

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal: Missouri State vs Stanford

Sunday, March 28, 2021

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome - Alamo

Missouri State Lady Bears

Coach Amaka

Agugua-Hamilton

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference



Stanford - 89, Missouri State - 62

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Obviously it's an emotional ending to a magical ride. Stanford is a great team -- well-coached, like I've been saying. And they were able to be comfortable all game. They got what they wanted on offense. They made it difficult for us on defense. And we just missed shots that I feel like we should be making. And we just couldn't get the ball to go in the hole and couldn't get the stops we needed. But our kids fought all the way to the end. And I'm proud of them.

Q. Looked like there was some powerful emotions there at the end of the game. What's the message to your players in that last substitution in the last minute?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: There was a lot of emotion because we talk about it all the time, that we're a family. And we're not just a coaching staff or a head coach that says that we have a family atmosphere or players who say they want that. We actually live that. And I truly love them.

Like, they're my family. That's how they feel about each other; that's how they feel about us. So when I subbed out those seniors and I think Jas was in that, too, it was just an emotional moment because I wanted to just win this game for them. I wanted them to be able to experience the Elite Eight and just experience this ride a little bit longer, because we just have so much fun together. We truly care about each other. And everybody on this team in this program just wants the best for the next person. And very unselfish people. And that's where that emotion came

from.

There was a lot of tears. I know, maybe the outside looking in, people didn't think that we could beat Stanford, but we thought we could. And so for us it was an emotional ending. Not taking anything away from Stanford.

I think they deserve to be the overall No. 1 seed and they're a great team, like I said in the beginning.

Q. You've talked about this journey you guys have been on for these last two years. And just coming to an end today. I know it hurts now. But just the perspective that you have on what you guys have accomplished getting to this point?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: I told the players, we had an amazing ride. And to do this in a year filled with so much adversity, so many ups and downs, so many quarantines. We didn't play a game for a month at one point. I was out. I threw my back out. I missed a game. We just had so many things that went on. Some people were -- injuries at times that kept us out. We had about 12 games that we played without somebody in our top six rotation.

So it just was a lot. And everybody's going through a lot, just with the pandemic, social unrest, the systemic racism, everything that's been going on. And so for us to stay focused and have over a 3.5 GPA in the classroom, go beat Maryland and have the non-conference we had and go undefeated in conference and then make it to the Sweet 16, with all the challenges we faced, some that other people in the country was facing, some that we were just facing, it was just a great, great, amazing journey.

And so my perspective is that we've got to keep our heads up. The emotion you see is because I'm looking in those kids' eyes and I'm seeing them broken, breaking down because they know that we had more basketball in us. We ran into a wall. We couldn't get through it.

So after the tears, we wipe away the tears, I think we're going to look back on this be really proud of ourselves. At least I know I'm going to be very proud of them.

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Q. I guess obviously you were looking forward to this rematch for a couple of years, in a sense. I guess for it to kind of come to an end in the manner that it did with Stanford taking control so quickly, was that a bit of a surprise?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: It's a surprise. When I say it's a surprise, I'm not saying because Stanford doesn't deserve to be the No. 1 overall seed or that they -- they have a great system, well-coached and they dominated the game.

It was a little bit of a surprise because we haven't really been in that position. Every game we've been down, we've always come down. There's always been a close game no matter who we were playing, some of the best teams in the country over the past couple of years, or people -- just anybody.

So it was a little surprise that we just couldn't get over the hump and they just kept increasing the lead. I guess you could say it was a little bit of a surprise for some of us. But at the same time we knew their talent. And we knew if we gave them open shots, which we did, that they would hit them.

And if we didn't finish layups or offensive rebound or defensive rebound, for that matter, that they would take control of the game.

It wasn't a surprise in what they did. That's what they're capable of doing; that's what they've done every game of this season. But I thought we could have put up a better fight at times.

Q. You kind of touched on the challenges that you all faced all season long. To go through the quarantines, to still make that run, win the conference championship, and then make the Sweet 16, what would you say you're the most proud of?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Our resilience. Our ability to persevere. I always say it's bigger than buckets. It's not just about the wins and losses. It's about us preparing these young people to go and be successful adults when they leave us. And I think that we're doing that.

I think some of this adversity we were able to fight through is just going to help them. Life is full of adversity. Especially being a woman. Even if you're a minority woman in a male-dominated world, there's adversity. There's going to be adversity in every one of their professions that they go into.

And they need to be able to be seen and heard. And so I just

feel like some of the obstacles we were able to get through individually and as a team -- a lot that people don't even know of or need to know of, is just going to help them when they leave and help them be successful and help them impact the world, because I think we have some great kids and great high-character kids, powerful women that are going to impact this world.

So I'm just happy to see them come into their own. I'm happy to see them continue to be resilient. And I just wish our seniors the best, and I wish the kids that are coming back, I wish them the best as well. I know they're going to do great things here.

Q. You're able to take Brice out there after a 3. And we don't know if she's coming back or anything. But just what impact she's had on you guys and how proud you are of her, and just the look of the team going forward. You've got to be excited about what you're bringing back and just the potential of this program as well.

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: I'm very proud of Brice, but she's not the only one I'm proud of. I think Brice put the team on her back. She's had so many game winners, helped us to continue to prevail.

I'm proud of her. She became a great leader. No fluke why she was Player of the Year. She's a special player. She's a special person. So I'm proud of her. It was great to be able to take her out on that note.

But I'm really proud of Elle. I think Elle, she continues to defy the odds, and people automatically underestimate her when she gets on the court. Her heart is so big. Her talent is so big. And she just continues to leave her mark here as a Lady Bear.

I'm just super proud of the way she came out performed in this tournament. I mean, what she did was amazing in all three games. So I'm proud of her.

I'm proud of Emily, our other senior. I think Emily, when I got here she didn't really have a lot of confidence and didn't really believe in herself too much. And was an average student. Now she's getting 4.0s, and now she's impacting the game on both sides of the floor. I'm just proud of her. I'm proud of our other kids that are coming back. Abby Hipp is coming back. Abi J is coming back. Bri Ellis, our other senior is not coming back, but she came in as a walk-on, earned a scholarship, and she's impacted our team just as much. I'm proud of every single person in that locker room from coaches to players, to support staff, trainers, everybody.

Q. In the fourth quarter there, Elle made four 3-pointers and Brice knocked one down. What does it say about not just those two but the whole group that even in that scenario they're out there fighting until the very end?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: We don't give up. We just don't give up. This group is resilient. We have come back down 20 at Oklahoma last year, come back and won the game; down 16 to Maryland, who is probably going to be in the championship game or could be. They're one of the best teams in the country. Ended up winning that game this year. Down 17 at Illinois State on our road, who is a team that was in postseason, in WNIT this year, came back won that game.

When we're down we don't give up. Those are just a few games I'm pointing out.

But our resilience is just what drives us and being mentally tough. So Elle and Brice stepping up in the fourth quarter, we're going to play until the last horn goes off. And we're going to try our best no matter what the score is, no matter who is in the game for the other team, no matter who is in the game for us. That's just who we are, that's the culture we've built.

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