

Mountain West Women's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

UNLV Lady Rebels

Coach Lindy La Rocque

Alyssa Brown

Desi-Rae Young

Kiara Jackson

Postgame Press Conference

UNLV 66, San Diego 49

THE MODERATOR: For UNLV we have student-athletes Kiara Jackson, Desi-Rae Young, Alyssa Brown. Coach Lindy La Rocque, let's get some thoughts on today's game.

LINDY LA ROCQUE: I just want to congratulate San Diego State on a heck of a tournament. To play four games in four days, to show up and bring that kind of fight that they did, it's really impressive and a testament to their leadership, the character on that team, and just the fight that they have as a group. Congrats to them on a great year.

I am extremely proud and happy for our group. Winning is hard. Winning championships is really hard, especially kind of when you are expected to. This group handles it with grace, with commitment, and willingness to doing whatever it takes.

It takes a lot of sacrifice. So obviously these three are phenomenal players, but it's all 14 players that we have, our staff, our coaches, our support staff, administration buying into what it takes to win.

I'm extremely grateful for everyone that helps us along the way.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Just for each of you, what does it mean to be able to three-peat for the third time in Mountain West history?



DESI-RAE YOUNG: My freshman year we lost the first game and then it was uphill from there. I'm just extremely proud of where I've come, where this team has come.

Lindy has done a great job of just telling us to trust her and telling us to trust the staff.

I mean, we all bought in at the end of the day.

Q. What kind of made it difficult? -- sorry, Alyssa. You go ahead.

ALYSSA BROWN: It's super special. Coming in my freshman year it was fantastic, and from there we tried to build a culture as a group, work day in-day out and try to get out what we put into it, and it's been paying off.

KIARA JACKSON: I'm just so proud of this team. I don't think I would have expected this coming as a freshman, but it shows off all the hard work we've put in.

Q. What made it difficult to get anything going in the first half? What kind of turned the tide in the third quarter to give you the confidence to pull it out? Are?

KIARA JACKSON: I just think we had confidence in each other and the coaches had confidence in us. They told us to keep shooting, keep being aggressive. They're going to fall. We just kept that attack mindset.

DESI-RAE YOUNG: Our defense kept us in the game. We did a great job just of defending and knowing our personnel and knowing the scout.

ALYSSA BROWN: Yeah, it was just about settling in. Our shots started to fall the second half. Adjusting to how the refs were letting us play, what the defense was giving us. Just settling in.

Q. Desi-Rae, you had six steals tonight, a Mountain West Championship game record. What was your mindset going into the second half with that to kind of get the defense going to get the offense going?

DESI-RAE YOUNG: I mean, defense is where it's at.



Defense wins games. We know we're an offensive team, and we're a first-half team, second-half team, but we knew that the defensive end was exactly where we had to be, play the hardest at, and be the smartest at.

Q. Alyssa, you seemed somewhat surprised to be named MVP. What were your thoughts when you were announced and now that you've had a few minutes to think about it?

ALYSSA BROWN: I couldn't hear anything after my name was called but my heart in my ears. I'm glad the girl grabbed me because it would have been water works a little worse than it was.

Super blessed to be in this position. The coaches since day one, I've had kind of every position on this team since freshman year, and they've instilled so much confidence in me and worked with me. The girls have put their confidence in me.

It was just like the highest moment in my career, and I felt very blessed and very proud.

Q. Desi, after last meeting with San Diego State you were open in saying that that team didn't really look like San Diego State that day. You said you expected another tough matchup if you guys saw them again. Kind of how difficult is it or how hard is it to face a team coming off of a performance like that, understanding they probably remember it more than you guys do?

DESI-RAE YOUNG: It's hard to beat a team three times in a row, and we definitely did that. I don't think they played fantastic today either. I think that we just played harder and we played smarter.

The second time we played them it was just our Senior Night and the team wanted to give me and Ashley the ball, but at the end of the day that's how we have to play every single game.

Q. You talked about the defense holding in the shots started falling. How were you able to keep the confidence up defensively? I think you went 8:06 without allowing a point to them.

ALYSSA BROWN: We talked a lot to each other on the court. Talking to people, coverages, telling them it's okay, next shot, we'll get it back. Just making sure everyone is on the same page constantly.

It helped us stay in the game.

Q. I think the entire arena was quiet when you went down. How were you making sure everything was okay?

DESI-RAE YOUNG: I was cool. It was just a little break for the team. You know, things happen, but I'm good.

Q. Coach talked about it coming into the tournament. She said that in order to win three games in three days it's going to take everybody. She said it may come a point where there's going to be players that have to play significant minutes, and you guys are going to have to quote, unquote, suck it up. Desi played more than 37 tonight. Ashley played 36. KJ, you played close to 35. How much is that indicative of how you wanted to close the show?

KIARA JACKSON: We wanted it. We can't let the fatigue stop us. We have to want winning more than we are tired, so...

Q. For all three of you, just back to the NCAA Tournament. Just your early thoughts on your expectations and the time you have between now and then.

DESI-RAE YOUNG: We expect to win games. That's what we want to do. This is our third time here, and we expected to be here for a third time, so winning games is our highest expectation.

ALYSSA BROWN: Yeah, exactly what Desi said. We expect to go in there, compete, and have a different outcome than we've had the last two years. I think we're all excited to be back in that position, and we're ready to work.

Q. For all three of you, how does this championship, how does this run to this conference championship feel different from maybe the first two times?

KIARA JACKSON: Personally I just feel like it feels the same. It's amazing to three-peat. I mean, we continue to work hard.

DESI-RAE YOUNG: I think it's because we're the best in the Mountain West. No one wants to compete with us. Every time somebody plays us, they give us their hardest game, but it's not hard enough. We just go out there and just bust them every time.

I mean, when it comes to the tournament, people try to play ten times harder, and I wish that we played Colorado or Wyoming in the final game. That would have been a little bit more exciting. But we had San Diego, and that's

just how I feel about it. I got your back. I know you didn't want to say it.

ALYSSA BROWN: It's hard to do it three times in a row, and I think that people -- our conference, they recruit to play us at this point, so I feel like are constantly adapting, trying to find ways to score, trying to make reads.

Lindy keeps us very prepared, and it was a little bit harder, but it's still the same. Blessed feeling to be here.

THE MODERATOR: We'll dismiss the student-athletes at this time. Questions for the coach.

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Welcome to my world. You get that once a year; I get it every day.

Q. How many laps are they going to be running for saying those kind of things?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: I've told you before, Desi is unapologetically herself. You got a glimpse into that. I think the biggest thing is every year is a different journey.

The last two years were great, but this year was totally different. It's a new team. You have to find your own path. You have to make different sacrifices. Whatever it takes to get here, you have to have people that are willing to do it. We do. It doesn't always feel good. More often than not it actually doesn't feel good.

You have to kind of sacrifice that to have the greater good of lifting the trophy. It's extremely just elating to even be in this position.

Q. Given all those things that you just mentioned, what does it mean to you as a coach to be able to take these players through three seasons and come out on top each time?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Yeah, well, again, it's so different every year. It's so different. We're not finished with this year, but next year it's going to be different, the year after, and the year after.

Each time it doesn't get old. For this group they've earned it, and they've put in the work, so I'm really proud of them.

Q. Two questions, Coach. The first one is the Xs and Os. We've talked about it all season long in terms of this offense going as Kiara goes, in terms of fluidity. Kind of a rough game yesterday to shake off, but she comes in tonight, she's aggressive from the start. What did you see from the guard position?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Yeah, she was really frustrated yesterday, but our team won, and that was most important. She knew that too. And really Desi too. I kind of grabbed them last night and reminded them that we don't go anywhere without them. They show up on the biggest stages.

I knew both of them were going to come ready to play. They had that look in their eye. This is Kiara's team. She's our point guard. I knew she was going to lead us to a championship today.

She battled again missing some little easy shots where she could have got frustrated, but she kept going downhill, finding her teammates, seven assists. Really proud of her perseverance and fight and sticking with it.

Q. Obviously the talk probably until Selection Sunday will be the three-peat, but I know that you are a journey-driven person. 87-12 over the last three seasons. I'm just wondering from a snapshot view what does that kind of feel like?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: Well, you are better at math than I am because I hadn't even added those numbers up. But again, I think it's the testament to the people that we have here, the players that we have, the staff that we have. It's great.

We're in a fortunate position where our players, our staff, we haven't felt a lot of losing. We want to keep it that way.

Q. Obviously the expectation was that you guys were going to win again. You guys have done that now. How do you balance celebrating, being happy, but also knowing what's ahead and what you guys want to accomplish still?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: I think it's important. We have to celebrate this victory just because it is so monumental to win the regular season, to win the conference championship.

While it's expected, you still have to celebrate it. We'll take a couple of days off, but then we'll -- they're all going to be quick to -- we want more and kind of we're not just happy to be here type of feeling.

But we've got to work. We've got to get people healthy and put some work in even before we get the Selection Show.

Then once we know where we're going, we've got more work to do.

Q. What was the message to the team at halftime

when the score was 20-20?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: I thought our defense was great, so that was the message. Our defense is awesome. We have to keep sticking with that.

Then offensively we just had to settle in and attack the basket, have the trust in each other that we have to play fast and get out in transition. I was pretty confident.

Again, the offense on our own end that we were going to -- I knew if we kept playing defense, then our offense would get going.

Q. Then the second half what are your thoughts of your senior Ashley and Desi closing it out for you guys?

LINDY LA ROCQUE: I thought Ashley hit some huge shots, really huge shots, and great execution by -- a couple of them were some sets.

And then Desi, I told her at halftime, we're going to you. You've got us here and you're going to take us home. She made some huge plays and some rebounds and some tough finishes.

Again, two senior leaders that weren't going to let us lose.

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THE MODERATOR: For San Diego State we have student-athletes Jada Lewis, Sara Barcello, Abby Prohaska. Coach Stacie Terry-Hutson, we'll start with you and get some of your thoughts?

STACIE TERRY-HUTSON: I hate to see it come to an end, but I thought our group battled. We just ran out of gas.

But these kids competed for the four days that they've been here, and it was really fun to watch. I've never seen them so locked in playing for each other.

We played some really good basketball here in Vegas. They don't need to hang their heads. I'm really proud of them. I know it hurts. Our season is ending. We wanted this championship, but they should be proud of themselves because they laid the foundation, and they also laid the expectation, and that's to be here next year.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. For either of the players, personally what does it mean to get to this point overall this season to the first championship appearance since 2013? Are?

JADA LEWIS: I mean, it means a lot, honestly. I'm very proud of what we went through to get here. There was a lot of ups and downs, but honestly when we found out the bracket, there was no doubt that we would be here.

ABBY PROHASKA: Yeah, I feel like we had a lot of



confidence coming into this tournament, but it stems from the beginning. I mean, we talked about it before the season even started. We believed in each other. We believed in the locker room and the people that were supporting us from the jump.

Yeah, but it means a lot. I'm really glad we were able to set that expectation of getting back here next year.

Q. For any of you that want to answer this, you guys don't look like a team that just took a pretty big loss to this same team and came a lot closer this time. It looks like you guys expected to win this game.

ABBY PROHASKA: Yeah, I think we came in fired up. Like Coach was saying, we've played really good basketball here, and I think just stems from really being prepared and getting our ass beat while we were here. I mean, that set the foundation. You don't want to get embarrassed like that.

Coming out here it was personal. Unfortunately, we couldn't get the job done, but I think we still played a hell of a game.

Q. This is a team that's won now three straight tournament championships. What do you think that the team can take from this to build on to take in next time the program is back at this level?

JADA LEWIS: If you're asking what I think you're asking, I think we've built the foundation right now. We know we can get here. We know what it takes now to get to this point.

I think this is the foundation, and this is just the beginning for this team.

Q. To any of the players, when you went in at halftime, it was tied. Were you at all disappointed that you weren't ahead? You really made them play well below their normal level in the first half. Unfortunately, you guys went through a drought yourselves. If you could do it all over again, would that be the one thing you might look back on a little bit?



ABBY PROHASKA: Honestly we had them exactly where we wanted them. It was 0-0 coming out of halftime. We wanted to keep it a low-scoring game, and I think we did that.

Like Coach said, we've played four games in a row. I'm 24 years old. We're not that young.

Q. Yes, you are.

ABBY PROHASKA: It kind of weighs on you a little bit. But yeah, I think we had them exactly where we wanted them. I wouldn't change halftime at all. Unfortunately, we just couldn't finish it out in the long run.

Q. All three of you are transfers into this program. What is so special about San Diego State basketball, and what are you going to remember most about it? To all of you.

JADA LEWIS: I came here because of Stacie, honestly. She's been the best coach this year, and I couldn't have asked for anything more. Even our assistants, all the staff, everyone is great. Honestly San Diego isn't half bad either.

ABBY PROHASKA: Oh, I'm going to get emotional. I really -- I fell out of love with basketball at Notre Dame. I wanted to quit, and I needed a place where I could fall in love again.

Stacie provided that for me, and I'm just so glad to have played a part in the transformation of this program.

SARAH BARCELLO: Going off of what was said, I think definitely Stacie and the coaching staff, but also just the potential for success at San Diego State. It's a phenomenal program top to bottom, academics, and just wanted to make something happen that hasn't happened.

THE MODERATOR: We'll dismiss the student-athletes at this time. Thank you, ladies. Questions for Coach.

Q. Stacie, talk about what you did differently from that game 11 days ago. They had 16 threes, and they had zero in the first half. They scored 28 points the first quarter. They only this 27 at the half. What did you do different tactically that worked?

STACIE TERRY-HUTSON: We wanted to make it a little ugly. We knew they were a high-scoring offensive team, but we just wanted to try to limit the threes. Desi and their post players do a good job down low so, we knew we couldn't completely stop that, so we just wanted to keep the score in the 60s. We did half of our job, but just

couldn't find a way to score the ball.

They came out and shot lights-out last time we were here. They were very prideful about themselves. They weren't going to allow that to happen again, but it was just the scout, just making sure they didn't get threes.

It was 16, like you said. That's unacceptable. We have to be better. We've been playing such better defense overall except for that the last four or five weeks, so they were mad at themselves.

We came back and had a tough film session and a wonderful practice, and then came home and beat Wyoming. So they wanted it. I wish I could say I did something great. They did that. They wanted it.

Q. Same question asked of the athletes: What does getting to this point at this level for the program mean to you personally and then these students mean to you?

STACIE TERRY-HUTSON: This group is very special because of all the adversity that we've been through. I've been saying that, but I mean, two of these kids up here will have surgery when we're done.

One is playing with a torn meniscus.

The other one that's shoulder's popping is in and out every day in practice. We've had some injuries other than that.

It's just the tenacity and the grit that they've shown to get to this point and the leadership that these three have shown is only going to trickle down and have a long-lasting effect on the underclassmen. So I'm forever grateful for that.

It started last year with that group, and now this group has really just taken the torch and run with it. So the expectations are just different now. The standards are higher now. We need to be back having this same conversation a year from now. That's the goal.

Q. You've seen UNLV a few times now. You've seen other good teams around college basketball. What do you think this team is capable of doing going forward and what should be their expectations?

STACIE TERRY-HUTSON: UNLV? They're a well-rounded team. They can hit you from a lot of different areas. They're well-coached. She does a great job.

But when you have post play like you do, you have shooters on the perimeter, and they have some guards coming off the bench that have a phenomenal midrange

game that can get downhill, so they can hurt you in a lot of different areas.

I think they're going to have a lot of success in the tournament when you get outside of the conference. We know each other pretty well. Hell, we run a lot of the same damn plays. So when they get out of I think Mountain West you'll see a lot of success because they're pretty poised for a long run in the NCAAs.

Q. I asked the kids that, but about the first half I thought they played -- you did a great job on them in the first half. You had a six-point lead. You went seven minutes without scoring. What did they do or what did you not do during that stretch when you may have been able to make some hay?

STACIE TERRY-HUTSON: I went to the locker room and said the same thing. That was our opportunity to probably stretch a lead out. Maybe go into halftime up six or seven because we played really good defense.

I thought we didn't move the ball like we have been. I thought we took some early shots in the shot clock. A lot of one-on-one that wasn't very successful. They just wanted it so bad, I think they kind of took it in their own hands.

We settled in, came back in the third quarter, and moved the ball a little bit, was able to score a little more. At that point we were just running on fumes, and I wish I had four, five more timeouts. I would have used them all, but they were just tired. I mean, those shots that were going in earlier in the week just were rimming out.

Q. Do you expect to still be playing, and do you have any idea in which tournament?

STACIE TERRY-HUTSON: I don't know. I don't know. There's a couple of tournaments that are coming. We'll have to go back and sit and talk.

But I mean, there's an RPI thing that comes with all of that. I don't know. It's like -- I don't know. We'll see. I guess the answer is I don't know.

Q. What is it about the culture of this program that you're able to bring in transfers and they're able to buy in as immediately as this group has? To that as well, what does it mean to you personally hearing what impact you've had on each of these young ladies?

STACIE TERRY-HUTSON: I think that's why all of -- well, myself and my staff why weigh into what we do, to impact lives like that. We want to give them a safe place to land.

A lot of them haven't had great experiences at their previous schools, and we want them to make sure that they leave with that love and excitement about basketball again.

San Diego, like they said, is just a great opportunity to play in a phenomenal arena, have all the resources that you possibly need. We have of the support from our administration and the community, and it's just a great place to land.

Like she said, San Diego is the best city to live in, but they're going to have fun in our program. They're going to work really hard. They're going to have a lot of fun, and I think it's attractive to a lot of young ladies who want to come and do something and build something, and we're going to go out and sell this program.

This is going to help. This is going to help. This run is going to help in recruiting, and back-to-back 20-win seasons is going to help. We've turned the corner. We had the blinker on for a long time, but we finally turned the corner.

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