

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 7, 2024

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Utah Utes

Coach Lynne Roberts

Kennady McQueen

Alissa Pili

Postgame Press Conference

UCLA - 67, Utah - 57

LYNNE ROBERTS: What a hard-fought game. Incredibly physical. I think that's the most physical game I've ever been a part of.

But I want to congratulate UCLA. They made plays. I felt like we were right there. They hit a couple of big shots. They play hard. They're disciplined. They're the whole package. And they have the ability to win a national championship for sure. So a lot of respect for them.

They make things hard, but I'm incredibly proud of my team. I thought we battled and played as hard as we physically could. We never quit.

They hit kind of end-of-shot-clock daggers. We missed of this those. We left some points on the table, free throws and missed some layups particularly in the first half. But against that pressure and the physicality, I'll emphasize that, to only have eight turnovers, it's pretty impressive.

That eliminates their ability to get out and run. I thought Pili did a phenomenal job on Betts. Betts is a challenge. You have to game plan for her. I thought our game plan was effective. We held her to only eight points, but so much of that has so much to do with Alissa's determination there.

But all of our guys -- Ines, she had two injuries. Came back, just the toughness. Jenna, again, the third game where she's needed face glue or stitches. And none of those were whistles. It's kind of remarkable.

Kennady played her tail off. She just did a tremendous job, all of them -- Maddie, Jenna, guys off the bench just -- I'm proud of our team. What I told them in the locker room is



the tournament's over, but our season isn't. And our goals in the NCAA Tournament are still in front of us.

And our style of play, and I have such confidence in these guys. We get a couple of weeks to rest and heal up. We're pretty banged up, particularly after tonight. I'm excited with that. We'll get healthy, rested and get hungry to take it to the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Could you talk about the game plan against Lauren Betts? Seemed like you were throwing a lot of players, sometimes two, three, even four players flashing at her while she had the ball in the post. You talked about Pili's ability to stop her but the overall game plan against her?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Pili -- Lauren has, I don't know, 10 inch on Liss, 8 inches. But Alissa is stronger than anybody out there. So the game plan was for Aliss to just hold her ground, basically. And we use the term Sumo, like a sumo wrestler, low man wins, and just push her so that Lauren catches it as far out as possible.

And on the pass we were sending someone to double. And then the other three -- it was 3-on-4 and they just had to scramble. We got burned a couple times, but for the most part it was pretty effective.

Q. I imagine it was a very challenging game to play through. You guys exhibited obviously a lot of toughness. I'm curious, did you know you had that toughness at the beginning of the year? Is it something that developed with everything you've had to go through?

LYNNE ROBERTS: I think that's part of our culture. Like, we don't ever get the benefit of the doubt, whether it's in rankings or 50/50 calls or -- we never get the benefit of the doubt. You have to have a little edge. And that's part of who we are.

Our football team's the same way. We're going to out-tough you. Things are never given to us. And so we earn it. I think we recruit players that buy into that. So I think because of that we've been able to endure all the



adversity we've faced, all the injuries we've had, all the tough things we've had.

But let's not take away the fact that this team has beaten four top 10 teams. We've won 22 games. Our NET is not -- 7, 9. Like, that's pretty dang good.

But that's not the narrative. The narrative isn't about what we've done; it's about -- what's the -- we've lost -- Izzy Palmer and Gianna, that's 34 points a game and we've still done well.

I'd like the narrative around this team to change a little bit. We deserve it. They deserve it. It kind of ticks me off that our body of work and the narrative is, like, oh, man -- I don't buy that.

Q. A lot of calls that the bench and fans weren't necessarily very happy with. In a game like this where it feels like things aren't necessarily going your way, how do you keep your team locked in and focused on winning and not letting the emotions get out of hand?

LYNNE ROBERTS: I think that's the toughness piece. I tell the kids, let me worry about the officiating. They just need to play. But like I just said, we know that's what it's going to be. It's been like that all year. It's been like that for years. It's the way it goes.

So we fight, scrap, claw. If that means me getting angry, that's what it takes. But I don't think the players ever hiccupped. They just kept coming back. That's our culture. That's who these players are.

Q. Could you kind of elaborate on what Coach was talking about before with just the toughness that you were able to use to withstand this tough stretch with the injuries and to be able to, even tonight, to come through with a gritty effort. What's allowed you guys to do that; how do you guys stay together in these moments?

KENNADY MCQUEEN: Yeah, I think Coach Rob said it really well. Our coaching staff does a great job of recruiting players that come in, see our picture that we want to paint here at the University of Utah. They do a great job from the moment recruits step on campus.

When you recruit a whole team full of those types of players -- we just can't get caught up in those things like calls and we know that. And throughout the entire game we were sticking together and moving on to the next play, just worry about what we can control.

I just think, at the end of the day, we're a team that doesn't

care who -- we're not out to get mine. We just want to be successful, and I think that's what you saw tonight and just that toughness piece.

ALISSA PILI: To go off of that, I think this whole season we faced so many things, like injuries to like just like concussions and things like that and players being out for a short amount of time.

I think we just are used to bouncing back and that's just what this team does. Like Kennady said, that's the type of players that Coach recruits. That's the culture at Utah.

I'm just lucky to be a part of that, and it's a lot more fun and I think easier to buy in when you have a team full of players who think the same way.

Q. Because you had to run so many people at Betts, did that open up Dugalic to do what she did tonight? And also if you could all talk about turning the page and going. You had a successful NCAA Tournament last year. So you guys know what kind of what turning the page is and moving on to face teams that aren't as familiar with you as what you're seeing here. Could you talk about going forward now toward that?

LYNNE ROBERTS: I'll answer the Dugalic question. I think she had a great game. She hit big shots, like I said, kind of dagger shots. And she's a good player, and that was their X factor tonight. When you're going to blitz Betts, you have to pick your poison.

I thought we did a pretty dang good job of scrambling. Some of those shots she hit were deep. And, like, laws of percentages, I think coming into this game she was shooting 29% from 3. She made 3-for-4. So you have to tip your hat for the kid making the plays when that was the shot they could get. Good offense beats good defense.

In terms of turning the page, I do think -- I told them this in the locker room. I think every team in this conference that goes on to the NCAA Tournament is in the same boat in terms of we know each other so well, conference opponents.

We know their play calls. Cori's calling something. And I'm, like, hey, this is what they're doing; all their players are doing it. They're doing something when we call something. They know every players' weakness/strength.

You play somebody so many times you figure out what it takes. So going into the NCAA Tournament, it's kind of exciting to play somebody different.

It's been two and a half months of kind of beating the crap



out of each other, all 12 of us, all 12 teams. But iron sharpens iron. I think every team, that's why we do so well in the tournament.

I think our style of play is unique. I think it presents challenges that if you haven't faced it, you're not used to it. So I think that is an advantage of ours in the NCAA Tournament.

I don't know how you guys feel, but I feel like I'm monopolizing this. You two.

KENNADY MCQUEEN: I feel like the Pac-12 gets us battle tested. We learned throughout the season when we're at our best, when we're at our worst.

And I was really proud of our effort tonight and just the urgency part of it when we play like that we're a hard team to beat. We came up short tonight, but definitely proud of our fight.

And just our run that we made last season at the NCAA Tournament, I think that just gave us experience moving forward. And we're ready to get back to work. We'll rest up and get back to work. And I have full confidence in this group going forward in March.

ALISSA PILI: Well said.

Q. What kind of goes through your head when you see lines go down twice and then get back up and go in and make those hustle plays and just embody that toughness that you were talking about?

LYNNE ROBERTS: To be completely candid, the first one was down at the other end. I didn't see it. So as I was walking out there, the whole thing of, please don't let it be a knee or something like that.

So there was this sense of relief when she said it was her ankle. And that's weird, but... and it hurt. And I went over to the sideline and she said, I'll be fine, I'm going to go back in, I'm going to go back in.

Again, she goes down. Poor thing. So that, I think, is a great example of what our team's about. And I don't know how many people could do that. So I'm proud of her.

Again, Jenna, that's the third time she's had to have her face put back together. Bless her heart. She came right back in.

These guys are just tough. And I will win or lose with these guys any day.

ALISSA PILI: That's why they call her the Mosquito. No matter how many times you try to swat it away, it just keeps coming back. (Laughter).

LYNNE ROBERTS: That's right. That's right. Yeah, the Mosquito. Fans have Mosquito T-shirts, sweatshirts. She doesn't love the name, which makes it stick more. (Laughter).

Q. Did you come up with that?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Our PA announcer. It stuck. People love it. And she's a fan favorite for that because of how hard she plays and the motor she has. She plays 40 minutes unless she's injured. So I'm grateful and thankful that she's okay. She'll need an ice bath, but she'll be back.

I want to congratulate UCLA. They played tremendous. They played hard. Congratulations to them, and I think they have what it takes. Just a lot of respect for them. Just want to make sure that message gets sent. Very good job by them.

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