

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Sunday, March 7, 2021

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

UCLA Bruins

Cori Close

Postgame Press Conference

Stanford 75, UCLA 55

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by head coach Cori Close. Coach, would you like to begin with an opening statement, then we'll take questions.

CORI CLOSE: Well, first of all, I want to say that Stanford is I think playing as well as anyone in the country. And credit to Tara and her staff and her team. They played a great game. They have been playing great basketball. Just all the credit to them.

I'm rooting for all the Pac-12 teams to be really successful in post-season. I'm sure that Stanford will lead the charge for our conference. So all the credit to them.

I was on the radio after, and he asked me how disappointed I was in the result. Of course, I'm a competitor; I want to win. But I'm much more disappointed that we played so below our process and commitment to what we said we were going to do.

The lack of urgency, commitment to the game plan, rebounding, I mean, we didn't do anything in the first half that we said we were going to do. That is the one that really stings. We talk about a lot in our program that you either have the pain of discipline or the pain of regret. Unfortunately there's a lot of pain of regret right now.

The choice before us is what we do with that pain and how we respond. Those are the choices in front of us. But that's as disappointing of an opening effort that we've had. Stanford, quite frankly, put on a clinic of what it takes to be at a Final Four level. We're either going to allow that to teach us and call us up to that standard or it's going to be a quick out in the tournament.

Next time we play with that lack of urgency in the first half of an NCAA tournament, I don't care what round, it will be our last. So we better learn from this real quick.



THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. When Michaela goes out, Charisma went out, Lauryn went out at one point. In terms of your consistency and your rhythm, how disruptive were having those key players leaving the floor, then coming back?

CORI CLOSE: To be honest with you, I mean, I didn't think -- I thought we were awful before any of them went out. I mean, obviously to have -- with the numbers that we have, it's better to have consistency. But I sure don't blame our effort on that.

Q. The day off was obviously new. In terms of momentum, mentality, do you believe that worked against you guys?

CORI CLOSE: No. We would have been in big trouble if we had to play yesterday, to be honest with you.

No, I thought it was a really wise adjustment by the Pac-12. I think it was really good.

I think this had to do with what was in between our ears. We can't look at any excuse, nothing. I mean, I don't care who you are, I don't care if you're really deep like Stanford or you're not deep like us. At this point in the year, everybody's banged up, everybody's trying to get rest, everyone is doing this. You have to make a mental decision.

Is it hard? Yeah. If it was easy, everyone would be do it. No, I thought it was a really wise decision by the Pac-12. I think the Pac-12 deserves so much credit. They've done a spectacular job trying to get us to this point. The effort behind the scenes, the people that busted their butts to make this an experience for the student-athlete deserves so much credit. I thought the adjustment to have that day between the finals was a very wise and excellent adjustment to make during this year.

Q. You've said there's a lot of regret, people didn't stick to the game plan. Can you elaborate moving forward what adjustments you feel need to be made?

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

CORI CLOSE: You don't have enough time. The reality was that we said the transition game, the takeaway three-point shots, and rebounding were going to be huge. They were catch-and-shoot-three players or put it on the floor off the bounce. We took away neither.

We talked about Kiana and going to her left, right to left step-back three, how we were going to have to close the gap, even go further out. We just didn't do it.

It's nothing we haven't shown we can do. Obviously we've shown we can do a lot better. I thought we were incredibly tough against Arizona in the semifinals. I think we've shown incredible toughness at many different fronts. I know it's in my team. My belief in them has not wavered. My love for them will always stay committed. I'm just really disappointed in our behavior and our choices right now.

We have to take responsibility. I told them, you may not like me the rest of the year, but I'd rather deal with that and call you up to the standards of excellence that I know they're capable of. We have really wonderful human beings, but they didn't just come here to be wonderful human beings. They also came here to have a standard of excellence of what they were trying to do, the excellence they were going to live in and provide on the court, and we didn't do that.

We have to look in the mirror, take ownership, we have to have humility and we have to come out fighting. It's my responsibility as the head coach to bring out the urgency, the fight, the focus and the togetherness of executing a game plan that it's going to take to be successful in the NCAA tournament.

Q. Obviously a lot of negative, so to speak, what you're talking about. Michaela's play as usual a positive?

CORI CLOSE: I think Michaela, I mean, people have been talking to me all about how it's the hardest transition to make to being a small forward in college to going to be a three player in the WNBA. If you look at the skill set she has shown just in this tournament, whether it be covering the length of the floor, attacking off the bounce, her midrange game, her ability to shoot the three. I mean, she's been really, really good.

I try not to mince any words. I think most of you on this call know me well enough to know that I'm really committed to the total collegiate experience. But a big part of that is being an excellent basketball player. Competing that you might win the race. We're trying to win, be at our best.

Coach Wooden talked about competitive greatness is being at your best when your best is needed. The three people that I thought really finished empty both mentally, emotionally, physically, Michaela Onyenwere, Lindsey Corsaro and Emily Bessoir really played hard and tried to give us a spark off the bench, her consistency in rebounding.

Yes, I think Michaela is the biggest silver lining. You look at her, how much she was double-teamed, triple teamed, she still found ways to end up with 30. It's pretty remarkable. Michaela, she's an elite basketball player. She's not even close to what she's going to become at the next level whenever she decides that is going to happen.

Really, really proud of her. Definitely I think she showed out. We let her down, quite frankly. I take first responsibility of that. I'm the head coach. The buck stops with me (tearing up). We let her down.

Go ahead. Next question.

Q. Obviously emotional, but you talked at the end of the last game about how you felt like the team had a lot of room to improve on the offensive end. After the slow first half, you were able to have 20 in the third, 15 in the fourth. Do you feel there was some real improvement there in the second half?

CORI CLOSE: Yeah, I mean, this team has so many weapons. That's what's so frustrating to me. I think we made -- yeah, we just played harder. Every single time, even in the first half, every single bucket we got is because we did things together, we were the aggressors, we set good screens, we second cut, we played with effort and pace, togetherness.

Yeah, I think we responded in the second half. I still think we -- the challenge for us is it's really hard for us to work at that in practice because of just COVID protocols and numbers, no scout guys, all those different things. The challenge as a teacher is I have to be really, really creative of what that looks like.

We've tried to do things that we've never done before just because we're limited in our options. That's going to be my challenge over the next 10 days, is we got to figure that out. We're better than that. Yeah, I think we showed a lot. We won the second half. I think we're even on the boards in the second half. That's what's so frustrating.

But it teaches us what we can become. But time's running out. Bottom line is we got to choose quick. I think there's more in them. Hopefully the pain of this is the most powerful teacher.

Q. How confident are you that your team will take ownership of this loss?

CORI CLOSE: Totally confident. That is the one thing that I have zero doubt about, is that they will respond. We're going to have to deal with -- we talk all the time that events plus response equals outcomes. If you don't like your outcome, you better change your response.

This happened. We can't do anything about it now. So our choices that we're going to choose to strengthen our R, our response. I was telling Dave on the radio that bottom line is there's one thing I have zero doubt about, is that they will respond, they will let this teach them, they will show up with a competitive spirit, they will show up. Even when I left the locker room, Lindsey Corsaro says everyone shows up at the next practice with a heart willing to change this now, and we will change this, we will be better, there's no other option.

I have zero doubt that we will be better for it.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach.

CORI CLOSE: Thank you all for your time. Appreciate your coverage of the tournament.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports