

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday March 1, 2018

Gary Blair
Danni Williams
Khaalia Hillsman
Texas A&M Aggies

Texas A&M - 82, Arkansas - 52

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by head coach for Texas A&M, Gary Blair and student-athletes, Danni Williams and Khaalia Hillsman, 10 points, 13 rebounds and Danni Williams 22 points and 5 rebounds. Coach, your thoughts on playing Arkansas?

GARY BLAIR: We played very well. We came in knowing that a team who plays the day before was feeling great about themselves. Arkansas had a great win against Vanderbilt. This was a business-like approach for us. We had so much transition early, it wasn't that we were converting but they were 1 out of 16 from the three for the first half and it opened up the doors for us to run.

I thought Danni and Kennedy had great shot selection in the first half. That's where we made it. They were concentrating on Hillsman. We found her more in the second half. That's how unselfish this basketball team it. We're going to take what the defense gives us, but I thought we played well, shared the ball and 19 assists and the most important thing, 63 rebounds. When my bench came in and played the whole fourth quarter, I thought they did an excellent job of shooting percentage, staying active and staying on the boards.

It's a W! We're going to get a good night's rest and try to get ready for LSU.

THE MODERATOR: We will now take questions for student-athletes.

Q. Khaalia, only seven shot attempts. How difficult is that to be patient when you know the ball is not necessarily going to go to you, that they covered you up early on?

KHAALIA HILLSMAN: I mean it's not very difficult because the guards are knocking down shots. I'm fine with not getting the ball as long as we are being



productive on offense. If we weren't productive and I wasn't getting the ball I would probably be more frustrated but the guards do their jobs well and they do it we will. So it makes it easy for me when I'm not getting the ball because at least we're doing the right things on offense and I'm happy within the getting the ball as long as we're doing what we need to on offense.

Q. Danni, I think that was one of your more high-scoring games against an NCAA team. What does it mean to you to have one of your better games when it is do or die in the tournament?

DANNI WILLIAMS: It means something but I was just coming out -- I found my rhythm early and I was sticking with it. Like Khaalia said, just being in the flow, moving the ball, that's what we needed today.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, we appreciate it. We will dismiss you back to the locker room. Thank you. Questions for Coach?

Q. Coach, you had played Arkansas just a week before and they get a win yesterday. Is there any challenge in getting your girls up for when they know they blew this team out a week ago?

GARY BLAIR: It's no challenge at all. Mike is one of my best friends. You play harder and you prepare harder when you're going against a friend and particularly against a school that gave me the chance in the SEC, Arkansas. I'm very indebted to them for what they did back in '93 when I had the opportunity to coach. We played well.

Right now we're clicking. Look at the stats, Hillsman had 4 blocks in that game, we're not a shot-blocking team but look at what all she did. We don't have to shoot the three ball 30-something times just because we're open.

We know we're efficient. We want to get the ball inside. That was the game plan early. But paint touches come from guards as well as post players. So Arkansas had 13 wins on a depleted roster and he should be given consideration for Coach of the Year because he did a tremendous job with that talent. But he knows how to build a program. It will get done. He's going to gather up some recruits, hopefully not any of mine and he's going to do very well. So give Mike a lot of credit and his staff.

Q. There is talk about Mississippi State and South Carolina, but how many legitimate -- how many teams could win this tournament you feel like?

GARY BLAIR: Everybody that's left. I mean, you're not going to get me to talk about my brothers and sisters like they don't have a chance, uh-uh. Kentucky looked pretty good today as well. It's hard to win sometimes when you're playing that first game out, and I hope LSU has that problem tomorrow and we got one under our belt. I remember two years ago we had the bye and then had to play at Tennessee and we got drummed. It's hard.

South Carolina, of course, depends on the health of Wilson. Mississippi State, they played the best ball all year, give them credit. That's why they're No. 2 in the nation. But it's hard to win the regular conference and the SEC tournament because everybody is shooting for 'em. Right now LSU has got our attention. They play a tremendous zone defense and they've got Jackson and Louis and they got Mitchell, three of the best players in our league.

Q. Was there anything that LSU did particularly better that second time you faced them they didn't do the first time?

GARY BLAIR: No, they're very good at mid-range jumpers off of ball screens, and I mean, they can elevate. So it puts a lot of pressure on my post players to come out. It's not who they hit on the roll player, the little Harris kid last time we played 'em did a good job hitting the corner shot. How they beat us last time they went to a four-guard lineup and went with Mitchell as the 5 in the second half and we had a whole lot of problems guarding that. They just have all four of them with Jackson and Louis you have to spend so much attention but all of the sudden you had Pointer and Harris over there in the corners and Mitchell was doing just a great job on the boards.

So what we've got to do is we've got to be able to score inside early and be efficient, share the ball, find out who the hot person is. I think this is a key ball game for Kennedy because her two worst conference games this year have both been against LSU. So I know she cannot wait to show the country and the rest of the SEC what she can do and hopefully she is going to have a good ball game like she did today.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.