

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

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Manhattan, Kansas, USA

Bramlage Coliseum

**Colorado Buffaloes**

**JR Payne**

**Aaronette Vonleh**

**Tameiya Sadler**

**Maddie Nolan**

Media Conference

Colorado 63, Kansas State 50

JR PAYNE: Wow, very, just so proud of our team for how we played today. The environment was incredible. Shout-out to Manhattan Kansas, the entirety community has welcomed us this week, and that's great. That's a great basketball environment. But we love that environment. We love being the underdog. We love -- we kind of thrive in that role. So I know that as a group, we are very, very comfortable going into such a tough environment.

Congratulations could K-State on such a great season. I know a couple of their seniors very well, and just really proud of them for their careers.

But yeah, really, really proud of our team. When I look at the box score, any coach in the world would love to see a box score like this where you have nine points, nine points, ten points, like the balance on our team is just unreal and I think that's really, really hard to guard.

We executed some things down the stretch that were really great. Defensively, I thought our pressure was great. We were down pretty big on the boards at halftime and ended up out-rebounding them which is just grit and toughness. So yeah, really, really excited to be moving on.

**Q. You had zero points in the first half, all ten in the second half. Talk about what you did differently:**

TAMEIYA SADLER: I would say I was way more



aggressive going into the second half. It was really easy for me to pick my spots because netty was posting so hard so it was opening up gaps for me to attack and find opening to shoot my pull up. I was just taking whatever the defense gave me and from there, that's where it went.

**Q. For all of you, you guys had 17 steals tonight, Aaronette, you had 7. I guess the best way so ask is, what happened tonight?**

MADDIE NOLAN: If you saw us right before J started talking, she showed me Nette's steals and I'm like damn, damn, look at this and she showed Nette and we are like, oh, my gosh.

But it just speaks to Nette how good she is. We always talk about Nette offensively I feel like, but I think we have seen it throughout Pac-12 play and especially tonight and especially in the Pac-12 tournament. She is one of the best post defenders in the country. She's one of the best players in the country period and I think we saw that tonight and she just had a huge game for us.

TAMEIYA SADLER: She's so athletic and when you see stuff like that, you're not seeing many post players that can slip around someone that fast and easy, and she did it really well and it worked for us. So I'm really proud of her.

AARONETTE VONLEH: I was just trying to be really intentional about getting in the best position to be able to slip around her. I never really look in the steals column when I look in my name, so to see seven there is kind of crazy. But yeah, being aggressive and not letting her get any easy touches.

**Q. Holding Ayoka Lee down like that and holding K-State to 15 points in the second half. Tremendous group effort. How did the group come together and is this what you expected out of the day?**

JR PAYNE: The great thing about the the Pac 12 Conference is we have seen a lot of really good post players through the year, and Ayoke is special, no doubt. But I thought Nette felt very confident going into the game regardless because she's seen such tremendous post play



in our conference. So I think there's a lot of confidence collectively that we could guard.

But I wouldn't say we held her down. She still had a double-double because she is that good. But Nette's defense, and we've seen that, as Maddie said, a lot of us talk about her offense but her defense is she's an unsung hero defensively for us because there are not tomorrow players that can single-handedly guard; that athleticism, that size, that combination of skill, and she's done it time and time again for us.

**Q. This could be for any of you guys. The scrappiness you showed on defense, and tenacity; what does it say that so many players can contribute defensively?**

AARONETTE VONLEH: I think it shows the depth of players that we have and we have players that can be at multiple different positions and be effective and there's never really a drop off when new people come in the game and that's something we use to our advantage, and that's why, I mean, the stat sheet looks the way it does.

TAMEIYA SADLER: So we really pride ourselves on defense. So every day, every practice we are always going at each other. We are always going to be aggressive, attacking every moment, every time on defense and that's who we are and that's what we fed into tonight.

MADDIE NOLAN: Yeah, definitely. I think going off what they said, I remember watching Colorado last year in the Sweet 16 game, and I was like, wow, the toughness and the tenacity, like you said, that they play with on defense is amazing, and that's going to win a lot of games and get you far, especially in a tournament like that.

So I think now to be a part of it has been a lot of fun and something that we definitely emphasize and Coach P does a great job of making sure we're on that every day.

**Q. First off, third quarter, a lot of it was Tameiya, but what changed the third quarter where you were able to just explode and kind of take over this game a little bit?**

MADDIE NOLAN: Yeah, I turned to Tameiya at the end of that third quarter and we were up ten and I said, Tameiya, that was because of you. I think she had eight points in a row there, something crazy like that and it kind of played our defense, I feel like, and we were getting stops and Tameiya did a tremendous job running down the court and Kindyll found her. Nette, the whole game she was running, and that opened up a lot of transition looks for us in

general. So obviously Tam had a huge part in that but in general, I think our defense sparked that^ .

**Q. The fourth quarter starts, and we were like, the fourth quarters haven't been good and you guys don't score for six or seven minutes. Did that enter your mind, and can you talk about how you overcame such a long scoring drought and were still able to pull this out?**

TAMEIYA SADLER: We all just came together. We've been here before. It was nothing to tank our confidence. We were going to go out there and continue to fight until the last horn sounds, and I think that's what we did.

**Q. This team has kind of a trend of these unsung heroes popping up. The other day it was Kindyll. Today it was you. They are running a lot of stuff through you in the second half. Can you talk about how all of you guys are -- really just stay ready for these moments when your number is called?**

TAMEIYA SADLER: It's funny, you never know, we have so many people on this team that can go for 30 tonight or ten the next day, and like it was just nice just to know that like your teammates are going to instill this type of confidence in you. When they were like, get Tam the ball. I was like, they believe in me, so I'm going to go out there and do whatever I can to help us win this game tonight.

**Q. First of all, can you describe the feeling of being in the Sweet 16?**

AARONETTE VONLEH: I was just telling coach, it has not really hit me yet. I'm really blessed that we are able to be here again for another here in a row. It just has not registered that we are really going back again.

**Q. Second part of that, you face the prospects of facing a premiere player, you don't know yet, but how much did playing against Juju at USC twice prepare you for that type of setting?**

AARONETTE VONLEH: Yeah, I think that's a good example. JuJu is a very similar calibre player to Caitlin. She really is like the engine of their team in the same way that she is. So I think that was just a good opportunity for us to see those things in conference play. So it's not going to be a shock to us come the next game when we see it again.

**Q. The heartbreaking double OT loss to Oregon State in the Pac-12 tournament, and then the time off in between, how did you ladies regroup and get that better mentality going?**

AARONETTE VONLEH: We just spent a lot of time focusing on us and what we needed to work on to be ready for our next opponent. Just doing little basic -- going back to the basics, really, in practice and getting that synergy back and being connected with each other. That was just our focus.

TAMEIYA SADLER: I feel like we used that week after that to prepare and focus a lot on us because at the end of the day it's always us that we have to work on, so going -- after that game we were just like, what could we have done better, and we focused on those points that we didn't do and we got better at that.

MADDIE NOLAN: I completely agree with what they said. For a lot of the seniors, that game really stung because we had high expectations coming into the season to win a Pac-12 championship and that was our last chance to do that. We took that week to regroup mentally as well as physically and get ready for this tournament.

**Q. You talked about the balance in scoring. Does that reflect the fact that there are no egos or no big egos on your team? Talk about that.**

JR PAYNE: I think one of the best things about our team, we've said for a long time that, nobody really cares who gets the shine. We have a lot of different players. We don't have a single five-star recruit. We don't have a single McDonald's All-American, but we have a group of young women that are willing to fight and compete every day that they take the floor. And so I think that leads to a group that really wants to see each other succeed. I think it leads to a group that really loves to feed the hot hand no matter who it is, where it is, what it is, they try to get that person the ball and it's just a really fun way to play.

**Q. First, just back-to-back Sweet 16s, first time in 21 years in the program, what does it mean to the program and you especially?**

JR PAYNE: To the program it means everything. So many players on our team, we're really fortunate, we have a veteran group and most of those players came to Colorado when we were not good. We were in last place in the conference and sort of believed in a vision and dream to help us be great, and through the pursuit of excellence every single day when we were not winning, they continued to work to be great. That's how we are in this position.

So I'm just beyond proud of our team for that. You know, going into the Sweet 16 is awesome. We are super excited and I'm kind of like Nette, hasn't really sunk in yet

but I'm mostly proud of how they have pursued that excellence every day for the past four or five years.

**Q. At halftime, Aaronette had seven steals. We looked at each other, they can't even complete a pass. What was that like for you to just watch every single time she got a hand on every entry pass?**

JR PAYNE: It was incredible. I mean, I always talk about Kindyll's defense, and so to hear that Nette passed her first half scoring -- or, I'm sorry, first half steals record is almost hard to believe.

But yeah, it was pretty great to watch. Everybody had so much confidence in Aaronette to guard because she has done it night-in and night-out all year long.

**Q. Could you take us through what you saw in her during the intentional foul?**

JR PAYNE: I actually didn't see it. What I was told was that Jaylyn had ^ fouled her and I think as soon as that foul had happened, maybe she flung her arm and hit Jaylyn in the face. They just said it was contact above the neck, so I did not see it. Just that there was -- not intentional contact, but contact.

**Q. First after, Quay, we are not talking a lot about her, but she has a double-double and I thought she was fantastic tonight. Can you talk about her contribution of what she meant tonight?**

JR PAYNE: Quay was incredible. I was looking at the stats, I thought her rebounding was absolutely essential. She was the only player I think on our team with a couple o-boards at halftime and she stopped possessions on the glass and gave us a few extra that we really needed. The ball seemed to find her late in the shot clock several times and I thought she made really smart basketball plays. She's a pretty veteran kid, very comfortable and confident in herself, and we are all confident in her as well^ .

**Q. Jaylyn did not play a ton in crunch time. Is that because she was banged up or because Tameiya was playing so well? What went into all that?**

JR PAYNE: Yeah, here is a great example of how unselfish our team is. I had put Jaylyn back in, because again you don't often play long, extended minutes without Jaylyn and she recognized that Tameiya was playing better than she was. So after a few minutes, she said, get Tameiya back in for me.

And I -- "For you?"

"Yeah, for me."

I was already thinking I had to get Tameiya back in the game, but J just recognized that Tam was the hot hand. Kindyll was incredible defensively so we were not going to take her out. It just ended up that that group was clicking and rolling and we went with that group.

**Q. You handled a partisan crowd today, and your next game is not going to be as much, at least theoretically, of a partisan crowd, but sometimes a crowd is drawn to an individual talent. How much does today's game prepare for something like that?**

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I think it's huge preparation. Any time you can play in front of -- how many? 10,000 people, is a great opportunity. Little girls grow up dreaming about these opportunities to play in the NCAA Tournament in front of that many people. Whether they are for you or against you, it's passion and excitement for the game that we all love so much. So we feel very prepared by our Pac-12 play and then also the game today.

**Q. Thoughts on West Virginia or Iowa?**

JR PAYNE: I'm sure they are both fantastic. Honest I don't have a lot of time to watch other teams during the season because I'm always watching our team and our opponent but I have seen both of them play a fair amount and they are both very, very good.

**Q. In your opening statement you talked about the environment, Manhattan. The Big 12 commissioner was here sitting courtside. Hard to watch these two teams play and not think about what the future looks like with you guys joining the conference. How excited are you guys for that and could you see this developing in a nice, competitive rivalry?**

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I think that's actually interesting to think about rivalries, because we have no idea what our rivalries will be. Brett came in before the game welcoming us to Manhattan and the conference. I couldn't be more excited to have someone like that leading our new conference because he's so passionate about all sports, and so yeah, great to have him here. It's great to be in Manhattan, like I said, in Big 12 country. We have very little experience with Big 12 country. We played at Oklahoma State a couple years ago, so this was a neat opportunity for us, and I'm sure rivalries will develop based on great games and tough environments.

**Q. You brought up the guard duo, they played awesome, what do you think went into their explosion coming off the bench and being the better guard duos**

**tonight?**

JR PAYNE: Confidence. They are very confident in themselves. Their teammates and coaches are extremely confident in them. We love to have some of our more aggressive players off the bench because we've all felt like they could come in and bring a spark and tenacity and toughness in that second wave, so to speak. But yeah, they were both fantastic and both capable of, again, defending scoring and creating tempo and things like that.

**Q. I would like to get a coach's perspective. After that double overtime loss in the Pac-12 tournament what was your message to your group and how do you think they rebounded from that?**

JR PAYNE: Yeah, thank you. The message, as always, we have a lot of places that we can improve collectively, and we kind of tried to be really intentional about attacking. You know, some of those areas that we thought we could improve, where he really tried to prioritize execution and we tried to prioritize communication, making sure that we are on the same page at all times no matter what, and we were able to really pour those things into our practices that week. I do; I think we got better, and I think we are a better team now than we were during the Pac-12 tournament.

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