

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 4, 2021

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

UCLA Bruins

Coach Cori Close

Postgame Press Conference



UCLA - 58, Washington - 46

Q. You mentioned a couple weeks ago how tough this was going to be for you guys because you don't have the numbers on the bench. You won tonight. How are you going to come back tomorrow and potentially the next day knowing you'll have to put in a lot of minutes to advance again?

COACH CLOSE: I think you'll have to see what we're made of. I don't think you can rely on how you feel. How you feel doesn't really matter. How bad do you want it? And how bad do you want to prepare with your mind and heart? Anything else is just not an option if you want to get to the finals.

So, is it hard? Yeah, but we've been dealing with that all year. So it really is just how bad you want it. And we're going to have to, people will have to play, yeah, it was more minutes than we would have liked to have had to play tonight for some of our players.

But you know what? We just outchallenged the other three, you're going to have to give us more tomorrow. And bottom line it's up to your mind and your heart. And if your mind and your heart is strong enough, then your body will follow.

Q. Michaela talked about how you guys, defense is your anchor. Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

COACH CLOSE: Yeah, you know, we are a much improved shooting team than we were a year ago. But it is still not the preeminent part of our success. Our success is built on defense, rebounding and passion plays. And passion plays are nonstatistical hustle plays that we believe are the intangibles that lead us to high levels of play and help us survive bad shooting nights.

And, you know, I just think, yeah, we didn't shoot well from 3. So adjust. Like, who cares? That's not how we build.

We're not a "live by the 3, die by the 3" kind of team. We needed to be a lot more, just, poised and go, hey, you know what? Let's not take the first open 3. Let's make sure we get Michaela, for instance, we need to get her some better scoring touches. And we need to have more purpose. And then when that ball comes inside/out, then go ahead and shoot it.

But I thought we were settling for 3s after it was very apparent that we weren't on. And we can survive that as long as we play with purpose and awareness of how the game needs to be played that way.

And so I think we've always built our team around that. And so in nights where we don't shoot as well, we need to be able to recognize sooner that that is our anchor, remember what we forgot and get back to getting stops and rebounds.

Q. She also mentioned Lauryn is your rock. For you all, what it means to have that type of player on your team that doesn't have to do much to make the stat sheet, but she's a huge presence in the game?

COACH CLOSE: I thought our communication was really poor, to be honest with you, out there tonight. And Lauryn was the one who held it together. I think Lauryn Miller and Lindsey Corsaro were the two communicators out on the floor, getting us back together, regrouping us. But Lauryn is such -- her IQ is off the charts.

She understands what the game plan is. And her communication changes us from being a reactionary team to an anticipatory team. And I thought Lauryn was a tremendous steadying force with her communication tonight. And just really those baseline jumpers, the ones that she hit in very key moments. I thought -- I think she's getting more and more confident and also she's been putting in the work. Before practice every day she's been working with Coach Tasha on her perimeter shot. That's paying off. I thought those were clutch buckets as well.

Q. I asked the question the teams that are left are all teams that play really good defense. I mean the scores today indicate that these are four really strong



defensive teams. And I asked Adia if she thought defense might decide this championship. On the other hand, Stanford put up 92 today. So you have to score, too, right?

COACH CLOSE: Absolutely.

Q. Which one will win out ultimately, you think, in this championship? Is it a team that makes a defensive stand or are you going to have to score a lot of points to win this title?

COACH CLOSE: I don't know if you have to score a lot of points. I think every team is going to play great defense. And I think the defense keeps you in it. But you've got to be -- you're going to have to put the ball in the hole. And I think in general and in the postseason, if you analyze over the past several years, let's take Stanford who is averaging 79 points a game, right? Usually when you get to these kind of semifinals, finals games or Sweet 16, Elite Eight, Final Four games, the points go down about 11 points a game.

So you have to execute in the half court and you have to be really strong and usually you have to go a little deeper into the shot clock even though -- actually all the teams, maybe with the exception of Oregon State, wants to play up and down. So, you have to be able to execute. The answer to your question is I really don't think you can do one or the other.

If you want to win a championship in this conference you better be able to do both. Maybe not proportionately 50/50. I think probably all of us would say it's going to anchor -- be our defense -- but we'll have to be able to run good offense and create teamwork shots together. But I think you have to be able to do both.

Q. I know this isn't a new situation for you guys. You guys have been able to find your way somehow out of various situations throughout the season. So maybe you could, A, talk about how you guys are always able to find a way out of whatever rabbit hole you went down into? And then tonight it seemed kind of unique because it seemed like all of a sudden, boom, somebody woke up T'Challa in the "Black Panther" and all of a sudden you guys were the Bruins again, like, kaboom, they're back. Could you speak to that and also tell us how you guys can always find a way? And it's true, Lauryn did seem to be really something out there tonight. So...

COACH CLOSE: You talked about the real shift. I think Natalie Chou deserves a lot of credit for that. Her deflections and defensive plays and hustle plays and

saving the ball back in bounds that led us to a two-on-one break, I just thought some of her passion plays were really huge in that momentum shift.

But I think that -- I just think we don't see it as the rabbit hole, so to speak. I think we see it as, okay, what does the team need from me right now.

And I just don't think we, if we're going to go make a deep run in March, we have to be a team that doesn't see obstacles. We try to find solutions.

And I think that's pretty much for all of us. This has been such a crazy year. And teams that have stayed focused on, okay, we've got to adapt here. This is what needs to happen right now. And just don't even let the things that are out of your control distract you from adapting, being flexible and making your next right step.

And, so, you know I just think we try to not see it as deficits or get too down on ourselves. But it will be interesting to see. When we played Arizona last time we had that abysmal third quarter. And that was sort of panicked a little bit. We actually, we didn't turn the ball over. We were pretty even on the boards, pretty even in terms of assist/turnovers. But it came down to really focusing on getting teamwork shots together and the next right step. And we sort of panicked a little bit.

Maybe we did go into that hole. But I think we're different now but we'll see tomorrow. Because they're an incredibly good defensive team. They're going to put tremendous pressure.

And give them credit, they're good at that. We're going to have to be able to handle that well. But we'll have to be able to create shots for each other and with each other. And we'll see how much we've learned, won't we?

Q. You have Arizona tomorrow, obviously. And they have one of the best players in the conference in Aari McDonald. What does the team have to do to prepare for her and them in general tomorrow?

COACH CLOSE: She's a great player, but we have some great players too. If you're going to play at this level, Aari is the fastest guard in the country with the ball in her hands. No question about it. Her relentless pressure, the way she flies around the court and gets traps and pokes the ball and she just -- she gets her team extra possessions.

Credit to her. But you know what, we've got some dang good players. And they've got to be, hey, as much as we have to worry about Aari, they have to worry about us.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

And so mad respect, not just for Aari McDonald but their team. They're balanced. They hustle for each other. They're physical. Arizona is really good basketball team, period. But I think we're a really good basketball team too. So we're going to face this -- every single team we play at this level has a really, really good player. It just looks a little different.

So all the credit to Aari and all she's earned. But my focus is how do I put my players in the position to play to their best and make them worry about us.

Q. You guys have had a pretty uncharacteristic showing in terms of turnovers and shooting the ball, and yet you still won by double digits. What can your team learn from a game like this? Can that be seen as a good thing in any way?

COACH CLOSE: I think it reminds us of what we're built on. And I think probably Michaela talked about that, it sounds like, and that definitely, I think, informs us of how to reset our minds correctly, then maybe it is a benefit.

But 12 turnovers at the half, that was really poor. We usually average under 12 turnovers for a game. So credit to Washington. They really play that style. The bottom line was that you've got to play to your team's identity and strength. And the reality is that Washington played to their strengths and identity better than we played to ours tonight.

And that's going to be what we need to learn from going into tomorrow's game is that we have a way of playing the game that is best for us.

And Arizona has a way of playing the game that's best for them. Can we disrupt that and play to our strengths, or is it going to be vice versa? That's going to be the battle. It's going to be the battle within the game. It's going to be the battle within our preparation.

But, yeah, I mean, I'm not as worried about our poor shooting night, but the turnovers, those concern me, because we need to stay at 11 or under tomorrow, for sure, if we want to be in a position to win the game tomorrow.

So that one concerns me more than the poor shooting because that's something I think is a little bit more under our control and I think we could have prevented that a little bit. But the tougher, more together team, is going to win tomorrow. Period. So the challenge will be which one wants it more and which one puts themselves in the position to be the tougher, more together team.

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