

Big East Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 8, 2026

Uncasville, Connecticut, USA

Mohegan Sun Arena

UConn Huskies

Geno Auriemma

Sarah Strong

Azzi Fudd

KK Arnold

Postgame Media Conference



UConn - 100, Creighton - 51

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, thank you. Pretty evident the way the game started. The defensive pressure that KK was able to put on Ava, their point guard, I thought was really a big part of why we got off to such a quick start defensively, and everyone else just kind of filled in. And we did a phenomenal job of taking all their best actions that they wanted to use away from them. And whenever we're playing like that, it's just a matter of when is our offense going to get in gear, and we were right on point offensively the whole game.

THE MODERATOR: Take questions, please.

Q. KK, obviously Coach mentioned your defense. You also had a season high 18 points today. We talk about your defense all the time, but where do you feel like your offense has grown this year.

KK ARNOLD: I have I feel like confidence and having trust in myself in taking shots and being aggressive, which will create for my teammates as well, and just also the trust and the confidence that my teammates have in me that helps me a lot each and every possession, whether that's me being confident, open shots or attacking. So it starts from there as well.

Q. KK, what's the biggest difference you feel you've brought to the off-season offensively?

KK ARNOLD: Like, what I worked on?

Q. Yes.

KK ARNOLD: Oh. Being consistent, whether that's from the shot or just being able to attack the basket and convert on that. I feel like the biggest thing is just for me having that intensity, having that leadership coming in, working on my defense, making sure that I'm being aggressive without fouling, being that energy person for our team.

Q. Azzi, obviously there are plenty of -- you've been a part of a lot of really great UConn seasons. How different does this one feel or similar or does it feel typically to the last having this specific cast?

AZZI FUDD: Yeah, I would say this one feels a little different in a sense. I feel like the people on this team -- well, one, all these healthy bodies, that's new. But also just having so many people being able to come in and contribute. Like, looking at this stat sheet today, seeing that everyone came in, scored, got a rebound, got a steal, they did something, things that aren't on the stat sheet, like making great passes, great reads, setting great screens.

So being on a team this deep has been a lot of fun. It's been amazing. But then also, I would say, just to touch on what can KK has been talking about confidence-wise, I feel like this team -- coming off last year, I feel like that -- the confidence that's carried -- come and carried with people and stayed with people, I think the confidence has just continued to grow with us individually, but as a team. So I feel like we're in a great place.

But it's also just been great to be on a team like this with depth, with confidence, and just the people who know how to play basketball.

Q. KK, Azzi alluded to it, but you've played on teams that were kind of shorthanded, had injuries, you only had a few people, you had to worry about foul trouble, you had to worry about maybe nobody on the bench to come in. How much different is the defense knowing



that you can just kind of play full out because you don't have to necessarily worry about those things? Is there a certain freedom to the way you guys are playing defense that you haven't been able to do in the past?

KK ARNOLD: Yeah, I mean, like Azzi said, we have so much depth and healthy bodies this year that we can be aggressive, but just also be smart as well. But just knowing that whoever comes in they're picking up where we left off, in a way, being aggressive and making sure we have that same amount of ball pressure and energy like we started out the game with.

Q. You guys have been so confident and driven all season long. What would you say to the next generation of ballers?

AZZI FUDD: I would say -- all right. Come on. You got it.

KK ARNOLD: Okay. Well, I would say just be yourself. I feel like that's where it starts. Confidence is where it starts. And just having teammates surrounding you, whether that's people, family members, surrounding you that's going to kind of feed into you. I feel like that's the biggest thing that we have is the big sisterhood that keeps us motivated, keeps us driven, keeps us going.

Q. Azzi, so much is made of this team's defense, and rightfully so because you guys are so good at it, but can you just talk about how much fun it is to play offense on a team like this where there's such an unselfishness and such great passing and just the overall scheme that you guys run?

AZZI FUDD: Yeah, the coaches really harp on us playing smart basketball, and not having set offenses where we're just running each play, we're not making reads, so I feel like playing on a team with people who can make great decisions, make great plays, people who are in phenomenal passers, cutters, screeners, and like you said, unselfish, it makes playing basketball so much fun because anyone can be open at any moment and you know anyone can make that shot.

So this team, playing offense, no matter what play we run, we know you're going to get a great screen, a great pass.

Q. Azzi, you've seen KK grow from a freshman now to a junior. Talk a little bit about her confidence where have you seen her growth offensively.

AZZI FUDD: I for sure see her confidence. We all had that confidence in her before, but to see her on the floor being that floor General leading us, taking shots, whether it's a

three, a pullup, seeing how she's getting to the rim, getting in the paint, making plays for everyone, just I feel like the presence is -- it's a lot more demanding this year. She steps on the floor and you feel that presence offensively and defensively.

But this year -- you saw it today, she came in, it was layups, it was pullups, it was threes. She -- how many assists did you have?

KK ARNOLD: Four.

AZZI FUDD: Four assists, exactly. So she's on the floor, she's doing everything, and it's exactly what she's capable of and what she needs to do every night.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse the players and take questions for Coach.

Q. Sarah broke your program record for steals by a sophomore by six. She's the only forward in the top 10 in a single season. What allows her to be such a disruptor with the size and skill set that she has?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, it's a unique combination that doesn't come along very often, obviously. I remember Nykesha being a big guard who just had great anticipation skills and great hands and feel. Sarah has that on the ball, off the ball. I think she has a really good idea of where the ball's going and she has tremendous confidence in herself. And it's not something that anyone's -- you know, I can't take credit at UConn, Hey, we taught her how to do all this stuff. We put her in position to do some of these things.

But she's just -- it's a lot of God-given -- you know, how does somebody know how to hit a hundred-mile-an-hour fastball, you know? They just can. And she does things because she can. She's just really, really smart, really intuitive, and big enough that you can't bully her and quick enough that you can't out-quick her. So it's a rare combination, for sure.

Q. Yesterday you talked about coincidence and trends and player production. After tonight, KK has now had three straight games of nine-plus points. Can you just talk about her offensive production and is this becoming a trend, in your eyes?

GENO AURIEMMA: Well, you know, I'm always curious about where do the points come from, how, when. Some people are great at scoring a lot of points when we don't necessarily need a lot of points because you're already up a bunch, and some are really good at getting 'em exactly when you need 'em. And I like when KK feels confident that she can just shoot a wide-open three with a lot of

confidence and knowing that it's the shot I'm supposed to take and at a time when I'm supposed to take it.

So yesterday she made two. Today she made two. I think the third one should have gone in. So that's a game-changer for us, knowing that we have the ability to do that, and that teams now have to play us much differently than they were maybe earlier in the season when they weren't sure whether she could make that shot. So all I can do is put kids in a position where they can do their thing, and then hopefully they get some success and then they feel confident enough to keep doing it. We have no control over that sometimes.

But she seems to be in a really, really good place. I don't think two years ago she would have been able to finish some of the shots she finished today around the basket. She's made a good progression from freshman year to junior year, and that's what you hope for all your players.

Q. Sarah Strong kind of hits every stat that you could have. When you first recruited her, was there one facet of her game that stood out or was it just the fact that she did everything?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, it was hard not to see the impact that she had on the stat sheet. But the thing that I was most taken by was how many things she saw on the basketball court that only some exceptional players would have the ability to see. There's an old basketball adage that Coach Bobby Knight used to talk about all the time when I was young. He said, you know, you can teach players to look, but you can't 'em to see.

And we got a lot of players in college basketball today, you tell 'em to look for this and they don't even know what you're talking about, and she sees things before they happen, and she knows things before they present themselves. And when you have someone like that, that's a God-given gift that automatically makes everybody on your team a better basketball player. And if you saw how many games they won with her -- the team that she had, you would understand what I'm talking about.

So her physical things, yeah, being able to you know pass it and shoot it and dribble it and rebound the ball and steal it and all the other stuff, but I saw right away that she sees things that other people don't see. I've had a couple of those, so when I first saw it, I knew exactly what I was looking at. I learned how to see.

Q. I'll ask you the similar question that I asked Azzi. Perception-wise, in the past, Paige took up a lot of the spotlight, whatever the team-wide contribution was, in basketball was. As a lot more people now in March

start watching your team and the rest of women's college basketball, how different is this team from last year?

GENO AURIEMMA: It's different in that we have more ways that we can play. We have more bodies that can contribute. And I think they maybe alluded to it also, defensively we're able to be more disruptive than we have been in maybe the last 10 years, you know, given what we've been through. So it's a much different team than it was last year. I'm not of the opinion that we're better. We're different. So there is no are we the same, are we better, are we worse. We're different, and we play a different style of play than we played last year.

The results seem to be kind of sort of the same as they were last year, just a different way about going about it. And when we're on our game, we're as effective as we were last year at this time, for sure.

Q. You've alluded 10 years ago, which of your teams -- what's the best group defensively that you've had and how close is this group to that?

GENO AURIEMMA: Well, times have changed significantly. We've been lucky at UConn, you know. We've had some great defensive teams that had a lot of pieces to it. The interesting thing about -- the game was played differently, let's say. You know, Kara, Rebecca, and Jamelle's championship team, the game was played more inside the three-point line -- a little bit outside the three-point line, and we were so big and so dominant and so smart, and it was hard to get quality shots against us.

As the game started to change, how you play defense changed and you needed different kinds of bodies. That Sue, Dee, Swin team, we had a guard that could guard their centers, and our centers could guard their guards, you know.

But we didn't have quite the depth. I would say the team that had it all was probably the Stewie, Stefanie Dolson -- when we ran out that lineup with Stewie, Stefanie Dolson, and Kiah Stokes on the front line, it was hard for anybody to see the basket, much less get a basket. And I would say that team with Bria Hartley, Kelly Faris, I mean, that may have been the hardest team to score on of any team that I've coached.

But, you know, if Renee and Tina were here, they would tell you that the Renee, Tina, Maya, Kalana Greene, Tiffany Hayes and, that group. So we've been lucky that we've been able to put defensive teams out there that are what the time called for. You know, like, that Rebecca team would be too slow in some ways to play at this level

of basketball being played right now. And this team that we have right now, you know, because we're so versatile, but for everything you get, you give up something. This team creates a lot of turnovers. And the trick is going to be, as we get into the tournament, what happens if we aren't able to create a lot of those turnovers, and that's why we spend so much time working on our half-court offense and our offense in general, and that's why today I was kind of pleased to see us, you know, offensively be what we were because when the NCAA tournament comes around, all those teams that you just steal it from and run in there and shoot layups, they're watching on TV, they're not playing against you, so you're going to have to be a little more well-rounded. And I think we're getting there little by little.

Q. I know you love talking about streaks, so I'll ask you about not you guys, but I wonder if you're aware of what NYU has been doing lately?

GENO AURIEMMA: I have. If I'm not mistaken, I think a kid that played on Sarah Strong's team is at NYU.

Q. That's right. You've been through this, so just what they have run the last couple years, what they're doing right now, getting 89 in a row --

GENO AURIEMMA: How many are they at?

Q. 89.

GENO AURIEMMA: 89.

Q. Yeah.

GENO AURIEMMA: Damn. Did they say they tied our record or UCLA's record or who?

Q. UCLA.

GENO AURIEMMA: UCLA? God damn. When you do something that's so consistently good, I think the danger that you see is, well, if you can do it every day, then it must be easy. And I would always say, well, how many things do you do every day that are exactly as good as they were the day before? Probably none.

I mean, so doing something exceptionally well and doing it every day that you have to do it is way, way, way more difficult than people think. Oh, well, it's Division III. I don't care if it's Division 12. You know, people say, Well, the conference they play in. None of these things are relevant because you have to go out there and you have to -- first, you have to execute to the best of your ability; and second, with each game that you win, people are throwing that

number at you all the time and you have to kind of keep your mind on what got you there. What got us here is just we go every day, and we practice really hard.

So, you know, I've met some of the kids in the program and the coaches, and I have a lot of respect for them. I knew it was a lot. I didn't know they had gotten to 89. But I hope they get to 112. I think that would be unbelievable (laughing), you know. I might want to be at that game.

Q. A lot is made of your defense, but Jim Flanery was saying how in today's world, there's a lot of one-on-one basketball, people attacking the rim. And you guys still do it the way you have been for a long time with great passing, unselfishness. Talk a little bit about how good your offense is this year and how good it could be with the personnel you have and the style you play.

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, well, I complain all the time that we don't play one-on-one basketball enough. I complain that we don't attack the basket enough. You saw Sarah today be more aggressive, putting the ball on the floor and playing, because in the end, basketball is a game of one-on-one. It's I catch it, you're guarding me, and now I got to make a decision, do I shoot it, do I drive it, do I pass it. And I think teams that just pass, pass, pass, pass, pass, pass, they end up having problems. And teams that can't pass have problems.

So I've always thought that in order to get a good one-on-one situation, you have to be a great passing team, and so we spend, from the time I first got the job here at Connecticut, an inordinate amount of time passing and catching the ball and moving without the ball, and I take great pride in how our teams have been consistently one of the leading assist teams in the country year after year after year after year. It's a tremendous sense of pride in our team that Sarah can get 23 points on 11 shots or Azzi gets 16 on 10 shots. Around the country you got guys taking 23 shots to get 11 points. And everybody goes gaga, you know, because the shots they make. And I just think it's the way basketball should be played, and I'm fortunate that I can get the players to come here that want to play like that. And I told Flan, I said, I hope, regardless of what happens today, I said to him, I hope you guys keep playing. And he said, We are. Because I enjoy watching the way they play, the way they move without the ball. They just don't have the talent, obviously that we do. They don't have the shot makers or the playmakers that we do. And they got a couple young kids that are really, really good. But when you see teams like that -- and Villanova will be the same way tonight, Seton Hall is kind of similar. The teams in our league, they all play a very similar style, because you also don't have the opportunity to coach guys

that can just put the ball on the floor and go get whatever shot they want. Our league is a league that doesn't have as much talent as some other leagues in the country, but it has a style of play that I think when you play against it every day, you get to appreciate and you get to prepare for whatever style's coming up when you get to the NCAA tournament. Teams that pass are fun to watch. Teams that pass are fun to watch. I think that's one of the reasons why we're so popular as a program. I think we just really value -- we had a hundred points today and we had eight turnovers. We got games this year where we had a hundred turnovers and eight points it seemed like. That's what it felt like anyway.

Q. Back-to-back games where you had all three of these guys in double digits. What stands out to you about the way that they have kind of developed as a unit this year and kind of built that chemistry over the course of the season?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, it's hard to say what you think is going to happen. I always hope that we have at least three players that at the end of the game have had, you know, really, really productive offensive games. And like Azzi said, you know, when I see that we have three players in double figures and then we have a couple with nine, you know, I think that's what teams should do. They should grow as a team. And they should be able to trust each other. And a coach shouldn't have to always, Let's call a play to get this shot. I mean, there's a time and place for that, don't get me wrong, but as units start to become one instead of a group of five individuals, they become one, they have a sixth sense of what's coming next. Where's our next basket coming from. And those are the teams that are hard to play against. Teams where they're constantly looking over to the sideline for, Coach, help me out here. What should I run. I think those teams -- and we become that team sometimes -- are not as hard to play against as the team you saw play today.

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