

# Big East Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 5, 2022

Uncasville, Connecticut, USA

Mohegan Sun Arena

**UConn Huskies**

**Coach Geno Auriemma**

**Aaliyah Edwards**

**Christyn Williams**

Postgame Media Conference



UConn - 84, Georgetown - 38

**Q. Aaliyah, we're starting to see a player that we saw much of last year on a regular basis now. How are you feeling? How are you enjoying the game now that you seem to be back?**

AALIYAH EDWARDS: It's great. A lot of confidence. It's crunch time. We're going into our last couple of games into the season and what we want to accomplish as a team. So just me being able to step up and be impactful.

**Q. Christyn, obviously your defense brings so much. You held them without scoring for about 17 minutes today as a team. As defense, I know shooting can be infectious, but is defense infectious also when you guys get a block? Or when Nika gets defensive player of the year, you guys are so happy. Is that infectious also?**

CHRISTYN WILLIAMS: Absolutely. I feel like this team that we have, we thrive on defense and it helps us get going offensively. If you start off aggressive on the defensive end it gets us going. I think we just need to play all our games like that and with that mindset.

**Q. Christyn, you came out and you couldn't miss. What was your mindset finishing with 13 points?**

CHRISTYN WILLIAMS: I was throwing it from 3. My teammates did a great job of finding me, getting me the ball when I was open. And I just had confidence in us knocking it down.

**Q. Aaliyah, the ability that you have now to sub a lot, move fresh players in and out, how much does that**

**affect your ability to play defense that maybe you don't have to worry as much about fouling because you have more players, you have more energy, because you're not playing 38, 39 minutes? Maybe both of you can speak to that, but Aaliyah, how does that affect your ability to play defense?**

AALIYAH EDWARDS: It definitely shows the depth that we have on our team and that whenever somebody subs in we're going to come out with that same intensity. So, Coach emphasizes a lot on when you're out there on the court give it your all because someone's going to come in and match that same energy that you just produced. So I think that's the mindset for everyone on the team.

CHRISTYN WILLIAMS: It's been great. This is my fourth year being here and this is one of the first years we've been able to do that. And I feel like it will help us a lot in the long run because we can have a lot more energy and save our legs.

**Q. This is now the fourth consecutive game that your team has held the opponent to under 40 points. I mean, I know that offensively you've got a lot of weapons. But I feel like y'all take so much more pride on the defensive end. So you can speak to that. Is that a true statement? And how much can you speak about just how good this defense is especially over these last four games?**

CHRISTYN WILLIAMS: It's been a long time coming. We've had our struggles earlier on in the year, but Coach is always on us in practice by staying aggressive on the defensive end. Like I said earlier, once we get going on the defensive end it just helps our team overall. It just brings a lot of energy for us.

AALIYAH EDWARDS: For sure. I think just holding ourselves to defense first and offense will come, and it helps our momentum and our transition game.

**Q. Christyn, can you address how Paige is working her way back into her role on this team? What have you seen in terms of progress over these last three**



**games? Is she back where she was? Does she still have room for improvement? What have you seen out there on the court?**

CHRISTYN WILLIAMS: Paige has come along way as well. She had surgery. I think she's doing a great job coming back from surgery. Obviously she's still trying to find her role. But Paige is still Paige. You saw today, what was she, 3-for-3 or 4-for-4 from the free-throw line. She's still a shooter and still has assists and always looking to get people open. She's still the same player.

**Q. Can you talk about working Paige into the game today? You said she's not going to be playing 35 minutes these three games. Is this exactly what you wanted to see from her today? And where do you think she is in terms of getting back to where she wants to be?**

COACH AURIEMMA: It's hard to say exactly where she is on that timeline. On a scale of one to 10 last year, last year maybe she was at a 10 most of the season. I really don't know how close she is. I know she's not there yet.

I know she was probably anxious to play more than she played the first couple of games. And she did. And I think she got more involved than she did the first game.

It's probably something different for her coming off the bench. Not that that's going to be how we're going to do it going forward. But little by little it improves every day.

You look at a game like today, she makes 3s, she rebounds the ball, she has four assists, couple of steals. She impacts the game in so many different ways. To be able to add somebody like that to your team, I think that's pretty significant. Not very many people are going to be able to do that this time of year.

But she's still a ways away from where we need her to be. She got knocked on her butt on that one layup because she's worried what would happen in that situation. She's okay. It's going to happen and she can deal with it.

**Q. When you all rotate in two or three players at a time multiple times in a game, are you looking to see what's what or do you already know what's what when you're doing that?**

COACH AURIEMMA: I want to give you like Ruthy's answer on "Ozark" but I can't. (Laughter). It's a family program here. (Laughter).

I generally just try to look at what's going on out on the floor. And one of the assistant coaches will say, at one

point will say, man, we need one more shooter out there. And that kind of opens up one avenue. And for everybody that you sub, obviously somebody has to come out. And you're trying to make sure that you have players that complement each other out there and can play multiple positions in case they have to, especially because we're switching a lot of screens or trapping a lot of screens, they're going to end up guarding different people.

And you need something on this end where you have the ability to stress the defense enough where you can make enough 3s. So some of it's that.

The other part is I want the minutes at the end of the game to reflect that we work pretty hard to try to make it fair so that everybody got significant time. You're obviously not going to be able to give everybody all the time that they want. And some days some people get more based on just how the flow of the game is.

But there's no predetermined method that I have that these three are going in now, these two are going in now, and just kind of roll with it, see what happens.

**Q. I don't think Paige scored until you had like a 28-point lead. So it didn't necessarily impact the outcome today. But how uplifting is it for her emotionally for you and the team to know she can come out and be really productive?**

COACH AURIEMMA: I just think that when Paige doesn't score, doesn't shoot, doesn't get involved in the game, it's her choice. I don't think the defense is doing anything to keep her from doing that. So it's a choice that she's making.

Most of the time I wouldn't agree with her. And I let her know it. And sometimes I watch her for two, three minutes and I get her out -- like, the wrong Paige showed up today and I need to remind her that we need the other Paige.

I just want her to be in her comfort zone as she's playing, to feel like I could still -- I could make any 3 I take. I can dribble the ball from this spot to that spot and get my shot and nobody can keep it from going in. I can get to the basket whenever I want.

I just want her to feel that. And then whether or not she actually does that every time she can, that's a choice that she makes. I just need to know that she can.

**Q. Is defense the key to postseason success for you guys?**

COACH AURIEMMA: It always is. It always is. It's always



been that way and some years it's better than others. Some years you have a team that's better equipped to play better defense. Some years you've got to really cobble together a good defensive team from guys that are not great individual defenders.

But this team works pretty well together. At least they've learned how to work pretty well together. Because I don't know that individually, maybe other than Nika -- by the way, I know the rest of you vote on that. (Laughter). Me, I might have, the coaches might have, but I guarantee none the rest of them (indiscernible).

**Q. Talk to me about this team's hustle and effort on transition and defense, even when they're up by big numbers.**

COACH AURIEMMA: That's one of the benefits of having players that can come in and play and be productive. I think there's two kinds of kids that come and play college basketball. There's ones that have tremendous pride in themselves. They don't need outside motivation to be really good players and to play the game a certain way.

And there's others that show up and want it to be at their place and they want it to be as easy as it can be without breaking a sweat. And for those players you have to threaten them and then you've got to bench them and you've got to sub them out.

We've been fortunate for the most part over the years but we have kids that come here and they take tremendous pride in how I look, how I play, what my coach thinks of me, what my teammates think of me.

So if we're up 20 and you don't care about guarding anybody anymore then you're not going to be in the game anymore. And they know that. We're not concerned with what the score is. We're not trying to run up the score, but we're trying to make sure that what we've worked on in practice, we do it and the effort is there. And I think we've got a team that's finally starting to embrace that.

And the difficult part is when you get players that want to score, which is today, in today's world. Nika's such an anomaly in college basketball, I think, in that she doesn't care if she scores. She doesn't care if she doesn't take any shots.

She's perfectly content to do what she does as long as we win. That's really, really unusual today. Today a kid averages four points a game in college, but both of those baskets are on their Instagram account the next day. So we're dealing with a whole different animal today.