

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Southern Jaguars vs UCLA

Friday, March 21, 2025

Los Angeles, California, USA

Pauley Pavilion

Southern Jaguars

Coach Carlos Funchess

Aniya Gourdine

DaKiyah Sanders

Media Conference

UCLA 84, Southern 46

CARLOS FUNCHESS: Well, I knew it was going to be a heavyweight battle. Their size was a major factor tonight. They did a great job rebounding the basketball. And they shot it exceptionally well, especially from three.

Against a team like this you have to pick your poison. Either you're going to try to stop them from scoring inside or you're going to have to give them some threes. So we tried to mix it up a little bit, tried to play some zone, but they were knocking down shots. So it was really tough to try to keep them off balance offensively.

I thought in this third quarter we just had some shots, but just never could get going. The size was a major factor contesting a lot of shots.

Q. For either of the players, it's raw right now, but you guys did achieve history for this program. What has it season meant to you guys to be on this stage?

ANIYA GOURDINE: It meant everything. I was everything. I wouldn't have wanted it with nobody else. We fought hard to the end and we knew it was going to be a tough game. We wanted to get this game but we came up short. I'm so proud of team what we was able to do and make history.

DAKIYAH SANDERS: As I previously stated in our first press conference this is my first year with Southern, and I just want to thank the coaching staff and the team for welcoming me and just allowing this to be the best experience for my last year of collegiate basketball.



Like Niya said I wouldn't want to do it with anyone else. So proud of the girls. Some of the best, strongest toughest girls I've ever played with.

Q. Tough draw to get a No. 1 seed, No. 1 seed overall. How far do you expect them to go? Are they as good as advertised?

ANIYA GOURDINE: They're a good team. Like Coach Funchess said, good inside and outside, so I think that will help them a lot. Betts is an exceptional player, so I think I they'll go pretty far.

DAKIYAH SANDERS: They're not No. 1 for no reason, so I just feel like if they have that seed they're capable to go as far as they worked for.

Q. Question for coach. Coach, beginning of the third quarter you guys were still within striking distance. Did you feel your team had a chance to make a run?

CARLOS FUNCHESS: Oh, yeah without a doubt. I thought if we knocked down a few shots we could continue to keep our confidence really, really high. We ran some good things execution-wise; just missed a few shots.

You know, they had something to do with that because that length. It's hard to shoot over 6'2"s and 6'3"s. They made everything tough. Everything we got tonight we had to earn.

Q. You guys had an 8-nothing run to close the second quarter. In the third you were limited to seven points. What was working in the second quarter and what changed coming out after halftime?

CARLOS FUNCHESS: I thought we hit shots. We got shots in the third quarter, but like the close of the second quarter we just missed some. Wasn't bad misses but they were misses.

You don't get many good looks against a team like this. They are really good defensive team, especially with 6'2"s and 6'3"s on that perimeter guarding you.



Q. You have mentioned it was a struggle defensively to stop them as well. Talk about what was your message to the team?

CARLOS FUNCHESS: Well, we had to play a physical game, and I thought we started out not really being as tough as we needed to. But we settled down a little bit in the second quarter. We kind of got into a flow on both ends of the court.

We were driving the basketball extremely hard to the basket and scored a few defensively. We were physical with them and boxing out strong and getting some O-boards.

Q. DaKiyah, you're 5'4" but UCLA also had a 5'4" player. I know you mentioned they had a size advantage. Londynn was out there. You went up against her a couple times. What was it like being out there with her and against her?

DAKIYAH SANDERS: I think she's a great player playing for a great team. It's great to see somebody my height that is at the level that she's, so I just commend her for that. I applaud her for being at UCLA.

And just playing-wise, great to play against her too. It's nice playing against somebody my size, so, yeah.

Q. For student-athletes, what does it mean for your team to represent HBCUs at the NCAA tournament?

ANIYA GOURDINE: It means everything. I think a lot of people underestimate HBCUs. They don't really believe we belong here. I think it was huge for us to go and get that big win, which is why we wanted the UCLA game so bad. It's huge for HBCUs. I think we shined the light; Norfolk State shining the light. I think it's good putting us on the bracket for all the little girls that might want to go to HBCUs. I think it's huge.

Q. Hey, Niya and DaKiyah, this is to you all.

DAKIYAH SANDERS: Hey.

ANIYA GOURDINE: Hey.

Q. Can each of you share one or two non-basketball memories you'll take away from this experience? Was there like a police escort at the hotel, something at the hotel or in LA or something like that that really enhanced your NCAA experience?

ANIYA GOURDINE: You go first.

DAKIYAH SANDERS: I'm not sure if a lot of you know, but my fiance plays for Alabama State, who made it to the -- past their first round as well. So I think that was pretty big, because we got a lot of like recognition for that.

I'm also very proud of them too, because he also goes to a HBCU.

ANIYA GOURDINE: I would say just the full experience. This is my first time. It's everything I ever dreamed of, so I think just the experience alone. I always wanted this moment, so I'm just grateful for the experience.

DAKIYAH SANDERS: And the atmosphere is crazy. Just being in the atmosphere is crazy.

Q. DaKiyah, what were the conversations like with you and your fiance just throughout the week? Obviously played on different days so had an opportunity to probably watch each other's games and chat. What were some of those conversations like?

CARLOS FUNCHESS: A lot of FaceTime.

DAKIYAH SANDERS: Yeah, it was a lot of FaceTime and just really staying locked in, taking this moment for what it is, taking it as far as we could for as long as we could.

You know, just continuously tell him to play his game and do the best he can for his team and bring whatever he needed to bring, and me with mine.

CARLOS FUNCHESS: I'm just so proud of these young ladies. They started on June the 3rd getting ready for this moment, trying to get here. All the work they put in paid off. And they're not just exceptional young ladies on the basketball court. I mean, DK is in grad school right now. Niya will be graduating this summer. Over the last seven years we've had 27 seniors; all 27 have graduated; we have a 100% graduation rate.

Traveling a lot with the rigors of basketball, maintaining those academics -- this semester we had a 3.0. I mean, it's really tough.

So they have about done a great job on and off the court.

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