

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 3, 2022

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Washington State Cougars

Coach Kamie Ethridge

Bella Murekatete

Krystal Leger-Walker

Postgame Press Conference



Utah - 70, Washington State - 59

COACH ETHRIDGE: I want to congratulate Lynne and her staff and Utah. I think they're playing incredible basketball and that first half was just a tidal wave on us. They shot the ball so well from 3.

They're really hard to guard. They made us pay for every mistake we made. And we made enough to get ourselves in a hole, giving up 45 points. It's hard to come back from that. I loved our fight in the second half. I thought we got started. And a few mistakes, then the ball not going in the basket with some of the stuff we were trying to do.

And just 40 minutes of really hard effort and good effort from our team, just couldn't beat a really good Utah team tonight.

Q. It was a tidal wave. They shot so well. Was that they were hot? Do you think you missed a lot of defensive assignments?

COACH ETHRIDGE: A little bit of both. But obviously they're taking hard shots, but we let them walk into some 3s. We sometimes aren't convinced that people can shoot. And they showed us. And their stats are getting better. Their players are -- so many of them can shoot the 3 now.

Again, when they're all on the same night and playing that well, it's hard to defend. And maybe they got tired in the second half and didn't make as many. I thought we had really good effort, though, to try to crawl back in.

And they got a lot of easy baskets and we didn't. That's kind of our problem with our offense right now. We're not getting enough easy baskets. We've got to try to find ways to fix that.

Q. Obviously going into the half down 20 is not ideal. What's the message to your team to try to motivate them to try to get back in the game, make it happen?

COACH ETHRIDGE: We wanted to just beat them by five, five or six every media timeout. And we did. The first one we got it to five. Then they got it right back in the next one.

So just try to condense it and play mini games and put yourself in a good position to make a run. Again, I think we're going to put in the film and see some good looks at the basket, where we just didn't make enough shots. And I know that sounds simple, but the ball does have to go into the basket for us to crawl back into a game like that.

But I do think we had unbelievable effort to try to play tonight. I liked our effort. I liked our spirit. We've just got to be better on the offensive end and the defensive end.

Q. You've got two weeks now before the tournament starts. You're going to get in. How much better can you get? And for the players, what do you two especially want to work on? But, Kamie, how much better can you get in two weeks?

COACH ETHRIDGE: I think we still have a high ceiling. I think every time we watch game film and watch ourselves, I think we've really improved over the last month. We're just a little bit too tricky for ourselves I think on the offensive end and we don't score it as well as we need to from 3.

I do think we have some opportunity to get better. I think we've got to get more easy baskets. I think we've got to run the ball a little bit better and get some easy baskets. I think those are things we can really attempt to do.

And, again, I think our defense is really, really solid. I think we put ourselves most nights in really good position. Maybe not so much tonight. But I think we can still get a lot better on the offensive end.

KRYSTAL LEGER-WALKER: I think we can be a lot better than we were tonight. Definitely a bad game for us and



things didn't go the way we planned and how we wanted it to. We didn't execute the way we wanted it to.

I think we can definitely turn it around in two weeks and come back a lot stronger than we were tonight because it wasn't our best -- this definitely wasn't our best game. I'm very positive about getting back in the gym and showing up again in two weeks and putting on a better show.

BELLA MUREKATETE: Like Krystal and Coach E said, we'll go back watch film and figure out what we did wrong and get better, because that's our only option, to get better.

Q. You had a worse loss than this when you lost to Oregon and came back and played really well since then. Is that kind of the experience you can draw on to help yourselves get ready for the tournament? And, Kamie, did you think about doing more timeout-wise in the first quarter to try to slow that down? And could you comment on Charli Turner Thorne retiring today?

KRYSTAL LEGER-WALKER: I definitely think all the great teams have to respond well. And if we want to continue to grow and build a great program here, I think we have no choice but to respond great.

And I know that we're a very self-accountable team. I know everyone feels they're not impressed with themselves and we'll be a little bit down. But we know we can be better. And I think that hopefully we'll respond well and we'll show up.

And I think we all want to be a great team and I think great teams have to respond well. So, yeah, definitely hoping we respond. I don't want to say we will. But we'll prove it. But definitely optimistic that we'll respond well and everyone has that mindset.

BELLA MUREKATETE: It's really hard to talk after Krystal talks. Like she said, we've got to respond. That's our only option. I feel like I'm repeating myself a lot, but we have to respond. That's the only option. And after the Oregon game we had to get better because we know there was no going back because we had to get better and win the rest of the games. So, yeah, it's getting better.

COACH ETHRIDGE: I think we've been through two quarters that were like that, the Oregon game and this game. And, again, we made three mistakes early when we were still right there tie game, and they were all three mistakes that were just -- we're not making that mistake, we don't. We're not walking in that game making those three mistakes, the third one being I think we fouled a 3-point shooter.

And had a timeout. And after the timeout was the media and it was still basically a 3-point game and they were going out and shooting three free throws. I don't know if they made all three of them or two of them.

So in that timeout, all we talked about was not giving up 3s. And so I guess I could have used more timeouts. It was just the same stuff. It was exactly what we didn't want to do we were doing. And it was multiple positions and multiple players.

So, sure, I could have used another timeout, but I think it was pretty clear people were stepping into 3s and we didn't want that to happen.

You know, I was surprised by Charli retiring because she's younger than me. And I'm so impressed with her career. She's just won and won and won. She's impacted a program, a university, a community and just countless numbers of lives in young women. And it's unbelievably -- just felt like she had a lot more to do. I'm happy for her. I'm happy that she can move on and be satisfied with her career.

But clearly she's going to be missed. And she was a big part of this conference for a long time and has been really good to me while I've been in it. But, again, everybody across the country respects Charli and what she's done and accomplished. And it's something that I think we all aspire to, to impact people like she did.

Q. On a night where Krystal and Charlise struggled how good was it to see someone like Tara step up and have 16 points, a career high for her? I know she's only a freshman, but how does that give her confidence going into the NCAA Tournament and the rest of the postseason?

COACH ETHRIDGE: There's no question. I thought she just had a great game. She's on the floor with a cramp right now so I don't know if she could have got herself ready for tomorrow if we were playing.

She's just got a huge ceiling. And I'm happy that it's happening right now, that you're seeing how good she is. We obviously need her to step up and be a great scoring threat for us because that's just one area where we've got to shore up and have three, four and five people in double figures.

Happy for her. She's worked so hard at it. She's had to learn so many positions and so many things. And now I think it's kind of coming together, and she's really taking off. And, again, someone that I think is going to be a major, major player for us for years to come.

