

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Colorado vs Kansas State

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Manhattan, Kansas, USA

Bramlage Coliseum

Colorado Buffaloes

Coach JR Payne

Maddie Nolan

Frida Formann

Media Conference



think it's something that we've seen all season long and something that we're definitely prepared to do, and obviously they had experience with it last year playing at Duke.

So I don't think it's something that I'm like, yeah, I would sign up to do every day, but it's definitely something we have experience with.

FRIDA FORMANN: Yeah, I agree, but I also think a big crowd is always good. You want to play on a big stage, and of course it's more fun when they're cheering for you, not against you. But it's noise either way. It's just a lot of noise.

I think just being used to playing through that, even on your home court, it can be kind of hard to hear what each other is saying and getting the play calls from the coach, so just being used to that pressure.

Q. What has been the toughest environments you guys have played in?

FRIDA FORMANN: Can you answer it first?

MADDIE NOLAN: In the Pac-12 this year I'd definitely say the Oregon State game. They have a lot of fans. They do a good job. I thought Washington actually had a nice fan base, too. I've also had to play at Iowa for a Big Ten championship, so that was not fun at all.

Yeah, just stuff like we're used to that.

FRIDA FORMANN: Yeah, I agree. I think the times that we've played at Stanford, we didn't do that this year, but that's always a really hard crowd. I think a lot of Pac-12 teams that have a lot of attendance this year -- the USC game there's always a lot of people. It was tough to be on the road this year for sure, so this will be no different.

MADDIE NOLAN: Arizona, too. They always have a really good fan base.

Q. What have you learned about K-State over the last few hours?

Q. I don't know if it's an advantage that you guys have played Friday-Sunday, but is there some comfort in just knowing that this is what your schedule has been basically for three months is playing Friday, playing Sunday?

FRIDA FORMANN: Yeah, I mean, it's pretty much the same schedule as we always do. We did travel a little bit earlier, so that was kind of different, but yeah, we're used to this.

But if it had been a night game, I think we would have been able to do that, as well.

MADDIE NOLAN: I think from personal experience I guess the last couple years playing in a conference that didn't play Friday-Sunday and then having to come to a tournament that is Friday-Sunday where you only have one day of prep in between, this year with the Pac-12 having that experience I personally do think is an advantage because you're more used to recovering and getting your body ready, getting your mind right, and the coaches kind of know what to do within this one day of prep versus having two or three.

Q. Jaylyn said on Sunday that she likes playing in front of big road crowds. Do you guys enjoy that, and just your thoughts on playing in front of what should be a pretty rowdy crowd tomorrow night?

MADDIE NOLAN: Yeah, I wouldn't say I'm like, yeah, woohoo, let's always play in front of opposing crowds, but I



FRIDA FORMANN: I think obviously they have a really big piece of the game in Ayoka Lee in the post. She's super dominant in there, but I think we're confident that we can find ways to stop her and handle her, and we have such a deep team, and we know they have good guard play, as well. They're a Power Five team, so they're going to have good players in all spots, and I think we're comfortable seeing that type of team.

But yeah, definitely going to do a lot of prep today and see how we can stop them.

MADDIE NOLAN: Yeah, agree with Frida. Obviously they're a great team. They're up to No. 2 this year in the rankings, and they obviously, like Frida said, play in a Power Five conference, so they've played opponents at our level all year. But obviously Ayoka Lee is a huge part of their team, and like Frida said, they have good guard play, they play that four-out motion offense, a little similar to what we saw yesterday. But yeah, we're going to lock into scout today and continue to watch film on them.

Q. Frida, last night we had Kindyll Wetta as one of the breakout stars of the game. Is it kind of a privilege that you have different people breaking out each night for your team, and could it be a different player tomorrow night, and can you talk about that a little bit?

FRIDA FORMANN: Yeah, for sure. I think it's a huge privilege. It's also kind of the reason I came to play college basketball, because I wanted to be a team where I was with great players who all could contribute in different ways, even if you have a night where you don't score a lot. Just watching our team do so well from the bench is honestly just really, really fun, especially when we win.

It's not as frustrating, but yeah, it's frustrating to be on the bench and sit with fouls. But I love our team and everyone is so capable, and we don't really care whose night it is, as long as we come out with a win.

Q. I imagine it was a frustrating game for you last night personally with the foul trouble, things like that. But you've always done a pretty good job of bouncing back from tough games. Why are you able to do that? What allows you to be able to bounce back quickly from a game that's not up to your standard?

FRIDA FORMANN: Yeah, I think just having some perspective. It's not the first time I've had a game like that, and it's probably not going to be the last. But I know that you kind of just have to put it behind you. That's just one game. However Drake was guarding us just wasn't matching up to me well or I was in foul trouble so I couldn't

get in my rhythm. Whatever it was, it doesn't have to be the same the next game. You can't really take that with you.

So just knowing what I can do and staying in my role. I know what I need to do for this team, so that's what I'm going to focus on for tomorrow.

Q. Do you see Kansas State as a team that stepped in front of you and swiped a 4 seed from you, and does that motivate you in this game?

FRIDA FORMANN: Yes. Yeah. We knew that we were definitely in a battle for that 4 seed. Not that they don't deserve it at all. I think they had a great season.

But of course we wanted to host. So now being in this environment, we do feel like we have something to prove, of course. So yeah.

MADDIE NOLAN: Yeah, I mean, same with Frida, it's not just Kansas State. There are a lot of people on that 4 or 5 seed line, but obviously being here, like she said, it is motivation for us. Everyone in the tournament is motivated to move on to the next round, so it's not like you need to look too far for that, but yeah, we're definitely excited to get a chance at a Sweet 16 again.

Q. You guys are both shooters. Maddie, you talked about in Vegas getting used to the court, getting used to the backdrops, the rims. How much more confident does that make you guys going into tomorrow now that you've already played here once this week?

MADDIE NOLAN: Definitely. I mean, just being able to shoot around there yesterday, we got a practice the day before, and having played a game I think is huge on this court. So going forward we know how shots are coming off and what the backdrop is and everything like that, so it's a huge help for sure.

FRIDA FORMANN: Yeah, I agree. I just hope to shoot a three tomorrow. But I've shot plenty in shootaround and practice and everything. I'm sure it'll be fine.

Q. You brought up earlier in the year that Kindyll Wetta was the best defender in America, annoying, all these things. What do you think about some of her troubles in high school with injuries, how do you think that shaped the way she sees defense as a college basketball player?

JR PAYNE: I think Kindyll sees defense the way she sees everything in her life. She'll attack it head on. She'll be totally fearless in her pursuit of being the very best that she

can be, whether that's organic chemistry or defense or whatever it could be.

But yeah, she's battled and persevered through a fair amount of adversity and injuries as a high school player and just always attacked it the same way. Be great at my rehab, come back better than I was before.

Q. How unique is the mindset that she brings to your team?

JR PAYNE: Very unique, yeah. If we could have 15 Kindyll Wettas, that would -- any coach in America would love to coach Kindyll, I've said that before, just because she's so tough and so resilient and so fearless, so I think that's probably a big reason why she's so successful at everything.

Q. A lot of the players are talking about how they are looking forward to playing in a hostile environment. Do you like coaching in a hostile environment?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I mean, I just love coaching. Anytime I can take the floor with this group of young women, it's an incredible opportunity.

The great thing for us is that it doesn't bother us. Like we've had great crowds in Boulder. We also have really great crowds in the Pac-12, similar to the Big 12, I'm sure. So yeah, it is what it is. It's great. When they're rooting for you, great. When they're rooting against you, that's all right. It just means we have to dig deeper and kind of stay together a little bit more.

Q. Some of the players are talking about maybe some motivation because this is a spot, a hosting spot that you guys wanted and felt that they should get, not that Kansas State wasn't deserving, but the players talked about that's some motivation. Is that something you use with the team --

JR PAYNE: No.

Q. Or is it let them -- if that helps them --

JR PAYNE: Whatever works for them is absolutely fine with me. We're not hosting. It had nothing to do with Kansas State and had everything to do with Colorado. But if that motivates us to think, man, this is an opportunity that we missed out on, then I'm all for it.

Q. Obviously it's a big challenge for you guys tomorrow in the middle with Ayoka Lee. How much confidence has it given you in airing it the last couple of games against Raegan Beers in that quarterfinal and

then yesterday against Anna Miller that she's really ready for this moment against these big-time post players?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I mean, we've played against a lot of really good post players in the Pac-12. We've seen size and strength and mobility almost every single night. I do think Ayoka and Aaronette are two of the best centers in the country, so it'll be a really fun exciting basketball matchup. But yeah, we definitely have seen great size, and I'm excited to see the matchup tomorrow.

Q. Is Reagan maybe the closest comp that Aaronette has seen to Ayoka, or is there somebody else that's sort of similar strength and all that --

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I would say Betts and Beers just because she's taller than Beers but kind of built real strong like Raegan.

Q. Starting next year obviously you're going to start seeing Kansas State a lot more. Do you approach this game kind of as an opportunity to learn and prepare for the future, as well?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, definitely. Not just being here. At first when we realized we weren't hosting -- we were really excited to be in the tournament but really disappointed we'd put ourselves in the position not to host. But then about five minutes later, I was like, this is awesome, we're getting a taste of Big 12 country, not just the game and the arena but the community and all of that.

So it really is a great opportunity to play a Big 12 team, play in the arena, get comfortable in this space so that next year maybe this will be the one Big 12 team that doesn't feel brand new next year when we play.

But also in preparation, we've watched so many Big 12 games now in preparing for tomorrow's game, so we kind of have a better feel for the entire league in just 24 hours' notice.

Q. Are you acquainted with Jeff Mittie at all, and if so what have been your interactions with him?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, just a little bit. We actually were at a tournament together -- where was it? It might have been -- I can't remember where it was. It might have been at a tournament years and years ago. We were in Mexico, and the whole tournament got canceled because of some strange reasons.

I think it was Kansas State. But anyways, we all ended up at a resort for like three days because we were stuck in



Mexico with no games and all the players kind of hung out. So I don't know him very well but have spent time sitting in gyms together and things like that. I think he's done an incredible job, has great talent, really well-coached team.

Q. Your success here is great. Has Tad Boyle reached out to you on the men's side, and have you kept an eye on them, and what's it like having two teams advance in the same day?

JR PAYNE: It is incredible. First of all, I love Tad Boyle. I think he is -- as great of a coach as he is, he's an even better man. For a women's basketball coach, it's always great to have your men's staff be so supportive and so encouraging of what you're doing. It makes all the difference in the world.

So Tad usually reaches out to me more when we've had a hard game. He's one of a few people that will reach out and say, keep your chin up, and you guys are doing great, things like that.

I think we're all kind of celebrating each other from afar, but we all have a lot to pour into our own basketball preparation. We'll keep cheering for them. I know they're doing the same for us.

Q. Maddie and Frida were just talking about some of the best road environments they've played in this year. I'm curious from your perspective what are some of the best atmospheres that you guys have been in?

JR PAYNE: Well, by far the best atmosphere is in Boulder at the Event Center. We've had great crowds all year long at home. That's been really incredible. Everywhere honestly in the Pac-12 has been really good this year. Corvallis for Oregon State has historically been great. They'll sell out a lot of games. USC was a great environment this year. Oregon always has big crowds, UCLA was a great crowd, Arizona always sells out. Lots of really tough environments we've played in.

Q. Kindyll brought up Jaylyn as someone who's a very adamant supporter of what she does, and as a player that doesn't start as much, that type of deal, that may be very powerful. What do you think that says about the culture of your team?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I think Jay and Kin do a great job of really supporting and challenging each other. They're kind of like-minded in that they, as I said earlier, just attack everything in front of them. They're very competitive.

You talk about starting, I think Kindyll is one of the most productive, most inspirational players on our team, and

that's why she comes off the bench, because she can bring something off the bench that nobody else on our team brings.

As a coach, it's an incredible thing to have that, that you can plug in and be able to change the dynamic of a game, or even yesterday we were obviously not great the first couple minutes. In comes Kindyll, call a time-out, the whole dynamic changes. So we're really fortunate to have that.

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