

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Final: Baylor vs UConn

Monday, March 29, 2021

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome - River Walk

UConn Huskies

Coach Geno Auriemma

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference



UConn - 69, Baylor - 67

Q. This streak of the 13 straight Final Fours, it seems like everyone is special like the last one, Katie Lou had seven 3s and you beat Louisville. Today you get a great Baylor team. This game had everything possible in it -- ups and downs and 19-0 run, which is unbelievable against the best defensive team in the country. And how do you feel about all that?

COACH AURIEMMA: It's a lot. It's a lot to digest, but right now you can only think about this particular one. You don't necessarily are thinking the other 12. We have 10 kids on our team that have not been to one Final Four. And so that to me is what the excitement is all about. Those 10 kids have never been to one and they're getting an opportunity to go to their very first.

And yet Jamelle and C.D. and the other people that work here that have been to a bunch of these, we obviously feel incredibly fortunate to be in that situation. And they're all special. That's what I tried to tell everybody, when they say which one, how does this one feel compared to all the rest. They all feel amazing. There's never been one that felt bad. It's like Christmas. People say, how was your Christmas. I never had a bad one. So there's never -- it's all amazing. They're all amazing.

Q. I know you didn't have a great angle on it, but Coach Mulkey is claiming after the game that last play was a foul based on replays she's seen. It's part of the game of basketball whether they call it or not. Have you seen that last play is it a situation it could have gone 50/50 or was it a foul at all?

COACH AURIEMMA: I don't know. I haven't seen it. But I'd also like to look at all the fouls in the first half where they shot 11 free throws and we shot two. I'm not going to go

back and check all those. I'm not going to go back and check on the last one. So a call's a call, and you've got to live with it. And the officials are going to make the call they think they need to make.

Q. Considering two of your last NCAA Tournament trips ended on buzzer beaters, how good was it for a defensive stop to win the game?

COACH AURIEMMA: Well, we put ourselves in that situation. We made it incredibly difficult on ourselves. I thought DiDi Richards getting hurt, I think, probably opened up some things for us defensively -- on offense, and we were able to take advantage of that. But late in the game, with a couple of violations, a couple of missed free throws and -- but we made enough plays.

In a game like this, just like in those games that we lost on buzzer beaters, a lot happens along the way way before that play that accounts for winning or losing the game. So if you coach long enough and you're around long enough you're going to win some at the end and you're going to lose some at the end if you put yourself in enough of those situations.

We went on that 19-0 run and to Baylor's credit, they came right back. We came back from down 10 and we went up nine, I think. We went from down 10 to up nine, and they could have easily gotten down 15, just like we could have easily gone down 15. But they're a great team and they came back like we knew they would. And we knew we were going to have to keep making one play after another all the way to the end.

Q. Obviously you spent a lot of time with Paige during the recruiting process, but what are some things you learned about her having a chance to be around her every day in practice. Is it true you were Joe Senser's college roommate?

COACH AURIEMMA: Yes it's true I was Joe Senser's college roommate. And people up in Minnesota would be happy to know that he was probably a better baseball player than he was a football player. And that's saying something when he was All-Pro. Probably one of the



nicest and most loyal men I've ever been around in my life.

Paige does a lot of things that you can't explain. And believe me, there's a lot of things that Paige has got to learn to handle that she doesn't handle so great right now. But what Paige can do is Paige can sense the moment. Like all great players, she can sense the moment, when it's time, what's needed in that time, what's necessary.

And she has the ability to fulfill that moment. Not everybody does. And you could see that in high school and Coach Cosgriff saw it every day for however many years. And our fans and fans around the country are starting to see it now on a regular basis.

Q. I imagine you're not going to like this question but I do have to ask. Everybody from LeBron James actually to your daughter tweeted that was a foul at the end.

COACH AURIEMMA: Really?

Q. Do you think this is just sort of in some ways the nature of sports, because like you said I guess you could go back through a game and check, but when games end that way, did that just tend to be what people focus on?

COACH AURIEMMA: Maybe. Maybe. I don't think LeBron's ever won a game on a bad call by the other team, by the officials on the other team, do you think? I probably doubt it. I probably doubt that in his career he's ever won a game and decided to give it back because he looked at it and went "That was a foul." (Laughs).

It is what it is. It is what it is. The officials -- one time I asked one of the officials how did Paige end up on the ground with a Baylor player on top of her on a loose ball? He goes "I don't know." That was the answer. He said, "I don't know".

So you want to go back and check every single call throughout the entire game? And then add them all up and -- you don't. That's the nature of sports. That's the nature of sports.

We probably fouled a number of times during the game and we didn't get called for it. They probably fouled a number of times during the game and didn't get called for it. Or we got easy -- we got free throws because of non-fouls. I mean, you could go back and forth, the whole thing.

The bottom line is the officials did what they're going to do. And if they would have said it was a foul, I would be on the

other end going, you can't make that call and make that call a foul. So it is what it is. I'm not going to sit here and apologize for it. And if people are going to want to talk about that the rest of the week; you're welcome to do that. It's not going to change the outcome. And it's not going to make me feel bad that you say it was a foul.

Q. We like to talk numbers, at least I like to talk numbers. 13 consecutive Final Four appearances and the other teams will have one consecutive Final Four appearance. That will be the second longest streak after tomorrow. Could you put some perspective into what you guys have done in the regional final in a game that you used to say was the hardest one to win?

COACH AURIEMMA: For sure this game is the hardest one to win. And for sure I thought when they first announced the brackets, I thought something doesn't look right here. If you look at the seeding, you're telling me that Baylor is the seventh seeded team in this tournament. If we're the number two, number one, that Baylor is number seven.

So that decision is a lot bigger than the decision made by the officials to make the call or not. Trust me when I tell you that. And I know Kim will agree with me on that. She won't agree with me on the foul call, but she'll agree with me on that point.

So to have to win this game to go to the Final Four and to have to beat a team like that, you know, that's clearly seeded way lower than they belong, it just added to the intensity of it and the difficulty of it and everything. This was harder than winning some of the national championship games that we've won, without question. Without question. This game was tougher than a handful of National Championship games or any Final Four game that you want to mention.

So winning this game, given how it played out, you know, getting down 10, that's an amazing accomplishment by these young kids.

Q. In the locker room I think it was Christyn or Evina said that I guess when the team was down 10 you called them out for looking shellshocked or like they were about to lose or ready to give up or something like that. I guess what did you say to them at that point and what did it take for them -- you pointed to DiDi going out -- but what did it take for the kids to turn things around have the deficit into -- have the belief they could go out and retake the lead?

COACH AURIEMMA: When you're in this situation if you've never been in this situation, you don't know how

you're going to react to it. And these kids have never been in this situation. They never have. Evina has not been. Christyn and Olivia have been on teams that have been in this situation, but they haven't been.

And then you've got all the other kids. So when it started to get away from us, even one of their teammates even said, you know, you guys need to change the look on your face, man. They started to question and doubt and started to lose faith.

And I basically said if this is how it's going to be, then let's just go home and say we tried. Or let's get out and play, show some toughness. The toughness, stay with our offense, let's get a stop. Somebody step in front of somebody and take a charge. Do the things that the fundamentally right things to do, that good teams do and stop worrying about, oh, my God, we might lose.

Aubrey took a couple of charges, then we started to play better defensively and that fueled our offense, gave us a lot of confidence. And Paige making shots really ignited everyone else. That just got everybody feeling much better about themselves.

Q. Which teammate called them out for how they were looking, their lack of confidence?

COACH AURIEMMA: Anna.

Q. Anna Makurat?

COACH AURIEMMA: Yeah, and she did it in English. I didn't know what to say. I turned around and said even she knows it. I'm not looking it up, even she knows it. There was a look on their face, like, we don't know that we can do this. We don't know if we can do this.

We had to figure out a way -- look, you only have two choices, guys. You either do the things that we do every day or we go home. It's not that complicated. It's not complicated at all. I don't think they wanted to go home. I think they'd rather keep playing basketball. So that's what happened.

Q. Curious about preparing for the physicality of this game, knowing the style of game they play, what you saw on the court tonight that you had to adjust to.

COACH AURIEMMA: You can't prepare. The only way we could have been able to prepare would be if our practice squad that we left at home, if we had them with us and, excuse me, every day we had this simulate that. And even then it's difficult. It's difficult to simulate their talent, they're aggressiveness, their length. It's just very difficult.

They don't look like any other team in the country. They don't play like any other team in the country. That's why they're so hard to play against. And you don't get ready for something like that, you know, by just going to practice every day and playing against yourselves. Playing against our second team wasn't going to get us ready for something like this. We had to experience it firsthand.

After a while, to their credit, it was a great game all the way around, because we started the game like this, and then I think it was 12-4 at one point, 16 to something. And they came right back at us, and we hung in and they came right back. We hung in and they came back. We went in at halftime, and we were fortunate. We thought, man, to only be down two, we're fortunate. Then when we came out and got down 10 there was a feeling on the team, the kids felt -- you could see it, as we talked about, that it's gotten away from us. It's gone. And we got it back.

And then when we thought we had put them away, they came back. So it was just a great battle by two great teams. And it went down to the last possession.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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