

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 8, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Maryland Terrapins

Brenda Frese

Faith Masonius

Brinae Alexander

Shyanne Sellers

Postgame Press Conference

Maryland - 82, Ohio State - 61

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. We will start with the Maryland press conference. Opening statement from Coach Frese.

BRENDA FRESE: I just loved our intensity and energy from the tip. I thought we weathered foul trouble, and our fifth years, Jakia, Faith, and Nae, 53 points combined were huge.

Shy has battled injuries and has been tough all year. So proud to be able to get this win against Ohio State with her.

All these guys have been to an Elite Eight, so you talk about being on the biggest stage and knowing they weren't going to be denied this time of year.

Rebounding was huge. That was an area for us to go on the glass and be plus 24. Just really proud of this team. We've battled so much adversity this season -- injuries, one of the toughest schedules in the country. We played so many top 25 teams, top 10 teams, and have battled them all.

So to finally get over that hump today when it matters most in the most time of pressure is a testament to these guys.

Q. Shy, you dribble out the clock at the end and you turn, and you've got a message that you sent out. What was the message? What do you want people to know about this team?

SHYANNE SELLERS: I feel like we're just peaking at the



right time. That's what I said. I said to Coach all year, especially the second half, I feel like we're right there from flipping the switch and making those turns. Our Iowa game, our Ohio State game have all been super close, we just haven't gotten over that hump. Now we've gotten over the hump, I feel like we're going to keep going and not look back.

Q. Question for Faith. It really felt like you were just locked in this entire game, and it was one of your best performances of the season, if not of your career. What was your mindset going into this game preparing? Like obviously a huge test on defense and offense.

FAITH MASONIUS: It is hard to beat a team three times, and I think we wanted to come out here and just play to the best of our ability. Coach B's been telling us the only team that can beat us is ourselves. Even before we left, Shy looked at me, and she was like, just be on the glass tonight. I took that to heart and just got in there.

Q. You guys just talked about how it's hard to beat a team three times or hard to get beat by a team three times. What was different about the game plan this time, and how did you attack this game differently?

BRINAE ALEXANDER: We focused on our defense, and it's really about a defensive mentality. For us it leads to transition points and also just feeds into our offense. I think the biggest thing is we were just like we've got to defend. Even if we're not scoring, we've got to defend. I think we took that to heart and really put a big emphasis on that today.

Q. We talked after the last Ohio State game, Brinae, about what kind of change in those games. For you and Shy, you just mentioned it, close all year and couldn't get it done. What changed today? What was the main reason you would say -- you guys, wire to wire, were winning the whole time?

SHYANNE SELLERS: I think we've always had it in us. Even though people don't believe in us and still don't believe in us. Maybe they think this game is a fluke. I'm



telling you right now, the Maryland team you see in March is not the same team you see at the beginning. I think we just proved that right now.

Obviously it's one game at a time. We have to wait for the next game to see who we play. But we're going to continue to fight and keep pushing off this.

Q. Shy, you mentioned it a few times already, but that previous March experience you guys have playing top 10 teams through the Big Ten all season, how much does that experience count in 40 minutes in a do-or-die situation like today?

SHYANNE SELLERS: I always tell people you can't teach experience. You can't teach the pressure situations you've been in before. I think our seniors do a good job of leading us, telling us keep our composure, and then we respond.

Ohio State made a run a little bit in the third quarter, and I looked at them, and we all said, we've got to come back. They punched first. We've got to punch back.

We've just got to respond. I feel like March, if anything, is about how we respond. It's about will to win and who wants it more.

Q. It seemed like you guys were just breaking down Ohio State's defense with ease. What gaps were you seeing in their defense that might have not been there the first two games?

FAITH MASONIUS: I think for us obviously we know Ohio State has a great press, and they tend to get a lot of steals and momentum off their press. So I think for us it was just, you know, looking up, passing the ball up, staying composed, seeing what was open. They try to speed you up.

So really just taking a breath and taking a second to find the open man.

Q. Shyanne, you talked about the team you guys would be in March, but you guys had to get through so much of this season. I'm just wondering, I know you've probably talked about it a lot, but the resilience of the group with the numbers dwindling, to be able to come in and do something like this.

SHYANNE SELLERS: I think really after that Penn State loss, we really tried to pull it together. We had a meeting after that, talked everything out, what we needed of each other.

I feel like after that game we were trying to start putting it

together. I think we won 5 of 7 after that. I feel like this team just really relies on each other. I feel like teams were going to fall apart around that time if they were in our shoes, but I feel like we got it together.

We just leaned on each other, tried to respond. There's not much you can do. We're in a tough conference. I'm super proud of this team. I don't even have the words to answer that question. I'm just really proud of us right now.

Q. Ladies, for every little girl who was once in last place, who's climbing to beat that No. 1 seed, what's your message of empowerment for all the girls behind you?

BRINAE ALEXANDER: I would say my biggest message is trust the process and everything happens for a reason. So take it one game at a time, take it one day at a time.

SHYANNE SELLERS: I was going to say mine is be fearless.

FAITH MASONIUS: One of the most important things in sports is have fun with it. Make memories, make friends, and just put everything out there.

Q. Brinae, when did you feel that today was like the ball was going in? When did you feel like you had your shot today? And what did you guys do to kind of create better looks for you guys, for you specifically? Because sometimes there's been times throughout the season where you guys haven't been able to kind of create those looks for you, but you guys were able to do so today.

BRINAE ALEXANDER: I think for that last point it was twofold. I've got to move on offense more for my teammates to get open, and I think I did a better job at that today. Even though I did miss -- I think I missed my first three threes. It's just the mentality to keep shooting. Once it goes in, the basket just gets bigger and bigger.

So once I get that confidence, there's no coming back from that.

Q. For Brinae and Shy, I'm on the sidelines, and I can hear Faith talking. What's it like playing with a player who is always guiding and leading and just always being the first one to start talking and being the first one to really provide?

BRINAE ALEXANDER: It's extremely beneficial for me personally because, even -- in the heat of the moment, there are a lot of things going on as you're playing, and you've got to remember what coverage you're in, but also

knowing your personnel and things like that. So I think having that voice and having that safety net to be able, just when she screams, you got up, it's just like very helpful. I think that helps all of us stay together and connected.

SHYANNE SELLERS: I also think that Faith doesn't get the credit that she deserves. A lot of the reason why our defensive intensity today was so good is because of Faith. She does all the things that doesn't show up on a stat sheet. You can highlight my name a thousand times, but really Faith is the one that holds this team together and keeps us going.

BRINAE ALEXANDER: She also had the biggest plus-minus.

SHYANNE SELLERS: That's a great point. But Faith is the reason why Maryland is always so good.

Q. Ohio State's press is obviously their calling card, but when you get defensive stops, is it harder for them to set up obviously? Then how much of that was able to fuel you guys' offensive attack? Do you feel like the defense to offense was one of the best it's been this season? It kind of felt like that. When they didn't have time to set up, you guys were scoring at will.

SHYANNE SELLERS: I think it's hard for them to set up obviously when we get stops and keep it pushing. Also even when we don't get a stop, they make a bucket, we get it out, we break the press, it's always a disadvantage for them because it's a three-on-two, two-on-one situation, and it puts a lot of pressure on their back line.

I think we did a good job of just being poised, not forcing it, not taking super, super quick shots, and if we did take a quick shot, we've got to stop and try to slow down a little bit. I think we played Maryland basketball tonight.

Q. Going back to the defense just real quickly, what part of the defensive effort today were you most proud of?

BRENDA FRESE: We were really connected. I thought it was a physical game. So when you saw us like pushing catches out, our denials, our jump switches, they were really a connected unit, I thought, for 40 minutes.

Q. You're no stranger to Ohio State's late-game comebacks, especially in that third quarter, and there was a little bit of a run. What do you think it says about your team that you were able to stop that in its tracks?

BRENDA FRESE: I think it's how much we've grown.

We've had so many games with Ohio State and Indiana and games that have been possessions in the fourth quarter, and they've gotten away from us. So I think that's the growth of this team is the resiliency and just to be able to keep their poise together and be able to weather that storm.

Q. Building off that question, there's been a lot of games this tournament, you guys are a prime example of falling behind early. You guys came back against Illinois. The stat that really pops out to me is you guys really led this game for over 30 minutes. What does that say about the consistency of today?

BRENDA FRESE: Again, I think consistency, resiliency. We've had the last two games where we've started in the first quarter. I hope we don't have to do that tomorrow. But where we've just stayed the course and we've trusted and remained positive and confident in one another.

You have to be able to have that consistency if you're going to beat a great team like Ohio State. We just took down the No. 1 seed. You have to be consistent. We didn't beat them just by a possession. That was a game that we put our most complete 40-minute game together.

Q. The first two games, you kind of went to like a zone and switched up. Today it felt all person-to-person defense. Two-parter, what made you decide to do that, and how impressed are you? Also slowing Cotie down. I know that was a huge story line in the game. Who do you think was the most to credit for that?

BRENDA FRESE: The ownership in our man was we kind of one-on-one wanted to be able to guard, and I thought that mentality was there. I mean, we did sprinkle in some zone, but they were selective out of timeouts and different times to kind of throw them off.

I thought it was team defense. We've played Ohio State three times, and Cotie had her way both times. The first game she challenged and made it personal about our rebounding, so I think this team really put a statement together on the glass when she told us we looked tired.

This team has a lot of heart in the locker room, and I think they showed up when it mattered most.

Q. I don't know if you're aware of this -- you probably are -- but four years ago, according to my phone, you won the Big Ten Championship over Ohio State, a completely different team, of course, but could that be a good omen?

BRENDA FRESE: We'll take any omen this time of year.



If we play like we did today, again, we can beat anyone. This team is connected. They're playing for one another. It's March. Anything can happen.

Q. Coach Frese, you were safely in the tournament, the NCAA Tournament, but this obviously helps in terms of seeding and going forward. Can you talk about that a little bit? Not just from a confidence standpoint, but helping your seed in the tournament.

BRENDA FRESE: I always say you control what you can control. What I love about this team is we've had no bad losses. You look at our strength of schedule, being ranked 7th in the country, we played a hard schedule. They say it matters when you play that difficult of a schedule.

Then conference play. You look at every game, we've been in it. We've been competitive. But just fitting that through the adversity and injuries that we've had this season. Every time you kind of have to remold your team. The last one with Lavender Briggs going down, this team has continued to trust the process and just continued to put their head down and work.

Q. Similar to what I asked Shy and Brinae, what does it mean for you to have that leadership on the court with Faith, your fifth-year veteran, who's bought into this program year after year?

BRENDA FRESE: It's huge. These guys have been last season to an Elite Eight. They allow -- when they made that little run late, I had Faith on the bench when they kind of made that run. So you saw I had to quickly get her back in to infuse that confidence back within our team.

So they're the calming forces. Every time Nae hits a big three. I just can't say enough for Faith today. She was our MVP and really allowed this team to stay the course to stay confident with the way she fought.

Q. You're the first team in this tournament to win and now have an unknown opponent coming up next. I know you'll know in a couple hours, Michigan or Nebraska, and you've got to enjoy this one, but is there any mindset that's different or it's kind of a wait and see approach?

BRENDA FRESE: Definitely wait and see. For us, two teams that beat us in the regular season, and they were possession games. I mean, I know for us, we don't care who we play. We're playing tomorrow.

I know for us we're excited to have another matchup. We had to play them both one time on the road in neutral settings. So I know this team will be prepared to play.

Q. Just building off that last one, is the plan now to go watch them, kind of see in live person? And then what's kind of the plan for the rest of the day? I'm just curious, now that you don't know who you're playing, what's the turnaround like?

BRENDA FRESE: Our team will watch them for a half, and then they'll go back and do their part with their rest and recovery. Then we'll meet back up and be able to do film tonight once we know who we're playing tomorrow.

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Ohio State Buckeyes

Kevin McGuff

Jacy Sheldon

Taylor Thierry

Postgame Press Conference



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THE MODERATOR: The Ohio State press conference will begin with an opening statement from Coach McGuff.

KEVIN MCGUFF: We can go right to questions.

Q. You both are just clearly very emotional right now. Can you just talk about the emotions of this game, not being able to pick up this win?

JACY SHELDON: Yeah, it was a tough one. We'll regroup after this, take a couple days off and then come back and get ready to go for even more hard games.

THE MODERATOR: Taylor, you want to answer that question as well.

TAYLOR THIERRY: Just kind of the same thing. This loss definitely sucks. It stings. We're just going to move on to our next game and fix up some of the mistakes we made this game.

Q. What do you think the biggest difference for your offense was this game versus the prior two against Maryland?

JACY SHELDON: We didn't make a lot of shots that we normally do. Credit to them, they played great, though. Really we got outrebounded. That was the main factor for us that we're going to have to be better at moving forward.

Q. This goes for either one of you. Obviously the season is not over. You guys will be playing in a couple weeks. How quickly do you flip that switch and just get ready for the tournament?

JACY SHELDON: Tomorrow. We have to. Like you said, it's not over. We have a lot to prepare for coming up. We have to shift our focus after today.

Q. It looked like Maryland was doing a really good job of slowing you guys down, and I know you guys like to play a fast pace. How badly did that hurt, not just on defense, but on offense too when you're missing those shots that you guys usually make?

JACY SHELDON: They did a great job of that. They pressed a little, and I think the idea was to slow us down. They played a great defensive game. Like I said, we weren't ourselves today. We didn't make a lot of shots we normally do. So credit to them.

Q. Jacy, you talked about you guys can flip the switch. Does being a veteran team that's had the success you've had in the NCAA Tournament help a little bit that you guys know you can get back to maybe being yourselves for the next tournament?

JACY SHELDON: I think so. Moving forward, everyone hates losing, especially this team. I think moving forward, people have been here before and have played in March Madness in that tournament before, I think that does help.

Q. Cotie's not up here, but I want to get your perspective. What do you think the biggest reasons were for her struggles tonight? I know she missed a couple she probably normally makes. Other than that, was it anything Maryland did? Was it kind of her? What do you think?

JACY SHELDON: She got a lot of good looks. Like I said, everybody had a lot of really good looks that didn't fall tonight. She's going to be fine. She's a competitor, man. Like I said, it will sting for us today, but we've got to move on and shift our focus after today.

Q. After the Iowa loss, you guys said it was turnovers and rebounding were two big factors in that loss. How big did that affect this loss again? It felt like there was a couple unforced turnovers that you guys had that led



to big runs for Maryland.

JACY SHELDON: That and rebounds. We are minus a lot on the board. I think moving forward that will be -- we didn't play our best game in that aspect. So we'll be working on that.

Q. I wanted to ask about the offense also. Was this one of those days where shots just don't go down, or was there something that Maryland was doing to make life a little bit more difficult on that end of the floor?

KEVIN MCGUFF: In general, I thought Maryland played a great game. They were really prepared. They played like a team that might have needed this to get in the tournament, and we played like a team that showed up as the No. 1 seed and everybody was just supposed to lie down, and that's not what happened.

Give Maryland credit, first and foremost. I thought they played -- I thought Brenda coached an excellent game, her staff, and I thought they played extremely well and they deserved to win the game.

More specific to your question, we had just played them a couple weeks ago, and I thought they played really well then too, but we played really well. We had to play a good game to beat them when we played them, and we didn't play well today. They played a similar game to what they did last time, but we were bad.

Q. You definitely got a little bit animated there in the second half. Can you just talk about some of the calls that might have not went your way and the officiating.

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, once again, there was a whole lot I didn't agree with and a whole lot I don't understand, but it didn't impact who won the game. Maryland deserved to win the game. They were the better team today. So let me make that crystal clear.

But there's a whole lot I don't understand about the way the game is called.

Q. Half-court defense has been one of the biggest topics of discussion this season. You felt like the team has been improving. Today it seemed like Maryland just broke it down very easily. Can you just talk about what you saw was going wrong in the half-court defense?

KEVIN MCGUFF: I just think in general one of the things I think we've really hung our hat on this year is our competitive character. We've not lost a game this year where our competitive character hasn't been where it

needed to be, but it wasn't there today.

They wanted the game more, and you got to really fight on defense. You've got to fight to get rebounds. We didn't fight, and they did.

Q. Can you talk about what going forward in the NCAA Tournament you need to do rebounding-wise? That obviously was a big factor today. How do you think this group with their experience will react to this loss?

KEVIN MCGUFF: I think we'll bounce back because we've got great leadership with people like Jacy. It's really simple. You've got to hit them and grab the ball. We looked like a volleyball team out there for half the game just batting the ball around. Just hit them and go get the ball and grab it with two hands.

Q. In your guys' losses this year prior to today, Cotie is kind of -- struggles has been her theme. I think she averaged like 7 points in those games. What needs to be done to flip the switch, I guess? What did you see out of her today? Where were the struggles rising from?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Coming out of Christmas, she's played really well and just been great and been a huge part of us getting better as a team. She didn't have it today. It was kind of reflective of the whole group didn't have it, and she's certainly part of it.

We're not the team we're capable of being without her playing at a high level because she's such a great player.

Q. You've said in the past that the bench was going to be really important, especially late in the season. It feels like lately the bench hasn't been producing like it was earlier in the season. How big of an impact has it had in the recent struggles that you guys have had?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, I didn't really feel it at Iowa. Today like nobody was very good. So I don't think the starters were good, the bench wasn't good, I wasn't good, nobody was good. I think today it was less reflective of, is the bench, can they contribute, and more reflective of just we were bad and they were good.

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