

# Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 4, 2022

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Utah Utes

Coach Lynne Roberts

Gianna Kneepkens

Kennady McQueen

Postgame Press Conference



plan in the quick turnaround of how to kind of, without Peyton McFarland, how to counter Oregon's clear and obvious height advantage. And so hats off to them; they did an amazing job.

So it's a great day. And I couldn't be more excited for this team and where we're at. And they say it's hard to believe, but with this team I actually do believe it.

Utah - 80, Oregon - 73

THE MODERATOR: Head coach Lynne Roberts and Gianna Kneepkens and Kennady McQueen.

COACH ROBERTS: Appreciate you guys all being here. This is fantastic that you're supporting our conference and women's basketball.

I apologize for the wet dog look. I got doused, ruined some heels and had to borrow a jacket. But all good things when you feel in that locker room, it's good.

I want to congratulate Oregon, and I think the reason this is such a big deal, one, we've never been to the championship, but also just how good Oregon is and how well-coached they are and how talented they are.

So they're going to make it, I'm sure, a deep run in the NCAA Tournament, as usual. They're very, very good. And so congratulations to them on a great season. They'll be playing in March. That's for sure.

Incredibly proud of my team. We've been on them about how to win in March and just kind of we picked two things about what it takes to win in March. And we just talked about being like 30 percent tougher, just every possession, every person.

You don't have to be perfect. But you need to be as tough as you can and play as hard as you possibly can. And tonight I think you get rewarded for, that was an example of us just playing so tough and so hard and effort. I couldn't be more proud of them.

I thought our coaching staff, Gavin Petersen, Joanna Reitz, Jerise Freeman, they came up with an incredible game

**Q. There's a moment I think like 30 seconds left where the cameras caught it, it looked like in your head the gears in your head were turning like you knew you guys were going to win. What's going through your head in that moment? Are you thinking on past experiences that led you here? Are you thinking about the year? What was the thing that kind of made you crack a smile there as you're seeing what's about to happen?**

COACH ROBERTS: I got caught, I see. I think it's just this is, as a staff, our seventh year here. And we've worked really hard. And I just told the team, too, sometimes when you want something you don't get it right when you want it. And it's like, oh, how many times are we going to keep pounding on the door and when are we going to kick it down.

And we're not done. But this was kind of a monumental kind of moment of getting to the championship, beating Oregon for the first time since I've been at Utah. It's the one team we hadn't beat. Dru Gylten and I gave each other a huge hug afterwards because we finally beat Oregon.

It's all that stuff. You work so hard. You want that moment that you kind of push through. And also, honestly, so happy for our players that they get to experience all this.

**Q. Your entire team, but particularly I think the birthday girl sitting to your left?**

COACH ROBERTS: Yes, the big 1-9, you guys. Season 19.

**Q. They just played fearless. Is that something you**



**coach into them or instill into them or did she just show up like that on campus? Because I was blown away that they just kept going at them.**

COACH ROBERTS: Yeah, they've been that way all season. That's a better question to ask them where they feel like that comes from. I try to empower them, yeah, I try to empower them.

But at every turn they've been fearless. And this team plays pretty well when they're loose and confident. And the locker room's never that serious of a place. It's basketball, at the end of the day, and I think they just kind of love to play and compete. Birthday girl, why don't you start.

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: I would say it's kind of a combination of everything, just having it within yourself but also like having coaches and our teammates have confidence, like if we missed the first one, they're, like, next one is going in. Shoot it no matter what. I think it's just everything. And us playing well together and believing in each other really helps a lot. So it's a lot of factors.

KENNADY MCQUEEN: I think I can look at each one of my teammates and I can see we're all fearless. I know I didn't have a good shooting night tonight, and my teammates kept telling me, Ken, the next one's going in. They never lost faith in me, so it just upped my confidence. Just knowing that we trust in each other like that and we have each other's back, that we believe in each other, it goes a long way too.

**Q. You've talked all year about how Gianna is fearless, takes the big shot, wants the big moment. How much trust do you have in her as a freshman to hand her the ball down the stretch needing big baskets and for her to come up with these big moments in only her first year, on her 19th birthday? And, Gianna, to be in this moment and take those shots as a freshman, what it means that the coach gives you?**

COACH ROBERTS: I have the utmost confidence in her. Down the stretch we kept calling a high flat screen for her. She can create her own shot but she's also a good passer. Can take contact and still finish and can shoot the 3. But to your point, fearlessness. And I also know that Gianna wants those moments, which is unique. But, yeah, I have full confidence in her.

**Q. When you're down 11 in the first quarter, there's two ways to go, right? There's a lot of game left and you've got to rally up, or maybe it's just the start of something and the evening doesn't go well. What was the mindset at the end of the first quarter and what do you feel like turned the game?**

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: I would say the biggest thing that we talked about -- well, it's all season but especially in this game -- like Coach said, we were kind of doing a new scout on them since we were undersized. So I think the biggest thing for us was process, process, process.

They were taking the shots like we kind of wanted. And it can be disheartening but we knew those were what we wanted to give up rather than wide-open 3s or getting to the bucket, like wide-open layups. Just trusting that what, like, trusting in the scout and knowing that if we stick to our principles and we all buy in, then it would work out.

COACH ROBERTS: And I think, too, the first quarter they crushed us on the O boards. And that's where they were -- then we turned it over I think, I don't know how many times in the first quarter, but it felt like 80. And Oregon will make you pay every time you turn it over.

That's what I said. Clean up the O boards, get physical and value the ball. And our half-court defense is pretty effective.

KENNADY MCQUEEN: We just kept saying process, like G said, in the timeout, new scout. Just trusting in that and then we focused on it all year, but just staying neutral. Don't get too high, too low. We know we can come back so there was never a doubt.

**Q. Last night you were asked about the potential benefits of playing in the first round rather than having that bye. I was just wondering, obviously there's no game tomorrow, what do you guys plan on doing with your day off?**

COACH ROBERTS: No idea.

**Q. No idea?**

COACH ROBERTS: No, we'll rest, get healthy, eat, recover, eat some more. Unfortunately we eat as much as the players do and we don't do anything. (Laughter).

It's a tough combo. But yeah we'll get healthy, treat like crazy, get off our feet and game plan for Stanford, which if you have any advice -- (laughter).

**Q. Kennady, in the technical-foul situation, they had just gone ahead and then all that happened and now you've got to go to the free-throw line and shoot five free throws, which is kind of the turning point of the end of the game. Can you just talk about what it's like to be up there for five free throws, what was going through your head and just making four of them?**

KENNADY MCQUEEN: Right. I wish it could have been five. No, just having the confidence, trusting in the work I've put in. Just trusting that when I get up to the line, no doubt that it will go in. Like I said, wished it was 5-for-5 but four got it done. So that's good.

**Q. On Sunday you're facing a team that's done this a time or two when you guys are obviously in a new spot. How much of that fearless needs to be accessed on Sunday in terms of facing an experienced Stanford team?**

COACH ROBERTS: Yeah, all of it. That's going to be -- that's been a key to our success all year. And nothing changes. And we've played Stanford twice.

The game at our place went down to the wire. And then they kicked us pretty good at their place. So those were learning experiences that we'll pull from.

But our team and staff respects the heck out of Stanford. We know how talented they are. They're the reigning national championship. So much respect for them but I'm not fearful of the game. I'm not intimidated of, like, oh, no.

But the pressure's on them too. It's fun to be the underdog. It's fun to come into a game and say if you're open shoot it. What's the worst that could happen?

So we know how good they are, how well-coached they are. I think Tara won her thousandth Pac-12 game. I am not quite there, but -- or remotely close. We know what we're facing. But we'll be ready to go and we'll have a good game plan and let's go.

**Q. What can this kind of a win and this kind of a run that you're making in the tournament do for your program in the long run?**

COACH ROBERTS: Well, I think it's exposure. We'll be on ESPN on Sunday. And those are great moments for just program, putting us on the national map, which has been my goal since I took the job here. And we've been knocking on the door of that.

I think it's just validity, kind of validation that we're a legit program. In the short term, I think in terms of NCAA Tournament seeding, this will really help. We want to be as high a seed as we can be. So I think short term and long term shall it's all good. And it's important for us to compete and play to win on Sunday, too.

**Q. In the first half, Oregon was around 40 percent from the field. In the third quarter you held them to 1-for-12**

**and eight percent from the field. I was wondering what changed?**

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: Well, I feel I touched on this a little bit earlier, but process. And also we talked about in the locker room maybe pressuring a little more, getting a high hand on the shooters because all of them can hit like 15-footers. So giving them a little more pressure but also still being aware of the post rolling.

KENNADY MCQUEEN: Exactly what G said. I think that was the biggest difference too.

COACH ROBERTS: I think, too, we made a little bit of adjustments. But we also talked -- what we were down at half? Five. Don't worry about -- just let's win the third quarter. Whether we win it by one or whatever, win the third quarter. But you've got to come out attacking, let's throw the first punch, figuratively. Let's be the attacking team here.

Let's not have a first quarter where they were clearly the attacking team and we were on our heels. We've got to come out and be the attacker, the aggressor, put pressure on them. And I think that's what they did, the players did that.

**Q. Last year you had a program low in wins --**

COACH ROBERTS: Thank you.

**Q. Talk about making the turnaround from winning five games to your first Pac-12 championship, and I know last year was a tough year with COVID, but making that turnaround and now be going to the Pac-12 championship this season?**

COACH ROBERTS: We didn't play as many games, let's be clear. We did not play a 29-game schedule. But yes, it was not a fun year. And it wasn't a successful year.

And we regrouped and we've got the right pieces. And chemistry is a crazy thing. It's a powerful thing, for better or worse. If you've got great chemistry and great kids and good staff and you can get some momentum going. That's how change happens.

So that's my opinion on it. But I never lost confidence or lost faith in how we do things or what our culture is. We adjusted and adapted to how we can be better. But the players we have in our program are championship game-worthy.

KENNADY MCQUEEN: I think starting in the offseason and how we ran our practices and skill things, you could



just tell there was a different feeling. Like, we weren't going to have another year like last year and that was very clear.

So just bringing in our awesome freshmen and us returners just, like, being determined not to let that happen again. And then now to see it pay off, it means so much.

**Q. I don't want to get you in trouble with any of your alums. But you talk about delayed gratification of getting something like this. What is it about this current group that makes it so gratifying for you?**

COACH ROBERTS: I don't know that I can separate the groups that way. It's the culmination of just a lot of teams. And everybody that's put on a Utah uniform is a part of us. They sweat just as hard as these guys did and put in the work, and they're part of the building blocks. And whether they're in the locker room currently or not, they're still a part of this.

So I think it's just time and building this up and certainly appreciating those players that I got to coach when I first got here and they gave me everything they had.

**Q. For Sunday, what are the three things -- you've played Stanford a couple of times. You know the answer to these questions. What are the three things you have to do and three things you absolutely cannot do?**

COACH ROBERTS: So you want our scout? I'm kidding. Stanford is incredible in transition if you turn it over, they will make you pay.

If you're not physical on the glass, we've got to be really physical on the rebounds. And then everyone -- their offense is a machine, but they're really good defensively. And Tara and her staff are the best at putting together a game plan to take away what you're really good at.

You have to be able to kind of get to other things because they're pretty effective at taking away what you want to do. So there's a lot of things we've got to do and not do, but off the top of my head, that's what I'll say.

**Q. Do you have an update on Peyton? I would assume she won't be available Sunday. And because you won't have her, will it be similar to, hey, we've got to do a different scout?**

COACH ROBERTS: Potentially. Oregon is just so huge inside when they go with their big lineup. Stanford is not small.

But so Peyton is out. We'll get some imaging done on her right knee when we get back to Salt Lake City. So she's out for the foreseeable future, unfortunately.

**Q. Gianna, is this one of your better birthday presents? Like if you just think about that. And also there was a point in the fourth quarter where you're driving the lane and you dribble behind your back, in traffic, going to the basket. Like, do you even remember that? Or is that instinctual? How does that happen because seems like kind of a risky thing to be doing.**

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: First of all, your first question, yes, best birthday I've had so far of all my years. It was awesome.

Second, when I'm playing, I don't really think -- I actually do remember this play, but I just was reacting to the defense, and I made a read and that's what I read.

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