

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Oregon State Beavers

Scott Rueck

Postgame Press Conference

California - 63, Oregon State - 71

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we'll let you start.

SCOTT RUECK: Well, first off, this time of year it's just survive and advance, right? Really pleased with the win today. Impressed with Cal and what Charmin and her staff have done. With a lot of young people, we can certainly relate, have some similar stories.

At one point I looked out and we had six freshmen on the floor between the two teams, and two of them are high schoolers. Pretty amazing.

The journey that we've all been on under duress, meaning two or three non-conference games, then thrown to the wolves in the Pac-12 with lots of new faces. For both of our teams to be playing their best basketball this time of the year has been a credit to both groups. So to Charmin and her staff great job. I thought they played an inspired game today, their defense was excellent, hospitality big shots all day long, kept answering. I was proud of our team to making the plays down the stretch.

I still haven't seen a stat sheet; they're hard to find. So I don't know what we shot. It didn't feel great for what we're capable of. Certainly that will need to change going forward. But we survived it, defended well enough, got the stops we needed down the stretch, made some big shots.

I thought Taylor's and-one was big, Sasha's three was probably the basket that finished this game today. But it was a gritty win at 11 a.m., first round of the Pac-12 tournament, so we're pleased with that.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. It was 58-54, you called a timeout just under five minutes. Kind of what was going through your mind? What did you tell the team at that point?



SCOTT RUECK: Well, just to relax. I mean, we had missed so many good looks during the fourth quarter, during that stretch, the first five minutes. We had a wide-open layup we missed. There was a deep-post move we missed. Wide open threes. I felt like we were getting the shots. It's like, Okay, settle down, let's win this game.

The team, for many of them, this is their first time here. So you can kind of understand; it's a different environment, a new environment. Just settle down and let's go. Then we also challenged them with rebounding, so those were sort of the two things. They got several O boards to start that fourth quarter, that was a bad trend for us. Those two things had to be reversed.

I think we settled in after that, got the stops we needed, then made shots.

Q. You said you didn't feel like you shot all that well. Shot 51%. It did feel like the offense wasn't quite clicking today. Is that accurate or...

SCOTT RUECK: Give them credit for that. I don't know if it was clicking or not. What did we get to, 70?

Q. 71.

SCOTT RUECK: 71. Yeah, I mean, 71 in a tournament game usually means a win. So it was clearly not the performance we saw the other day. So we're going to need to step it up just a little bit moving forward, of course.

But it was good enough to win today. First day of the tournament, like I said, you survive it and move on.

Q. Talia, we know what she's contributing on the court, when she joined the team part of the growth of this team started right about then or a little bit thereafter. Does she bring anything intangibles-wise that you felt maybe helped this team turn a corner?

SCOTT RUECK: Well, we had actually played pretty well up until to that point. We had gained a lot of traction, I felt really competed well, through that 29-day break. We competed very well at Arizona. We just hadn't had the



reps to execute like you need to against a team that is that good on their home floor especially.

I thought things had really started to click for us, where we competed better. Then her addition, we weren't certain what she would bring. It was kind of a mystery to add a high schooler to your team at that point. But what she did bring was a secondary ball handler for us, that second one to go along with Aleah that's comfortable with the ball in her hand. That's what we'd been forcing up to that point. We'd been asking wings to play that role, out-of-position players. They'd done an admirable job, learning, getting better. When Talia came in, she added one more point guard mind to our team, a great shooter from the outside, a play-maker. She definitely added a different dimension.

She's a savvy defender, which is always a big mystery when you add someone to your program. I don't care what time of the year it comes, you never know how they'll defend. You assume it will be all new. She picked things up so quickly.

To her credit, I'll even add this to it, she plays multiple positions for us. Not only has she learned our system from the point guard position, she's also learned it from both wing positions, which is just remarkable. Just one more ball handler that puts people's mind at ease, like it is when Aleah has the ball. Very similar.

Q. A quick turnaround to Oregon, which you are actually used to. Do the second games usually play out on the floor similar to the first game or are there a lot of strategic changes?

SCOTT RUECK: Yeah, over the years, typically it's a Friday-Sunday turnaround with our rivalry game.

I think there's always a little bit of chess being played, for sure, little adjustments. That's a good question, if there's too many. I think you are who you are with slight adjustments. Not a lot of time to make too many changes, of course, since Sunday. But looking at the film, there's a couple things that we can certainly clean up from that game, and I think will.

That's the fun of it. It's kind of odd that we've done it so many years now back to back like this. But in a way it's similar, you're right.

Q. You mentioned the youth that you have. Sasha taking and making that three-pointer, that was the first one she took, seems like your freshmen and the younger players played with a lot of confidence, didn't think about the score and time. Thoughts on that and how well they played, especially Sasha making that

huge shot for you?

SCOTT RUECK: Yeah, I mean, it was a big shot. It was kind of nice just to see her kind of nod after she knocked it down, like, Let's go. McIntosh is a tough cover. So Sasha worked hard all day defending her.

To get free like she did on that last one, Aleah found her, perfect timing, Taylor rolled right on time, created a really good look. Sasha is the ultimate competitor. She loves that environment, loves that moment. That's what she's made for.

You know our program probably well enough to know we have empowered young players year after year. We talk a lot about, we don't care where the game is, what time it is or who we're playing. We love to play basketball. That's been kind of just our theme all year. It's been that way forever.

This class has done exactly that. In fact, in the locker room, I can't remember, maybe Taylor actually pointed it out, that our freshmen played so well today. They all brought great energy and played big. Savannah had big moments in today's game. Her defense was disruptive in the first half. Obviously Talia had 20 today.

A great sign of things ahead, but also a great sign of things this year.

Q. Is it weird that you've never played Oregon in the Pac-12 tournament before?

SCOTT RUECK: That's a little bit weird.

Q. Only team you haven't played.

SCOTT RUECK: Yeah, it's a little bit weird. Even before me, like never? Wow, that's crazy.

It's always interesting how it's worked out because you kind of, up in Seattle, I picture those years where we traveled so well, that it would have been kind of cool to have that rivalry game up in Key Arena. Certainly Vegas would be fine, too. But it is strange. Here we are, first time.

Q. It was a year ago right after the Pac-12 tournament when everything shut down. Can you reflect on where or this team has been over the past year, what this last year has been like, to now be back in Las Vegas at the tournament that ended last season?

SCOTT RUECK: Sum that up really quick, huh?

Yeah, it's amazing. After leaving Vegas last year, going



home, feeling like that team last year had played its best basketball down the stretch of the year, too. Certainly it was a tough loss here to go home with. But we were excited about the NCAA tournament. I thought we hit our groove. We had lost players, added players. We felt like we were just in kind of in a really good rhythm, where roles were clearly defined, had enough reps to be playing good basketball. Obviously just a halt, a stop, go home, stay away from each other. Fascinating to think back to what spring was like a year ago, it's almost surreal to even think back to it, what all of our lives were like. Wondering what the future held.

All the remote conversations, the remote communication, learning what Zoom was, learning how to use it. Then it becoming so normal for us. Then getting together in July for the first time, all these obviously weird circumstances on how we were able to work out, wondering what our season was going to hold, then even having changes up to seemingly the last Minnesota, what a season was going to be like.

Now, this year, getting to the point where you wake up in the morning not knowing if you're going to have a game the day of the game because you're used to so many disruptions. We've learned to be very grateful. This team has rallied together, all that outside adversity has bonded and galvanized this group. That's what everybody is seeing on the floor. We have a blast together. This team has chosen throughout, our staff, too, I give them all a ton of credit, for bringing a positive attitude. I used the word, the term or the phrase this week 'relentless positivity is the reason this team is where it is right now' because there was a reason for this team just to get down and discouraged, kind of go with the, Why me attitude, why me thought process. Never happened. This team just stayed the course, enjoyed every day, and has played their best basketball because of it.

It's been a crazy journey to look back on actually, all the things that we've endured. I'm just thankful that I've gotten to be around such great people throughout the whole process.

Q. If I did my counting correctly, you have not played more than five consecutive games this season. Tomorrow is game number five. What does it mean to you all to finally have that opportunity to possibly play six, seven, eight, nine, 10 consecutive games for the first time in a very long time?

SCOTT RUECK: Well, from what I've learned, good things. Not only are we grateful to play, but this team just continues to get better and better as we learn each other's terminology. When you talk about Cal playing their best

basketball right now, you talk about us playing our best basketball right now, you have these fairly new-ish teams that now have had enough reps and games, I don't know how many total games they've played, but it's somewhat similar to us, where we've played the fewest games of anyone I think.

We're finally able to adjust on the fly because we know enough now, been in enough experiences. For us it just means a sign of great things ahead. Any time we've had consecutive reps, consecutive games you've seen huge strides and improvement going forward because of it.

Yeah, let's hope it continues.

Thank you very much.

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