

# Never Forget Tribute Classic

Saturday, December 11, 2021

Newark, New Jersey, USA

## UCLA Bruins Women

Prudential Center

## Coach Cori Close

## Charisma Osborne

## Jaelynn Penn

Postgame Press Conference



punched back, but we will grow from this, and we'll look back on this event and how we feel right now, and we will give it credit for the new habits it forms in us and gets us ready for Pac-12 play.

### Q. (Inaudible.)

CORI CLOSE: I think -- I'm not sure; I think they are really good at knowing who they are when they're at their best, so we really knew they wanted to play through the paint. They're shooting in the 70s when they get the ball to the paint, whether it be off a post-up, a back-cut, dribble penetration. They're very efficient there, and when we were efficient to take that away, we forced further shots, then we controlled the rebounds.

They just keep at it, and all of a sudden you have one little play where they get behind you on a back-cut and then it's an and-one or they get the ball in transition and Westbrook gets all the way to the basket.

So it's just little small plays, and I think they're relentless of playing to their identity, and I thought in that middle -- when we go back and look at the film, we're going to see that they hit some jumpers but we can adjust to that. I thought there were some key ones from Dorka, and obviously I thought Liv did a couple, too, that I thought made us sort of come away from the basket a little bit more. But I think they were relentless on getting on the offensive glass and getting paint touches, and in that period of time we needed to stop that.

We also let some offensive frustrations -- we made plenty of shots. Coach Tony on my staff did a great job in the locker room talking about our shooting was pretty consistent, but we let some frustrations really distract us mentally from our game plan, and we just didn't execute our game plan with elite consistency.

I think in order to play and win these games, you've got to do the simplest of things with the least consistency and we had some lapses. We have to take responsibility for them.

### Q. How different was this (indiscernible)?

UConn 71, UCLA 61

CORI CLOSE: Well, I think I would be remiss in not acknowledging the death and the anniversary and the name of this classic and the perspective that we know -- we got to go to the 9/11 museum yesterday, and to just acknowledge the incredible people that have lost their lives, who are fighting for things, the ramifications of 9/11, and just all that going into remembering is. So just want to say that we are humbled and we are honored to be a part of something that honors such a significant event. I did want to say that.

Just a mixed bag for me right now. Really proud of some areas of our team that really stepped up and fought and grew, and then really frustrated with those inches kind of plays that are under your control that you let slip away, and the pain of regret is no fun.

But it's only redemptive if it changes you, if it creates new habits, if it shows you what you can become and what it takes to actually go to where you want to go.

It's really a mixed bag. I'm really proud of these two young women right now. They've just been leading us incredibly well. They've been growing every single day, and they've been really facing adversity head on.

Really appreciative of the experience to be here, but we didn't come here for moral victories. We just didn't. Those days are past for UCLA basketball. We came here to compete to win, so obviously we're really disappointed, and I think we showed some great growth, but bottom line is we didn't come here for a moral victory, so we've really got to face the pain of what made this game slip through the cracks.

Credit to UConn and how they responded and how they



... when all is said, we're done.®

CORI CLOSE: We've had some very similar situations. We've had a ton of -- our roster doesn't look exactly the way we thought it would at this time, and neither does theirs. They've still got a lot of really, really good players.

I don't feel really sorry for them, to be really honest with you about that.

I think we're going through the same things. We have really good players, too. They have still really good players, and both programs are trying to adjust to that. I have a great relationship with Coach Auriemma and I have tons of respect for him, and those kids are going to respond. We knew that. But we're responding, and we're finding our identity and we're stepping up.

I have tons of respect for UConn, but this was about us, and I wasn't going to make it about UConn. This is about us playing to our best. They had a few more possessions where they played to their identity than we played to ours.

**Q. How would you describe (indiscernible)?**

CORI CLOSE: A work in progress. Honestly. But I think we've got to play through these two early on, and that doesn't mean they have to put the whole team on their shoulders. It means that we've got to have purpose in how we get them different kinds of shots, different driving lanes.

I really thought the game was going to be a lot of the Westbrook/Williams versus Penn/Osborne matchup, but I think our identity needs to be playing through the paint first.

We shot way too many threes to be honest with you in the first half. 18 threes is way too many. As good as we shoot it, I thought we rushed some.

We need to have better purpose together, but we've got to play through the paint, and we've got to do a better job consistently on defense. Our rebounding has got to get better, and that needs to be our identity. It just isn't yet.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

CHARISMA OSBORNE: I think she's really getting out in transition, and that was one of our keys to the defense. She's really good at pushing, and I think that was kind of getting her set up. Then we just needed to make adjustments as she started to hit more shots earlier.

And then for Dorka, I wasn't really guarding her as much.

CORI CLOSE: Dorka, she hit a couple of jumpers but that's not where she inserted her will on the game. 16

rebounds, that's where she inserted her will on the game.

I don't think it was how we guarded Dorka; I thought we did that fine. We didn't keep Dorka off the boards, and credit to her, 16 rebounds was an absolute difference maker in the second half, and credit to her.

She's relentless. Coach Tony was very clear on that in the scouting report about how relentless she is on the glass, and she lived that out.

**Q. For both players, you got in a couple good ones near the end and really pushed them. From a leadership perspective, how do you approach keeping your team's composure when the energy and emotions are ratcheted up?**

JAELYNN PENN: I would say that as a leader, leading by example, we have that poise, and to just get the team now they look to us and see don't get the emotions too high, let's do our jobs and just execute what we have to do. It just comes down to execution really, executing in those tight moments, having the discipline to do your job.

CHARISMA OSBORNE: And I think we've been doing a lot of mental training so we all have a reset routine, and I was trying to implement that in my routine and then trying to bring others along with me.

But like Jaelynn said, it's all about executing, and we believed at the end that we could actually come back, and I'm sure that Jaelynn didn't doubt it, as well. We made a couple mistakes at the end and really stopped just executing.

**Q. Question for the players. I'm curious (indiscernible) emotionally, how much it really takes (indiscernible) your coach referred to this as an issue (indiscernible)?**

CHARISMA OSBORNE: Yeah, I think I'm a little bit more used to it because last year we didn't have as many players, but it can be really hard just because we do have so many great players that are out, but I think that we're fine with what we have. We were clearly able to come out here and play really hard and do things that we were supposed to do, and obviously we didn't get the outcome that we wanted, but what we have is enough, and obviously when we come back and get other players, that's going to be great, and we'll become an even better team.

But honestly we're not really focused on who we don't have at the moment, we're really just trying to focus on who we have and trying to grow with that.

**Q. Coach mentioned in her opening statement that there were moments of growth and then also (indiscernible). What are some of those moments of growth or opportunities for growth that you're seeing and maybe some of the little things that you wish you had back?**

CORI CLOSE: Those are a big thing for me because there's a pause, right, so you always have a chance to reset your mind and go, hey, what do I have to do. There's never an excuse for me to lose focus on those kinds of things.

Having three out of the five people being really focused on what we were trying to get out of execution on offense and then having one or two people forget, not do their -- like Charisma said, everybody being responsible to do their job. Maybe it was Jaelynn said that.

But I think that everybody for a higher percentage of the time, and I think that it doesn't matter -- I always think that performance equals potential minus interferences. In that moment, what kept you from doing your job? What kept you? Was it not playing through fatigue? Was it a bad call by ref? Was it missing your previous shot? You've got to take responsibility for that, and you've got to learn how to stop those things from becoming interferences from you doing your job on the next play, and we call it next-play speed. You just have to have mental next-play speed. We just had -- we missed opportunities.

I think we always say the tougher, more together team wins, and we had possessions where maybe we had three people that were really tough. I thought Chantel showed a lot of toughness. She's really, I think, giving us great belief and leadership.

But people have to come together with that and play together. We have to play better together than we have individual pieces, and I think we had possessions where we went into islands.

As soon as you go into an island and you're playing one-on-one, you're not the tougher, more together team, and I think we'll look back and go, hey, there's a dozen possessions where we just did not do the disciplined simple things with consistency that lead us to being the tougher, more together team that possession.

It could be a screen, not second cutting out of a screen, not understanding what we're trying to look for in our game plan, not turning your head quick enough on the back-cut that we knew was coming every time, those little things.

I know it's very cliché, but it is so much a game of inches,

and you have to be so on top of the inches that you can control because sometimes you can't control.

**Q. I want to know how much, how long it takes generally for players to adjust to role changes. As a coach, how patient do you have to be for that?**

CORI CLOSE: I think that you can be patient in some areas, but chemistry is an evolving thing, understanding, hey, where does Jaelynn really like that pass or how can we keep -- these two are elite defenders, and we made some changes on how to learn, get chemistry things. I can be really patient with those things. Those take time.

But where I think you need very little patience to get tougher, to box out every time, to not allow yourself to get boxed out, set a great screen for someone else, to win every 50/50. I think there should be as a leader very little patience for things that we know are within our control and that you can do to help our team win possessions.

We need five people just completely locked into those things. Before any injuries, we had eight new players this year that were not on our roster last year, so that was already going to be in play. That was going to be an evolving process that I think there needs to be some patience on the chemistry side.

But I really actually think that my bigger challenge as a coach is to not lower the bar one ounce on the things that are within our control. To be really candid, we haven't responded as quickly as we need to in those areas. I think we could be tougher at this time of year.

Can't do anything about that, but I can do something about this kind of pain right now, teaching our hearts better and me holding that standard even stronger.

**Q. You obviously had a 14-0 run in the third quarter. Do you think (indiscernible) for any of that second run?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, of course. I mean, I think that you've got to stop those runs. You've got to be able to play through -- maybe if I had to do it all over again, I might have -- one of those was happening, there was a media time-out the next dead ball, and I was just trying to get to that next media.

But at the same time, yes, I think that basketball is a game of runs, but why those runs are happening are different, and I think we need to do a better job of recognizing that and responding quicker. Your response time -- we say events plus response equals outcomes, and events are not always under your control, but how quickly we respond is,

and we've got to grow in that area. We didn't respond quick enough.

**Q. Charisma, when you checked back into the game in the fourth after you left for a bit, you almost single-handedly brought the team back. Could you take me through what happened with your cramp and everything.**

CHARISMA OSBORNE: I think I just wanted to win. That's what we came here to do, and I think in that moment, like obviously time was going down, and I was really just like, okay, what can I do to put my team in a position to win. It wasn't just me by myself. There was people setting me good screens, giving me shots and stuff. But really my mindset, I was just like, I need to make these shots. I need to do whatever I can to get our team back into the game.

**Q. It seemed like things were going to end about two minutes -- with two minutes left in the game, but you guys scored 10 points in 37 minutes. Can you talk about the fight? I know you said you don't want moral victories, but that shows you guys weren't done. What can you say about that part of the game?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, I'll just say this: That is what gives me great hope about what we're going to grow into is when you see those willingness to fight. Like I want to become great. I want our team to conquer. I want our team to overcome, and really it's led by these two right here, and I think that that gives me great hope about what we can grow into.

All these games, they just teach us something about what we need to become to be our best in the Pac-12s and to be our best come March. They really are a waste unless we learn those lessons, and I think that they should gain some confidence from the fight that they showed.

**Q. Just wondering, it seemed like from what was said at the end of the last game, Stan said that you guys had some reasons to be optimistic after this outing even though there was a loss. Do you see encouraging signs of you guys coming together as a team a little bit more and being a little bit more cohesive with the runs that you made in this game?**

JAELYNN PENN: Yeah, definitely. I think it's easier to learn because it hits harder on losses, so willingness to grow and to come together as a team, the chemistry, so yeah, we're definitely taking this loss. We're upset and frustrated, but we realize that we need to get together, and the willingness to grow is really up there.

CHARISMA OSBORNE: Yeah, I agree with Jaelynn. These losses do really hurt really bad and can be very frustrating, but it was kind of like the same thing when we were in Florida, like those two losses hurt really bad, and when we played San Jose State coming back, we responded really well.

I think this team will come back and we'll watch film and have practice and we'll respond and try to find new ways to give and grow to each other.

CORI CLOSE: I think you hit it on the head is that come together -- Jaelynn has talked about that a lot in our practices, just our need to become a better unit, to develop our chemistry, to understand each other's game. To be honest with you, that's been a longer process than I thought it would be, and then obviously the injuries maybe exacerbated that challenge, but like what are you committed to.

We always say that our commitment not your feelings will determine our destiny. We're committed to championship process, we're committed to championship-level habits, we're committed to giving and growing every day, and we're just going to let how we feel right now give us not only great motivation but great hope of what we can grow into and what we're willing to fight for.

I really appreciate you guys being here. It was like a mass exodus when Geno left before we came in, so thanks for hanging in there with us and for covering our team.

I do want to make this point. I really appreciate the organization of this event. I also appreciate ABC. This was the first ever regular season game televised by ABC, and this is about UCLA and UConn competing, but it's also for something bigger, it's about growing women in sport and growing the game of women's basketball. Really appreciate the opportunity to be a part of that, and we not only want to represent and just really move UCLA women's basketball forward, but we also want to contribute to growing our game.

It's really an honor to be a part of that, and we do not take that responsibility lightly.

Thank you guys for partnering with us and growing our game, and let's continue to move UCLA forward and to championship standards and habits, and let's move our game forward together, as well.

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