

# Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 4, 2021

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

**Oregon Ducks**

**Coach Kelly Graves**

Postgame Press Conference



Oregon State - 71, Oregon - 64

COACH GRAVES: I'm proud of our team and the fight we showed certainly in that last quarter. It was like the game last week, it was that third quarter, they had a stretch where they, you know -- we took a couple bad shots, had a couple of decent shots, some good opportunities and didn't convert. But unfortunately our defense just in that third quarter let us down.

We did such a great job in the first half against them. And it just kind of fell apart there for a little stretch in that third and that was the game. We tried like crazy to come back. Had some opportunities and that's it.

**Q. Down by 15, no quit. You got within four with less than a minute to go. You gave yourself a chance.**

COACH GRAVES: Yeah, we did. That was a good thing, something to build upon. But unfortunately we just, you know, you can't spot a team like that 15 points in that quarter and expect to have a chance at the end. I was pretty disappointed in that.

It's not fun losing anytime. It's certainly not much fun losing to the Beavers for the first time we've ever played in the tournament. But hats off to them. They earned it. They played well and down the stretch they know who they are, and they execute.

**Q. How about the play of Taylor Mikesell -- 24 points, 10 of 9 shooting good? Good to see her get some rhythm. She looked good.**

COACH GRAVES: She played a good game. I thought early on she was pressing a little bit. But then once she came back in and really settled down, she played well. And hopefully that is something we can continue through the NCAA Tournament. We'll be playing in a couple of weeks but we've got to figure out a way to play better or that tournament's going to be short as well.

I believe in our team. I believe that we can do it and somehow right this ship a little bit. But, boy, we're on the struggle bus down the stretch.

**Q. I thought in the beginning of the game that you came out, looked like ready to play. You defended them really well early. But the offense couldn't get going, because it looked like there you had a chance to have a sizable lead and just didn't.**

COACH GRAVES: Yeah, and I thought we had some pretty good looks. There were a couple of possessions where we shot it a little quick. But for the most part if you looked at some of our shots and put it against our shot profile, I thought they were decent. And just unfortunately not enough went in. And we could have -- I thought -- really put them on their heels early in the game and we didn't.

But defensively in the first half, I thought we were as good as we have been all year. Something to build on but now we have to put four quarters together.

**Q. Outside of Taylor Mikesell, who has obviously got back to shooting form, what is the offensive role of your various guards right now? I know obviously you turn to Maddie to run the point a little bit today. But whether it's Chavez, Maddie, Jaz, what are their offensive roles right now as you have to shuffle the deck a bit?**

COACH GRAVES: Well, first of all, we've got to make baskets. What we struggle with sometimes is the -- we don't have a ton of playmakers. We inserted Maddie tonight mainly for defense on Aleah. I thought she did a really good job, certainly in that first half on Aleah. She's such a great player.

And we made her work for a lot tonight. I thought Maddie did a great job. That's why we inserted her there. She is our best perimeter defender.

Taylor Chavez, I thought, had some moments tonight. Jaz, she just has to get it going. I hope she does. I'm confident



she will. But, you know, Taylor Chavez is one of the few players that we have that can actually make plays for other people. And so we need that from her going down the stretch here.

We are in the stretch. We are guaranteed probably one more game. And now we've got to earn more. We're good enough to. We've just got to get it done.

**Q. I'd be remiss if I didn't ask, you know, this time last year you were headed to Arkansas and leaving the park and all of a sudden everything gets canceled and all of this COVID stuff begins. Being back down here one year later, I mean, was there a weird feeling to it? And can you put into words what the last year has been, given that this is really the starting point of it all?**

COACH GRAVES: There's been some good points, but this has really been a tough season. It's been a tough season for these kids to get up at 7:30 every morning and go get tested and to have to walk a half a mile -- I'm not complaining because every team had to do it. But I'm just saying it's just different. They walk a half a mile to get served food in a to-go container and they have to walk back and eat it in their hotel room.

It's just been like that. It's hard to just be happy-go-lucky for these young people. And I give them all a lot of credit -- not just my team but all the teams. It's been difficult.

But, no, one year ago I wasn't traveling; I was preparing now for the second game. It was kind of a coronation last year the way we were playing and we were so good.

We still had two games to win here. And then I stayed and watched my son win a conference championship with Gonzaga. I'm not allowed to go to that either. So this is really surreal.

We haven't not played in the championship game in a while. So we played multiple games in this tournament for a lot of years.

So, this is a new experience, actually, to be able to have to go home after the one day.

**Q. You did not have -- (lost audio).**

COACH GRAVES: We did not have a lot today.

**Q. You did not have Paopao today, but you did play your other freshman down the stretch during the comeback. Could you explain the impact of not having Paopao and how that experience might help your other freshmen in the NCAA Tournament?**

COACH GRAVES: Well, Paopao was first-team all-conference this year. And she runs your point. And on a team that doesn't have a lot of playmakers she is one. She's one of the players that just makes everybody else better.

It hurts. It hurts.

But guess what? Nobody is crying for us. And we're going to have to find a way to figure it out because I don't think we're going to have her for the rest of the year. We'll have to figure out how to proceed going forward.

But any time you take a player of that magnitude, it's the same as Oregon State losing Aleah Goodman. How good would they be without Aleah Goodman running the show?

It's a huge hit. But, again, nobody's crying for us. We won three conference championships in a row. This was people's chances to kind of beat up on Oregon a little bit.

Now our backs are against the wall. We have a chance to redeem ourselves in an NCAA Tournament. And hopefully we will. Ultimately that's what you're judged on. And so we want to make it a positive going forward.

And somebody else is going to have to step up and take those reins. I liked what I saw from Maddie tonight. That was great. It's something to build on.

**Q. Wanted to follow up on your comments about Te-Hina. The Pac-12 Network is reporting that you might have her for the NCAA. Are you suggesting that's not the case? And I guess how do you proceed if that is?**

COACH GRAVES: You know, I'm one of those, I hope for the best and plan for the worst. This time of year you don't know. We've had players in that same kind of injury and it was season-ending. So I don't know. I'm hopeful. But we've got to prepare without, knowing that -- just figuring she won't play.

If she does play, it would be later in the tournament. And we better play a lot better or we're not going to be playing later in the next tournament.

**Q. For some specificity there, since its right foot, is this like Lisfranc? Are we talking about that kind of timetable?**

COACH GRAVES: You know what? I leave that to the doctors. One of the things I learned a long time ago I do not force kids, pressure kids, passive aggressively try to

talk to kids about coming back. I stay away from that. I have no idea.

I was told it was going to be weeks. Weeks to me could mean two or it could mean four to six. It could mean eight to 10. I don't know.

So I hate to give you a non-answer there. I just don't know. I'm really not going to press our doctors because when you start pressing your trainers and doctors they sometimes feel pressure -- oh, Coach is putting pressure on me to get this kid back. If she's back, we're a lot better and we'll love it. If she's not, hey, toughen up, we gotta do with what we've got.

**Q. You look at it, you miss a couple of wide-open lay-ins. You only hit a quarter of your 3s. So how do you approach it in the future? Do you look at the whole film with the team, or do you just say, hey, we didn't shoot well, you know, did a couple of things, what do you do?**

COACH GRAVES: Well, the shooting didn't lose the game. Our defensive focus, lack of in that latter third quarter is what did us in. Sure, we could have shot better. Sure, we had some shots at the rim that we left on the floor tonight. And you can't do that this time of year.

But, again, how many of our players have a ton of experience to really kind of fall back on and know that? We just weren't at our best.

But, again, I want to credit Oregon State. They earned it. They're playing well right now. That's a team that could do some damage in a NCAA Tournament as well. I don't know how far they can go here. But I certainly know when they match up in the NCAA they're going to be a tough out for people.

**Q. Have kind of an extended break here, Coach. What's the plan and how do you want to use that? Is this soul-searching time or do you have -- what are you going to do for the next couple of weeks before you play again?**

COACH GRAVES: Well, I'm going to probably spend some time in Black Butte a few days and get away from everything. I'm certainly not going to go to Costco or Trader Joe's or anywhere else in town because we have a lot of fans that follow the team. (Laughs). So I'll stay away from them.

But I don't know with the team. We have to start getting tested on Wednesday. So we'll have seven consecutive days of testing before the NCAA Tournament. Normally

speaking, you guys, we give them the week off after the tournament. Let them just -- no practice, no nothing. A lot of them go home. They can't do that this year. So, I'm not sure if we're going to have quite the same schedule this week. But there will be significant time off.

I think finals are coming up for our players. So they've got to remember that they're students first. And, so, I'll talk it over with my staff. To be honest with you, I wasn't expecting going home today. So I hadn't thought about it.

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