

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 8, 2024

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

UCLA Bruins

Coach Cori Close

Charisma Osborne

Lauren Betts

Postgame Press Conference



USC - 80, UCLA - 70 (2OT)

CORI CLOSE: Credit to Southern California. They made plays down the stretch. As much as this hurts me to admit, we always say that the tougher, more together team wins. And they were a little bit tougher than us. And just being really candid.

And it's always on me. It's my responsibility to have our team be in the position to be that, and we weren't. So now it's my job to respond and figure out what led to that, how we need to use this to fuel us for the NCAA Tournament and get us ready.

And we said this when we were in our rocky time that, stealing from Tony Bennett, that adversity, if handled correctly, can buy you a ticket to a place you wouldn't have gone otherwise. And that's my job as a leader is to help us handle the adversity wisely and to help put a plan together and an environment where we have to make those choices to hopefully buy us a ticket to a place in the NCAA Tournament that maybe we wouldn't have gone otherwise.

Q. Regulation and first overtime, 1.9 left in each, could you just walk us through the play, what you had drawn up?

CORI CLOSE: Probably, if I had to do it all over again, we might have done something different on the first one, on the side, to try to get us something a little quicker. We didn't get a clean catch or inbound to get it right back to the inbounder coming off the flare.

The other one is a play that we do a lot -- I thought Riz had a look maybe right at the beginning. But those are situations that -- that's not the place where I thought we won or lost the game. Giving up defensive rebounds on

free throws. We were up four. We control that, and they get an offensive rebound on a free throw and kick it out for the 3. All those kinds of things.

You can look at when we had 18 seconds, I think, is when we went one-on-one and it was tied, and we didn't get the call there but we ended up getting the stop. So, I mean, there's just all those scenarios to go through.

I'm sure I'll look at some of those, and ultimately I'm responsible to better us and get us in those situations. We did not handle it as well as we needed to.

I did not think we were good out of timeouts tonight. And that's been a strength of ours, is being really efficient on ATOs and we weren't tonight. And that's on me.

Q. Charisma, taking responsibility and being a leader on the court obviously isn't anything new to you with this roster. One of those responsibilities tonight was that kind of one-on-one defensive match-up with JuJu. Could you take me through that match-up, especially in the second half it really heated up?

CHARISMA OSBORNE: Obviously she's a really good player, and I was just trying to take away her right hand. She likes to go that way a lot. That's something we talked about with the scout.

She gets a lot of ball screens. So just trying to navigate that and get help where we can on the backside. So, I mean, it was really fun, it's always fun when there's a good player and I can match up against them.

Q. I feel like after every game you talk about, like, we've got to put the ball into Lauren more. She's so good. She shot 50 percent from the field tonight. She took 16 shots in 41 minutes. Is that enough?

CORI CLOSE: No, it's not enough. And it's everybody's job. And I think that's one of the things that we're going to have to see on the film, is that we missed several opportunities, and we get our head down off the bounce and we forget what our purpose is in that, and making reads to put her in positions to be successful.



She's got to get it more, especially tonight, maybe the first game that they played her one-on-one. I thought she did a much better job in the second half of getting deeper post-ups. She was getting a little too far out in the first half. I thought she made a really good adjustment in the second to get those deeper post-ups so she didn't have to have so many dribbles, which allowed them to dig in out of that.

And I thought she made a great adjustment. And we just needed to keep going to it. And we made some mistakes.

I was trying to get run, pick-and-roll, fill behind. And we got the two-on-one out of the drop coverage and we weren't able to make the pass to get it to her.

And that will be one of on your major focuses over the next two weeks before the NCAA Tournament is how to become more efficient at that.

Q. When you say you felt like your team lacked toughness tonight, where were those areas, in particular?

CORI CLOSE: Rebounding, 50/50 balls. Like those tie-ups, like eventually you just don't let people get in there. And I thought -- just don't let people get in there.

I thought it could have been called differently. I didn't think there was as good as consistency as I would have liked on that. But the reality is that defense -- the rebounding-wise, some of it was mental toughness, like knowing what we're trying to accomplish and being counted on to do your job every time.

And it didn't change much in terms of what we were expecting them to do. And we didn't execute. And, as I said, I will never -- ultimately I am responsible. So that's a reflection of my leadership, and we'll take care of it.

Q. For this to be a semifinal game, double overtime and cross-town rivals in the setting of the tournament, just being part of that and having that energy of that game, I know obviously the result wasn't what we all wanted, but can you speak to just that whole environment, too?

CORI CLOSE: I think this will be obviously for the committee to decide and all those things, but I think that what you've seen is that we have three No. 1 seeds in this conference. Point-blank. And you can't say -- everyone's talking about well maybe six or whatever. I'm, like, give me a break.

That's just to me so short sighted with this conference. If

you're going to say we're the best conference in the country, you can't cut those people off that are in that conference and you're beating each other up.

But I just think that this kind of game, I'm just not sure what else they could see. If we had made it, does that mean that we would be and USC wouldn't? I think on this kind of stage what you saw is two really, really tough teams and really good teams. And I think all three of Stanford and USC and us, I just don't know what else we can do.

We have more Top 25 wins than anybody in the country. I just think that's what you saw on display is two really good teams that really wanted to get after it. We came up on the short side of that, but I think the game sort of spoke for itself.

Q. The disparity at the free-throw line was 37-17. How hard is it to fight back and overcome when they're getting that many opportunities at the line? Is there anything different that you think you guys could have done to close that gap?

CORI CLOSE: I think that we needed to find cleaner ways for our guards to get downhill. And we did that better a little bit in the first half, the second quarter specifically. And I think we needed to press that issue a little more.

But I think we were being pretty darn aggressive, too. And I just -- it's hard to, in the emotion of the moment, to make really wise and discerning decisions about that.

But I always think about this, that every game I have to come up here and I have to be accountable. I'm the leader. I'm the head coach. And I really do wish there was a system in place where there was a little bit more accountability for that kind of thing as officiant as well.

I'm not saying good or bad. I may watch the film and go, I was wrong every time. But I do think that's interesting that something that has so much to do with growing our game, that we're here to talk to you guys and to give you a really honest, candid expectation of what went on.

And ultimately I need to stand up and take the responsibility of the loss, but I'll take the responsibility. If I made a bad call in the game, I'll tell you and I'll tell my team. I'll do that.

But I just think it's interesting that the system doesn't make that more of a priority. And I think our officials might get a little bit better. The game's sure getting better, isn't it? The game's sure moving up.

Our officials are working hard. I'm not saying anything. It's



a very difficult job and we need more people to get into it, more former players specifically. And that needs to happen. That's very important.

If our game is going to grow at a rate, so does the officiating needs to grow at that same rate. So we need to encourage that. But I do think that our systems could be better.

Q. You mentioned after last game you thought the winner of this game was going to be the team that played better to their identity. What is -- you've seen USC through three games -- what is their identity? And what after this game do you feel like you can do to kind of better refine this program's particular identity?

CORI CLOSE: Well, I mean, I don't know if I can answer totally from USC's perspective. That theirs to answer. But I think that from watching it and scouting against them, their identity is put JuJu in situations of space, especially in transition where she can attack to her right hand. And to attack the right side of the floor.

And then to have shooters that spread you out enough, and then when you help with some of your bigs to try to create some dump-down passes.

But they'll try to play through JuJu, get as many 3s out of that as they can. I thought Forbes was so key in some critical situations. And I think their bigs do a great job playing great defense and rebounding, which gives them more possessions and more opportunities to do just that.

But I think that for us, you know, I think we've already really touched on it. We need to have a balance of Charisma and our guards being able to -- specifically Charisma; it's got to start with her -- to get downhill, a balance of that while still getting Lauren really quality touches. And we're still not as consistent in that as we need to be.

And then defensively we've got to do things without fouling, and we've got to do a great -- that was the biggest thing statistically where -- we're the number one defense in the conference except for one area, and that's our free throw percentage, sending other people to the free-throw line. And that's something that we've got to get better at.

Q. Lauren, 18 rebounds for you tonight. It is so hard down there. I'm looking at the bruises on your arms. How would you describe your ability to stay in it mentally and be so strong and so tough when you're getting really so much physicality?

LAUREN BETTS: I think it's just like a mindset. Obviously I've been getting fouled my entire life -- 6-7 posts.

Obviously I'm going to get beat up.

But I think I just have to continue playing, and I do it for my teammates at the end of the day. Like I have to do what I have to do to make us win.

Obviously I think I could have done more tonight rebounding and just getting those 50/50s, like we talk about. But, yeah, I think it's just a mindset. I tried to do everything that I can tonight.

CORI CLOSE: It was key. Another reason why I think those fouls, it changes the rotations. And we had several kids with four fouls. And, Lauren, you think about it, how much time she had four fouls. And she still had to play with that aggression and toughness. I think that's a compliment to how far she's come.

Q. (Off microphone)?

CORI CLOSE: A lot of discipline there.

Q. Charisma, you came back for this experience and the chance to take this team far into the NCAA Tournament. What's your perspective on tonight and what that means for the next three weeks? Is there a list of things that you feel like you guys saw tonight that, again, like Cori talks about that you have to work on, or what's your perspective heading into the tournament?

CHARISMA OSBORNE: Obviously it's super disappointing losing tonight. But after the game, I told the team, like, our main goal is the NCAA Tournament, and we still have so much basketball left to play. And obviously this sucks and we'll have to watch the film and see ways we can all get better individually and as a team.

But I'm still super excited for this team because I think we can go all the way. And we just have to clean up some of the things that Cori was saying.

But, yeah, it sucks, it really sucks. But I know that our main goal is the NCAA Tournament. And we still have that to fight for.

CORI CLOSE: That's why we'll go far because exactly her leadership and what she says there.

Q. What do the next two weeks look like for you? Is there anything from tonight that specifically you're going to carry into what this time before the tournament looks like and what the preparation is going to be?

CORI CLOSE: Well, I think we've really identified the three areas. I would say it's special situations, and as much as we work on it every day, we're not getting the job done.

And we've got to figure out how we win those situations. And literally it's a part of what we do, and it's been one of the strongest parts of -- that's why I'm frustrated as a coach because it's been such a strength of ours for several years.

And we have not -- bottom line, is, again, I take responsibility -- is we haven't gotten it done in those special situations. So they're not ending. They're coming again. And will we let -- I always say, will the pain of this be greater than the pain of what it takes to change.

It's tough. You've got to buck up and make changes and look in the mirror at every single person, staff and player has to look in the mirror and go, how can they get better. And the pain of where you are has to be greater than the pain it will take to change. That's a big one. Special situations.

We've got to find ways to use Lauren in the post on a consistent basis. And we've got to play better -- I'm sure other people -- this is a rarity the way they played tonight -- single coverage -- we've got to be really crisp out of double-team situations.

And we've got to get her touches and then be really deliberate on how we handle those cuts and fills on the double-team situations. And then we have to do the little things. And defending without fouling, box out on free throws. We have to be a dominant rebounding team on a consistent basis. And those are just a few.

And we're in final exams. It's very delicate. But I always think that time in between, you can regroup a little bit and you can sort of get healthy and take care of some things. So I really think you're going to see some really big areas of improvement from us. And we're going to finish strong in the classroom.

Q. I know it's a long time ago, but the way the game started, with them getting up by 16 and then you guys coming back the way you did in the second quarter, very similar to what happened in the first game. Oregon State up by 16, Stanford coming back. Is it just a case of, yeah, these teams are so good, someone can make a big start like that or a big run like that, but it's going to balance out because these teams are just too good for someone to run away from another team?

CORI CLOSE: It's rare. I think especially, you know, teams that are balanced. We have good guard play, good

forward play. I think it's rare.

If you're a competitor at this level and all these teams are in the top 10, that we're battling it out against top 15, I just think it's rare that someone's just going to lay down.

It wasn't a good start for us. I was very disappointed in how we started. But bottom line is we won every quarter after that. And I think you're just not going to have a group that's not going to compete to scratch and claw and come back. The teams are too good.

Q. Lauren, we talked about the physicality for this game. You've played so many talented posts in this conference, like the game tonight. How well do you feel those tests have prepared you for the NCAA Tournament that's coming?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, it just goes to show how talented the Pac-12 is. Every single game I feel I played in this conference I have had a really good post I had to compete with. I feel at the end of the day I've just gotten so much better throughout the season. I just think I was really well prepared. Even in practice, like, we have a really good group of practice players who beat me up every single day, and I think they've made me much better at the end of the day.

I felt really prepared today. Obviously, like, I'm not happy with how the game turned out, and I always feel like I could have done more. But I think that throughout this season, I think I've just gotten a lot better.

Q. Charisma, JuJu gets a lot of credit, obviously, for being a great offensive player, and it was really fun in regulation watching you two go at each other. But at the end of the game she made two huge defensive plays, tipped a free throw attempt, and she drew Kiki's fifth foul. You're a great defensive guard also. How good is JuJu defensively?

CHARISMA OSBORNE: She made some really big plays at the end of the game and that's what great players do. I mean, I think those were really key plays for her. I don't know really what else. She's a great player overall, so...

Q. Charisma, after playing five years of USC-UCLA games leading up to this one, what can you say about the evolution of this rivalry and what you guys have done for basketball in L.A.?

CHARISMA OSBORNE: It's always fun, always super fun playing against USC. I've really enjoyed it over the years. It sucks that my last two I've lost, especially with most of the time of us winning and beating them. So that really

sucks.

But I'm happy that the rivalry is there because it does bring people out to come and watch women's basketball, and I think that's just like the most important thing. I know soon, one day, I'll be coming back and watching and seeing how exciting that is for basketball in Los Angeles.

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