

# Big East Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 4, 2023  
Uncasville, Connecticut, USA  
Mohegan Sun Arena

## UConn Huskies Coach Geno Auriemma Aaliyah Edwards Azzi Fudd

Postgame Media Conference



Connecticut - 69, Georgetown - 39

**Q. Azzi, when did you know for sure that you were ready to play? When was the decision made? How was it made? How did you feel when you woke up this morning figuring you were going to play?**

AZZI FUDD: Well, this was always my goal was to come back for tournament time. So I'd been working up to it this last week at individuals practice. I was mentally prepared, and then waking up this morning, I was very excited.

**Q. Azzi, what have these last couple of months been like for you both emotionally and physically as you worked towards getting back?**

AZZI FUDD: It's been tough having to be on the sidelines so much watching everyone struggle through all the ups and downs we've been through. But that was my motivation, just to keep working hard. My goal was to get back on the floor. So every day working hard in rehab, doing what I need to, all my extra stuff, hoping that I could get back here at the end of the season with them.

**Q. Azzi, what were the expectations you had for yourself? And were you just patient when you missed the first few shots knowing that it would come eventually, as long as you've been off?**

AZZI FUDD: Yeah, I was really nervous kind of leading up to it, thinking, like, this is my first game, am I going to do well? But then I remember this is my first game. So I wasn't worried. I knew that I've been doing well. So kind of just have confidence in all the work I've put in, and not to overthink it. And what happens, happens. If I miss, I'll make the next one.

**Q. Aaliyah, this was (indiscernible) your first game not finishing in single digits of your opponent of the past ten. How does that feel to have that more wiggle room?**

AALIYAH EDWARDS: I'll pass this question off to Azzi. (Laughter). No, I'm playing.

I think that it was a great first game for us. I think that we stuck to the game plan defensively and we flowed offensively off of their turnovers and off of our defensive rebounds.

So I think that was a good flow for us, especially coming in for a first game off a big break for us. And I think that we can only learn from this game.

**Q. Azzi, whenever you shot, even though you missed the first few, the crowd seemed like they were holding their breath, waiting to be able to give you that reception, that they felt like you deserved. And then finally making those back-to-back 3s, what did it feel like getting that reception from the crowd?**

AZZI FUDD: The crowd is always amazing. The fans here are great. Just getting to be there, be in this atmosphere, in this environment with everyone, it's great to hear them all screaming.

But also, all my missed shots Aaliyah rebounded. So it was basically like I was making it anyway.

**Q. You held Georgetown in the first quarter, the fewest you have allowed to a team in two months. What was the emphasis in setting the tone defensively early? And how did that carry over for you guys into the rest of the game?**

AALIYAH EDWARDS: We wanted to come out and compete and be competitive and hit, make sure we took the first punch. And I think that's what we did in the first quarter. And then it just lasted throughout the 40 minutes.

And I think that we just need to keep up this intensity both

**ASAP** . . . when all is said, we're done.®  
sports

defensively to help with our offense and to keeping aggressive as we are.

**Q. Azzi, did it kind of feel full circle for you to come back today against Georgetown, the team you last played against before you had gone down again? How did it feel? Once you got that first shot down, did you feel you were back in your rhythm back to yourself when you were back healthy a couple months ago?**

AZZI FUDD: I did. I actually feel better than I did the last time we played them. It was nice to be back on the floor against the same team and get that little rematch.

**Q. Aaliyah, today you were named the national ballot for the Wooden Award. We talked yesterday where you think you've improved the most, but where do you feel like you've learned the most this year?**

AALIYAH EDWARDS: I think I've learned the most about just through all the challenges that we faced as a team. I think everyone is having that next-man-up mentality. There were a lot of positions where I had to be that for my teammates. And I kind of just took that responsibility and that accountability for myself to help better myself and for the team. And I think that I'm just proud of how far I've come here.

But we're not done yet. We still have two more goals that we're trying to accomplish here for the rest of the season. So I'm just happy to be here with my teammates and be successful.

**Q. Aaliyah, emotionally can you explain what it means to the team to have Azzi back? And just from a game perspective, the spacing on the floor and all of that, what it means to you guys down low to have her back?**

AALIYAH EDWARDS: First, mostly, I think we all just took a breath, okay, we're going into the right footsteps of being a complete team again. And I think everyone was happy to have her on the court because it was going back to our first game of the season when we felt that we were, everything was clicking for us and we were on to have a great season.

But Azzi coming back, I think she adds a lot to the team, both offensively and defensively, and it showed tonight. And even though it took her a couple of shots to get into the rhythm, she did knock them down eventually, which we all knew that she would.

**Q. Azzi, you said you feel better than you did last time you played these guys. Is the knee just much more stable at this point? How do you feel better? Are you in better rhythm?**

AZZI FUDD: All around, just my knee, my confidence, just playing with my team, like the last few days in practice felt really good -- our chemistry, our flow, everything -- it just felt like everything was clicking.

**Q. You had 10 players to start the game and Caroline goes down. Just kind of seems the way the season has been going. Do you know how she is and what that means for going forward?**

COACH AURIEMMA: I've never seen a kid have the circumstances happen to her that she's been under. You almost want to laugh about it even though it's not funny that it just continues to happen. I don't know what came out of it. I think we'll know more later today, tonight, tomorrow morning. But Carol says she wants to play tomorrow.

Right now we're going under the assumption that she will unless we find something to the contrary tonight or tomorrow morning. She's a magnet. Her head is a magnet for elbows, especially Aaliyah's.

**Q. This was your guys' first double-digit win since January, dominated from start to finish, Azzi was back. How re-energizing was it for you guys to start the postseason like this?**

COACH AURIEMMA: The first game of the tournament is usually just kind of get your feet wet, get acclimated to postseason play. It's the first game you play all year long where it's one-and-done.

You usually get five, six, seven days off, whatever the case may be. And you're working new people in. So it's never smooth. It's never flawless when you play that first game. Very rarely is it.

And I thought there was a 20-minute stretch there, if you add it all up, where I thought we just played great at both ends of the floor. We did what we wanted to do defensively. We got the ball out in transition the way we wanted to. We found the right people. We made the right decisions.

And it helps when you have people that they have to guard and the ball's going to go in more times than not.

So the final score really, wasn't really important. You just want to get your feet, get your wind and get your legs back and get ready for tomorrow. That's basically it. And try to get some bodies out there and get some rest when you can. So I feel like we accomplished most of that.

**Q. First half, Georgetown was just 12 points, 5-of-36 from the floor. How impressed were you by that first-half defense? How important was it to set that kind of a tone for that first 20 minutes?**

COACH AURIEMMA: Everything starts there. It always has. And anytime our defense is as good as it was, it's followed very quickly by really, really good stuff offensively. And when your defense isn't what it was in the beginning of the game or throughout most of the game, it affects what happens on the offensive end, too.

So, again, I think the players realize this is postseason play; every possession matters. And we did a tremendous job of executing the game plan. We didn't make very many mistakes defensively. And the last month there's been a lot of that, a lot of mistakes at the worst times.

But today there weren't any that mattered. And if we can do that again tomorrow, play the same kind of defense against either one of these teams -- they both score a lot of points, both of these teams -- I think it will give us a chance to do offensively similar things to what we did tonight. Not that we were great on offense either. But we were better.

**Q. You said yesterday it isn't fair for anybody to expect Azzi to do what Paige did last year, lead you guys to a championship game. But when you see her go out there and she says she's feeling good and she makes a couple of 3s, do you feel like, you know what, that kid could still make a pretty impressive impact for us?**

COACH AURIEMMA: I don't know that anybody on our team can have a similar impact that she had. So you're adding someone that she's going to play good defense. She had four assists today. And she's going to make shots.

So the impact that she's going to have on the team is -- you can't calculate the meaning of that because they're just everything. And as Aaliyah said, the confidence that the rest of the team gets knowing that she's out there -- you know when you're talking about a player that good at that many things, you benefit from it because she's so skilled.

And the other team knows it. So they have to change their defensive approach. So I always said if we didn't get Azzi back and Caroline, if we didn't get the two of them, that it was going to be a short postseason probably for us.

What that means, I don't know. But I think having Azzi and hopefully having Caroline, I think, gives us our best chance to go far in not just this tournament but the next one.

**Q. I know Azzi's impact is immediate. How much will that impact be kind of fine tuned moving forward? Does it take a little while for a player on a team to get used to one another again?**

COACH AURIEMMA: It does with most players. I've said in the locker room -- it didn't go over too well -- I said in the locker room, the first game is just kind of like find your way. I said, you all remember last year when Paige was trying to come back and she was coming off the bench in the Big East Tournament. And I said, she ruined everything for everybody. And we were rolling and then she came in and screwed it all up.

Naturally she had to tell me we won that first game by 40 or something like that. And she didn't look like herself one bit.

So I didn't expect Azzi to come in and have a huge impact. I expected exactly what we just got.

How will that change going forward? It's only going to get better because all her talents and all her skills, they fit perfectly with what we do. And we haven't changed what we do even though she wasn't in the game for the last however many months. So she just steps into something that's very familiar, very comfortable and doesn't have to relearn anything at all.

And as long as Nika still knows where she is on the floor, we'll be good to go.

**Q. Wondering about Aaliyah. She was honored with most improved player. Can you talk about some of the specific ways she's improved this season and how that's impacted your team?**

COACH AURIEMMA: She's been more consistent. The things that we wanted Aaliyah to get better at, I think her conditioning has been way better. Her ability to sustain a certain level throughout the entire game has gotten better. Her approach to the game, I think, has improved.

And that's not even talking about she's shooting the ball better, she's finishing around the basket, she makes her free throws. I would think that most players make those incremental improvements as they go along.

And these were the things that Aaliyah needed to improve on and she has. And she needs to keep doing this, not just for this month -- this weekend, this month, but throughout this summer and going into her senior year where she needs to take -- there's even another step or two for her, which makes her one of the best players in the country.

**Q. Aubrey continues to play with such aggression. Was there a time when she was getting her back surgery, where you were curious what she would look like as a player afterward?**

COACH AURIEMMA: Anytime you're dealing with someone's back, there's always fear. Number one, will she ever be back and be able to do the things and how much will she have lost? And I think that's been put to rest that she was able to come back.

And you saw flashes and examples of what she used to be before the surgery. The one thing that may be different that -- is that there's too many lulls during the game, so -- and even game to game. So during the course of the game, she'll be like on this trajectory and then she'll disappear for a while. And then the next game she'll just explode the whole 40 minutes. And then the next game it's a struggle.

So how much of that is related to that and how much of it is, you just haven't played basketball in a long time. But you take her season as a whole and I think she's had a great year, considering.

If anybody's had back problems, it's not the easiest thing to come back from. And, again, she's another one that if we can get her to be more consistent game to game, within the game and keep her confidence level up we have to have her because we don't have a lot of those Aubrey types.

So same with Azzi. We need Azzi because we don't have a lot of those. And we need Aubrey because we don't have a lot of those. And I think the less minutes she plays, the more rest she gets during the course of the game, I think the more that's going to help her. Now that we can sub in and out, she doesn't have to go 40 minutes every night. I was looking for a sub myself a couple of times.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports