

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Texas A&M vs Nebraska

Friday, March 22, 2024

Corvallis, Oregon, USA

Gill Coliseum

Texas A&M Aggies Coach Joni Taylor Aicha Coulibaly

Media Conference

Nebraska - 61, Texas A&M - 59

THE MODERATOR: Let's open it up with a statement from Coach Taylor followed by questions for the players.

JONI TAYLOR: Tough, tough game. Really, really proud of our team's fight to come back and take the lead, being down as much as we were.

We went into the halftime and into the third quarter. We've had a sense of resilience and fight all year long, and really proud of how we handled ourselves and came back in the game.

Obviously Nebraska is a really good, really good team. And when it came down to the end, they made more plays than we did.

But I don't want to lose sight of this step we made from year one to year two in our program. You're looking at a team who won two conference games last year, nine games total. And in year two, we're sitting here at the NCAA Tournament, which is one of our goals for our program.

And so I don't want how this game ended to overshadow the tremendous year that we had in year two of our program. We have our team returning with the exception of very few. And so I'm really, really excited about the future of our program.

But, again, hat's off to Nebraska. They made more plays than we did. They were really good tonight. We just didn't have enough time on the clock to win the game.

Q. A.C., just a dominant game in itself, especially in



the third quarter. Just what was working so well for you tonight.

AICHA COULIBALY: I feel like in the first half I wasn't really helping as much and my shot wasn't falling, and in the third and fourth my team trusted me and believed in me, and they were telling me to keep shooting the ball.

And I just had my confidence. I just kept shooting and do whatever I do best, and it was just working.

Q. What does it say about the resilience of this team to be able to battle back and down to the very last second?

KAY KAY GREEN: I think it goes back to Texas A&M. Aggies never die. And so we showed that tonight, and I'm very proud of us. Unfortunately we didn't get the win. But that's what we do.

Q. I know a lot of you guys are coming back. What does it say about the future of this program that you're able to get here in year two and possibilities are kind of endless in year three?

KAY KAY GREEN: We're in grand hands with Joni Taylor. Coach of the Year two years ago or three years ago, I'm not sure. But, you know, she does what she needs to do. She's a great coach. And she's going to lead this program and do well for us.

Q. Aicha, can you speak to what playing in Texas A&M has meant to you this year, and where you feel like you've grown as a player?

AICHA COULIBALY: It means a lot. Like Kay Kay say, I know coming here, I was going to be in great hands and just to be able to develop my game, being at the 3 position, and just keep adding onto my game.

And it's been a blessing. I can't really complain. And I'm just ready to work with Joni Taylor in whatever she tell me to do. I'm just here to help and do whatever it takes to make Texas A&M at the top.



THE MODERATOR: Thank you both for being here. You guys are good to go to the locker room.

Questions for Coach Taylor.

Q. Obviously had that huge run second half, came up a little bit short, but what was the message to the team going into the fourth quarter, going into the second half that kind of sparked that?

JONI TAYLOR: Well, if I'm hearing your question correctly, what is the message that we gave to our team going into the fourth quarter? Was that the question?

Our league prepares us really well for anything that we might see. There's been several times this year we were up, we were down. A team makes a run, we make a run.

And so a conversation during the timeout, anytime there's a dead ball, it's just we've been here before. We need to get a stop, we need to get a score. We need to get a stop, we need to get a score.

Because we play in such a difficult league, you're tested night in and night out, and you're constantly put in time and score situations, you're constantly put in situations where you had a lead and you lost it or you were down and had to try to fight your way back.

And so I think our team was really poised in that moment. We've been there before. We knew we could make a run. We trusted our defense and knew that we could get some stops.

Q. Coach, I know you talk a lot about how this team is new to winning. But knowing this experience that you guys got this year, what are you looking forward to in future years and where do you feel like this team can go?

JONI TAYLOR: I'm really excited about the future of Aggie women's basketball. We have the majority of our team returning. Last year it was learning how to play basketball, and this year it was learning how to win. And we did that well at times, and at times we did not.

The experience we gained this year in our wins and our losses, being able to come to the tournament in year two, it puts us in a really good position.

That locker room is really hurting right now, and I feel for them. But I'd rather see them hurting and be motivated to come back better than for them to have a lack of empathy or a lack of care.

And so this going to drive us. This is going to motivate us, give us some things to go work on in the offseason because we've gotten a taste of it.

And this team has never been here before. They've never been to the tournament. Even Kay Kay, Sahara, and M.J., they were freshmen, and they had a different role as freshmen than they did this year on our team.

And so I think this is going to motivate us. And, again, for us in year two, we're moving in the right direction.

Q. What was your message to the team after the game, and do you think that they appreciate what they've been able to accomplish in this past year?

JONI TAYLOR: My message after the game was how proud I was of their fight, how hard they fought, their resiliency, their toughness. We talked about being able to put four quarters together, not play just a half of basketball.

And that's our next step, is to play four quarters consistently, all the time.

The last thing I said to them was the same thing I said in here. I certainly hope that this one game and how we feel right now doesn't overshadow the tremendous step that we took from year one to year two.

With that being said, there is a standard and there is an expectation, and we're going to take some time off and let them rest their bodies and their minds. And then when it's time to get back to work, we're going to do that so that we can be in a better position next year to make a better run.

Q. Can you speak to Aicha tonight, the performance she put on and her ability to show up in these big moments, both tonight and in the last game? Massive.

JONI TAYLOR: Yeah. We talked a lot about obviously coming off of 32 against South Carolina in the tournament to let the game come to you, and I think that's where she's grown the most, is she doesn't try to force the issue, whereas she did maybe early on when she first came to us because she was so used to having to do that.

We've got people around her who can also score. And so I think her maturity and her growth has come not only in learning a new position -- you got to remember she's played the four. And so she's doing this playing a new position.

But that she just lets the game come to her. She rebounds it, she defends, she can shoot the three, she can get to the rim. So she now has a trust in her ability and her skill set

where she doesn't feel like she has to go out and touch it every single time and force the issue.

When things open up for her, she takes what the defense gives her. She's a great two-way player. And her time on the floor is just invaluable. She guards the best, our opponent's best player night in and night out, whether that's the guard or the forward. She rebounds the basketball. She's someone who's just really, really fun to watch.

Q. Endyia Rogers, it's her last game here in her college career. What has she meant to this program and where have you seen her grow in Texas?

JONI TAYLOR: We're so fortunate that Endy came to Texas A&M. She brought just a level of leadership from the point position that we did not have. And I think everybody on our team learned a lot from her.

I was extremely happy that she was able to play tonight given that she not even a month ago had surgery. And again, the way she rehabbed to get herself back, not only for the tournament but for this moment, I'm glad she was able to be a part of it.

I hate we couldn't close it out for her. Didn't want to see it end this way for her. And I think her future is going to be really, really bright at the next level because she, again, is someone who has a high basketball IQ. She scores three layers of the basketball, and she's got a toughness to her that a lot of people don't have.

I don't think the public realizes how much she went through to get herself back and to be able to play and do what she's done.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach Taylor.

JONI TAYLOR: Thank you.

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