

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Minnesota Gophers

Dawn Plitzuweit

Amaya Battle

Niamya Holloway

Postgame Press Conference

Minnesota - 77, Rutgers - 69

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with opening statement from head coach.

Go ahead, Coach.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: First of all, I thought the crowd was absolutely amazing and to have so many fans in maroon and gold, it was absolutely phenomenal.

We said to our team before the game -- before we even got to the tournament, we need to be really thankful for this opportunity because our trip to get to the Big Ten Tournament is 10 minutes, 15 if there's some traffic lights, right?

But it was great for us before the game to be able to see all of our fans there. To all of our fans who came, a very, very sincere thank you for doing that. You made it a home game really essentially for us, so that was really fun.

Destiny Adams played just an absolutely amazing, amazing, amazing basketball game. And they shot the ball, Rutgers' team shot the ball at such a high level, certainly in the first half. I thought we were able to force some turnovers, but when we didn't turn them over, they scored really efficiently.

Second half, we didn't really turn them over as much, but we started to defend a little bit better. So that was really good to see.

I thought our young ladies played with a lot of energy and a lot of intensity and did a lot of great things.



Then these two ladies that are sitting up here just played their best basketball games that I've ever seen them play in their careers at this point in time.

Amaya did a great job handling the basketball for us, making great decisions with it, then she scored a lot too. She took a burden in doing a lot of that for us but made great, great decisions with the ball in her hands.

Then Nia, I thought, came in and made big-time plays for us on both ends of the court defensively, doing her best inside against the physicality of Rutgers. Then offensive end, five offensive rebounds is just an incredible, incredible effort, incredible intensity.

Really proud of our young ladies for how we bounced back from some adverse situations and really excited to continue playing and to move on.

Q. Amaya, we talked about earlier in the season you playing with more controlled aggression. What was your mindset today in your career night?

AMAYA BATTLE: I think I kind of just came into the game with a blank mind. Like I knew the scout, I knew what coaches tell you to do, but I think it really helped that I wasn't overthinking and thinking a lot in my head. Just kind of flowed.

Q. To both the players, this is the biggest stage that you played on as a collegiate. How you felt you did tonight? Especially in crucial times when the game was going back and forth.

NIAMYA HOLLOWAY: Obviously I didn't get to play last year, so I watched us go into the Big Ten Tournament last year, and just being able to play on this stage this year was so special.

Just like Amaya, I came in with an open mind, kind of just want to go play my heart out, and I think I did that.

AMAYA BATTLE: I would say before the game we all were saying we just want to stick together and be encouraging and bring energy, and we all did that. So super proud of



our team.

Like you said, in crucial times in huddles, we were still being encouraging and holding each other accountable, and we just stayed together.

Q. Amaya, clearly a career game. Everybody's going to look at the points, but I look at the seven assists, five rebounds, and zero turnovers. I think back to last year in a tough game against Penn State, it was such a different game. Tonight there were really no mistakes. Where did that game come from? Where did the best game of your college career come from?

AMAYA BATTLE: Like I said, just having a blank mind. Then also my coaches, they've invested in me. They've been helping me grow my game and understand what I need to do and what they expect from me. My teammates, they were super encouraging and always instilling confidence in me. They were working hard and that just inspired me to work hard as well.

Q. Hi, Amaya, congrats on the win, you guys. I noticed in the first few seconds of the game you were able to get a steal, which helped the spark of the team. What was going through your head during that steal? How did that feel?

AMAYA BATTLE: I honestly don't remember getting a steal (laughter). But I probably -- Dawnie P preaches active hands and seeing the ball, so I probably was doing that.

Q. For Nia, obviously I don't think anybody was going to slow down Destiny Adams tonight, but in the fourth quarter you certainly did a good job of slowing her down, making her a little bit less effective, especially off the glass. What do you think was working so well for you, especially in the fourth quarter?

NIAMYA HOLLOWAY: Like Coach P said, she's an amazing player. She did a really good job. She had an outstanding game. I think just my toughness and wanting to get stops and knowing that my team was behind me, knowing that if I could keep her where I had to keep her, then they would be right here to help me.

So I think that was really encouraging.

Q. What does this win mean for you guys, going through so much adversity the last two months of the season, then finally getting over the hump and getting back in the win column?

AMAYA BATTLE: Shoot, it means a lot, especially after

last year we didn't make it past the first day. We made it past the first day, and obviously we lost Mara and Soph. So just showing our resilience in how we were able to stick together and battle, no matter the circumstances.

Q. Amaya, just curious, when did you know you were locked in tonight?

AMAYA BATTLE: I was like -- I don't know. Probably -- well, after I hit the three off the screen and Mara was like, I knew you were feeling it because you never do that. I was like, shoot, I guess I'm feeling it.

Q. You guys just spoke about how you didn't make it past the first round last year, but now you have. How do you prepare your bodies? Obviously an excruciating game, came down to the wire. How do you get ready to go now in less than 24 hours?

NIAMYA HOLLOWAY: Well, we have a really good team behind us. Steve and Coach Ham, our trainer and our strength coach, they do everything they can for us to make sure that our minds and our bodies are right.

Even my team right now is back there rolling out, stretching, doing all that stuff. So we have all the tools. Just getting ready, getting rest, ready for the next day.

Q. Nia, we all know about the injury from last year, but the way you played with such physicality, how much does that do for your confidence tonight and moving forward?

NIAMYA HOLLOWAY: I think it helps my confidence a lot. Obviously I just like to be in spaces where I can help my team. Obviously we've been in a lot of adversity this year, and I think just being there and my ability to step up was just based on my confidence that I know my coaches had in me and my teammates had in me. So I just felt like I could do that.

Q. About seven-plus minutes left, it was a tie game, then you guys went on a 9-2 run, and you had six points and an assist on a three during that 9-0 run. Was there a point at which you felt like I just needed to kind of reassert myself? Or can you take us through? Or are you going to tell us you don't remember that stretch?

AMAYA BATTLE: Honestly, I don't remember that stretch (laughter). But the score was tied, so I think we all just had an urgency of we need to get stops and we need to score, and we did that.

Q. Nia, you've been playing against her probably back



... when all is said, we're done.®

into even before high school days. Have you ever seen her play like this before?

NIAMYA HOLLOWAY: I don't know, I played a lot of games against Amaya, and she's always had that competitive edge, but I love to see her when she turns it on. Thank goodness she turned it on for us today.

Q. Coach, how did you get your young ladies to play so loose and freely because, when we spoke the other day, you just talked about how they had to go out there and let the shots fly, take open shots, and have fun. What was your message to them before this?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, a couple different messages that we had going into it, but ultimately, after our last couple of games, it was a clean slate. It really was. We had to wipe it, get rid of it, move on.

The great part for us is it's tournament time at the same time. Then the next message was a Winnie the Pooh kind of message about Tigger. So we showed a little video on Tigger because that was important. We needed that kind of energy, and it's not necessarily easy to do, especially when you haven't had the results that you want to have and you have all this adversity around you.

I think our coaches have done a really good job of really trying to get our young ladies to really clean the slate and move forward, and certainly we played at a much higher level and played with energy, intensity, and were a lot more relaxed, I think, and confident at the same time.

Q. Obviously the points were huge for Amaya tonight, but can you just talk about how the controlled play, how huge that was for the team tonight and your momentum.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: She played phenomenal. She really did. Amaya made great things happen on the defensive end for us. She was someone that it was a great voice in huddles. I think after every single timeout she asked me a question about what I just said in the timeout, to make sure she knew exactly what was going to happen and then could go back and relay that.

That doesn't show up in a stat sheet, but that leadership is something that we really desperately need, so it was great to see her really take that forward.

Then you talk about her decision-making. Rutgers continued to change how they were guarding ball screens, and a lot of it was in a drop coverage. But then they came out and attacked it and really hard-hedged it almost into kind of a double-team scenario, and continued to make

great decisions. That's something that is a great growth zone for her.

I think her practice yesterday, her shootaround today -- I didn't see them on the court warming up before the game, but all the things from a mindset standpoint leading into it were absolutely outstanding.

To her credit, she continued to play really, really poised the entire game.

Q. Not to make too much of one game, but on this stage after what's happened in recent games, is this the kind of game that can kind of change the trajectory of somebody's, I guess, college career?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Absolutely. Absolutely, it can. It's something that -- I think Ahmad asked me the question about what's the hardest part about dealing with what we're dealing with right now, and the hardest part is that you're in the middle of it. In the middle of it sometimes, it's hard to see the light and break through it, and tonight we were able to do that.

Now regardless of what happens, we now have this to fall back on. We've done that. Niameya Holloway played an incredible basketball game and was the most physical we've seen her play and aggressive on both ends of the court. So now we have the receipts of that. She has those receipts. She earned the confidence to continue to do that.

You saw what Amaya did, but at the same time, Janay Sanders, I thought, played a really good basketball game. She fouled out. So we talked about she's got to stay in the game. She can't put herself in that situation. She fouled, is what I told her. Stop fouling them. You're arguing you're not fouling them, but those are fouls.

I thought Mallory Heyer played a tremendous basketball game, and so did Grace Grocholski. They didn't make as many arc shots. Hopefully they're saving them for the next one. How many of those were halfway down and out, and the crowd kept wishing them back in.

I think it's just overall, they talked about the energy and the team kind of lifting each other up and really encouraging each other at a very high level.

Q. How are you feeling about tomorrow's matchup against Michigan?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Michigan, I think, is a team that's really, really disciplined. They're a team that really attacks you. They can space the floor. I think they're really good at getting the ball inside, and I think they're really attacking

the rim with some post-up action, maybe even more than when we played them last time. They space it, and they shoot it, and they defend at a really high level. They can really make life difficult for you getting it inside.

All things that will provide incredible challenges for us. So now we have to get recovered first. I think you talked about it. Our players haven't really been through this, a lot of them haven't, in terms of what it takes to get recovered. Now we have to do that first and foremost and then get ready tomorrow on a quick prep. We haven't really done that before in the same way. So that's going to be another great challenge for us, but one that I think our players are really excited about.

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THE MODERATOR: The Rutgers press conference will start with an opening statement from Coach Washington.

COQUESE WASHINGTON: It's cool to be here at the Big Ten tournament. I think we put on one of the best conference tournaments in the country, and it was a great environment for our team to play in front of.

I thought the Minnesota fan base showed up and made it a really good environment for us to play in. Really proud of how our team competed, showed a lot of resilience with as many injuries as we've suffered through over the course of the season and getting here tonight.

The same thing with Minnesota. I thought it was a great game with two teams who came in kind of limping into the tournament, but both teams played hard and gave a good show for the fans here and for the fans watching on Peacock.

Proud of how we played. Disappointed in the outcome, but really proud of this team for what we've gone through this year.

Q. A record-setting performance, over 30 points, 24 rebounds. I know it didn't come in a win, but did you feel just from the jump that this was going to be a really good game for you tonight?

DESTINY ADAMS: Yes. I think my whole team, I think we were all ready to play. We all came, and we wanted to leave everything we had out on the core, and I think we felt that from the start of the game.

Q. Destiny, what has this year been like for you coming over from UNC and now finishing your first



year at Rutgers?

DESTINY ADAMS: It's been a life-changing year. I think to finally have the chance to play how I used to play, to play for a great coach, to really get the love back for the game. If I could go back and do it again, I would do it all over again regardless.

So it's been a really great year, and I'm really glad I chose to come home.

Q. Late in the game you kind of had that takeover. At what point are you like, I've got to start putting up the shots, got to take the responsibility? You start heating up, and you rack up over 30 points. At what point is that heat check?

DESTINY ADAMS: I think like, if I'm on, if I'm scoring, I think that -- I knew I had to get the ball and put it through the hoop. I think that goes for anybody on our team, whoever's having an on night, they deserve to have the ball. I think that's just what it was for me.

Q. Sorry, follow-up. There was a couple shots that kind of just rolled off the rim. What's going through your head when that kind of happens? And to kind of come back and to continue shooting the ball like that.

DESTINY ADAMS: Everybody misses. You've got to keep going. You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take, so at some point, you've just got to let it go.

Q. It felt like it was a really efficient performance in terms of shooting the basketball for the whole team tonight. What do you think went into that? It kind of happened against Minnesota last month too. What do you think went into another pretty good shooting performance tonight?

DESTINY ADAMS: I think we knew what we had to do. We've been working on shooting leading up to this game, and I'm really glad we went out there and shot well, just like we practiced.

Q. Despite the disappointment of the game, is there



anything you can take away from this that you can build on going into next season?

COQUESE WASHINGTON: I really like this team. I really like the young ladies that I'm coaching this year. They make it easy to come in the gym every day. They make it easy to come to work every day, to keep fighting because of who they are.

We are still in the mindset and the process of building this program up. We're still building our culture. We're still getting the pieces that we need to have. This year was a really, really tough year for a lot of reasons, but the perseverance that these young ladies showed throughout the season is the thing that we'll take out of it.

That's the lessons that they're going to learn is, you know what, I can persevere through adversity. I can persevere through hard stuff. I can show up every day even when I don't always feel my best.

So those are the things, the lessons that they'll learn, those are the things that make this game great and make coaching worthwhile.

Everybody wants to win every game all the time, but it's what you learn and what you grasp upon and what you embrace in the hard moments that make sports so -- such a wonderful thing to be a part of, and that's what we'll take from it.

Q. So many great performances in that game tonight. As an opposing coach, I know you tried a lot of things against Amaya. You dropped off a little bit. You fought through screens. You went over. You went under. Just kind of give me your impression of the game she played tonight.

COQUESE WASHINGTON: She couldn't miss, you know. She got hot, and we're contesting shots, and as you said, we're trying different ways to stop her, but she got in the zone. That mid-range jumper, she really couldn't miss.

She put the team on her back, especially in the second half. For a stretch there, it was just get the ball to Amaya and get out of her way, and let's see what she can do. I thought she gave their team a lot of confidence and made the big plays, especially late in the fourth quarter when her team needed them.

Q. You just mentioned the part that makes coaching worthwhile. What's it like seeing players like Erica Lafayette really pick it up at the end of the season. Kennedy Brandt starts to get those minutes, she comes in and immediately shoots the three ball.

What's it like as a coach seeing that development, especially late in the season on a stage like this?

COQUESE WASHINGTON: It's really rewarding to see all their hard work pay off because those are two players on our team that, when nobody's in the gym, they are. They're putting the work in for the opportunity to be ready. For the work that they've put in in the dark, everybody got to see.

So it's really rewarding to see them step up and meet the challenge when they're given the opportunity.

Q. In that first half, 15 turnovers. In the second half, I think only one. What was the biggest key to flipping that switch and keeping the ball in possession?

COQUESE WASHINGTON: I thought in the first half we were playing, we were trying to win the game with one play every time down the floor, and we were a little -- gambling a little bit too much, trying to make this pass, trying to make this play.

I think in the second half we just did a better job of just trying to stay patient and poised on offense, getting the ball to the folks that could make the plays and the right plays, and that kind of helped us get shot opportunities instead of turning the ball over.

Q. You and Melissa, two black coaches in this conference. In this tournament for young Black girls and Black young men to see two people of color on the sidelines, how important is that in a tournament, especially in a tournament like this?

COQUESE WASHINGTON: Yeah, I hope it's meaningful. It doesn't matter that we're in 2024, representation matters. Not only just as women of color, but as women. It's Women's History Month that we're celebrating now, and all the accomplishments of women of color in this conference, being able to step into the shoes of Coach Vivian Stringer, who's had tremendous success coaching at Iowa and coaching in this tournament.

So definitely want to be somebody who folks can look up to and have aspirations to do tremendous things in their own lives, whether it's in sport or outside the sport. So take that challenge and just try to be the best we can be all the time.

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