



2019 NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

MARQUETTE GOLDEN EAGLES Practice Day Press Conference - March 23, 2019 College Station, Texas

QUESTIONS FOR COACH CAROLYN KIEGER, NATISHA HIEDEMAN, ALLAZIA BLOCKTON, AND SELENA LOTT

Q. Natisha, Chennedy Carter remind you of anybody who you guys have played? And how do you kind of contain her?

NATISHA HIEDEMAN: I think she's pretty unique. She's a great player. She's very explosive, but I don't think we've played anybody quite like her. And the game plan going in is just to try to contain her as much as we can.

Q. Going into tomorrow, you guys are going to be playing in front of A&M's home crowd. How do you guys plan to weather the storm early and take the crowd out of the game?

ALLAZIA BLOCKTON: I think we just like to bring our own energy, so obviously we're playing at Texas A&M but that doesn't really down our energy. We like to bring our own energy. So whether we're playing in a sold-out crowd, nobody, we like to focus on our own energy and the energy we bring. We're going to come in hyped and create our own energy.

Q. Selena, after maybe you-all didn't play as well as you would like yesterday, is there an additional hunger going into this game? Or what's the feeling?

SELENA LOTT: Definitely. We know we started off really slow. In the first half that we played, it was probably the worst half we've ever played. We know we've just got to get our tempo back up.

Q. Follow-up to that. Natisha, when you've looked back 24 hours, any particular reason why you guys struggled from the field? Because you played a lot of great teams and that hadn't happened. Really looking for stats.

NATISHA HIEDEMAN: I think it was an off night for the team. The shots weren't falling. But we just got to stay confident, and, hopefully -- we know that's not going to happen two games in a row. So we should be good. We've got a lot of shots up today. We felt good out there. As a team and individually, everybody was shooting the ball well.

Q. Allazia, after you all were able to do what you did yesterday, did you kind of forget about the game and put it to the side, or do you use it to build off of going into this game?

ALLAZIA BLOCKTON: This morning at film session, we looked at the stuff that we did good to get us motivated for the next game. It was motivation that we didn't play our best game and we were able to come up with a win still.



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We just look at past movies when we were playing with tempo and we showed a united team out there. We started to pick it up a lot. So I think we use it as a little bit of motivation to get our confidence back on to the next game.

Q. Obviously, no 6'5" players tomorrow. But A&M does have some size all-around. How do you guys plan to counter against them and take what you did against Rice yesterday and bring it back tomorrow?

SELENA LOTT: Yeah, like with Lauren [Van Kleunen] and Altia [Anderson] stepping up, they should be big bodies for us to hold the big girls down.

Q. Natisha, when you're playing against another really great guard like Chennedy [Carter], do you get up for those kind of matchups to kind of show what you can do or is it just another game?

NATISHA HIEDEMAN: I think it's just another game. I think that our focus as a whole team is knowing we have to step our game up not only offensively but defensively. We have to work really hard to shut her down because she's an elite athlete.

Q. Allazia, how do you guys plan to utilize that fast pace you guys have been using all season to tire out A&M?

ALLAZIA BLOCKTON: We're a really fast team, and we like to play fast. It is not going to be anything changed for us. We want to get out in tempo and push the ball. This just falls right into our game plan, and we're going to utilize our speed like we've done all year. That's pretty much how we play at Marquette.

Q. Natisha, I've read a lot about seniors, veteran team. What do you think is going to be different to get you over the hump to get you to the Sweet 16, which Marquette hasn't done?

NATISHA HIEDEMAN: Yesterday, it was just our composure. There have been games we've been close but haven't been able to finish it out. Yesterday it shows our maturity that we were able to finish it out even being down by nine with three minutes left.

I think that moving forward, I think maturity is probably the biggest thing. And we listen to each other and talk to each other on the floor and making in-game adjustments.

Q. Natisha, your coach was telling us about how yesterday in the huddle you were telling the girls like, "We're not going to lose. It is not even an option." How does this team get that strong mindset? And how were you-all able to stay so positive in such a tough situation?

NATISHA HIEDEMAN: I think with most of the majority of the team being seniors, it is just we don't want it to be our last college game. And we know that we have the potential



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to make it to the Sweet 16. That's been our goal since we got here. So we want to be the first team in program history to do that, and we're really striving for that goal.

Q. You guys had a program record of 27 wins yesterday. How does that feel and for everything you've accomplished so far and turning this program around and making everything here so special?

ALLAZIA BLOCKTON: I think it is the coaching because of our hard work and the fact that we have faith that our coaches put into us and to get to something this special is amazing. We can use that momentum going into the game. But I think it is just a special feat that we have in showing how much better we've done each year that we've been here.

NATISHA HIEDEMAN: We want more, 28, 29, 30 wins.

COACH KIEGER: Well, it's great to be back here practicing for another game with a chance to make it to the Sweet 16. You heard our student-athletes up here just right before me and how much they have this goal of getting there and leaving the jersey in a better place. And so I think our team is extremely focused. I think we're really excited to play Texas A&M on their home floor in front of their home fans. I think you'll see a very different team tomorrow than you did last night.

Q. With that in mind, Coach, did you schedule this -- make this tough schedule knowing they would be seniors, knowing this would be your time? Or do you guys always play that kind of schedule?

COACH KIEGER: We always like to play a hard schedule. To be the best, you have to beat the best. That's always been my scheduling philosophy. But specifically, definitely this year. We wanted to challenge ourselves as much as we could for this moment right here to prepare our team mentally, physically, and in any way we possibly can.

So I think our team has been in this situation before. We've played in hostile environments. We've played SEC teams. We've played ATC teams, and I think we're ready. I think they go back to their training and they go back to the moments where they've had success against some of these teams. And they also have a chip on their shoulder because we've been so close in some of the ball games and we quite haven't made that hump and got one of those big-time wins this year. In years past, we have. This year we're hungry for one.

Q. Coach, when you look at the tape, does any of that remind you of any team you've played in particular, or is there one thing they do that stands out to you?

COACH KIEGER: That's a great question. I think Natisha [Hiedeman] had a great statement. They're very unique. [Chennedy] Carter is probably one of the best guards with the basketball I've ever seen in my entire life. So for us, just to try to stop her is going to be a battle.



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And I think our team is excited for that challenge. I think they're going to be really pumped up for the matchup. And I think you'll see a team that has really focused on the defensive end. I think any time we can scheme defensively, our team seems to like that and they seem to be locked in.

In the Big East, we have so many teams that run a five-out motion where they have five people that can shoot threes at any given time So we don't get the scheme as much as we get to tonight -- or I should say tomorrow. I think our team is going to be really ready for that battle.

Q. A lot has been made about how maybe you guys didn't play your best game yesterday. However on the flip side, you held a team that was on the verge of closing in a game scoreless for seven straight minutes. Is that something you can build on, the defense you played in that stretch?

COACH KIEGER: Absolutely. I said this last night. I don't think in years past that we would have won that ball game only scoring 58 points.

I'm really proud of our defense this year, and it is something we've been working on since the moment that we lost last year to Louisville. We really knew we needed to fix that end of the basketball floor. So our team has really bought into that from the day one of practice. And it showed up in the biggest moment that we needed it.

And, you know, Rice is a great team. They're disciplined on both ends. I was really pleased with our defensive intensity, our communication, and how we held them to what we did in that stretch. That was huge. We don't win that game if we don't lock in defensively.

Q. Coach, how do you combat their size? They have two players inside that are pretty physical in [N'dea] Jones and [Ciera] Johnson.

COACH KIEGER: We have to keep them off the boards. They both have about 105 offensive rebounds on the year. We have got to be big and we've got to be physical. That's our number one thing to the game plan, is they've got to be one and done. We have to keep them off the board and we have keep them off the free-throw line.

Q. You just talked about [Chennedy] Carter but obviously Natisha [Hiedeman] is a great guard for you and [Gary] Blair raved about her. Can you just tell us, what makes her special in your eyes?

COACH KIEGER: She's fearless. She's so athletic in a way that is pretty deceptive. She can get her shot off very quickly. She can miss five and believe that the next ten are going in and I love that about her.

What I really have been impressed with this year is she's developed her game more than just a spot-up shooter. She's attacking the hoop. She's fighting people off the



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bounce. We really challenged her this off-season to kind of grow her game, take better shots. She's always been an elite shooter. It is just I think in years past her shot selection is what made her percentages down. I think this year she's trusted her teammates more a little bit more, trusted her offense, and I think it's really helped her out. You've seen her whole game go to a different level.

Q. How about the luxury of having two Big East players of the year, is that like having -- kind of unusual?

COACH KIEGER: Makes our job a lot easier, doesn't it? Our team has worked extremely hard. That's one thing we really pride ourselves on, is player development. We really get in the gym and get after it.

I think my staff does a phenomenal job with individual training and knowing our weaknesses and knowing our strengths and getting everybody better. So when Allazia [Blockton] went down this year with the injury, Natisha [Hiedeman] really stepped up in a big way.

So when you have two people that are capable of that, honestly probably two or three more, in that senior class, I think it just speaks for the diversity of our team and how versatile we are. But I think that's been accruing since their freshman year and how we train and how much work and hard work they put in.

Q. You touched on this a bit earlier, with a senior team and you've known these women for so long, what would it mean for you personally to get this Sweet 16, to add on to your win total?

COACH KIEGER: I want it so bad for them because they want it. This is something we've been talking about now for four years. And for me, this group has trusted in us and they've stayed loyal and they came to Marquette. We told them four years ago we were going to be a top-ten team with nothing to show but a lot of paper and me selling a goal and saying what our plan was, and they bought in.

And they've let us coach us -- or they've let us coach them, and it hasn't always been easy. We've had our ups, we've had our downs, but this group has stayed together. They've stayed committed to Marquette. They've stayed committed to me. And I think that says a lot about who they are as people. And I just -- I can't say enough how much I would love to see them get their goal.

At the end of the day, we have got to earn it and it is not going to be easy. And Texas A&M is not going to give it to us. That will be a great lesson in life. If you want something, you have got to go with it with everything you have and lay it on the floor. And that's the plan for tomorrow.