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An Interview With:

## **PENN STATE**

### **COACH COQUESE WASHINGTON MAGGIE LUCAS ZHAQUE GRAY**

THE MODERATOR: We're joined now by Penn State head coach Coquese Washington and student-athletes Maggie Lucas and Zhaque Gray.

We'll start with questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Maggie, how tough was it playing the rest of that first half with the foul situation?**

MAGGIE LUCAS: You know, I usually don't get too many fouls. So it wasn't that difficult. Just a little extra thought. Probably not going to try to take a charge at that point.

So, you know, tried to focus on it.

**Q. Maggie or Zhaque, you said time and time again you don't worry about the halftime going into the locker room regardless of the score if it's somewhat close. Were you worried today?**

MAGGIE LUCAS: We weren't happy with how we played in the first half. I don't think we were concerned. We know we can string together quick points. So we can get back in the game easy, just get a few stops.

**Q. Maggie and Zhaque, what changed for you guys in the second half? You came out with a 16-2 run and completely took away the halftime lead.**

ZHAQUE GRAY: I felt like we got the first-half jitters off. We came out kind of tight, and

then I feel like in the second half we just relaxed and executed the game plan.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Questions for Coach.

**Q. Coach, did you try to take advantage of Minnesota's physical play in the second half and try to draw those fouls like that and get some points?**

COACH WASHINGTON: Well, I wouldn't necessarily say we tried to take advantage of it. But we certainly talked about responding to their physical play in that we had to play a little bit tougher in the second half than we did the first half. And I thought we were able to do that and we got on the bonus early which helped us.

**Q. Alex started 1-for-7, Nikki started 0-for-7. What did you say to them in halftime to get them going the second half and get production out of them?**

COACH WASHINGTON: We didn't talk about offense at all. We talked about our defense. I thought offensively we were impatient. And I take that back, we did talk about offense in the sense that we talked about being more patient and getting more ball movement.

The first half I thought we took a lot of quick shots. And we weren't moving the ball and making the extra pass. The second half I thought we did a little bit better job of that. I also thought we mostly defended better. And we defended better. We got some transition opportunities. We got to the free-throw line. And Nikki and Mia did a great job on the board in the second half giving them second-chance points.

**Q. You said you talked about defense. Alex had a steal, just ran the floor completely, looked over at you, all you could do is smile and shake your head. Then you have another one from her and it leads to a three-point play from Maggie. Can you talk about what that did to spark you guys?**

COACH WASHINGTON: Our defense is

what keeps us in games. In the first half, we shoot jump shots. Sometimes they go in. Sometimes they don't. You can't always control whether or not you're making baskets, but you can control your effort on the defensive end. You can control how you make shots for your opposition.

In the first half we didn't do that. The second half I thought we did a better job of it. But I thought Minnesota did a really good job of staying in the game, even when we went on our run and we got the lead, they kept attacking. Banham had a really good game and Buford was aggressive the second half, and that allowed them to stay within striking distance.

**Q. Coach, earlier today Jordan Hooper got two fouls early and sat the rest of the first half. This game Maggie gets two fouls. She plays through it. Can you talk about the thought process behind that and her being able to play through it and be effective?**

COACH WASHINGTON: Well, again I just have a lot of faith and confidence in Maggie. I've told her it was like you've got two fouls you've got to be smart. So she said you just can't gamble. Maybe you don't get in there take a charge. Maybe in some areas you're not as aggressive or assertive.

And then we talked about offensively she had to be smart in terms of shooting the pull-up and not putting herself in the position to pick up a charge call.

So I just have a lot of faith and confidence in her ability to play smart with two fouls.

**Q. Alex and her energy level. Obviously radiates. Obviously she doesn't do anything quietly. And I know that sometimes controlling that and pulling the reins in can be difficult. Can you speak to her energy level what it means to the team? And then for those who aren't aware of your career, how does her temperament and how she played the point compared to when you played?**

COACH WASHINGTON: Oh, okay. Well, her energy level is key. She pushes the pace for us. I mean, she changes things defensively for us. I mean, I think you can see tonight why she was named to the All-Defensive Team because she gets into the action and creates plays.

I thought one of the biggest plays she made was steal late in the game on three-on-one transition, and she gets a steal and comes back down the other end. And I think we either get a

layup or we get an offensive foul. Yeah, that was a huge play. So her energy level is off the charts for us.

How she and I compare? I'm a little more cerebral than Alex. But, I mean, she's -- we're similar in the sense that we like running the team. We do it a little bit differently.

But, at the end of the day, she's a winner and she wills our team to win with her leadership, her energy level, her effort, and she makes big plays. Doesn't matter how she's playing. If the game is close down the stretch, she'll make plays that we need to win.

And that's just a tremendous attribute that she has.

**Q. What changed for Nikki in the second half? Two different players there.**

COACH WASHINGTON: You know what, I think the first half she -- Zha-Zha [Zhaque Gray] said they had a few Big Ten Tournament first game jitters. I thought she rushed a little bit. She played a lot more in control and a little bit slower in the second half. That allowed her to kind of get in the rhythm.

So I just think -- I think they all were a little nervous, a little jittery, and we didn't play our best basketball the first half, but the second half I thought we, all of them played a little bit better.

**Q. Back to Alex. I'll be totally unhip to say this this way, but do you dig her swag?**

COACH WASHINGTON: Absolutely loved it. Loved it. If I had a little bit of her swag, I'd probably still be playing.

**Q. You were talking about leadership and calm around Maggie, free throws down the stretch. Can you talk about what makes her such a good player and why you can trust her in that situation?**

COACH WASHINGTON: Maggie has put in so much work that she trusts everything with her game, because she's put in all the work. She shot a gazillion free throws coming into this game.

So she gets -- she expects every single time she shoots it she expects it to go in. She's slightly neurotic when she misses, and we have to go, Maggie, you're not going to make every single shot she shoots. But because she's put the work in, she has a lot of confidence in herself and I have a lot of confidence in her.

So her confidence and her composure just comes from the preparation.

**Q. You guys were down 31-18 in the first half. Were you worried at any point during this game?**

COACH WASHINGTON: You know, I can't say that I was worried. Honestly, I can't do that math. I don't even know how much it was. So that keeps me calm.

I always just think that the game is long. And, you know, if you're down double digits and it's still the first half, there's so much time left in the game. There's so many opportunities for adjustments.

So I wasn't concerned about the score. I was concerned about our execution or, I should say, lack thereof of the game plan. And like we talked to the team, if we start to execute the game plan, the score will take care of itself.

So I feel -- I have a lot of confidence in our team that we can make adjustments from first half to second half. And we usually play better the second half, we haven't had a great first half.

**Q. Do you think you guys took them lightly at all?**

COACH WASHINGTON: Absolutely not. We absolutely did not take them lightly at all. I mean, Minnesota's a good team. They beat Ohio State. They almost beat us at their place. We caught them at the end of the season last week. And we played better at home.

But we absolutely did not take them lightly. I think Minnesota is a good team and deserves a lot of credit for how well they played, how aggressive they played. They didn't appear tired at all from having played on the first day. And I just have a tremendous amount of respect for Pam Borton and what she does with her team.

**Q. With the team's initial struggles in the first half off the bat, how key was it for Zha-Zha to pop those threes and keep the attitude up?**

COACH WASHINGTON: She's playing some really good basketball, and she got some open looks and she played within herself and took what the defense gave her. That made some great shots, big shots, and that allowed us to stay within striking distance.

**Q. Looking ahead, it's not going to get any easier from here. What do you need to work on the most looking ahead to tomorrow?**

COACH WASHINGTON: I think we've got to put a full game together. We're not going to be able to advance in the Big Ten without a complete game for 40 minutes on the defensive end. So we've just got to start off the game better in the first half in terms of executing our defensive game plan.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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