

# Mountain West Women's Basketball Championship

Monday, March 10, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

**Wyoming Cowgirls**

**Coach Heather Ezell**

**Malene Pedersen**

**Allyson Fertig**

**Emily Mellema**

Postgame Press Conference



**Q. Malene, the shots really started falling for you in the third quarter. You kind of spearheaded that run to get back in the game. Just what was working for you? Take me through those couple runs.**

MALENE PEDERSEN: I think starting from the halftime that we emphasized that our shots are going to fall. We've got to be more confident in our shot and just be ready to make those plays.

I think I got the passes delivered on time and on target. And I think it was shots were just finally falling. And it built up our confidence and momentum for the rest of the second half.

**Q. Emily, 9-of-10 in the third quarter. That totally changed the game. Was it just an adjustment with the way they had to guard the interior that you guys realized that the outside would be open? Or is there any explanation for hitting at that kind of a clip?**

EMILY MELLEMA: I think it's a testament to the experience of our team. We talked about leaving the first half behind and knowing our shots would fall in the second half.

The confidence that I think the girls that are on the court have we're thinking every single one is in. And that helps us a lot and I think a lot fall when you're thinking like that.

Just a testament to the confidence we had. It wasn't so much what they changed; it was just knowing we had the confidence to make the shots in the second half.

**Q. A lot of people talk about beating a team three times, how difficult it is, especially with a scrappy opponent like that. How difficult was this challenge just preparing for and playing those 40 minutes?**

EMILY MELLEMA: I think that's two teams that are playing their best basketball in March. That's what you want in the tournament is two really good teams going at it. We've had some really great contests against Air Force this year.

Wyoming - 77, Air Force - 64

HEATHER EZELL: First off, credit to Air Force. Gave us a really good fight. Obviously came out in the first half, I think our nerves, just being the first game, had to kind of get those off our shoulders. And came out in the second half, thought we executed both offensively and defensively. And we were able to find the open people, knock it down and come away with a victory.

**Q. 60 percent shooting on the night. That's a conference tournament record. Was it just that kind of night?**

ALLYSON FERTIG: We were just talking about that in the hallway. The first half, we couldn't -- seemed like we couldn't make anything. We talked in the locker room to say, they're going to fall. We'll get those shots. And it just happened to do so in the second half.

**Q. Allyson, not a very big team, Air Force, but they're bringing it to you early. How did you settle in? How did you react to that?**

ALLYSON FERTIG: They don't have a lot of size but they're really aggressive. And they don't give up. Like, they're going to give you their 100 percent all game long. So even though there may be lack of size, you can't really tell sometimes just because of how aggressive they play.

But we knew that coming in playing them two times. We just had to see what they threw at us in the beginning and then, like, change our game plan from then on.



And we're just really happy we can get all three of them, and especially this one, the most important one. I think 0-0 going into it with both of us. And we're just happy with the 1-0 after today.

**Q. Emily, a bit of a frustrating first half, I guess. What was the message for you and the rest of the team just at halftime?**

EMILY MELLEMA: Just relaxing, taking a deep breath. I don't think we were playing our best team basketball in the first half. That's something that we really keyed in on the second half. I think we played really good basketball with whichever five were on the floor. We played really well, 1 through 5. And that's when things starting rolling for us a little bit.

**Q. Do you think this is a pretty good example of surviving and advance through the tournament?**

EMILY MELLEMA: Like Coach said, just getting those first half jitters out of the way. We haven't played here in over a year. Just kind of getting that first half, figuring it out, being back on the court, playing again -- it's been a while since we played. Just getting that confidence going and advancing. It's always fun.

**Q. Can you guys just talk a little bit, like your coach did at the beginning about the respect that you have for the Air Force Academy, not only because they're great student-athletes, but also they represent the United States of America. They're in a tough situation at the service academy. So what's it like for you guys to take the court with opponents like that?**

ALLYSON FERTIG: We've had the honor to the last couple of times we played at Air Force to go learn more about what they do at the academy. We have such high -- we put them at such high regard just because what they do is like not even close to how -- their way of life is way harder than we will ever have to kind of experience.

So I just want to say thank you for their service but also just it's really cool to see just how awesome they go out there 100 percent. They're respectful. And even though there may not be the most basketball-looking, like your true every point because you have girls from all over who are coming there for the main reason, the Air Force.

It's really cool to see a group of girls that are all in the same mindset, just same beliefs and just go out there play the hardest every single time.

EMILY MELLEMA: I'll piggyback on that one. Just so much respect for their girls. All of them are just such great

people as well. It's more fun to play against girls that are obviously working hard and they're really tough and beating on us, whatever, but they're super nice girls.

It's fun to play against girls who are obviously working hard for their team. We're working hard for our team. But just a lot of fun when you have two really hard-working basketball teams going at it. And we have so much respect for their girls and their coaches.

**Q. Coach, the question is urgency in the second half. Did you talk to your team about coming out with a little bit more urgency? You had, I think, 24 points in the paint in the first half but just three 3-point attempts?**

HEATHER EZELL: We talked about just relaxing, having good composure, understanding that our run was going to come. For us, it started on the defensive end where we just needed to get more stops, be a little more engaged and in tune.

But credit to these guys here, the seniors, especially, too, settling everybody down and understanding that, okay, we let the first half go and we come out with another 20 minutes of our basketball and our toughness.

That's what we really emphasized. We didn't change a whole lot at halftime. It's the whole Aaron Rodgers thing: Relax, take a deep breath and it will come to us in the second half.

**Q. Emily, any preliminary thoughts with quick turnaround with tomorrow's game?**

EMILY MELLEMA: Talked about getting our bodies right, our mentality right, getting some recovery in. Again, this game just gives us a little bit of confidence, getting it rolling.

She's talking about staying here for three days. It starts with the next one tomorrow. Glad we got this one done and over with. Now we just have to get our bodies ready to go for tomorrow.

**Q. What's it like for you when you come out in the second half and they're shooting like that and you end up breaking the conference record?**

HEATHER EZELL: Makes my job really easy. I thought Malene's 7-0 run on her own really got us going. It was just what was said, taking that deep breath and relaxing.

Everything we got in that third quarter we had gotten in the first half. I thought we were just rushed or we weren't patient enough to find it. That's what we talked about was



going, hey, just slow down, don't let them speed you up. As soon as we did that we were able to get easy opportunities that they were able to knock down.

**Q. After that run to begin the third quarter, they kind of, they kind of bring it back to you. They stay in the game. Any more additional messaging or more of the same?**

HEATHER EZELL: When the fourth quarter started, it's exactly what I continued to write on the board, 10 minutes of toughness. At the media, it was five minutes of toughness. We've got to finish.

It's exactly what we talk about, is Air Force, no matter what, they're not going to give up; they're not going to stop playing hard.

**Q. You guys were able to really limit Milahnie Perry tonight. She only had four points, only took six shots. What were you doing to limit or deny her the ball and just limit her chances?**

HEATHER EZELL: To be honest, I put my defensive player of the year on her, Emily Mellema. That was her match-up for the majority of the game. Obviously a very high-level defender.

But what we talk about, it's not a one-on-one match-up, it's team defense that we use. We made her catches tough. But then we were in some gaps, able to help off, really try and close off those opportunities to get downhill and drive and get to her sweet spots.

**Q. You talked about the nerves. How do you go about kind of calming them down at halftime? It's such a short amount of time; what's that conversation like?**

HEATHER EZELL: It's just having that conversation. They've all been there, done that. And they all knew exactly what it was. It was just reassuring them and being able to go, yeah, we're getting everything we want, we're just allowing them to speed us up and play more of their game; we've got to get back to playing our game. That's what happens when we've got really good leadership, really good experience here at the Mountain West Tournament with our upperclassmen and they're able to flip that switch and come out in the second half with that composure.

**Q. With such an experienced group, what are your preliminary thoughts on tomorrow's game?**

HEATHER EZELL: Right now it's going -- we've got to recover, getting our bodies right, getting our minds right to

come out and whoever it is being ready to focus in and play our Cowgirl toughness for 40 minutes whoever is across from us.

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