

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Arizona Wildcats

Coach Adia Barnes

Esmery Martinez

Helena Pueyo

Skylar Jones

Postgame Press Conference



putting a lot of pressure on the ball and made us better, just the other four around her.

I thought Brea and Esmery did a really good job guarding the post and the guards because, remember, they played four guards. That's a challenge for our post players. But I thought overall down the stretch we got better as the game went on. That's playing seven players.

Q. You just noted, to Courtney, she scored five points but was plus-16. Skylar, when she was in the game, what did she add to the team overall? And, Adia, what she was doing defensively that she was able to do that?

SKYLAR JONES: Courtney is a dog. She's going to come in the game and bring the spark off the bench no matter what, no matter if she plays 30 minutes or 20 minutes, doesn't matter. She's gonna be a dog.

She brings intensity off the ball defensively as well. She pressures the ball, gets a lot of steals and deflation. She makes a difference on the court. And she can score the ball too.

ADIA BARNES: We always talk about the dog mentality, just being tough and gritty, just relentless. And Courtney is that. Courtney is like that itch in the middle of your back that you can't reach. You have to find someone to itch it. That's what she does. That's what I want her to do. That's what she's capable of doing.

She did that because her pressure in the back court really slowed Sayvia down and that was important because Sayvia is a really good player and she's a freshman. By her doing that, then on the perimeter, one pass away we were better in the front court.

So a really huge defensive effort by her, and she hit a really big 3. When we couldn't pull away, that step-back that sidestep, I don't usually like a sidestep 3, but that side step 3 in the corner was huge and gave us momentum. She came in, gave us huge minutes. We're going to need her to continue to play like that tomorrow.

Arizona - 58, Washington - 50

ADIA BARNES: I told our players, this is a new season. And just really proud how we came out and battled. Washington is a really good team. And they run -- their Princeton offense is really hard to guard. And our players weren't too excited because they had to play defense for 30 minutes and that's women's basketball. But they found a way to bear down and get a win. So, proud of us and this young team to get a win in the postseason. It was really meaningful.

Q. Your defense was on point right from the beginning. You were altering shots most of the game. Towards the end you had at least three shot-clock violations that you forced. What was it about that they just took it up a notch today?

ADIA BARNES: To start the game I think our defense was awful. Not awful. I think they were nervous. The three freshmen starting were, like, ah. Because we let them shoot 50 percent from the field and almost 50 percent from the 3.

So, I was not happy with our defensive intensity. Not the making mistakes, just our intensity.

Challenged them at halftime. I thought the second half was a much better defensive effort, wouldn't you guys say so? Maybe they settled a little bit and down the stretch even better.

That's the way, I think moving forward, that's the way we have to play from the beginning of the game. Yes, I thought Courtney did a really good job coming in and



And I think for her, because she's such a good defensive player, she can get steals that creates early offense and get to the basket a little more. I think she'll play even better as the tournament goes on.

Q. Helena and Adia, in that third quarter you were really the spark -- I wrote down you had six points, three steals, two assists and a rebound in the third. What was your mindset in the period? And, Adia, how important is it to see that from your senior leader.

HELENA PUEYO: I think our mindset was just keep going, we had to keep pushing. As she said, it's a new season so you never know. Just bring energy, just keep pushing the goal, just keep pushing on defense, too, and I think that was our mindset.

ADIA BARNES: I think we were really flat in the beginning. I think we settled and then we got more comfortable and then got some confidence from our defense. Helena, they call her the Cookie Monster. I should call her the stat eater.

You look at the stats, you're, like, oh. Her stuff is always silent. And it will be like 14 points, seven assists five steals, two blocks. She had five blocks today, right? She had four blocks.

But we're talking about she does everything. She doesn't turn the ball over a lot. She's extremely efficient. She doesn't take a lot of shots when she scores points with limited shots. But that's what she does. She's finally getting her flowers this year. I'd say, started to get them last year, but I've always said it -- she's one of the most underrated players in the country.

If you watch her and you know basketball, she's a very good basketball player. And her strength is passing. If you watch the way she passes the ball, moves the ball, for us I ask her to do everything. So she plays the 1, she plays the 2, she plays the 3 and she plays the 4 and she guards some of their best players. And she played 40 minutes which I didn't realize, I always play her 40 minutes because she's hard to take off the floor because she does so many things.

She's special. I'm just proud of her. I think it shows, like, her experience shows. She's the only player left from the team that went to the national championship game.

And her experience and what she does down the stretch it shows in situations like this.

And she can teach these youngsters. She can teach Brea and Skylar and Jada, because it's a learning

experience. They're getting tremendous experience this year that will pay dividends later.

Q. Esmery and Skylar, what did you like about the way you guys passed the ball tonight? You were able to get a lot of shots easy at the basket off the passing tonight?

SKYLAR JONES: Es and Pueyo did a good job of cutting. If someone was trapped they would back door and cut and we got a lot of good plays off that. It opened up things for Brea and Es and Pueyo, opened up things for shooters as well.

I feel we're playing really unselfish, and we've been playing like that for the last few months. I think we're all getting comfortable playing with each other, especially at this time it's really important and all the possessions matter.

ADIA BARNES: But if you think about our team, we're the youngest team in Pac-12. We start three freshmen. And we've lost half of our scoring this year. So of 70 points we've lost 35 points. They're battling, different people are stepping up at different times and they've done a phenomenal job.

This is a very cohesive unit. Great chemistry, love for each other and fights without the most talent. And just finds the way to get the job done. I'm proud of them.

And people may say you're down a little bit this year, you're younger. But it's been one of the most enjoyable years to coach, because it's been fun. There's been some adversity. But it's been fun with this group that just is hungry and wants to win and figure out a way -- with seven players and limited practice for the last two and a half months. So just proud of them.

Q. Do you feel that you are playing for a spot in the tournament, tournament seeding? What do you think you need to do to solidify and make sure you have a spot there?

ADIA BARNES: This game was very important in my mind. I'm not on the committee. I'm not like the Neighbors' guru with the numbers. I actually tried to call him the other day. He called me back, so phone tag. I don't want to get stressed out put more pressure.

But I think this game was imperative to win because if we lost that USC game, I think to me, in my opinion, I think that USC game probably would have solidified us in the tournament, I think, maybe not.

But I think this game was a must-win for us to have that

chance. I think we've shown that we are a tournament team and hopefully the committee agrees with what I say.

But we've had some good wins. We've also lost a lot of close wins. But this is with a young team, and I think we're capable of winning some more games.

Tomorrow will be a challenge. Tomorrow for us it's payback because I really felt like we let the USC game slip away in Tucson a week ago. That was a hard loss.

I think that it's now, it's a different season. And I was with a team a couple years ago that just got hot at the right time. There's a little bit of luck and a lot of hot. It's one game, not a three-game series. It's one game to win.

I think we feel good about that. I think we're in a good place. I think this game will build confidence. And I think that we're going to be ready.

And I think we are a tournament team. I also think the Pac-12 should have more than seven teams just like other conferences if you compare us head to head.

Q. You mentioned Washington's offense and then going up against USC tomorrow, another very difficult offense. Just with so many unique playing styles in the Pac-12, how difficult is it to transition between guarding game after game?

ADIA BARNES: I think a couple of things separates the Pac-12 from other conferences. I think the first thing is elite coaching. I think we have some very good coaches in our conference that are better than most coaches in the country.

You look at Tara and Scott and Kelly and Cori and look at Lynne. I mean, you look at (indiscernible), God, everybody's good. There isn't one bad coach in our conference, unfortunately. So really good coaches. I think really good tactical coaches and very different teams.

We play Washington, they're very patient. It's very slow. It's a hard thing to play. You guard like seven back cuts before a shot and then it's four guards.

Then you play USC, they're very different. They have a go-to player, they have JuJu, which is only the best freshman in the country, and they have athletic players around. So They're just different.

I think you have to adjust. That's what basketball is. That's why I think we're prepared for the NCAA Tournament, because we've had to do that. We've won some games. The games we've lost have been close

against top teams, top 10 teams. So I think you just do it. You just have to find a way. That's why it's good to be a pretty good defensive team because then you can adjust.

I think you can always be aggressive because we're aggressive. It's easier to make a passive team be aggressive and change styles.

So I think we're ready. I just think we've been doing that. I think that's why there needs to be more Pac-12 teams in the tournament. That's why Pac-12 teams are successful in the tournament because we do that every game. I don't think other conferences have that.

Q. Es and Sky and Helena, you had a rough weekend last weekend. The loss to USC. The senior day, that was just really tough. And you go from that and you flip a switch and you're able to play the way you can play tonight. Besides the message that Adia gave you this week about it's a new season, we're starting over, did you guys come together, especially you two as senior leaders, and talk to the team? Was there anything that you -- sort of a message that you gave the youngsters or anything to say, like, we can do this. This is our time?

ESMERY MARTINEZ: I feel they've been, they knew we need to win this game. We didn't want to go back home today. So we really came out ready to play and ready to win. That's how everybody feel, right? So that was everything.

ADIA BARNES: They've been doing that. They've been tremendous leaders. I think Esmerly has grown so much in the last year and a half. Always works hard every practice, has been a great leader and mentor to Brea in the post position and Skylar and Jada. Helena too.

Helena has a lot of experience, played on the biggest stages, international and here in college. They've been great leaders in different ways. They're both not the most vocal. But when Esmerly talks, you listen. You need to listen. Helena doesn't talk a lot, but when she talks, it's powerful and impactful. I think you can also attest to this, they've really helped the young players.

SKYLAR JONES: That's why we came here. It wasn't the prettiest game. But we got the job done. We didn't even play our best basketball, but we wanted to do this for the seniors because they went through up and downs for however long. We just want to give them a up because they worked so hard. They're great people. We don't want them to go pro yet. We want to play a few more games with them. We want to shock the country with the seven people, with the magnificent eight -- seven.

ADIA BARNES: We have eight because of Brooklyn, but she doesn't know any offense. So it's seven.

SKYLAR JONES: We want to show how tight knit of a family we are, how far we can make it down the stretch, here and in the tournament. Hopefully we can make it.

Q. Esmery, I know the drums are a huge thing in your culture. What was in your heart when you went over to the band and started beating it?

ESMERY MARTINEZ: I love it. I like music. I like the instrument. I love it. Bring me some things from back home. That's why I did it. I was excited.

ADIA BARNES: If you follow her on TikTok you'll see lots of dance moves.

ESMERY MARTINEZ: Yeah, follow me.

ADIA BARNES: I think it's also meaningful too to have all the fans come. We had a lot of fans here from Tucson. There's so much support, and we have the best fans in the country that have supported us through ups and downs. We've lost more games this year -- even in McKale, they don't leave early. They love us. They come here. We've seen red all over the MGM, gambling all day and night.

But they're getting ready to come back next week. But they came and showed up. I think that they all can say they feel a lot of love from Tucson and our fans.

Q. Because you played the two close games, then the triple overtime and two-point game in Seattle, how did that help you, if it did, when you're seeing an 11-point lead shrink there down to 2 but you still are able to regroup and win this game?

ADIA BARNES: I think I felt like the first game at Washington, I thought -- we felt like we gave that game away. And we were up. We had a foul to give. There was a mistake and it was a layup. That was a last-second shot. That was a tough loss.

I think that we look at a lot of games, we were so close, should have won some of these games at home overtime. We played more overtime games this year. I think we played four overtime games and eight periods. It's a lot. Feeling like we should have won those games. At home, we almost lost the game because it was a buzzer shot that didn't count. Then it was that triple overtime. I don't think I've ever coached a triple overtime game. She played 55 minutes (referring to Helena).

I felt like today we felt like we can beat them. We know they're a good team, but just with discipline. I think there's confidence. We played them a couple weeks ago, and I think -- you guys can tell me if I'm wrong -- but just confidence against them, knowing it was going to be hard to guard their offense. But knowing that they have to guard us, too.

HELENA PUEYO: I think we know them better now, we played them twice. I know they have great players, JuJu. But as I said, I think we're just ready for them. We want to win it. We just are going to take it back, as she say. But I think it's going to be a good game and hopefully with no overtime.

ADIA BARNES: It's hard to beat a team back to back. It's hard to beat someone -- it's hard, statistically, to beat a team three times in a row. It's hard to beat a team back to back in the postseason when they have more experience. They're more experienced and deeper than we are. I think that was a challenge.

When I saw that 11-point lead diminishing, I was nervous because against them they have four shooters on the floor and we have a post we're usually guarding a shooter or we're out of position or we have her playing the 4, which changes everything we do.

So I was nervous. I felt like even at eight seconds that's not long enough for them because we saw in Arizona they hit a shot they should have won the game if it would have counted. So we weren't, obviously, content with, like, a little cushion. So they're a good team.

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