

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Chattanooga vs NC State

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Reynolds Coliseum

Chattanooga Mocs

Coach Shawn Poppie

Sigrun Olafsdottir

Jada Guinn

Media Conference

NC State - 64, Chattanooga 45

THE MODERATOR: Coach Poppie, if you could start with an opening statement.

SHAWN POPPIE: Yeah, hats off to NC State, Wes and their group. Not only obviously playing and getting the better of us today, but really this whole last couple days.

It's been first class. We've enjoyed our time, obviously, besides the loss today. But I have a group in that locker room that I'm super, super proud of. I thought we competed. We defended. Offensively we struggled a little bit. That's a little bit of us and a lot of them. Their length really bothered us.

I couldn't be more proud of the group. These two obviously. But the rest of the ones that are in that locker room, I think they've represented our program, our university to the best of their abilities that we should really walk out of here with our heads up high.

And it's unfortunate it's come to an end. 28 and 5 is pretty darn good, though, and it's something we'll remember, not just the success, the relationships, the times we've had.

Again, I couldn't be more proud to be their coach, and just hard to have it end this way.

THE MODERATOR: At this time, we'll open up the floor for questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Why weren't you able to get much traction going offensively in this game today?



SIGRUN OLAFSDOTTIR: I think we're getting good looks at first, we just weren't making shots. And I think their length bothered us a bit. I think that was the main thing for us.

JADA GUINN: I agree with that. Like Sigrun said, we got a lot of good open looks. Usually we shoot the ball better than that. I think their length did affect us a little bit, but it was just we weren't hitting shots.

Q. You had a good contention of Chattanooga fans come down here, but this is a tough place to play. How do you think you all handled the crowd and the energy today?

JADA GUINN: I think we did a pretty good job. It is a lot harder. We're trying to hear Coach Poppie. He's losing his voice, so we're having to talk to each other and call the plays out. But I think we did a pretty good job of listening to him and getting in our sets.

SIGRUN OLAFSDOTTIR: Yeah, I think we did pretty good with that overall. But it was a struggle sometimes with the noise, and when they went on a run you could hear it. But I think for the most part we did pretty good with it.

Q. You guys got off to a hot start, took two leads. What was working so well for you guys early on and staying in that first half especially?

JADA GUINN: I would say in the first half I feel like we were kind of just knocking down those open looks. Coach Poppie did a good job of setting us up offensively, and we were able to execute. And I think in the second half we just weren't able to knock the shots down.

Q. Can you speak to the larger season, the success you had and what you've learned playing here.

SIGRUN OLAFSDOTTIR: I think we had a great season. I think the team got together as we went on and we got better throughout the season. And I think the staff did a great job preparing us for each game. So I think that's what made us so successful.



JADA GUINN: I think that this team is special, this program is special. Coach Poppie as a head coach is special. The relationships that you form here are different.

I've been on a different -- I've been at a different school, and coming here was probably like the biggest blessing basketball-wise.

But it's just been really successful just because of the togetherness of the team and how everybody is for each other and so self-less and like a family.

Q. Can't keep up anymore with eligibility, but I believe you're out of eligibility and this was your last game?

JADA GUINN: Yeah.

Q. What are the emotions you're feeling and what's next for you?

JADA GUINN: Yeah, I don't think it's really sunk in that I won't be able to be a college athlete anymore, I won't have those workouts, I won't get up for practices and stuff.

But I don't think basketball is done for me yet. I do have dreams of playing professionally. So that's the next thing I'll be looking forward to after we get back.

Q. Is there a specific moment that you're going to remember most about this season?

JADA GUINN: Specific moment. I would say probably like the happiest moment was us winning the SoCon Championship because that's something that we talked about since the summer, and we've all worked so hard, the players, coaches, like all the time and effort that everybody has put into.

So that was probably the biggest moment for that, just being able to happen after everything that we've gone through this year.

SIGRUN OLAFSDOTTIR: Yeah, I agree when we won the championship just seeing how happy everyone is and seeing that we made it and what we've been talking about since summer and all the hard work got like -- I don't know the word. Sorry.

SHAWN POPPIE: Translation?

SIGRUN OLAFSDOTTIR: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, you're excused. Thank you very much.

We'll open the floor up for questions for Coach Poppie.

Q. Coach, can you speak to the defensive strategy tonight and particularly the choice to double River and maybe Collins a little bit as well?

SHAWN POPPIE: Yeah, obviously they're big, big everywhere. Not only to double but we really stayed in our gaps much longer than we normally do.

They're so athletic. And so for us was in a sense we talked about blocks and elbows so much, dig that thing out as much as we could, and rely on and hopefully contested jump shots for 40 minutes. And then we had the rebound. I don't think we did a great, great job. I thought we competed, but we didn't do a great job on the glass.

But if you would have told me that we'd come in here and hold them to 33 percent from the floor, 27 from the three and only 10 paint points, I think we had a pretty good chance to win.

So I thought we executed really well. They hit some shots. But we knew they were going to. They're good. You have to give up something. We're not roll the ball out as talented as they are. They're here for a reason. So we kind of picked, that was what we were going to try to give up.

I thought it, for the most part, worked. We just had to be a little bit better offensively to get some runs ourselves going. We could never put a handful of possessions together to push ourself forward.

Q. What explanation were you given prior to the second half when there was a change in one of the officials?

SHAWN POPPIE: That there was a change, and that was it. Yeah, so they literally just -- Laura Herron came and got me in the locker room and said they were making a change.

I don't know what happened. I didn't see anything specific. So I don't know what that was. I think it's maybe the second time in my career that's happened. But the other one there was an injury, so you knew. But this one, I'm not really sure.

Q. And as a follow-up to that, there was a standby official listed, but that person wasn't used, and that --

SHAWN POPPIE: Yeah, yeah. I wish I could talk more about it. I don't really know. I thought that's what standby was for. But I'm new to this thing too. We're all learning.

So I'm not exactly sure what happened.

Q. You guys were held to single digits for the first three quarters. Jada and Sigrun mentioned they felt like you guys got open looks. What was not working and clicking?

SHAWN POPPIE: Yeah, I think some of it was we didn't score a ton. We didn't shoot the ball well, but we also were trying to slow the pace down.

So back to our defensive strategy. Our offense was to try to run stuff. And then try to get looks. And we were going to have to space them out. Hindsight is 20/20. Maybe we should have tried to play a little bit faster. I thought we played faster in the fourth, and we scored 19. But I just wasn't sold if you were able to do that long term you'd get enough stops.

We got some decent looks early on. We didn't make enough of them. And I think a lot of that is their length. I think that whether they were there to affect us and/or you see just the bodies of how big they are coming at you, even if it's not contested, it just feels different.

And then inside. I mean, Jada, I don't know the last time she's went 5 for 15 from the floor. I think when she got in there, it was just a little different. She was sped up a rushed a little bit. Again, that's credit to NC State and their game plan and who they are.

So to beat somebody like this on the road, you're going to have to shoot the ball better. I think 37, 38 percent from the three on the year, then we go 3 for 15, that's not going to win games especially at this level.

Q. This a two-part of question, but can you talk about Jada specifically, the impact she's had on this season. I know Sigrun is still TBD if she's going to return. The season in whole, what legacy you think this team will leave for the program?

SHAWN POPPIE: I couldn't be more proud of Jada Guinn. She took a chance on us to leave Tennessee Tech, had over opportunities. With what we sold to her in the process of helping develop her game, hopefully reaching her goals of what she mentioned up here, to be a professional. I think that is going to be reached here in a few months.

But I tell you what, what you don't know in recruiting, especially someone out of the portal, is how special of a person they are. Coach Jon Goldberg had a relationship with her out of high school. So he knew a little bit about it, but I didn't realize how special she'd be. She's a 23-year-old grad student who gets along with the

18-year-old freshmen just as much as she gets along with the other seniors.

It took forever for me to convince her to be more aggressive and believe in herself more than we did. But when that happened, we saw a really special run through the tournament, the Southern Conference Tournament. And then ultimately all she wanted to do was win.

And I'll forever be indebted to her, as we were last year with Yazz. What everyone sees from the outside looking in is the stats and how special they were on the court, but they represent our university and our program in such a classy way. And I'm hopeful and I believe if you were to ask her, she'll forever call Chattanooga home, which means a lot to me.

I wish you would have asked Sigrun that question because she shared some good news with us in the locker room of coming back. But we'll let her talk about that another time.

Q. Wes Moore was in here earlier and was saying he was afraid the selection committee was going to put you two together because of the emotional stakes of it. When you saw the bracket, how did you feel? And what's it mean to come here and play against a coach that's meant a lot to this program?

SHAWN POPPIE: Yeah, it was -- as the selection was going on, you kind of felt here it comes. They like storylines, I guess, with Chattanooga. It's two years in a row we've had an interesting storyline.

I think the neat thing is to be able to -- we talk about our history quite a bit. If you look, we've won 20 tournament championships. You look up in the banners, and it's numbers after numbers after numbers.

You talk about a lot of the players, but sometimes you forget to talk about the coaches. We were able to spend a little time this week on how special Wes was for our program; that we are able to sell a lot of what's up in the rafters when we call and recruit. And obviously you saw our fan base. It means something in Chattanooga for women's basketball.

And he was a big part of that, not only a really good basketball coach, but why there's so many donors and fans that, however many years removed, he still means a lot to them because it's who he is. He's a good person. He's continued to be successful up here.

So it was neat for me to be able to share that with them. I'm not sold there was a ton of emotion from their side, because it doesn't mean as much, but it was neat for the

story for them to hear that.

And I think it was neat for a lot of our fan base, donors, alums, that are proud of what we're doing again, for us to come play their former coach. I got a lot of text messages and messages just in general through the week of how proud they are of where we're back to not only winning but how we're doing it.

And hopefully it's a reflection of what he did when he was here in Chattanooga. He's obviously done it here at NC State. You don't have 800-and-something wins if you aren't pretty good.

So it was fun to come back up here and have a chance to play here in his place, what they've built back here. I love my kids to death, but sometimes they can't explain themselves too much. But that place is amazing. You can't hear yourself think when that place gets rocking, when they go on a run.

So I think that's a really cool experience. And I think when they have a chance to sit back and reflect on what this day was and this week was, they'll remember how loud it was in there. It was a lot of fun.

Q. Coach, you mentioned the record. Obviously a lot of highs this season, not too many lows. What are you going to remember most about this team?

SHAWN POPPIE: Yeah. As a coach, 28 and 5, or whatever it is, I guess, when you take a look back, you probably should have enjoyed it more, the wins. And that's a lot.

But what I'll always remember is just that group of kids we have down there. There's just so many storylines. And I can go by each one, but Addie Grace Porter, a lot of people would count somebody like that out. Five-foot-four, doesn't maybe look the part, but I tell you what, she hurt her ankle so darn bad in the Southern Conference Tournament, she's been battling along the way to make sure she could play today. 29 minutes, she was plus/minus 0 on the court against the 13th best team in the country, whatever the number is.

That's who she is as a person. That's why we are who we are, her leadership. And that's just the example of the type of kids we have in that locker room. That's what I'll miss the most with this team and I'll remember the most, is how much they've grown up as people.

That's why I do this. That's why our staff does this. I think we do things the right way and try to build them up as people while we win games or try to win games. But when

we do things the right way and we can look in the mirror and grow, this group individually has grown more than any one I've been a part of. And when you do that collectively, we've had a lot of success.

I wish I could go back in time now and enjoy it a little bit more.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.

SHAWN POPPIE: Thanks so much for having us.

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