

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

UCLA Bruins

Coach Cori Close

Ilmar'I Thomas

Angela Dugalic

Charisma Osborne

Postgame Press Conference



And I thought once we got back to that and really said, hey, who are we. We had a tough offensive night. It was not a pretty win. But we have never been built on having to win based on how many shots we make or how many 3s we make. And especially in the postseason. You've got to be able to grind it out with defense and rebounding. And really that's how we did it.

Really proud of how Angela just continues to get better with no practices. And just learning from everything. I'm very hard on Angela. And it's because I believe in her so much and she's having to learn on the fly. She's had three practices since October 30th, and to have her have 12 rebounds in 19 minutes of play, and the way that she impacted the game, I'm sure she'll want to talk about her two 3s, but I prefer to talk about her rebounds. But she's just really growing with us.

And I thought these two just, with Ilmar'I, I thought her aggressiveness especially in the first half to get really quality touches. She put so much pressure on their defense -- and Charisma's steadiness through a tough shooting night. That's huge. When best top two scorers have ups and downs on the offensive end, but they lead you with their mentality, that's a good night.

Q. That was a war. That was a battle. It was really physical. Lots of bodies on the ground. You have a really short turnaround, how do you make sure you recover? Will you change anything about maybe shootaround, anything like that?

COACH CLOSE: We didn't shoot-around today. We'll do our walk-through pretty much the rest of the way. We're pretty used to that at this point. And we've had a lot of practice this year of hard turnarounds and beat-up bodies and short numbers. It's really same song, 24th verse or whatever game this is.

I think at this point nobody feels perfect. And I challenge them -- it's really going to be which team can outwork each other before the ball even tips, right?

So that's our challenge. We think we have a really good

UCLA - 73, Southern Cal - 60

COACH CLOSE: Thank you all for being here. This tournament is what it is because of how it's grown in its exposure and its level of excellence.

First credit goes to the Pac-12. They have been Trailblazers in the level of excellence and equity in their Pac-12 tournament, in the conference tournament. So we thank them. But it doesn't have any juice if you aren't all bringing light to it and really telling the stories of these women. Thank you, media, for being here.

It's really a business-like thing for me. We've been talking ever since last weekend about really two words: Belief and character. We've earned a lot of belief. I can't give them belief. But they earned belief in how they've handled adversity, how they've responded, how they've come together as a unit. And they need to know what they've earned and they need to continue to believe.

But character is what allows you to make the hard choices to respond to runs, to turn difficult things into good things. And you saw a lot of that tonight. And USC did a great job. I thought they were well prepared. It's hard to beat a team three times.

I thought they made good adjustments. We're cross-town rivals. It's going to get chippy sometimes. But I was really proud of our sort of emotional steadiness, the way we got ourselves back. I thought we lost a little bit of composure in what makes us "us" in the third quarter. And we made some defensive mental errors. We weren't controlling the pace of the game and how the game was being played. And that's when USC made their run.



roadmap to do that. We're very proactive on that front. That's the choice before us.

And how much work can we do mentally. I think at this point experience has been such a good teacher, if you let it. And we're going to have to rely on that experience and the mentality to be able to focus, to learn a game plan through execution.

I thought Coach Shannon's scout -- and Coach Shannon and Chancellor (phonetic) on our staff did a great job preparing us today. Coach Tony and Coach So (phonetic) have the next one. We have so much confidence in which our assistant coaches and video team work together to put our players in a chance to be successful.

I really think it's a mental game at this point. I don't think there's much to change. But it's how much can we focus and concentrate.

Q. Angela, obviously you've been through a lot this season with injuries in your first year with the team. But to come out like this and a must-win game and have your best performance as a Bruins, talk about what that means to you and your decision to come to play for this program and what this means for your career?

ANGELA DUGALIC: It means a lot because I'm really proud to wear these four letters across my chest. Again, as Coach Cori said, I only had three practices, but watching practice, watching them practice all the time, and I keep trying to learn. I make a lot of mistakes.

But in the end, they get me through it, my teammates and my coaching staff. I'm really blessed to have them in my life. And I don't think it would have gone like this if I didn't have them.

Q. Could all the players talk about a tie game going into the fourth quarter, but everything you've gone through all year and how that translates into winning a game by 13, when you're tied going into the fourth quarter.

CHARISMA OSBORNE: I'm super proud of us in the fourth quarter. I think we've been talking about it for a while. In the third quarter, people will punch back and we just let them keep punching. And I felt like this game we were prepared and we knew that we had to fight, continue to fight in the fourth quarter.

And like Coach Cori said, it starts on defense and getting rebounds. I think we just did that, and we just stayed

together.

IIMAR'I THOMAS: There's almost no position we haven't been as a team. When that happened and they went on their run, we knew that we could execute our game plan for the rest of the game and we had each other's backs.

ANGELA DUGALIC: And we always talk about staying neutral. So I think especially after their run, we did that. We stayed neutral and we kept our composure, I think that's really what helped.

Q. In the first quarter, 38 percent shooting, 44 in the second, 58.3 for USC. And then in the fourth quarter you held them to 12 and a half percent. What was your message to them heading into the fourth quarter?

COACH CLOSE: I think Coach Tony really got into the huddle, I think it was the end of the third and said -- or maybe it was right at the beginning of the fourth -- and said, look, we've been winning games and creating this momentum because we haven't been making silly errors. And we haven't been being distracted by things out of our control.

And he just really challenged them to buck up mentally and quit having defensive mistakes. And I think that I think he just got their attention. And he just said, hey, learn from this. And look at what's happening. Turn this around right now. No more mental errors. And they lived that out.

I think we were really guarding them on the catch in the third quarter. So they were getting all the scoring catches that they like for their rhythm. And I think in the fourth quarter, we guarded them before the catch.

We made all those catches go further distance, make them more difficult. Get a deflection. And that made all the difference in the world.

And then we defensive rebounded. We got 86 percent of the defensive misses, we got 86 percent of those rebounds on the defensive end. And that's I think a huge point of the game.

Q. Wanted to ask you this all season, you guys post Natalie a lot. Does she secretly want to be a post in the way a lot of posts secretly want to be point guards?

COACH CLOSE: Yes, I think that Natalie is just a really versatile player. And it's interesting, we're having to beg her to shoot the 3. I still think today she passed up probably three open looks, and she needs to let it fly.

And honestly if she would do that more, she'd actually stretch the floor more and we'll be able to post her up more. But I think she really has -- she's always liked to post. I really give her mom, who was her coach growing up, Coach Lee (phonetic), a lot of credit.

She was her main trainer all through that. She really helped her become an incredibly versatile basketball player. The thing I've seen, she's done that most of her career with us. The thing I've seen different this year is her attacks off the bounce.

She's been much more aggressive to get straight-line drives, get downhill, and that's been the versatility that way. And her defense has improved. Those are the two things I really like to see.

But I don't think she necessarily wants to be a post player. But she doesn't mind posting up other guards. Everybody on our team thinks they're big guard. There's not a forward or a post player in sight. Maybe Izzy, she's maybe the only one that considers herself a post player.

Q. You had four players in double figures. Could have had six. You had one with eight, one with nine. Earlier in the year you had a small rotation, you were relying on a couple of kids. What does having the depth allow you to do, instead of having to relying on just a couple of players?

COACH CLOSE: It's imperative. We look at the foul trouble we had. We had Angela had four for a while and Ilmar'I had four. And to be able to -- this is not easy to do -- Kayla Owens came in the first half and gave us some really good defensive minutes. Got some deflections, some rebounds, made denials that were important.

I think you need everybody to stay ready. And on any given -- if you look at the history of sort of Cinderella teams, it's unexpected people stepping up. And it's every single person on your roster staying ready, even maybe through their own disappointment, even if they disagree with me. It doesn't matter because the whole focus is what do I need to do to help our team win. And anything else is really, it's inconsequential.

So bottom line for us it is nice. I think it's been huge to get a few more bodies back. But they don't do any good if everyone's not locked in mentally and they're totally selfless.

Q. Question about Penn and what she did in the fourth quarter, cuz she really helped you in the fourth quarter.

COACH CLOSE: Huge.

Q. If you could comment on Oregon, the other game was that mid-week game that they jumped you right at the start and whatnot. If you could comment a little bit about playing them.

COACH CLOSE: Sure, absolutely. Jaelynn has been a warrior for us. We rely on her to be a defensive stopper. She does that night in, night out. But since she's come back from her hand injury. It's been hard for her to get in an offensive rhythm. That's been a struggle.

What I respect about Jaelynn, she's kept at it. Her countenance never changes. She's always thinking about her next play, speed and mentality. So to me it was really nice to see her get a little rhythm.

I thought she was huge at the beginning of the game too. She was getting some downhill drives, got us going a little bit with an attack mentality. She's an absolute, huge key for us. And with every game I think she's getting a little bit more of her mojo back.

And we're going to need that moving forward. But I was really happy for her. I thought it made a huge difference spreading the floor.

They really wanted to take away the paint. When she finally hilt those two, I think one was a long two, and then the three, I thought that made their sort of scouting report a little tough in that fourth quarter.

Oregon's a great basketball team. And it really starts with those guards, Paopao -- and I had the opportunity to coach PaoPao with USA Basketball this last summer. And really not only enjoyed her as a person but really respect her as a player. And it starts with her and Endyia Rogers, and those two really got aggressive right off the bat when we went up there. That was the huge key.

It's really going to be important that we need to make them have to run through more of their offense. For them not to be able to attack off the ball-screen defense is always going to be a huge key against Oregon.

But our ability to be able to play through the paint. Even though they have good size and all of those things, you know, we have to be who we are and we were not the aggressors in the first half.

And if you want a chance to have, get a victory against Oregon you better be the aggressor for 40 minutes. They're so skilled, so versatile, a lot of great players. Obviously, when they play through Sabally, she does so many good things. But we're confident in who we are.

We have to play a lot better, but I think we learned some valuable lessons in that last game and we're really excited to be able to have the chance to compete.

This conference just forces new things out of you game in game out. And we have so much respect for every team in our conference. I had a lot of respect for USC going into this game. I know we're rivals, but rising tide lifts all boats. I want basketball in Southern California to be amazing. And we need all of our battles to be like they were tonight for basketball to continue to grow.

And I know Oregon. We've had some of the greatest, most epic battles in conference tournaments versus them. And so I'm excited to watch us compete against another great basketball team. And we'll see what gets brought out in us from that one.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports