

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

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Pete Maravich Assembly Center

Hawai'i Rainbow Wahine Head Coach Laura Beeman Media Conference

MODERATOR: Coach, welcome to Baton Rouge. Congratulations on your season so far. I had a chance just to talk to some of your players just a moment ago. You won 7-8, five straight and as I was telling them, 4-4 in January but 10-3 since, so from the coach's perspective, what seemed to click and maybe what has made the difference to get hot at the right time to carry you here to Baton Rouge?

COACH BEEMAN: First of all, I want to thank the NCAA and Baton Rouge, you guys have been remarkable in hosting us so far. So thank you very much for that, you've made the kids feel really comfortable.

You know I don't look at numbers a lot so what you just told me is like, oh, we've done OK in the last seven games, that's pretty good. 4-4 in January, we had gone through some pre-season injuries. We would get on a little bit of a tear, we would have another injury, get on a little bit of a tear. I mean tear, more just playing well with one another.

So I think this last chunk of the season is basically because we finally had some continuity with our lineups, with our rotations. It's hard to come up with plans and starting lineups and a game plan when two days before you play a game, two kids go down. We had two kids go down in a matter of five days with knees. So not only the physical part of that, but also the emotional toll of losing players that late in the season in that way, one on the road and one in practice. It was a gut punch to the team.

We had to take a breath and talk about our why, talk about our process, figure out what these kids wanted to do and where they wanted to go. I think after we all got out of the fetal position and cried a little bit about the loss, we regrouped and said let's go, let's play for them, let's play for our state, we know what our whys are, let's go out and do it. The effort and the enthusiasm for one another has been



tremendous and I really attribute it to these kids' resilience and how they like to play for one another and what they're doing. So I think that is really the main factor of why we've done so well of late.

MODERATOR: A lot of people see Hawaii's come to Baton Rouge and they will automatically think of the flight, but you were just telling me you didn't go back to the islands, you came basically from the mainland. Was that strategically done, was that done on purpose instead of trying to go all the way home and then turn around to go to destinations unknown?

COACH BEEMAN: Yeah, last year we went back to the islands after winning the tournament. Hawaii's an amazing place, the aloha spirit is absolutely real and you don't know until you've been there and you've lived there and you've met our community.

We really wanted the young ladies to feel the celebration because the program had not been in a NCAA tournament since 2016 and it was important for me to have them come back and be received at the airport with all the lei and all of the band and then to go on campus and have all the excitement. Hindsight, it was a little too much. Traveling then to Waco was a lot.

So this year was we win, we're going to stay in Henderson until the NCAA comes and picks us up in a nice little charter plane flies us wherever we have to go, and the girls were OK with that. We had quite a celebration in Vegas. That's not too bad of a place to celebrate. And we had a big fan base that travels, it's known as the Ninth Island and so we had a big fan base. Our band our cheer was there, administrators, a lot of family, so we were well received after winning our conference tournament.

But it was nice to be able to sleep on Sunday and Monday, kind of regather, watch the viewing and then figure out we were coming here, and the shorter flight was nice.

Q. Coach, could you talk a little bit about Lily's transfer? Was that a recruiting battle maybe that you had lost? How did that all come about and how big has her addition been? It seems she folded in very nicely.



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COACH BEEMAN: COVID played a fact for in how much we were able to watch Lily both on and off the island. At times the competition on the island isn't good enough for us to really compare to what we want our players to, you know, become, if you will. So she committed early out of the fear that she wasn't going to land a roster spot and we had said we needed a little bit more time just because of what we had going on on our roster, so it was a little bit COVID related.

Once she committed to Cal State Fullerton, it was, oh, now we're going to play against this kid. At that point we went really hard after her sister. Her sister's a phenomenal player, unfortunately one of our young ladies that has gone down with an injury. We went really hard after Jovi, nonstop and all stop, and fortunately we landed Jovi. So when we landed Jovi, we had no idea Lily wanted to come back home, but obviously with the caliber of player she is, once she got in the portal, we made the call and said, hey, we would love to have you back.

She said, Coach, I just want to come and play for my family, play for my state. Had nothing to do with Fullerton. Jeff Harada does a great job there. In her conference travels, always a tough thing to deal with, but it was more family, more ohana, more of the aloha spirit. And she had seen what we had done last year, so that had played a factor.

Q. Kim alluded to a relationship that you guys have. I don't know how well you all know each other or not, but just from afar, what is your thoughts on the job that she's already done here in year two?

COACH BEEMAN: She's fabulous. I don't know Kim well. She came to Hawaii I think it was 11 years ago for a tournament when she was with Baylor and I believe they had come off their 44-0 season with Brittney Griner. I remember when Brittney walked through the halls, I thought my team was going to just die. And I thought to myself at that moment, why did I take this job? This is my first season here, and we had some heavy hitters come in that tournament.

She's very gracious. She's intense. I remember when I was watching Kim and I was at a JUCO thinking that's one intense coach and players want to play for her because she's going to get in their stuff, she's going to be prepared. There's no coach at this level that comes in for the most part and overlooks a team. She's not going to overlook us. Obviously at 14-3 we know the odds. It's a David and Goliath, we all know that.

But as far as she goes, she's one of the trailblazers in our

game. What she did at Baylor was phenomenal, come here and turn this thing around quick. She's a good fit here.

Excited to say hello to her again. You know, she's just done a fabulous job.

Q. I guess retrospect's always 2020, but has it been advantageous for you and your staff as well as the players to maybe have gone through some of that shuffling around with the rotation in the lineup? When you get to this year, there's maybe a little more experience, a little more different lineup playing together?

COACH BEEMAN: Yeah, I think that's a great point. For a while our fans didn't know what we were doing. I didn't know if I knew what I was doing, but we didn't have a choice. It was this person is a game-time decision and it was a no or this person's a game-time decision and it was a yes. How do you put people back in getting chemistry, you don't want to lose a ballgame. I think there were a couple times my rotations were bad and we probably lost a couple games because of that and I have to take ownership of that.

Hindsight's obviously paid off well because we've been able to play some people in this stretch in either a little bit longer minutes or get a couple people on to give some people some breathers.

You don't want your season to go that way where you're always kind of fighting, but it's great to have a group of young ladies that has believed in our process and they bought into our process. Since 11 years ago, I walked in and said this is a process of how we do things on the course, how to do things off the court, and to have a team that says OK, we think you're a little crazy sometimes, but we're going to believe in you, that means a lot. It's humbling to have a team with all of the injuries and adversity we've had say, OK, Coach, we know you've got this and let's go.

I do think, to your point, some of those different lineups have helped us. Trust me, particularly going into tomorrow, I wish I had five players that aren't here today. We're going to need all the help we can get, we know that, but I do think some of that experience is absolutely going to be on our side tomorrow.

Q. Just want to make sure I've got the story, I heard right, the players said that you said we're six possessions down so let's go. Can you describe a little more of that game and situation? Does it speak to the resilience of your team that you've had this year?

COACH BEEMAN: Yeah, it was one of the time-outs in a championship game. We went into halftime, we were down I think 15 and we talked about the adjustments we needed to make, we talked about if you guys don't lighten up and have a little bit of fun, this game's going to get out of control.

And that was the same message that I gave them last year against Irvine -- we were down at halftime -- that you have to have fun what you're doing and that means you have to play hard, you have to lock in, you have to focus. That's fun. Going through motions isn't fun.

It was at one of the time-outs, I said we're six buckets down, we do this every day. They were like, oh, that's it. I was like, yeah, math is hard and we're six buckets down and they kind of chuckled it was full stop let's go. They locked into that message and they had a goal to be up at the end of the third quarter. We weren't, but we had cut into the lead. In the fourth quarter we had some great defensive possessions and hit some big shots and then from there, thank goodness Daejah was in the right place at the right time and Perez gave her a beautiful pass and we won on that shot.

MODERATOR: I had a chance to talk to Daejah when the players were here earlier. In this day and age of "play me now or I'm leaving," this is a player who came to you and said, "Coach, take me off the floor and bring me in off the bench." She's your second-leading scorer.

I wanted to ask you from a coach's point of view, have you ever had a lot of players come to you and make that request? And what it's been like having her come off the bench, because with her doing that, you're 13-5 since she came to you and said, "Coach, bring me in off the bench."

COACH BEEMAN: You know, ironically, she's not the first player that's asked me that. Our style of play has always been, and my SID can give you correct stats because, again, I don't do numbers, we've had one Player of the Year since I've been at Hawaii, even when we won the conference. I think we've had three or four Sixth Men of the Year, so we play team basketball.

Daejah, she saw, hey, when there's a little bit of sacrifice, we share the ball, I come in off the bench and do more. She doesn't come off the floor obviously. I think she felt like she needed to see the game better, it helped her mental, but I think she also was like this has been a recipe for success in the past, let me just come off the bench, let's see what happens.

Unfortunately, she had played too many games to be Sixth Man of the Year, otherwise she would have absolutely had

that hands down. She's a selfless kid. When she says she's a winner, she's won four state championships out of Vegas, she's won two tournament championships since she's been here with us. The only other year she could have we were shut down with COVID. When she says she's a winner, she is. She's going to do what it takes to help this team be successful and put us in a place for success.

Q. I was just curious, how short is your bench and what is your rotation?

COACH BEEMAN: We go 11 deep, one walk-on and she's a lot of our why, too. Born and raised in Hawaii and doesn't get on the floor. She's not a Division I player, but she's part of our why.

We try to play 10 or 11 if we can. So it's not terrible by any means, just like we're down to six or seven kids. When you're coming from 15 deep and three of those are starters, it's a little bit different.

And I'm not making excuses. These kids will show up tomorrow and we're going to play. The outcome's going to be the outcome. We want to put ourselves in a position to win a ballgame, we want to put ourselves in a position to grow this program. Everyone starts somewhere, so we want to put ourselves in a position that if we're back here again next year, we're not a 14 playing a 3, maybe we're a 12 and we give ourselves even a better chance.

On the men's side, you see the upsets all the time, we saw one today with Furman and Virginia where it's a 14-3. In the women's side, we don't have that parity yet. If we can get to that parity and we can put our team in a position, we do have depth on our bench, we're going to play everybody, give these kids the opportunity. Not what I want it to be, but it is what it is and we move forward.

Q. You guys played a tough nonconference schedule. What do you think the team learned through that period and how was it able to develop through that period?

COACH BEEMAN: Yeah, during nonconference they were like "don't do it again," that's what they learned. I think now they can look back and say that it's absolutely given us experience, it's given -- we've played in front of big crowds, we've played in front of rowdy crowds. We're fortunate we have a great arena in Hawaii where we can play in front of some people.

So it's given us the opportunity to go and play against teams that we're not supposed to beat and it's about finding the resiliency of your team and how they're going to

compete against bigger, faster, stronger competition. You know when you go in you're the underdog, but you signed up for it. I think all of those experiences have led us to tomorrow's game and we're excited to be in this position.

