

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 7, 2024

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Oregon State Beavers
Coach Scott Rueck

Donovyn Hunter

Raegan Beers

Postgame Press Conference



Oregon State - 85, Colorado - 79 (2OT)

SCOTT RUECK: Well, I was obviously very happy for our team that we found a way today. I thought Colorado played great. It's always tricky having the bye a little bit. They're coming off a feel-good win yesterday, accustomed to the arena, momentum. And we're coming in wondering how we'll play a little bit, certainly hoping for the best.

But there's always a little bit of a feeling-out time, and I thought that was the case early. I thought they came out so strong. We were looking around offensively just a little bit off. And give them a ton of credit for that. I thought Colorado played great all day.

Then it was nice just to see us settle in a little bit, and then it was back and forth. And then they got control in the second half. I remember looking up and we were down 11 and it didn't feel good and it didn't look good. But this team has found a way all year.

And a seven-point deficit with a 1:50, a five-point deficit with 25 seconds. Nothing really seemed to faze this team. They just continued to find a way. They continue to believe and they just have so much fun competing. And it was just a collective team effort today.

We had huge performances throughout our roster. First, I'll say Sherrod was just a beast today, just willing them. Just drives to the basket. Hit, hit, huge shots. Tough shots. Rae and Vonleh going at it underneath the basket. And everybody else is just filling in gaps, it seemed.

So it was a fun chess match. But this team, they wanted it, and they never gave up and just made the plays down the stretch. Got the stops down the stretch. And I just couldn't be more proud of the way they competed.

Also, I couldn't be more proud of the sea of orange that we played in front of today. It was amazing to see -- not surprising if you've been around a while; it's kind of what Beaver Nation does for us. But it was so beautiful to walk out and see that support today. And it helped carry us through a long, tough battle. Just a great win and really proud of the team.

Q. You talked about Raegan, 27, to me with a double-double. But the lady sitting next to you in overtime on and off the ball showed such poise in both extra frames. She comes up with a key defensive stop against Sherrod. Could you talk about the poise that Donovyn plays with?

SCOTT RUECK: That's what we're accustomed to, and those people who have been watching all year long, this is a true freshman that plays like a true senior. Just the poise that she plays with all year has been amazing. Coming over and talking and just wanting to be coached, understanding, learning. And then just shedding any mistake and just adapting her game. Nothing lingers with her.

It's such a great example to all of us. Just next-play mentality, and has the confidence to rise to it, the ability to rise to it and come through for us when we've needed it most on both ends of the floor.

Q. Donovyn, fantastic game. Just when you look at the complexion of your whole season and your approach to game 1 for your first Pac-12 Tournament -- it's the league's last tournament -- some of the freshmen in this league, and you're a star obviously emerging -- could you talk about how the regular season prepared you for your first tournament game and what it's been like leading up to this point?

DONOVYN HUNTER: I mean, our conference is such a good conference. We talk about it in practice. Every single game you don't get a break. So I think that alone -- especially as a freshman, you're going to have mistakes.

I've definitely had mistakes, and there's growing moments.



So I think each game that we played I've learned something. I've stepped away from the game and actually knew that I could take a small or even a big moment from the game and learn from it.

And I think it's really just going down to learning the grid. We talked about it in the locker room. I've learned that the most, and that helps prepare for the tournament.

You don't know what to expect besides it's going to be a fight every single time. Everyone's back to 0-0. Doesn't matter what happened in the regular season. Everything's helped me grow up to this point.

Q. Rae and Scott, when Dom hit that corner 3 -- she didn't shoot great from 3, unusual for you guys -- but Rae, first of all, were you surprised that she was going to put it up? Did you think she was going to go back in to you? She was the only one that hit multiple 3s. And, Scott, what were you thinking on the bench?

RAEGAN BEERS: You know, our shooting has been consistent recently. As you said, tonight wasn't our best night. But I trust my guards to hit those thoughts. They've been doing it all season long in Gill and on the road. I trust my guards to hit that shot. So I wasn't surprised when that went up, and I wasn't the least bit surprised when it went in because our guards are capable of that and they've been showing it all season long.

SCOTT RUECK: I would say that was out of a timeout and during the timeout I knew what I was drawing up, and I contemplated putting people who are known as shooters in those spots.

I just decided not to. I think AJ was in one corner and Dom was in the other and Dono was controlling the ball. There's something about Dom -- both of them, because they both hit huge shots in the game -- but there's something about Dom, she's such a competitor.

And while she's not just a pure 3-point shooter, she's a basketball player. She's an attacking guard who can knock the perimeter down. There's just something about her where you have so much confidence in those moments.

So I can't say -- anybody that saw a Cal game down there, we were down early in the fourth and she just took the game over. And part of that was hitting two big 3s. So today was another example of Dom rising and doing whatever it took for her team to win.

Q. You mentioned your team always finds a way to win. Where do you think that comes from, especially a group that's relatively young and inexperienced from

the college landscape?

SCOTT RUECK: We just talked about that, too. I think that comes from losing. I really think it does. Timea mentioned it a little bit ago in the locker room. She said a year ago we probably wouldn't have found a way. And I said why. Why could you now? And they just, well, we want it. No, because you learned how.

And winning is a skill. You have to go through some hellish moments to kind of really understand what it takes. And then you realize, oh, we can do this, and we have the talent to do this. We have the know-how. So this is actually something that we can control.

And this group is so competitive; they want it so bad. Last year hurt so bad coming up short so many times. You're seeing this evolution of this group forming where there's talent, there's a desire, and now just the mindset and the know-how to get it done when it matters most.

Q. You're down 50-38. Several times during the last seven weeks you've had these incredible rallies in games. What were you thinking at that point? I just wonder what was going through your mind at that point. Were you thinking back to those moments?

SCOTT RUECK: Well, all day long -- tournament's different. And so you can't come in with expectations as a coach. You can't say, oh, we've beaten Colorado twice; we should win again. That's the completely wrong mindset, in my opinion and my experience.

It's, like, I'm here to help this team on this stage. It's new to many of them. And Colorado is a team that's obviously very good and talented. Mad that we've beaten them twice probably and wanting revenge. And they played yesterday.

So my whole mindset today was help them. I'm just here to help them, be what they need. There was a time in the first half where they needed, I felt, me to get mad. It was, like, what are we doing? We're not competing like we need to, and I'm mad right now. And they needed that in that time. That's what I felt.

During that stretch that's not what they needed. They needed me and the coaching staff to encourage them and problem solve with them and remind them there's lots of time.

I told them today, we were down seven and found a way with 1:50. We're down 11 -- it was a little bit after that, I guess -- but we're down 11 with eight and a half to go, or 8:40 to go in the game. We can do this. But it's now. It

has to be now.

So we just stayed total process-oriented and strategic in our thinking. And it wasn't about motivation anymore. I know they wanted it bad and they were trying as hard as they could. It's just trying to find ways.

And our small lineup ended up being really effective in this game, which was -- it's something I didn't really see coming, actually with Timea at the 5 and giving Rae a break. It was a lineup that was a really challenging match-up for them and it sparked us during that stretch. And who knew?

It's just let's keep trying, keep finding a way and then believing that it's possible.

Q. I wonder, could you talk about setting up the play where Paurova made that 3-pointer? Was that what you designed? Talk about that. And when you took Raegan out, you alluded to it right there, I'm assuming it was just exhaustion; she missed the two free throws. And then just how that played out after you took her out because then you kind of put the game away at that point?

SCOTT RUECK: Aaronette was still in the game during that stretch, so who is she going to guard? She had to guard Timea. And a couple of the biggest baskets in this game were Donovan's layups when they didn't want to leave Timea because everybody's scared of Timea shooting the ball. And that was clearly a priority for them to try to disrupt. And so that opened up the basket.

We came out of that timeout for the play you're alluding to and they had switched. And they put Aaronette on somebody -- I can't remember, somebody different. And so we didn't quite get the look I wanted.

But Dono is Dono. She has a way of going by people. She found a way to create an advantage that drew help. Our spacing was excellent, I thought, all day today. And it was in that instance which created that shot for Dom.

Q. Raegan, your coach was mentioning last year there were a lot of moments you came up short and that helped you learn. In those games and during that stretch were you able to identify that, hey, there's lessons we had here? Or when did that realization come?

RAEGAN BEERS: I think for me, I think it came when we lost to Arizona at Arizona last year. That was a tough one because we were up by seven with no time left and they came back and hit those shots and they won. And it was,

what's going on?

But a lot of those games we took something from that. Coach alluded to it in the locker room. We didn't know how last year. We wanted to so bad but it was hard.

But this year we know how, we know what that feels like. We don't want to feel that. And we have all the pieces obviously, and a great freshman coming in, and Timea coming in with a full season rising and doing everything right. And, of course, Talia leading us as a team have just been great throughout the whole season. So we're ready to keep going.

Q. Raegan, being back for your second straight game after that injury you had with the nose, did you work through that? And how do you feel you are just physically working through the game?

RAEGAN BEERS: I had a great team around me telling me to take care of myself and whatever that needed, whatever I need to do to take care of myself. When I didn't come to the Washingtons I was sad not to go. But they all were understanding and realized I needed to stay home to get myself healthy in order to come back quicker.

I had a great team around me, a great medical staff. Oregon State, all the support in the world with my teammates and coaches that just wanted me to get back as quickly as possible. And if that meant staying home, then that's what it meant.

I'm happy to be back. I'm happy to be back on the court with this team and get a win.

Q. This is the last Pac-12 Tournament. What did it mean to all three of you to pull out a win like this in the very final tournament?

RAEGAN BEERS: I would say it was just unreal and exciting. I mean obviously you said it, the last Pac-12 Tournament. It's kind of sad to see the tournament go and this conference go because it's such a unique conference and there's so much competition that you get to see every single night.

But it meant a lot to get a bye this year and get that win tonight against a team who is really good and came to play tonight. We're excited to keep going tomorrow.

DONOVYN HUNTER: To add on to that, we work all season to get to this point. I mean, I grew up watching these tournaments. It's surreal being a player in it, let alone to win this first game.

But it comes down to, we've put our whole entire efforts into getting to this point. So I think -- I'm just really excited for my entire team that we're able to be here and compete and advance.

SCOTT RUECK: Well, year 14. It's been a while and we were -- yeah, two nights ago, I guess -- we got on the court for 30 minutes once we got down here. I was standing out there at center court and just bouncing the ball out there as everybody's getting shots up. And it was just a low-key time. But just looking down at the logo, looking at the hashtag that's on the court as well.

For me, knowing that it's the end, it's still a bit surreal because it's all I've known my whole life being a native Oregonian and a fan of Oregon State for every year I've been alive, to realize, wow, this is it. It still kind of doesn't seem real. Then it turns into gratitude and I'm happy to be a part of it and what an honor it's been all these years, from L.A. to Seattle, to Vegas, being a part of this tournament.

So you want to perform well, for sure, in it. Like, okay, if this is the end, let's go out in style and do the best we can.

That just puts maybe a little bit more emphasis on everything because, yeah, it is the last time, so it makes it even more special. But never take a win for granted and especially in the last year of the conference.

Q. Donovyn, back when I was in Medford, I covered a couple of your games at South Medford High School. How much do you think your time at South Medford helped prepare you to be ready for moments like today, and what does it mean for you to be here in this moment and not only, of course, represent Beaver Nation, Oregon State Women's Basketball, but also represent South Medford High School Medford, in general, your hometown, and all the people that know you?

DONOVYN HUNTER: I'm going to hit the second question that you asked first. It means a lot. I mean, I know I have a lot of Medford fans watching these games. My high school coach, Tom, he watches the games. Just extremely proud of what I've been able to represent my hometown for.

And then, I mean, high school, you learn a lot. I would say the biggest thing I've learned is the leadership aspect. Although being a freshman, you wonder where do I fit in when it comes to leadership because you kind of -- you get into the program at first and you don't know your role.

It's helped me learn, especially in the point guard position. I mean, with these games, you've got to step up at some

point. So I think South has helped me flip that switch in my head knowing the time that I need to step up and not just play my role but actually make a difference within the game.

So I would say that's the biggest takeaway I've taken from high school. But I know Medford's watching these games. My friends are all happy for me. So it means a lot.

Q. Yesterday, Natasha from Arizona State was talking about how the coaches in this conference have all checked in on her, you in particular, as she tries to build a program down there. In the time you've been in this conference, how have the coaches in this league helped you and even throughout?

SCOTT RUECK: That's a great question. The first thing I did, once I got hired out of Division III Siberia (laughter), was headed to Chicago to recruit, not knowing why I'm even there. Everybody's going to Chicago. I heard that. So book me a flight to Chicago.

I didn't even have a target to recruit other than some teams I knew of because the AAU teams don't send their players to D-III schools. They didn't, anyway.

And so I walk into this like sports complex, and I walk to the first court overlooking the courts down below, and out of my left is Tara VanDerveer. Well, I'm just a fan. I don't know Tara. She's Stanford, I'm D-III.

And she welcomed me and said she was glad to meet me and just anything I need, let her know. And that set a tone that has maintained.

This conference has had so many amazing coaches -- and I don't see the rivalries. They are rivals, but I see them as colleagues. How many of us do what we do? There's so few people that actually know what our lives are like and what we do. And we all have that.

While I can't sit there and tell you that I trust every single person with every single thing, of course not; we're all competing. I love the camaraderie that we've had, and it is warm. It has been warm, and there's just massive respect throughout, and it's always been the case.

So for me, I've felt included from day one. I've felt supported. I felt respect, mutual respect, and it's been a great joy, that part of it has been a great joy for me because you know you're competing against just incredible people and incredible coaches that pour their lives into this and that's not just our conference but that's nationwide as well. It's just a massive blessing to be a part of. So I've just felt from day one part of it.

