

Big East Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 8, 2025

Uncasville, Connecticut, USA

Mohegan Sun Arena

UConn Huskies

Coach Geno Auriemma

Azzi Fudd

Ice Brady

Paige Bueckers

Postgame Media Conference



defense was giving me. Them playing blue or drop coverage quite a bit let me get to my spot more.

Then trying to stay aggressive, continue to keep moving, looking for my shot even if the three is not falling, try to get different ways to score. My teammates did a great job of getting me open, setting great screens for me, and helping me find that.

So just trying to take what the defense gives.

Q. This can be for anyone who wants to answer. What's it like for you guys playing with Sarah Strong? What do you like about her game?

PAIGE BUECKERS: It's very fun. She's an extremely easy person to play with. There's nothing on the court that she can't do, so you feel like every single time a ball comes off the rim, she's going to grab the rebound. Any time you throw it to her, she's going to catch it and finish and make a great play. She can pass. She defends, rebounds. She can score at all three levels.

It's extremely fun to play with her and extremely easy.

Q. Ice, at the beginning of the season, you said to us that your goal was to gain more confidence in yourself and your play in your defense. How do you think you did accomplishing that goal this season, and what are your plans for March after returning from injury?

ICE BRADY: Yeah, I would say obviously the season wasn't linear in my progress. I definitely had some dips. But overall I'm happy with where I'm at right now, the relationship I have with my teammates, my coaches, and with myself. That time that I was out, I feel like I was able to really kind of get my mental back together and focus.

It's nice being in March so there's no time to kind of overthink anything. Yeah, just continuing to rehab my shoulder, get stronger, and yeah, continue to get better.

Q. Azzi, as a team, you weren't getting the three ball to fall, but you only had four turnovers all game. What did you do to just protect the ball well tonight?

UConn 71, St. John's 40

GENO AURIEMMA: We talked about it's always touch-and-go when you play in the first game -- when you're playing your first game, and the team just played.

(Technical difficulty.)

That's pretty much the story of the game, And it doesn't matter what it looks like this time of the year. Just move on to the next one.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. First, Ice Brady, how are you feeling? What is it about March and the Big East tournament that fuels you to step up to another level?

ICE BRADY: I'm feeling good. My shoulder is a lot better. Taking that time to rest and get it strong definitely helped. Yeah, like Coach says, March is just -- we're a different team, so the stakes are higher obviously. We want to win. We have one goal in mind, and I feel like we all have been preparing for that all season.

It's exciting to finally just get it all together and work together as a team and make that push, make that run, so yeah.

Q. Paige, 20 points without any threes today. How did you adjust with the long shots not falling to kind of get to the rim a little bit more and find your midrange?

PAIGE BUECKERS: Yeah, just trying to take what the



AZZI FUDD: Well, I think that it helped that our defense was really good today, so we got a lot of just easy buckets, transition layups, and three-point looks.

I think Coach has really been harping on taking care of the ball, setting up screens, using screens. So I think that is a big factor into taking care of the ball.

Q. Azzi, what was it like to see Caroline make her first bucket today?

AZZI FUDD: Super exciting. I'm so proud of her. I think all of us -- proud doesn't really do what we feel justice, but it was super exciting. I mean, we all know what it feels like to come back from something and just want the ball to go in and it doesn't.

So finally seeing that ball go in, now we know that whenever she shoots, they're all going to go in because that's how it is in practice. All of her shots -- literally all of them go in, especially when she's playing against us.

We've just been waiting. So I'm super excited to see that. I can't wait to see all the ones to come.

Q. For any one of you three that want to answer this, sometimes especially with the tournament, other teams with the exception of your team, they're looking to play you guys, give their best shot because they're trying to get into tournament play for the NCAA, whether it's WNIT, whether it's the Big Dance. How much does it help you with your play down the line in the future for your tournament play when you're facing teams that are facing elimination, and they're giving you their best shot and yet you guys still execute and dominate?

AZZI FUDD: I kind of think that's how it is all season. Teams play us and, like, we're playing UConn, we want to prove something. I think having that preparation all season long, we get teams' best every single game. It prepares us for now and eventually as we continue in March.

I think that just prepares us for we're going to get the best team every night. So we have to come prepared. The girl that's not a shooter, she's going to be hitting shots, and we have to know the scouts and the ins and outs of all the players.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thank you very much. Questions for Coach.

Q. Obviously Kerry Bascom was honored tonight, but I want to ask about one of her competitors, which is

Lisa Gedeka, 1988 Big East player of the year. Can you talk about any memories you have of playing against her and if you've followed her coaching career at all?

GENO AURIEMMA: You're going to have to give me her maiden name.

Q. I got to pronounce that one. What was it, Angelotti?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah. Lisa Angelotti. I knew who it was, but I wanted everybody to hear it.

Local kid from South Jersey. When she came to Villanova, it was -- they were a really good team. I don't think her freshmen, sophomore year that anybody looked at her as anything special. What happened was she just kept getting better and better and better, and she became one of those all-around players that was able to beat you moving without the ball, passing the ball, shooting the ball.

We had to compete against them as our program was establishing itself. One of the teams that we always felt like we had to beat was Villanova. To be honest with you, I think Villanova has one really, really, really good player every cycle, and it was her turn. She was great at it. I don't know where she's coaching right now. Where is she coaching right now?

Q. (Off microphone.)

GENO AURIEMMA: Gloucester Catholic? I remember.

The reason I don't know where she's coaching is because there's no way we would ever get one of her players if Villanova was recruiting them (laughing).

Q. Can I get your perspective on the season that Sarah Strong is having and how she has impacted your program?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah. Obviously no one is able to watch all of our practices, but the way she impacts games sometimes don't even show up on the box score. It doesn't always show up on the box score just how incredibly high her basketball IQ is, that she's able to see things before they develop. She knows exactly where the ball is going all the time.

Like these guys said, there isn't a pass you can throw at her that she won't catch. She's just incredible, again, at how to get the ball.

Whenever she misses, I'm, like, shocked. I'm surprised

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because she's so confident in her ability, whether it's around the basket, whether it's midrange, whether it's an open three. But I think the best thing and the worst thing about her is she knows she's a great passer, one of the best we've ever had. And we've had some great ones. She's one of the best passers we've ever had. That's incredible for a kid that can score like that.

What's terrible about it is she just wants to pass all the time, which, you know, I'm not a big fan of. It's fun because her mom and her dad -- all three of us are ganging up on her every day encouraging her to be more aggressive, be more aggressive, be more aggressive, take more risks, take more shots, don't be so quick to give it up. That's just who she is. That's just what makes her who she is.

She's just a great player who, first and foremost, wants to be unselfish. It's a great quality to have, believe me. I think that's probably the difference between coaching men's basketball and women's basketball. I don't think there's -- this phrase would never come out of a men's basketball coach: You need to shoot more. I'm finding myself saying that every day.

Q. I'm just wondering whether you had an update on Aubrey and what her status would be like for the rest of the tournament?

GENO AURIEMMA: She was really sore after the Marquette game, so the thinking was if we had to, we could, but if we don't, then it's best to give her all this time so that she's 100% ready to go for the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Just to clarify, is she out for the rest of the Big East tournament?

GENO AURIEMMA: Unless I suit her up at halftime because I don't like the way we're playing. But right now, that's the plan, yeah.

Q. I know you are focused on this weekend, but looking nationally for a second, can you remember a time that there's probably a half dozen, if not more teams, that could win the title this year in the NCAA's and probably more that could make the Final Four; that it seems that there's not the one dominant team and everyone's playing each other? So there's parity in that way.

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, I do think that the fact that we finally -- and it's taken a while -- we finally have more good teams wanting to play really good teams in their nonconference schedule early in the year. Because what happens then is you not only get a -- Well, I think this team

should be ranked No. 1, I think that team should be ranked No. 2. Based on what? I don't know. They just look like they're a No. 2 or they're a No. 3.

So now you can actually put them head-to-head and say this is what it looks like. This is who did what. When you get to the NCAA Tournament, the deeper you get, the more of those teams you're going to see. You expect to anyway. I think that's a new thing that's happened in women's basketball, relatively new.

But we've been trying to do that for the longest time. I think when we were in the regionals -- when we were in the Final Four in Philly and even before that when we were in the regionals, I think we had played, I don't know, something like 13 or 14 of the teams that were in the regionals. So there's no surprises.

I think more and more schools are starting to do that, which obviously makes the game better, makes the TV people happy because they're putting on a good product on television. The kids like it.

Yeah, it should be a great NCAA Tournament. Knock on wood, I think there should be more upsets. That's the one thing that I think we're missing in the tournament that exists.

That's what's made the men's tournament what it is, right? That's what everybody talks about. Everybody wants to see 15 beat a No. 2 or in some cases like a 16 beat a 1. You know, 3, and 4 seeds getting knocked out early. That hasn't happened in our game a lot, but I can see it coming. I can see those regional games not going according to plan way more so than previous years.

Since I said it and I own it, it shouldn't happen to us. Better not.

Q. Geno, two-part question if you don't mind. They announced the sell-out today, and hopefully someone in the Big East can tell me if that's happened before. Just a reaction to that. Second, to follow on the question about the Lisa, Kerry Bascom -- legends of the game. Can you talk about the impact she made on your program and what she did that made today possible?

GENO AURIEMMA: The sell-out, it's like that time in the world right now where all this is happening. It's not easy to come to one of our games. Our games are -- I mean, they're still a bargain compared to other tickets for other things, but getting people to come out and watch games instead of stay home and relax and enjoy whatever they're doing while they're watching the game, it's hard to get

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people to come out to games. So you have to be pretty good.

You have to have a good product, and you have to understand you're in the entertainment business. This is an entertainment venue pretty much, and I think people are excited about basketball, women's basketball especially.

Has there ever been a sell-out? I know when we played at the Excel Center, I don't think we ever got 15,000 in there, 16,000 in there. When it was at Rutgers, we certainly did. When it was at Gampel, I don't think we did. No matter where it was, it wasn't a sell-out.

Q. You have to go back to when it was on campus?

GENO AURIEMMA: When it was on campus at the smaller, smaller arenas, you know, you can get more of them, more of them.

As far as Kerry is concerned, you know, Kerry is the original Sarah. Sarah is Kerry in the next how many years? 35? Sarah is the 35-year evolution of Kerry. Kerry was one-of-a-kind back then.

We're trying to establish -- we're trying to become a Big East contender. The kid averaged 7 or 8 points a game as a freshman. Shelly Pennefather had just graduated from Villanova, who was three-time Big East Player of the Year. And Kerry stepped in and was three-time Big East Player of the Year and First Team All-American the year we went to the Final Four.

Nothing that has happened at Connecticut could have ever happened without her. Everything that came after Kerry was made possible by her. She had a really good supporting cast, don't get me wrong, but none of those guys were going to scare you, you know what I mean?

So if anybody wants to know who is most responsible for what's happened at Connecticut, it's a kid from Epping, New Hampshire, who just came to UConn. If she was playing today, she would be Sarah. Same exact player. Identical. Identical.

When we first saw her, when Jamelle and I first saw her play, that's exactly what I said. That's Kerry Bascom. That's a hell of a thing.

Q. I had a question. I know you said you guys dominate and execute basically how do we want it. But knowing you as a coach, you're going to look at certain things that maybe you could do better on. There was that one point in the second quarter, second period, where they seemed like they were

starting to get a rhythm, St. John's. I don't know what the reasoning was. I'm pretty sure you know and you saw it. Will that be brought up as far as --

GENO AURIEMMA: Oh, yeah.

Q. -- tomorrow?

GENO AURIEMMA: For sure, yeah. I think whenever a team scores two points in a quarter, you can pretty much bet on it's not going to be two points in the second quarter, you know? They did get into a little bit of a rhythm.

The things that we did really, really well in the first quarter -- we made two or three mistakes. They execute really, really well. You got to really be on your game against St. John's. They have a lot of sets. They run a lot of misdirection stuff. You've got to be paying attention.

We made a lot of mistakes in the first quarter, and they just didn't make them. And then in the second quarter, we made some of those same mistakes, and they knocked them in.

So, yeah, making sure that that's not an issue going forward. And I think we probably missed eight or nine, maybe ten layups. It wasn't just our guards. Our big guy, Sarah, missed a couple. It's just -- and some games are just played gritty. They're not pretty. There was nothing pretty about today's game.

We talked about it in the locker room. We played Iowa State here, and it was pretty, you know? Anybody that wanted to make a three, all you have to do is shoot it. Every three went in. It was fun. They were loving life. Today it was ugly, and you have to be able to grind it out.

But, yeah, believe me, there's a lot of stuff on that film. They're going to wonder, how did we win?

Q. You got points from just about everybody today. How did you feel about the contributions down the bench outside of your big three?

GENO AURIEMMA: That's good and bad, I think. We have three players that were First Team All Big East, right? I think it's my job to get all three of them a lot of touches. Then whatever everybody else gets, that's just added.

And sometimes those other guys, they really, really, really play great, and that's what makes the margins sometimes so wide. There weren't going to be a lot of possessions today. St. John's takes the whole shot clock to shoot sometimes. Most times. So there was limited possessions, limited touches for Sarah. Not happy about

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that.

You need contributions from everybody else. And it could be I came in and made two shots, I came in and got a bucket, got a steal, something, made two free-throws. Yeah, points were not easy to come by in games like today. Maybe they won't be the whole tournament. Who knows?

Q. To kind of build off that last question, you talked about a lot of touches, not a lot of players being able to get touches. One player in particular who has been doing it all season, Kaitlyn, came from a team where she was obviously getting more touches than she is here. Can you just speak to how she's adjusted to this new role and her impact on the team with this new role?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, Kaitlyn Chen is the kind of player that every really, really good team has. Somebody that doesn't have to score every time she touches. Somebody that isn't going to take bad shots just to get her shots.

She's going to be a great leader. She's going to be a good defender. She's going to be -- when she attacks the basket, I think the ball is going in. She's one of the best I've ever seen at getting in the lane and scoring.

When you come from a program like Princeton, you know, where they were really well-coached, and they depended on her a lot -- you might have come out of Princeton and go someplace where you're going to have the exact same role. When she came here, she knew it was going to be different, be a little bit different.

But it's exactly the role that we need, and she places winning above all else. So it's been great for us. It gives us a chance to play a certain way that we wouldn't be able to play if she wasn't here. You see we're pressuring the ball more in the full court, which we didn't do last year, the year before, year before that.

I think she's raised her stock -- WNBA draft stock because a lot of the GMs and a lot of the head coaches that have come to practice. She's become a better than average three-point shooter. She's a tremendous free-throw shooter. She's going to make it in that league.

I think if she was a backup point guard for you her first year, you would be hard-pressed to find somebody better.

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