

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Hawai'i vs LSU

Thursday, March 16, 2023

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Pete Maravich Assembly Center

Hawai'i Rainbow Wahine

Lily Wahinekapu

Daejah Phillips

Media Conference

MODERATOR: We are joined by two players. Here to my left, Lily Wahinekapu. Got it?

LILY WAHINEKAPU: Yep.

MODERATOR: And Daejah Phillips over there on the far left. Ladies, welcome to Baton Rouge, congratulations on your season to this point. It's great to have you here in our city.

Lily, let me start with you first, 4-4 in January for this team, then you went 10-3 since then. What changed, if anything? Was there anything you all adjusted or what has lead, because you seem to have caught fire at the right time?

LILY WAHINEKAPU: Yeah, a lot has gone on throughout this whole season with injuries and sickness and stuff, but I feel like our team really worked together more and we were just communicating with our coaches more and we were able to like hone in more on our shooting and our team's abilities, I guess.

MODERATOR: Daejah, I'm glad you're up here because I think this is a very unique story. For people who don't know your story and Hawaii's story, if I read correctly, you went to your coach and said I want to go off the bench because I guess you had chances to start and play, you decided you wanted to go off the bench, and since you made that move you've been 13-5.

What were you seeing that had you go to your coach and say let me come in off the bench instead of let me start this game and why has it made a difference?

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: For me it was easier to come off the bench, I think I can get a flow of the game and see how



they're defending our guards so I know what I need to do when I get in.

MODERATOR: That's worked very well, congratulations for you.

Q. This is for both girls, I guess, just different perspectives I'm assuming from last names. The travel, I'm sure by now you're used to it, but for those of us who have never made that trip, what does it do to your body, how long does it take to acclimate and how ready are you for a game like this having already played a season?

LILY WAHINEKAPU: Yeah, I think we've gotten used to all the traveling and stuff, but our coaches do a really good job making sure we ice bath and stretching on and off the plane, just making sure we keep our bodies right and stay hydrated.

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: Yeah, everything we do is very great. Our weight trainer does very good stretching with us, stretch and roll every time we get off the plane no matter what time it is.

Q. Lily, would you talk about your decision to transfer in and how you were received? And Daejah, I would like for you to comment on how she was received also by a team that already was a conference champion and a tournament champion.

LILY WAHINEKAPU: Yeah, my teammates, my coaching staff have welcomed me with like open arms when I did decide to come back home and I'm grateful for that. Yeah, I wanted to come home and play in front of family and with my sister. Then just experiencing this new atmosphere with coaches and girls has been amazing so far.

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: We wanted her to come home. We knew that she would be a good fit for us, she was going to do it for Hawaii and that's exactly what we did, helped her get a ring and celebrate and win a championship for Hawaii.

Q. For Lily and Daejah, LSU scores a lot of points, 84,



... when all is said, we're done.®

third best in the country. What does that do for your offensive mindset heading into the game?

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: Rebounding, sharing the ball, not just trying to like everybody go get theirs because it's a big crowd. Everybody just needs to play together.

LILY WAHINEKAPU: Defensively making sure they don't get second shot opportunities and yeah, sharing the ball, making sure we hit the outside shots because we know that they're tall inside so just sharing, kicking it out.

Q. And obviously you might have heard this by now, a 13 seed or a 14th seed's never beat a 3rd seed in the women's tournament. What does being an underdog mean to each of you?

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: Go out and play hard. It's anybody's game, whoever comes ready to play.

LILY WAHINEKAPU: Yeah, like Daejah said, it's just another the game and I guess we have something to prove to ourselves and to other people, but the pressure's not really on us I feel like.

Q. This is for both of you, but for Lily, being the hometown girl and all that, what does it mean to you to have that underdog mentality but represent the state in this big tournament? I saw on Twitter there's some Hawaii fans that were either in Texas or here on the mainland have tickets to this game. What does it mean for you guys to be able to show up for this crowd, for this fan base that you guys have been playing for all year?

LILY WAHINEKAPU: Yeah, this is a huge opportunity to play against the best of the best. I guess just playing hard and giving everything you have and taking advantage of this opportunity that we get.

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: The aloha's with us, they love us, we're going to play hard for them.

Q. I was just kind of wondering if LSU's reputation precedes them, and it doesn't help them make a basket or get a rebound, but Angel Reese with all the double-doubles and she's called Bayou Barbie, and Flau'jae Johnson, who's a legitimate rap artist, I mean, are you all aware of the kind of aura around their team at all?

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: A little bit. I see it on TikTok here and there.

LILY WAHINEKAPU: Yeah, I see it on TikTok, too,

Instagram, all over social media.

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: The Shade Room, everywhere.

Q. Can you share a little bit about what you may have learned about the scouting of LSU, the team you're going to face tomorrow?

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: To not let them get second chance points, one and done, just play hard and just go out there and try and win the game, because it's a winnable game.

LILY WAHINEKAPU: What she said, the rebounding.

Q. Lily, you guys really cut it close coming to the tournament, you barely got out of the first round of the tournament. Is there some way -- for Daejah also, is there some way to describe this confidence that y'all have, that you won't give up no matter how close or how far out y'all are, you believe you're going to win?

LILY WAHINEKAPU: Yeah, we played some pretty good teams in the conference play and everybody just wants to win. I guess that's everyone's mentality going into it, they're going to do everything they can to win.

Yeah, we got down in a couple games, but then we were able to stick together and regroup. I feel like that's what's one really good thing about this group is that we don't give up.

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: We aren't quitters.

Q. How do you think your nonconference schedule prepared you for a game like this having played Florida Gulf Coast, Stanford, some teams that are also in the tournament?

LILY WAHINEKAPU: Yeah, we played a lot of teams that are in the NCAA Tournament now, Florida Gulf Coast, Stanford, a couple other ones, too. But yeah, our conference prepared us a lot and I feel like, I mean pre-season it has helped prepare us to get to this point now, so yeah.

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: I think playing those teams in pre-season gave us a feel for what we have coming on Friday and I think we're ready.

Q. Daejah, Coach Kim Mulkey shared about watching y'all's conference championship game, was switching channels and catching it, and I think she knows your coach so she saw you. It might have been you, the postgame interview, and you said that you're a winner, you just -- she told us that story earlier today, right?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

So you obviously have her attention, but you obviously have a lot of confidence as well and I think you kind of talked about it a little bit, but just how much does that or is that required, right, to be successful at this point in this time of year?

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: I think my team, we just need confidence and giving them the confidence that we can win this game is just making everybody like OK, let's go, let's do it. We are winners and we're ready.

Q. Daejah, and Lily can answer, too, but last year obviously you ladies came out against Baylor, you didn't play the game that you wanted to play. How important is it for you just to play Hawaii basketball as well as you possibly can and let the outcome be the outcome but have a better showing than what you guys put together last year?

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: It's very important. I think it will get us ready again for next season, pre-season next year. It's super important. We weren't ready for Baylor, we didn't know how fast they were going to be and like what the difference was. Coming in this year, we know and we're ready.

Q. Knowing that that was the season, how it ended last year, how much do you kind of take on your shoulders and say, hey, let's make sure I'm going to do my part to lead these ladies like you've done the last week and a half or so, right?

LILY WAHINEKAPU: Yeah, we've got a different team this year. Everyone has improved their skills after watching that Baylor game last year. I feel like it's not going to be the same outcome, I feel like everyone's a little bit more confident in their abilities. Yeah, this is a whole different team and I think we know how to take forth this new challenge.

Q. This is for both of you guys. Throughout the season you guys always talk about just how much of a tightknit group this group of girls are, and just leading up to the week, on Twitter, you guys going through your travels, just showing just the bond that you guys have, how do you guys kind of use that when like in the Big West Championship game when you guys are down and things aren't necessarily going your way, how do you guys kind of use that to kind of rally around each other to put you guys over that hump?

DAEJAH PHILLIPS: When you have a coach that says you're only down six possession, we got this, let's go and the team gets like, OK, we're good, let's do this. We stick together and play for each other and play for the injured

people, the four that we have.

LILY WAHINEKAPU: We celebrate each other a lot. Even when we're down, we continue to celebrate each other and that's what helps us to continue to win.