

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 1, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Washington State Cougars

Mary Camille Ethridge

Charlisse Leger-Walker

Belle Murekatete

Postgame Press Conference

Washington State - 61, Cal - 49

THE MODERATOR: We're good to go. Welcome Washington State. Coach, we'll have you make an opening remark and then we'll take questions.

MARY CAMILLE ETHRIDGE: Well, I just want to say I think Cal played an unbelievable game. They were certainly the most aggressive team in the first half. They really made it hard for us to run any kind of offense. They were switching. We couldn't find the mismatch. We looked a little bit out of sync obviously on offense.

Weren't great defensively, but still I think our defense kind of kept us in it when we weren't so good. I was just really happy with our team and the response they made coming out of the second half. We didn't get it back all at once. But just the mindset and the discipline and the staying with it and changing kind of some of the things that we were doing, just, again, the hard work, getting more rebounds, continuing to defend them as well as we did.

Then obviously we made some really good plays offensively to get going and get some baskets and points up on the board. So I just think that 20 minutes at the second half was just really quality basketball for our team.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Your team won the offensive rebounding battle 16-2, and then the overall rebounding battle 40-33. How is that helpful in bringing the game back, getting back into the game and coming back to win?

MARY CAMILLE ETHRIDGE: You know, I don't know, I mean, stats can be so deceiving. We had 11 offensive rebounds in the first half, and we had 21 points. So I can't



think of a worse statistic to hang your hat on. I don't think that helped us at all in the first half.

But I thought we got a lot of defensive boards and obviously keeping them off the boards where they only have 10 or 11. They're hard to keep off the boards. I thought there was a stretch where they really got some offensive rebounds.

But I don't know that it hurt us that much because we just guarded even that attempt, the second attempt, really well. I think, again, just a really quality game from our standpoint on the defensive end.

Q. You guys came out in the second half offensively and were a different team than were you in the first half, shooting a lot better, getting a lot higher quality shots.

CHARLISSIE LEGER-WALKER: Yeah, I think, just if I'm focusing on offense, I think we came out and we kind of were all on the same page. I think in the first half we were a little frantic and kind of let their pressure on ball presence kind of get to us and kind of muck up our offensive game.

So I think coming out in the second half and having the sets and just kind of spreading the floor and moving the ball a lot more, getting good looks, seeing what they're doing on the on-ball screens, if they're switching, and really punishing them for their defensive schemes if they were switching.

So I think that in itself and just getting to the rim and finishing the shots. I think we had some great looks in the first half. They just didn't drop. Overall 2-19 three-point attempts, like that's obviously something we need to tidy up and clean up and it's the first game of the tournament and obviously they didn't even shoot that well either. So I think that's just kind of how it goes.

But I think overall we had great looks today. We just need to be a lot better at executing them.

Q. Talk about the last three years you've really to built this, obviously made the tournament the last two



years. Looked you're on pace to do that again. The fact that you've been able to grow this program to now 20 wins in the NCAA, how big that is for this program.

MARY CAMILLE ETHRIDGE: You know, a little bit of comedy in that. It's not a great statement for the history of our program, but that's what it is and we signed up for this and we signed great players. We have progressed to the point where we win more than we lose and that we compete well pretty much in every game that we play. We're to that point.

So to get that, to get a 20-win season, I mean, it's a milestone. It's something that really hadn't been done too much in our program history. So these guys need to be really proud about another thing that we can check off our little list of first times in a long time or first time ever in the NCAA era.

So I'm proud of the people we've recruited and what we've built in five years, and the best and biggest credit goes to signing really great players and great character kids and hard working and disciplined and serious about becoming really good at this, and great teammates on and off the court.

So that's what makes this really special and letting them, I hope, enjoy it and be proud of it. And, I mean, they need to celebrate that and they need to know that that's what they have accomplished.

Q. Can you talk about the experience and veteran leadership that you have that allows you even when you're behind at halftime to shake it off and come out and outscore a team 40-22 in the second half.

BELLA MUREKATETE: Well, it's a 40-minute game and as long as we still have more minutes on the shot clock, you know, everything is possible. We've been in it -- pretty much the whole season we've been in the same spot before like coming from down.

So we just got to keep working and knowing the scout and knowing everything the coaches want us to do and just believing. We've been in this position before, so there's really nothing new.

CHARLISSA LEGER-WALKER: Yeah. I think just to build on that, you know, you talked about the experience we have in the gym and we really do have that this season. We have players coming back who have been with Coach E right from the start of building her program and they have gone through the struggles of being blown out and not winning -- or not having winning seasons.

Now they have come into the era where we are winning and we are in games, and obviously the PAC 12 is so competitive, and so having players who have been through that and bringing the core of that group through to these games here, I think it just shows down the stretch in games like this, we are mature enough and have the knowledge to really lock in and focus on what we need to do because sometimes as younger players or if you don't have that experience, it can all get quite overwhelming.

So we're lucky in that we have a lot of experience and leadership on our team that can kind of carry us through those games. So, yeah.

Q. After playing Utah twice this season, what are some keys you would like to see tomorrow?

MARY CAMILLE ETHRIDGE: I would like them to shoot like we did tonight. If we could just wrap that up and give that as their gift. (Laughing.)

It's just, they're really hard to guard. Pili is unbelievably unique and maybe the most efficient post in the country. She's just, when you put her in that lineup and with the weapons they have around her, it's just a nightmare to guard.

So we have to be so good defensively and certainly we made a lot of mistakes in the last game we played in some of our scheming. So we need to clean that up. You just can't make mistakes. They will make you pay for everything.

We're going to have to shoot the ball decent. They're going to put points on the board, so we have to shoot it well and put some points on the board and match them in that.

But we're excited to play them. There were a lot of good things in the last game that we can be, that are positives for us, played hard, played, we see things that can encourage us if we can just put it together and do it as a team, and again, knowing that we're going to get just one of the best teams in the country that we're going to face.

Q. Bella's been playing really well. Tonight the numbers might not have been there right away, but then she ends up like with 13 and 11, and she's getting double doubles on a regular basis. Can you talk about what she's been bringing to the table, especially these last few weeks. And then also I wanted to ask you about Tuhina and what she does when she's out there that helps Charlisse.

MARY CAMILLE ETHRIDGE: Well, I don't really want



Bella to hear anything nice about her, so... (laughing.)

You know, I was just so happy with we got passion out of Bella in the second half. I don't think she -- I think just like any players, you can overthink it and you can kind of not be completely locked in the way you need to be or as effective as I think she can be on any given night. It's a hard thing she has to do.

Like, she can be effective against anybody, but that's not easy. You don't just walk out on the court and become that. You have to read the game really well and make the right decisions. We're all wanting her to be perfect and she's not going to be perfect. But what you saw was just a passion of running the floor hard, of doing some of the things that she can really control all the time. That kind of got her going. Gets her some easy baskets, deeper touches. When she does that she just is really hard to guard.

Still foul trouble. She had a great game and played only 23 minutes. So we need her on the court. She is our most explosive post player. Can create her own shot. Rebounding late in the game was huge on the boards when we needed those. We only have one Bella in our gym and we need her in there. I'm not sure we want another one (laughing.) But we really need her. She's come so far. It's a statement to her discipline and commitment that she made. I can pick the date or the month. April of last year. She's become this hard working, dedicated, focused, driven, wants to be great and wants to be a great teammate and help us win. When you put that in all that talent and that body, good things can happen for us. So we need her on the court and we need her locked in and double doubles need to just roll right in with her.

AT's huge for us. Her three, takes her off the ball, Charlisse, she doesn't have to bring the ball up and in bound the ball and shoot the ball and pass the ball and rebound the ball. She can like sometimes get off the ball and take a break. So her ball handling helps us. Great IQ. Her passing, she can get the ball moving. But those, she's deadly too with the little mid-range game and getting to the rim and that three. So we really need her. To me she's a starter, she just doesn't start the game. She's a key player for us to get -- I want her to be looking for her shot a little bit more and hunting some baskets. Because, again, we need to continue to find people that are capable of putting more points up for us. So I'm really proud of her year. Her numbers are unbelievable in conference. So she's going to be a great, great player for us for a long time.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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