

# Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 2, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Washington State Cougars

Kamie Ethridge

Charlisse Leger-Walker

Ula Motuga

Postgame Press Conference

Washington State - 66, Utah - 58

THE MODERATOR: We welcome Washington State. Coach, we'll start with an opening statement from you and then take some questions.

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Well, I just want to say congrats to Lynne and her staff and her team. I think they are so well deserved for Coach of the Year in our league and clearly maybe even National Coach of the Year. They have just done a phenomenal job.

Lynne came and saw me again after the game and just really gracious of her and complimentary of our team. So it just speaks a lot about her and the kind of program she runs. So really just want to -- I think we played a perfect defensive game against a great team and maybe it takes three times to really nail it down.

But we guarded them, we gave ourselves a chance to win, and then we just had some really special players step up and give us a cushion with some big, big big-time 3-point shots. So really a phenomenal night for our program and really proud of these two and everyone involved in our program.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Questions?

**Q. Speaking of big-time shots, Charlisse, get the ball with 39.3 seconds left. They let you dribble all the way down, get one pass off, get it back, and you drain it. Can you talk us through that.**

CHARLISSA LEGER-WALKER: Yeah, I mean, I originally thought they were probably going to foul to send us to the line and when they didn't, I knew we were going to have to run the clock down and just get one good look at the rim. I



think I came off the on ball and passed it to Ula and I knew kind of it was coming back, so I just knew I had to get it off fast and just shoot it, really. I'm just so glad it went in.

But I just think that everything leading up to that moment was just so good from our team. Obviously in those moments, you know, it's a big time shot, but the plays we made before that, the runs that we had in that third quarter, and then taking that momentum into the fourth, that's what really got us that win. So I'm glad I could finish it off for our team, but just super proud of how we came out tonight.

**Q. Kamie, can you talk about your defense on Alissa Pili, PAC 12 Player of the Year, and you guys made every look for her so hard for her. Lynne said that she didn't have a single easy look tonight. Everything was really battled for and gritty down there, which made her life so difficult. Just talk about that.**

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Yeah. I mean, I don't want to give away too many secrets that we have, but she's impossible to guard. We did have a little bit of a way we wanted to defend her pick-and-rolls. But I'm telling you, every single time we've matched up with Utah we do have kind of a secret weapon in Ula. She can match. I mean, not everybody can. Bella did not want any part of her in the first quarter. She just was saying, Do I have to guard her? And Ula just steps up and wants to.

And again, we had good help or timely help at times. I think not letting her just get those spot-up threes and some of the spot up standstill shots that kind of are just demoralizing a little bit if she gets those. Obviously I thought, I think she only had two rebounds for the game. We just kind of sandwiched and did the job on her. But it started kind of and ends with the fact that Ula took the challenge and guarded her many, many times one-on-one and ended up with the ball after a missed shot.

ULA MOTUGA: I think credit to Alissa, first of all. She's easily one of the best players in the country right now, and I'm sure she's going to do great things with that Utah program as they go into the NCAA tournament.

But the coaches did a really good job on preparing us, like



Coach E said, and how we wanted to guard her and how we wanted to navigate, I guess, the pressure that she puts on when she sets an on-ball, and my guards, who I was working with mostly, it was Charlissee and Jo, who are really good at talking to me and working through switches, switching back, and stuff like that.

But, no, I think my teammates did a great job in giving me that extra confidence that I needed to be able to step up and perform the way I did in tonight's game.

**Q. You talk about your matchups with Utah this year. You guys went 0-2 against them in the regular season. What was your game plan for tonight or what were the changes you guys made during the game to help you guys with the victory?**

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Well, again, it's a quick turnaround, so it's probably a good thing we played 'em twice, that our kids are very familiar with them. We were trying to do the same things that we kind of did tonight. On our edit, we had like 12 not knowing scout plays, just players making mistakes on what we wanted to do in the last game and didn't do.

So I mean, these guys are prideful. They're good at, we didn't have to, we were on the court a little bit today, but we didn't have to overdo it on the court. They learned by watching. They understood what we wanted 'em to do. Again, beyond just that, just the effort that they did won us this game tonight. We just were very determined to run their 3-point shooters off the 3-point line and we just didn't want to get killed in the paint with points. So we guarded those two things.

They're as good as, they're better than anyone else in the country at those two areas, and we just, again, I think the commitment to doing it and the effort that our players -- I was more worried. I thought we could guard 'em a little bit, and then I just didn't know if we could score enough to beat 'em.

And again, the shots that these guys stepped up and made, Ula's threes were just unbelievably big, and I think we had to, for us to have more threes than them is, again, a statement of our team.

**Q. You guys were able to hit two straight threes, both of you going four on your five straight threes. What was really flowing through your guys' minds in that exact moment?**

CHARLISSE LEGER-WALKER: I think we just knew going into those moments that that was going to be the shots that were there. We talked about how they were defending on

balls, especially when I come off in the middle and they tend to collapse a lot and they collapse late. So just being able to get in the paint and slow down and make the right decision to kick it out. I think I found Ula like twice in the corner and she was wide open.

And we just weren't getting those, making those passes earlier in the game. I think they were there for us a lot. So I think coming on the back end of that and knowing that that was the shot we were going to get, we were able to be ready to catch and shoot and we knew it was going up. So, yeah.

ULA MOTUGA: Yeah, I think any time you have someone of Charlissee's caliber coming off an on ball it attracts more defense than you can imagine. She was able to find me on two great passes in the corner and thank goodness they went in finally. I finally took the lid off it. But, yeah, just a good night for us.

**Q. Ula, you were on the bench at the end of last night's game with some sort of injury. Was there any question at all that you were going to play today or what was like your just health status? And for coach, they had some disruption in their guard rotation due to injuries and fouls. How much did that help what were you trying to do because they were maybe not fully functioning like they do when they have everybody?**

ULA MOTUGA: There was no question that I was not going to play. I think this is my last year and I love this team and this program and I'm fully bought into it and, yeah, there was no chance I was not playing.

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Yeah, I mean, we didn't know Palmer wasn't playing until right before the game. I think that's a big hit for their program. She has, she's like the motor. She plays a lot of minutes, so people were extended a little bit more than they're used to, people had to be more ball handlers than they're used to. I hate injuries for any team. I definitely do think it affected their team and their rhythm. So I hope they get healthy and I hope they make a huge, huge run in the NCAA tournament.

**Q. With Brenden Potts in attendance today and the fan presence, what did it feel like in that gym or in the arena? What was the feeling like? Did it feel like Beasley?**

CHARLISSE LEGER-WALKER: Yeah, it was amazing. We love our fans. Brenden is one-of-a-kind, super fan. Like, if you know women's basketball, Brenden is a part of this team so huge shout out. Great that he can come out and support and be here live seeing the action with us. So we love it, but, no, we just love our Coug fans. They really

got behind us today. We could hear them throughout the whole game. We're just super grateful that people want to come out and they want to watch us and they want to support us. So, yeah, just super grateful for that.

ULA MOTUGA: I think, on top of that, super grateful to have our dance team out here and the band especially. I don't know if you guys know, but Sam is in our band, so he's been one of the realest Coug supporters ever covering us from different, I guess, areas. So we're super grateful for you, Sam.

**Q. You guys have been on the road since Wednesday. What are some of your travel traditions and how do you stay focused L.A. then Vegas, how do you stay focused?**

CHARLISSE LEGER-WALKER: Yeah, it's hard to be on the road for that amount of time, but this year we've been pretty good on the road and I think that comes from the discipline and the experience of our seniors and the leadership that they bring. They know what it takes to win on the road. It's so, so hard. It's hard enough just winning in the PAC, but doing it when you're traveling, you have all those other little things you need to stay locked in for.

So recovery is really important. What you're eating, what you're putting in your body.

Then I think on the flip side of that it's also taking those moments to reflect and recover and enjoy the moment because I think it can be very overwhelming if you're just going from A to B to C. So our team's great, our culture is great. When we come off the court we know how to have fun. And you probably heard, but we love karaoke and we do a lot of that on the bus and in our room. So, yeah, just taking those moments to really reflect on why we are here. Yes, we are here for a business trip, but we are here because we love basketball and we love to play and just taking those moments to have fun.

**Q. It was very obvious watching you guys play that you have great team chemistry. This is a big win for your program. How will this propel you to get ready for tomorrow, because this will be your third game in a row.**

CHARLISSE LEGER-WALKER: Yeah, I think, again, the recovery part is going to be important for us. We have to switch modes kind of depending upon who comes out of this win. We have to be prepared for either team. Again, that's going back to being really focused on our film, our scout. Everybody in the PAC has a different type of style almost. So I think switching gears mentally as well is going to be vital for us. But, yeah, I think it's just keeping with the

same things that we've been doing throughout the season. Staying disciplined. Obviously being locked in to what Coach E and the coaching staff are putting out there for us.

Again, recovery's so important and just kind of believing in ourselves that we can win against anybody here and that's what we are here to do.

**Q. How does this, because I believe now you're 21 wins, am I right? Which is the most in school history. Am I right?**

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Yes. Yes.

CHARLISSE LEGER-WALKER: Tied.

ULA MOTUGA: Tied.

**Q. Okay. Sorry, I missed it. How does this rank for you? You've coached for awhile now, as -- because this is a big win -- how does this rank for you?**

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: I just can't even explain just the feelings that you have when you can watch your team that's so bought in and so together and it reflects everything we want for our program. And knowing the baggage that kind of came with it and how hard it was to turn a culture around. Ula was here from the very beginning. And, you know, the whole thing about coaching is just the joy that we have to watch our players celebrate. And I don't mean to make it like just because we win we celebrate. I mean, we've got to keep a little balance in that.

But they work so hard and they do so much for us and they, again, they are Cougs through and through. They represent our institution and our program and Pullman and the community. And just to see the joy that they have -- and they're doing things that we've never done before. So you just got to give 'em so much credit.

But they're serious about their basketball and where they want to go and what they want to do. My biggest thing is, let's not settle now, let's go do something else we haven't done ever before. So I love watching them celebrate and understand and have that joyful moment of all the work's paying off for what they're doing.

**Q. How did it feel to have been a part of going from one of the programs that's not very good and now you go to the semifinal for a third time, first win over a top-3 program, 20 wins. How does it feel to be a part of the change and bringing this sort of program into light in Pullman?**

ULA MOTUGA: Yeah, I think if you would have told me

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

that this was going to happen five years ago I would have said you're lying. No chance. But, no, I think it's just a credit to coach E and obviously who she is and what she's about. The team now are pretty much all players who she's recruited and everyone is bought into everything that she's about. I was ready to go play for her at a smaller school and she's like, come with me, we're going to, like I've been given a chance at Washington State and before I even knew what WSU looked like I'm like, yeah, I'm there. And then I got there and nothing but wheat fields (laughing.) Small, you know, almost a country town. But, no, I love it I'm super grateful for obviously the chance that she gave me to come out to Pullman and a chance to change the whole thing around and like she always says, make basketball relevant in a city where it always, it hasn't always been. I think moving forward I can't wait to see what they can do, with a what she can do with the program and how much further she can take it. But I mean that's going to have to wait because we've still got a bunch of basketball to play. Will really happy.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll wrap on that. Thank you.

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