

Big East Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 8, 2025

Uncasville, Connecticut, USA

Mohegan Sun Arena

St. John's Red Storm

Coach Joe Tartamella

Postgame Media Conference



UConn 71, St. John's 40

JOE TARTAMELLA: I thought we competed at a good level today. I told them in the locker room, I think the first quarter was just -- was torture to watch, but we didn't do really anything well. I thought we guarded enough and got enough missed shots especially early. We just could not convert and score, and the first quarter obviously hurt us.

Then I thought we got our footing a little bit. Was pleased how we went into the half, outside of maybe the foul towards the end. Then they started the third well, and we fought back again.

Look, we made them have to play. They had to play to win today, and they did. Yeah, I know we lost by whatever it was, 31, but we competed at a level that I was happy with. We've struggled offensively all year at times. It's not a secret.

I thought we gave away a lot of opportunities that we had in terms of at least trying to cut into the lead a little bit, but I thought we battled. These kids have been on the short end of a lot of games this year, but they've never stopped competing. So proud of them.

Look, we could have come in and after that first quarter, it could have been real bad. Which at least we came back and I thought really battled and showed some grit to try to claw back into the game.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. (Off microphone.)

JOE TARTAMELLA: Yeah. Look, Ber'Nyah has been great. I know she probably would have liked to have been a little better today. But for a kid to come from the A10 where she was in high-leverage games on tournament teams and had to battle through some adversity this year

with some injury stuff in the summer, she's got just a really, really good demeanor.

Yeah, I fought with her to be more vocal, but it's just trying to pull something out of her that I think she's gotten better at. But really just a solid and a great kid. She's been a good leader for us all year.

Shae, coming from Miami in terms of giving her a little bit of a different role, she's been a lot for us. Obviously you've got to play pretty well to be Defensive Player of the Year, and people have to respect what you do.

But both have great personalities. Shea makes me laugh, and so does Ber'Nyah. But they come to work, they want to compete. We'll miss them for sure.

Q. When you look at the year that Sarah Strong is having, what stands out about her game and what makes her special?

JOE TARTAMELLA: Yeah, she's just a matchup nightmare. It reminds me of some of the players that UConn has had in the past where the versatility is just really difficult to match up with, whether she can beat you from the outside. And right now that's probably where you hope she beats you, and that will probably change because their players always get better.

She's got a great demeanor about her as a freshman. You wouldn't think she was how she plays. She has a high IQ. Yeah, she's going to be -- she's easily obviously the best young kid in our conference and might be, if not the best, one of the best in the country. So she's got all the tools from what I can see.

Q. Clearly your regular season is over, but there's still a chance that you could have future play. If you could just speak about your team. And your team does have a winning record. It is in a big -- I would consider a Power 5 conference. Can you just speak about your team and why your team should keep playing and keep going and be picked?

JOE TARTAMELLA: Yeah, look, I'm not here to make



those decisions or to advocate for really anything. I think obviously we started really well. I thought we did a great job. Our net has been in a really good place, if that's one of the metrics we look at.

I think if you look at how we've played. I think we've played everybody outside of the game at Connecticut, our game -- even our game at home against Connecticut was similar to this one in terms of at least making them battle. But I think we've played everybody extremely competitive within our league.

That's for other people to decide. I told our team in the locker room, look, we don't know. We're going to prepare as if we are. That's how I look at it.

I think when you look around the country, we'll see how we stack up, but obviously the metrics are there right now for us to be in the conversation.

Q. What is it going to take for this conference to get back to a level that it was at when you were first starting coaching here? I know the teams aren't the same, but just what can help elevate this conference, get more teams to the NCAA and more teams playing in the postseason?

JOE TARTAMELLA: Well, I mean, I think there's a bunch of things probably. You have to have players. We've always been built on great players, and we've had great coaches, and we still do. Obviously the landscape is ever-changing in terms of revenue sharing and where that goes.

I think we've got to have the ability to stay up with the arms race in terms of what people are doing around the country. I also think our league -- look, our league has always been underrated especially in the realignment, I think.

Not in the old days. The old Big East didn't have to say anything or fight for anything because we were probably the best.

But I think now it's changed in terms of we've got to be able to not only recruit great players -- or as people will say now, find great players out there, whether they're with us now or they're in the portal and with NIL and the revenue share. And we've got to be able to keep them.

I think we've probably been hurt a little bit by some great players that have left the conference, but I also think it's a great opportunity. As I said yesterday, you're playing against the No. 3 team or No. 4 team in the country as a perennial power every year. Sometimes the No. 1 team.

We've got to get players. We've got to be able to do that. We've got to be able to win, and we've got to schedule teams that will play us in the nonconference. As coaches, we have a balance there that we have to figure out.

I think there's still a little uncertainty in terms of where it's all going, but I think the scheduling part, being able to play against top teams -- again, every year is different. Guess what? Next year we might not have this conversation. We might be right there.

Two years ago we were really good. Even last year I thought we were pretty good. Finished third and we weren't even in the conversation because we didn't start well.

Two years ago we had to beat three ranked teams including UConn at UConn to be in the play-in game, and we finished fourth. So every year I think is going to be different.

I think people respect the Big East. We have to make them respect the Big East in terms of playing teams and beating them outside of -- we'll call it the P4s, I should say.

But we need players. And we're getting support. I think our league understands kind of what we need moving forward. Then we have to go do our job and win games.

But nothing is going to happen -- nothing is going to change unless we find a way to get great players who have that personality and charisma and talent to be on the stage. Similar to what the Connecticut guys are doing, you know, right now.

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