

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 4, 2021

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Arizona Wildcats

Coach Adia Barnes

Postgame Press Conference



Arizona - 60, Washington State - 44

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Barnes.

Q. You guys jump out to an 11-0 run and it seemed like you were sparked by your defense. Could you just talk about the energy level from the get-go?

COACH BARNES: We wanted to get back to what we were doing so well a couple of weeks ago and defensive intensity and just coming out with that fire. And I think we really did that. Forced, I think, 20 turnovers in the first half. That means we were on point defensively.

Weren't able to convert at all times, but definitely I think really, really good job trapping their ball handlers, forcing them to be uncomfortable. And they had a really tough time getting into their sets.

Q. Trinity was pretty phenomenal tonight. She got off to I believe seven out of the first nine points. She just seemed to play with a different motor out there today?

COACH BARNES: Yeah, she did. I said, what did you eat, Trinity. She said, Coach I'm not trying to go home. This is Trinity's first PAC-12 Tournament. She was phenomenal. We got on her back and got going. She did everything, hitting 3s, rebounding, brought us muscle inside.

And you know what I thought she did a really good job was denying. She had six steals. So phenomenal performance by her. One of the reasons why we won. I think other people stepped up today and that's what we needed.

Q. What did you think about the way your team played offensively? I know it's been a struggle recently but Aari had a good game distributing and a lot of scoring from different players today.

COACH BARNES: I was impressed. I didn't like our

3-point selection. I thought taking step-back 3s early when we didn't need to, I didn't like that. But I liked the fact they were 42% from the field. I'll live with this. I didn't love our offensive rebounding, but besides that I think our offense was good. Different people stepped up. We had three people in double digit scoring.

And Aari, she didn't need to score 20 today. If you look in the past if Aari didn't score 20 we'd lose. To have 13 points and nine assists. That's phenomenal. And three steals. I thought Aari played a really good game. And it was low scoring in the first half, but Lauren came in and did her part.

Sam hit shots when she needed to. I thought this was just a really, really good team performance.

Q. I saw you put Mara into the game early what was the thought process behind that?

COACH BARNES: I know we're going to need to go deeper on our bench, and I have confidence in Mara. I thought Mara has had a really good week. She's a good defender, gives us size, can shoot the ball. I thought put her in there early, get some experience because I think we need her.

Also Madi. I think Madi gives us another shooter. She helps us spread the floor when we have other good ball handlers. I thought Madi came in and did a good job. She's fearless. Giving them experience to me was essential to me going down the stretch.

Q. Do you think there's a decent chance that defense might win this championship? You see the three teams in the semis -- we don't know how the fourth game will come out yet -- but every team plays really solid defense in their own way. Do you think that this championship could win on a great defensive performance?

COACH BARNES: I think defense can be a factor. But I think that you've got to be able to -- you've got to play great defense and be able to convert. I think defense will be a staple. I think UCLA and Stanford play great defense. But



you have to hit shots, especially when you're meeting another good defensive team you have to be able to convert.

I think we turned them over a lot especially in the first half. At times we weren't able to convert. So you've got to be able to score. That's the name of it. But the defense for us, we're not going to be a 45-percent 3-point shooting team -- that's not our identity. But we're going to defend.

I think for us hitting the shots, getting the shots we want. Doesn't have to be 3s, getting the shots how we want them off of our defense it creates easy scoring opportunities for us. So potentially it could be, if the defense is better than the offense, right, it can. But I think you still have to hit shots and you have to be able to convert.

Q. You were talking about getting the players in, getting some minutes. In the previous game Tara sort of said the same thing, how it's a precious commodity sharing the wealth in terms of the minutes played because of the bracket, this type of season that everybody's endured and that going deeper on the bench and getting everybody out there as soon as possible -- I think, you had eight players in double-digit minutes tonight. Did you come in with the mindset of making sure that you were able to get deep on the bench and make sure everybody is -- that way your starters had some fresh legs?

COACH BARNES: Yes, we for sure wanted to play deep into the bench. We don't need to play, in the first game, Aari 38 minutes and Sam 38 minutes. I didn't even want to play Aari 31 or Sam 32. I wanted to keep them a little bit under 30. But with Washington State, they're such good offensive players they have great shooters that a 10-, 15-point lead is not enough for them.

At some point in the fourth quarter we got really sloppy, started turning the ball over off offensive rebounds. That's why I put the starters back in because three minutes is a lot of time. Then I took them out. But, yeah, resting people, not having them play 40, it's a challenge because Washington State, their main players played 40 minutes yesterday. It's a lot. I think that did affect them.

So I think for us this is low minutes. We've got to be able to be prepared to play multiple games. It was good for us not to play 38, 40 minutes.

Q. There was a story that came out from ESPN recently that called Trinity one of the kind of unsung heroes -- that she could be going into this postseason. Did you see that? And did you really expect -- I know that she has her moments -- did you expect her to go

all out today and have this type of performance?

COACH BARNES: I did. I did expect her to have a presence. I expected her to be aggressive. I mean, she wants to win. So if I tell Trinity, you're not going to shoot; you're just going to set screens and rebounds, she'll do whatever it takes to win. She's selfless, that's just who she is.

If she wouldn't have been hitting her shots she would have been setting great screens and doing other things. She had it going. I loved the fact her teammates found her and looked for her. I'm not surprised. I'm actually really impressed and happy because I think she can do this every game.

And I like the fact that Cate and the guards, Sam, Aari and Bendu were looking for her, feeding her, helping exploit the mismatches. I always say if someone's hot get them the ball, feed the hot hand. And I think we did that today with her, and I'm proud of us because we were just trying to do whatever it takes to win.

Q. Your defense today you started out strong and then it really picked up in the next two quarters as you held them to five points each quarter. I know that you were talking about how this week you had -- they were hungrier and you felt that from them. What was it that they sort of were able to kick it up a notch even though they were playing Arizona defense already?

COACH BARNES: I think for us it stung. Losing to ASU last week, it stung. We didn't play well. ASU they were focused. It was a reality check for us, and how were we going to respond and bounce back. I said it before, I'm kind of glad we lost to them versus losing now.

Not a loss I wanted but it was a learning session to show you can't overlook anybody. You cannot come in intense. You can't get on your heels right away at the beginning of games like ASU made us to do. Wanted to come out with that sense of urgency, that dog mentality. And I think we did that.

It wasn't a perfect game for us, but I thought defensively I thought we were pretty solid. We made mistakes like we're going to but we had passion plays, we had hustle, we fought. I'm just proud of how we responded after the game because we could have just said, okay, we're not playing well, do it. But I thought they responded well and different people stepped up. I'm proud of our performance and proud that we're not going home.

Q. Aari, nine assists only three turnovers. She could have had some trouble scoring, but she made up with

that with the way she distributed. Is this one of her better games you saw her as a facilitator?

COACH BARNES: It is. I didn't like some of the 3s she set up for but they were in and out. I think the step-back 3s I probably would have changed a couple of those. She knew that, I'll live with that with her, I trust her.

I thought she played a phenomenal game. I thought she set up her teammates. I thought she called the right things. I thought she put people in good situations to score, almost a double-double. A month ago we wouldn't have won with Aari scoring 13 points.

But different people stepped up. That's what it's about this time of year. I'm proud of her, a plus-six assist-to-turnover ratio and three steals and five rebounds, I think that's a great stat line. She played a really good game. You don't have to score 20 to impact the game and make a difference and help us win and she did that today, tonight.

Q. Can you please comment on Madi Conner coming in and stroking that 3-pointer?

COACH BARNES: If you would have seen Madi in practice the last couple of days she was just doing that. I mean, we had her playing at some points in the game Leger-Walker, and she was just, she was shooting like Leger-Walker does, hitting 3s and just killing it the last couple of days.

She's still learning our system. She still has a ways to go. But she wants it. She's hungry. She puts in the work. She's a gym rat. I knew down the stretch she would help us, so I'm so glad she hit that 3. The other one was in and out. She's a shooter. She'll bring us more offense. On the perimeter, you have to guard her. So I'm impressed with the way she played.

Q. What was the message at halftime? You guys were up by, I believe, eight and you guys forced 22 turnovers or 21 turnovers. What did you guys talk about in the locker room during that break?

COACH BARNES: That up eight is nothing. Play it like it's 0-0. Second half they're a really good team. They can score in bunches. They score fast. They're good. We know they usually have big third quarters. And I told them remember what happened at Washington State. We were up 19, lost the lead, and ended up losing in overtime.

So, we don't want to repeat history. Go back and how we started a game play, that same intensity. And I think we did that.

The other thing I want to point out, Helena Pueyo wasn't shooting the ball today, it was not her night to shoot. But six rebounds, five steals and one turnover, one block. That's a phenomenal stat line. That is a plus-23 efficiency and that's the way to help your team without scoring. All those little things matter. But at halftime, an eight-point lead against Washington State is not enough. They're a really good team.

Q. And defensively you guys did a great job against the Leger-Walker twins. Last game that you just mentioned, the game in Pullman, they dropped 31 points on you guys. Today they scored 22 and shot 22 percent from the field. What went into that defensive effort?

COACH BARNES: Forcing them for 6-of-27, that's the defense we wanted. Those sisters are really good. Krystal is so experienced. She runs the team. So I think we gave her -- put a lot of pressure on her, but we had to. We had to turn her over and put pressure on her, try to take her out of the game.

Every game against us she hits these 3s at the end of the shot clock. It's just hard. I don't know how she makes those. She's such a good player. She's so smart.

And then Charlisse is just a scorer. We wanted to make sure as a team we made her work. I thought we did a really good job against them. Forced her 2-for-17, 1-for-4 from the 3. That's what we wanted. We knew we had to do that to win the game.

I thought great team effort against her because she's a good player. And she demands that. So very good by our defense and forcing her to be uncomfortable because she's that good but we had to throw different things at her.

Q. An Arizona women's basketball trip to Las Vegas would not be the same unless I asked about Sam Thomas, of course. You just mentioned how players don't need to score 20 to have an impact. She did so much of the blue-collar work, the grinding work, dirty work, hands in faces and does so much work. Talk about the impact she continues to have and what it's been like to continue to see her thrive and do all the things that need to be done so the stars can do their jobs?

COACH BARNES: It's very difficult to take Sam off the floor. Sam is consistently doing these things. I wish I would have got her more than four shots. She plays the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. She rebounds. She always guards the best player. She takes care of the ball, runs great offense. She's consistent.

So having her and Mara off the floor at the same time is hard. But Sam does it every day. She never does that. When she's scoring, it's a plus for us. She plays phenomenal defense, talks, a leader on the floor. So all those things make her so valuable. And it was just out today that she's a scholar-athlete of the year. So that's phenomenal, too, because she does it on the court, off the court. She's just a player that I wish I could clone and have some more of her. And I wish I could keep a player like her every single year for my whole career. But she's a great teammate. She's a great leader. And she's just a great basketball player.

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