

2023 NCAA Division III Women's Basketball Championship: Transylvania vs. Christopher Newport

Thursday, March 30, 2023

Dallas, Texas, USA

American Airlines Center

Transylvania Transy

Juli Fulks

Dasia Thornton

Madison Kellione

Finals Pregame Media Conference

JULI FULKS: Well, we are super excited to be here. Obviously playing in the National Championship is the culminating moment on the season, and it's been an absolutely awesome ride.

We have two of our four seniors here today. This was their goal from the beginning. We had coined the phrase Texas to Texas. We wanted to start the season, we played in Dallas and get those games and end the season in Dallas.

Anytime you can have a plan come together -- Maddie always says speak it into existence, so we did, and it's awesome to be sitting here today.

Q. You've had an opportunity in the last 24 hours to mingle with the other divisions and really celebrate where you are. Can you elaborate what that experience has been like?

DASIA THORNTON: Yeah, it's pretty great. Seeing them on TV, watching them on ESPN, it's crazy to be in the same room as them. Just to be able to be with all the other divisions, it just really represents womanhood and celebrates all the amazing things we're doing on and off the court.

MADISON KELLIONE: Yeah, it's been super awesome and we're grateful to be here. The NCAA has done an awesome job of hosting us and we're super thankful for everything they've done, and it's been a really great experience.

Q. Being two of the leaders on this team, how do you



feel like you guys' leadership aided the team to being undefeated this year?

MADISON KELLIONE: Yeah, I think that we have a really good group of girls, and I think personally I do better by leading by example and I think I set a high standard for everyone on the team and I uphold them to keep that standard and they've done really good stepping up, and it's led to a really successful season.

DASIA THORNTON: I like to lead with my words. I'm the extrovert of the whole team. If I encourage everybody to do good, then we do good as a whole.

Q. As a teammate of Madison, to watch Madison take in The Elite 90 Award, can you talk about what that means as a teammate? And Madison, if you could just talk a little bit about your road as a student-athlete in being able to garner that award.

DASIA THORNTON: Yeah, I think Maddie puts in a lot of hard work on and off the court. She gets in trouble a little bit for not sleeping, but we always encouraged her to do as much as she can. We walk into practice and she's already getting shots up. She's always studying for exams and her tests.

Like she's a physics major, and I don't know if you know how hard that is, but it's pretty hard, and we're just proud of her.

MADISON KELLIONE: It was a great award to have. I didn't know I was getting it, so I was super excited to receive that.

I think it's a really great thing to get to top off my career. I've spent a lot of hours and years getting to where I am and I put a lot of time into my studies, and to know that I can be successful in both school and on the court is something super rewarding.

I think my hard work is really paying off, and I'm excited to be here.

Q. Dasia, I know that you have plans to be president



one day; can you tell me how you are going to get there and when?

DASIA THORNTON: Yeah. As soon as I graduate I'm going to the Peace Corps. That's a two-year commitment, so they'll send me to a country somewhere around the world. I don't really have a preference because I know a lot of languages.

So I'll do that and then somehow work my way up in the State Department, and then I'll run for president in 2036. That's my first year I'll be eligible.

Q. Can you tell me what languages you know, please?

DASIA THORNTON: Yeah, English, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, and Russian, but they're all on different fluency levels, but Spanish is my second-best language.

Q. When did you decide you wanted to be president?

DASIA THORNTON: Probably around the age of eight. I wanted to be an interpreter and somebody was like, no, go bigger. I was like, okay, I'll just be a diplomat. It's not really too much. Someone was like, you should go bigger. And I was like, all right, President of the United States. I was like, yeah, that's me.

Q. How did your four previous HCAC tournament championship wins as a coach prepare you to lead the team for the big championship game?

JULI FULKS: Yeah, I think with this group and every team we've had, there's been a high commitment to excellence, and trying to learn how to be great in the biggest environment, so every time you get a chance to compete for one of the championships, we want to do that to the best of our ability and find different ways to win.

I think one of the strengths of this team that they talk about all the time is we know we're not going to be great every day and they're going to just -- how can we win tonight, and whatever plan that gets to. Sometimes it's plan A. Sometimes it feels like we're at plan Z. But I think being able to compete every year builds that experience, and so for this group, they've just now wrapped up their fifth championship in the conference, and I think that just gave them a lot of confidence.

They're used to excelling at a high level and finding ways to be successful every night with whoever is hurt or sick and whatever kind of the circumstances are. They want to find their ability to come out with one more point on the board, and sometimes that's all we have is one more point.

Q. Coaches like to create an environment of consistency throughout the season, and in an environment like this it's pretty unique not playing for two weeks. You're playing at a unique time of day, 11:00 a.m. central time; you're getting shots up here; you're going off-site. How do you approach the week knowing that it's hard to manufacture the consistency that you're used to?

JULI FULKS: Yeah, I think one of the ways that we do that is actually by being in some ways fairly inconsistent. We are always -- we have coaches coming and going. We have a great staff but they can't always be there. Our practice schedules are a little bit all over the board.

We played a conference game this year at 11:00 on a Wednesday. What we're really trying to get them understand and one of our core pillars is being adaptable. COVID certainly taught them that. We've had lots of breaks in the last few years where we thought we were going to play and then we had two weeks off.

And so really every day we go into practice and our goal is to be as good as we can be that day. And if this is our normal baseline level, we want that baseline level to be at a level that's high enough to win any game that we're going to go into.

This past 10 days we kind of treated it like one of the holiday breaks. We gave them a couple days to have to rest and then went pretty hard Wednesday to Friday, gave them a few more days' rest, and then went really hard Monday, Tuesday. I think they respond well to that. They're used to getting after it on the court.

And then come here and kind of enjoy the fanfare, but their goal is to still come out on top, and they're committed to that.

Q. You looked like you were kind of focusing on getting up shots today. How important is that knowing -- the size of venue and just kind of taking that all in before you start working on game plan and things like that.

JULI FULKS: Well, I hope they feel solid in the game plan coming into today. I think when we got on that court, that's probably the biggest difference. Being able to defend, that's going to be in some ways the same thing that we've done, and we always rebound. So those things are going to be the same, and thankfully the court and venue size hopefully doesn't affect that.

We are a team that tends to shoot a lot of threes, and I think we average about 30 a game. We want to at least

give ourselves the best chance to score, and some of the ways that we've scored normally.

It started a little slow today, but I felt like by the end everybody gained some confidence and felt like they were in a good spot.

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