conference tournament championship meant the world to our team. If you would have told me we'd be here a year ago, I probably would have told you that you're crazy. That's just the faith that we have.

I'm thankful to God for the journey that we've been on, and tomorrow is going to be no different.

We've been faced with adversity our whole year. I think that the biggest battle that we have is you cannot be scared. You have to go into this with a ton of confidence and be confident in what you bring to the table, and so that's kind of our motto going into tomorrow's game.

But obviously, we understand this is a huge opportunity, and we're thankful to be here.

Q. Destinee, can you explain more about some of the adversity from this year, and also what does it mean to be coaching in the first NCAA Tournament in program history?

DESTINEE ROGERS: Well, the biggest thing was, we only had three players returning from last year's team, and so we had to go out and get a brand new team, and we also took a risk and completely changed the way that we play. So that's adversity within itself, just trying to figure it out throughout the year.

We knew it was going to be a process and even finishing our non-con schedule, we were 4-7 going into conference play, and we lose our first conference game, and we knew some things had to shift. That was probably the turning point for us of, hey, we've got to trust what we do, but we've got to do it at a higher level. So we changed up some things in practice to help us out with the way that we play, and that's when we went on our 13-conference winning streak.

I think for us, it's just been about overcoming, believing in what we do. You have to see success to believe in what you do. So once we started to see that success in our system, you just saw the belief and the buy-in go to a whole 'nother level, and that's why we were able to be so successful in our conference.

Q. I know you haven't been here long, but what is it like to be a part of the tournament experience for these last 24 hours or so, have the logos, see this building and everything? Have you had a pinch-me moment yet?

DESTINEE ROGERS: You know, I believed that we could do this from the beginning. As you get to know me a little bit better, you'll see that I'm a small-town kid from Arkansas that has a ton of faith. I believe in things when people think I'm crazy. I'll look at you and say, this team can achieve this, and you're going to look at me like I'm crazy, and this team will go do that. We've nicknamed this team the team of firsts because they have been the first to do a ton of things for us, and I think this is no different.

I think this journey that we're on is by design, and I'm a firm believer in my faith, so I believe this is the journey God put us on, and I choose to have faith in that because who I believe in is much bigger than all of this. I'm thankful to be here. So I wouldn't say I have a pinch-me moment. I feel like we deserve to be here, and we've earned the right to be here, and we're blessed and happy for the opportunity.

Q. What's it like for you to be here in this extraordinary moment with your sister on the team?

DESTINEE ROGERS: Oh, this is a moment that we've talked about since she decided to come to Arkansas State. She went to West Virginia out of high school. So when she entered the transfer portal, immediately she said, I want to come play for you, and I want to help you win a championship.

So when we got an opportunity to raise that trophy together and embrace each other and cry together, it just made it all worthwhile. She is a kid that is going to work her tail off every single day. So her name is Wynter, but I say she's a winner. She's going to do everything she can to impact winning. So we're super blessed to have her on our team.

Q. My question is: With the size of UConn, even their guards are near six feet or six feet, their bigs are well over six feet. How are you with the size mismatch? Are you prepared to handle what they do?

DESTINEE ROGERS: Big things come in small packages. So while we may be a lot smaller than them, we believe in what we do. That's half the battle. You have to believe 100 percent in who you are and what you bring to the table, and you cannot fear whoever is across that sideline from you. It doesn't matter.

What we've done has worked for us. And so, you can't walk into this game saying, hey, this is not going to work.



You have to believe that it will. So the advantage for us, I think, is our speed. We have to impose our pace on them. We have to impose our defensive pressure and try to rush them. Let's try to make them adjust to us, rather than us having to adjust to them.

Obviously, it's UConn; they're big. They're the best in the country at making elite reads. But we also believe that we're the best in the country at getting that three ball off. We're the No. 1 team in the country in making shots.

We have to do what we do, and we've just got to have a ton of confidence in that.

Q. With regard to you and Wynter, was that something -- I don't know what your age difference is, but was it something that you talked about when you were younger, like going to the NCAA Tournament or playing in college or coaching? Was that something that you had ever talked about before?

DESTINEE ROGERS: I'm 35, and she's 22, so no. When I talk about my faith, I'm not supposed to be here. I'm a kid from a small town, about 700 people. The big thing for me is, like I told you, what we're doing is a lot bigger than me. It's a lot bigger than this team.

For me, I hope to be an inspiration for kids in South Arkansas that usually don't make it out, that, hey, if this little kid can make it out, you can, too. I think that is a big-time story for us, and we've just always had belief that we can do anything.

So just coming from a small town, not having a ton, having to work for everything you do, that's who we are. So I don't know if you guys are aware, our brand is nets ain't free. What does that mean? If you want to climb a ladder and cut a net, you've got to understand that that net, it ain't free. I know that y'all from the north and I'm from the south, so I got a little slang in there. But that net that you want, it ain't free. You got to wake up every day with a purpose and understanding that whatever it is you want in life, you have to work extremely hard for it, and that is the identity of this team.

Q. Speaking of inspiration, I read that when you took the job, you had the net that Coach Staley snipped and sent to everyone, all the other Black coaches. Was that inspiring for you? Speaking of a pinch yourself, was that amazing to get that in the mail and did that help inspire you at all?

DESTINEE ROGERS: How blessed am I to get two moments where I could pinch myself? I grew up watching Sue Bird. Sue Bird is my favorite point guard of all time, so

getting the opportunity at the age of 35 to coach against the Geno Auriemma, that's a pinch-me moment. Having Dawn Staley send me a piece of her net, another pinch-me moment.

I think when we talked about her, the biggest thing for me was, as a young coach, seeing a Black woman head coach do the things that she's done, it gave me inspiration that I can do it, as well.

So that's a hats off to Carolyn Peck, to Dawn Staley, that they're the type of coaches that will reach down to pick others up.

Q. Speaking of pinch-me moments, I want to ask your thoughts on the contract extension. Just where this season -- the ups and downs, especially earlier in the year where there was some noise on the outside about you underachieving, and obviously, you got into conference season and completely turned it around and obviously were rewarded with the extension. Can you talk about what that means to you?

DESTINEE ROGERS: I think the biggest thing for me is when you hear that noise, I don't seek validation in people, opinions of others. When you say something good about me and my program or bad, I don't seek validation in that because I know that what we're doing is bigger than that.

But I couldn't be more proud to be the head coach of Arkansas State. We've got our AD back here in the back. He's supportive of us, Jeff Puritan. I believe in his vision for Arkansas State. I believe in Dr. Shields, Dr. Kelly, and for them to look at me and say, hey, Coach, we believe in you, it means the world to me. This is absolutely where I want to be, and this is the start of us building something really special.

Q. There's no team in the country that celebrates a three-hour flight delay. You guys seem to play better when you go through adversity on travel this year, which is a very unique storyline.

DESTINEE ROGERS: I'm going to ask y'all a question. How many coaches would you ask them, hey, would you celebrate a three-hour delay for your flight, and they would say yes? Not one, right? We were happy because we have not had one trip this year that has not had a flight delay, some type of bus breakdown, some type of travel delay. You name it, that's more adversity that we've been through.

When I got the call two minutes getting to the arena and they said, hey, you've got a three-hour flight delay, I jumped for joy because this is what this team has been



used to, and we just used it as something to loosen us up, laugh about it. But it's just another step in our way of just, hey, we've overcome this before.

I've got to give a lot of credit to our team. We were supposed to get here and practice at 5:00 yesterday, and we didn't get to our practice until about 8:15. We were in the gym until 10:00 last night, and not one player blinked. We had a really good practice.

That just speaks to the toughness of this team, and if you want to be a part of something special and do things that have never been done before, you've got to be tough, and this team is definitely tough.

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