

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Washington State Cougars

Coach Kamie Ethridge

Bella Murekatete

Eleonora Villa

Postgame Press Conference

Cal - 65, Washington State - 44

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: I just want to congratulate Cal. I thought Charmin and her team were just amazing. I thought McIntosh was just a senior that wasn't going to let them win. I thought they brought more energy. They just crushed us on the boards.

Just the much more physical, more athletic team, that just pushed pace and got pretty much anything they wanted. We just didn't put much resistance up and obviously had a hard time scoring.

So congratulations to them. They obviously deserve to advance and we sit back and we wait and see.

Q. In terms of the offensive struggles it seemed after the first quarter they really did a good job of shutting down the passing lanes, frustrating. How much did you see that slowly deflate your team in terms of not being able to hit a bucket? There were some open shots they missed, some layups that they were missing. How much did that run a toll on their mental game as Cal built their lead?

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: I mean, I thought we got some really good looks, but finishing against length and athleticism, you know, being sped up a little bit, pressing a little bit, we weren't able to put some shots down.

I thought they did a great job in just guarding the pick-and-roll with two players and not coming off and not giving us very many good looks on the perimeter.

Again, they did a fantastic job of that. We felt we had to create an opportunity on those ball screens, and we just didn't connect very well with our posts and our guards in



that.

So I think we definitely pressed and got a little deflated, is what you termed it. Lost a little confidence there.

Then, because we couldn't keep them off the boards or just try to get some stops, we couldn't get ourselves back in the game enough because of what they were doing on the offensive end.

So you've got to match people. You've got to be able to score the basketball. You've got to score one-on-one at times. And they just did a much better job scoring one-on-one than we did.

Q. It's been a few weeks now, obviously, but just the loss of Leger-Walker and what you've had to adjust and adapt to offensively, and just kind of how difficult that transition has been?

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: I think probably in every phase she's a huge loss for us. But leadership is probably what she was -- just the one person that we couldn't afford to lose because she's so even keeled and she can kind of keep everybody together. She's the voice in every huddle.

You've got to have five people on the court on the same page. And she could keep people on the same page, not to mention she could bail us out a lot of times, too.

So that's the voice and the stability, I don't think you plan on replacing with eight or 10 games left in your season. So I do think that that continues to be a problem for us.

I think Ele's done everything imaginable to try to keep us in it as a freshman. But we still need some stability from our upperclassmen and the guys that need to score for us. We've got to get scoring punch from Bella. We've got to continue to get scoring punch from Tara and A.T. Those are key players for us. Bea needs to.

And we're just really inconsistent with getting the numbers that we need to get four people in double figures or five people in double figures. We're not getting that.



So Ele finishes the game with 17 and no one else really comes very close to it. So there's just not enough scoring punch right now, and we've got to continue to get that from multiple people.

Q. You're listed I think at No. 25 in the net rankings and you're listed in the NCAA Tournament. How do you view your situation right now?

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Well, they say it's the body of work. I still want our team to be in it. I think we've shown that we compete really well against top teams in the country. I don't know that tonight was a great representative of us.

But if they stay true to what they say, as far as body of work and the whole year -- I mean we're 25 or 26 in the net. We challenged ourselves in non-conference. Yes, we had a key injury, but we still beat someone in the top 15 on the road.

I don't care how we get in. I'd love us to have a chance to play. I'd love us to have a better chance to perform better than we did tonight.

So we're hopeful. We're hoping that the committee looks at our entire year's work. And I think it would be a great situation for our team to have a chance to perform in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. After the energetic performance at Colorado, what do you think happened here?

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: I don't know. Sometimes match-ups are just the way they are. I've always thought we matched up pretty well with Colorado. I don't want to be too simplistic. But I think Cal's a really tough match-up.

When you have a senior that makes five 3s -- you've got Krimili that you kind of expect, McIntosh starts playing like that. Michelle (phonetic) just crushed us on the boards and their whole team. I mean, they got it -- everybody crashed the boards and got them second-chance points.

When you get beat 26-8, I don't think that's an accident. That's kind of who they are, and unfortunately it might be a little bit of who we are. So we've got to fix that.

And that lets them be in games if they can kind of dominate the glass and continue to get shots after missing the first one.

It might be a tough match-up for us, but even at the end of the day they score 65 points. So you go, well, it's about scoring. And obviously they're very good defensively. I thought this year they've been way better than they've ever

been.

So, again, I think it's a lot of credit to them. I'm just disappointed that we didn't match their energy level. I thought they just really outplayed us again.

Q. I was going to ask you, make your best case to the NCAA, the selection committee chair's running around here somewhere, specifically given how this conference is so good. I know the ACC is good, too, but I don't think they're nearly as strong at the top as the Pac-12 is given how many top 10 teams there are?

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Right, we're the seventh team in the Top 25 of the net. So I don't know -- there's not another league even close to that. Again, I just look at -- they tell you to go play non-conference. We're in a league that is unbelievably strong.

We had a really hard conference schedule as far as the people we doubled up. Again, had a hard injury, I understand that. If you want to punish us for injury, I understand that maybe we don't make the tournament.

But they always say it's the body of work. A seed, they might give us a bad seed. Maybe we deserve a lesser seed, but I just think it's insane not to think that seven, eight or nine teams could get in from the Pac, with the depth of our league, and I think we're one of those.

I think we clearly have done the work for the entire year. And, like I said, if you say that's important, if you say the net is important, then we're clearly in the tournament.

Q. Bella, I wonder -- both players, really -- you guys played really close games with Cal in the two previous match-ups. What was the difference tonight between those games? And, Kamie, wanted to ask you and maybe Bella too to put in perspective what you accomplished last year and how hard that is to come back, now you lose in the first round -- admittedly without Charlissee, but just the difference between that feeling and what happened and where you are and what happened today?

BELLA MUREKATETE: I think Coach E just explained what happened today. I think they came in hungrier and they did not want to go home today. And they had a senior who was really committed to lead them and to not go home. I think that was the difference of today and the past two games we played them.

ELEONORA VILLA: I think they're a very good team and very hard to play against, and I think that maybe today we didn't impart the game as we wish. And what we can do

now is just learn from this game and do our very best the next time.

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: I think what we did last year was incredible, but I'm so sick of thinking about it. Like, I think it's over. I think unfortunately for our program we thought that was the end-all and have given ourselves too much credit, quite frankly.

You earn what you get. This year we haven't earned as much as far as what we can accomplish or haven't proven it on the court as much as we need to.

It is hard. There's no question winning this tournament is hard, certainly as a 7 seed or an 8 or 9 seed, really what we did was amazing. But this is a different team, and I want and we want this program to be known for making NCAA Tournaments and advancing in the NCAA Tournament.

So as good as that Pac-12 Championship was, it's still not the end-all for what we want this program to be. We're hungry to win a game in the NCAA Tournament and advance in the tournament.

So that's what I want this program to be built on and not just a conference championship.

Q. In terms of, what are the emotions with this being the end of the road for the Pac-12 Tournament, and also playing in Las Vegas? Your thoughts.

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Teresa is here, their staff. It's just the most unfortunate thing I can think of that this is kind of the end of the Pac-12. We all know women's basketball is the -- as far as sports go -- it's the highlight of women's basketball across the country. And it's insane that we're not going to be continuing this or have a West Coast footprint.

I'm going to trust Teresa to keep working this league and maybe we reinvent ourselves; but, again, it's been an amazing run to be a part of the Pac. And I'll be like everybody else, really sad that we no longer have this tournament and have this team and have this league that's going to continue to be -- I think these teams will continue to be some of the best teams across the country for years and years. Disappointed that this is how we end it.

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