

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 1 Semifinal - Oregon State vs Notre Dame

Friday, March 29, 2024

Albany, New York, USA

Times Union Center

Oregon State Beavers

Scott Rueck

Timea Gardner

Raegan Beers

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Oregon State 70, Notre Dame 65

SCOTT RUECK: What do you say? That was a fantastic basketball game. I thought it was a great representation of who we are. It showed every bit of us, I thought. It wasn't always perfect, but we found a way. That's what this team has done all year as we've grown together so quickly. Who would have thought before the year that we'd be sitting here? Not many people off this podium and in the locker room, of course.

This is a special team, and they demonstrated every bit of that today, and I just couldn't be happier for them or more proud of them for the way they operate every minute of every day, the way they take care of each other.

As adversity came today, obviously Notre Dame is a great team and have a ton of talent, great defensive team, disrupted everything, took advantage of the mistakes we made, and the resilience of this group withstood that and made the plays when it mattered. We got the steal when it mattered. We hit the big three when it mattered. We executed late and made the free throws to separate.

Just a great win for our program, for Beaver Nation, and just so happy for everyone.

Q. Raegan, early on it seemed like you were having your way inside. Was there a moment early on where you felt as if this was a game you were going to be able to take command of in the paint?



RAEGAN BEERS: I feel like that started a couple days ago when we started practice, just watching them on scout.

We knew we had an advantage down low where at least getting it to the basket was going to be our main goal throughout this whole game, whether that was off the dribble, passing it to Timea inside or vice versa. So that kind of started earlier this week when we were trying to figure out who they were as a team and what we were capable of for the game today.

Q. Talked to your brothers a little bit in the stands. Your whole family was obviously ecstatic after the game, but they were talking about the toughness that you have that was instilled in you growing up with them and how excited they were for you. I wonder, the cul-de-sac, these games growing up in that family, how did that make you the player you are?

RAEGAN BEERS: They probably said it, but they just beat up, like brothers do. If any of you have brothers, I have one older and one younger, but they were both bigger than me pretty quick. They are both 6'5" now. And so once they passed me, they just continued to beat up on me, which was that brotherly love. Obviously my younger sister as well.

So that cul-de-sac was two-on-two basketball games, lots of scrapes, lots of bruises, turned into fights, but that's what brought me here today and that's what they're able to do down at Florida International, which is where they both play football. I'm just happy they got to come out. They had to ask their coach to skip practice one day, so I'm just glad they could make it.

Q. Timea, can you discuss the defensive mindset of this team?

TIMEA GARDNER: Yeah, I think having last year happen and us not exceeding expectations of what we could do with the core group, Talia, A.J. and us five now sophomores. We kind of knew in order for us to get where we wanted to go, we needed to key in on defense. All of us over the spring, over the summer and into this year came in with the mindset of understanding what we needed to accomplish defensively in order to win those



close games.

So this year that core group, we know what it takes now. So we know what it takes to win. We're obviously doing it, so it's super fun.

Q. For Gardner specifically, this is a big game. Clearly you guys felt that you could win this game, everybody in the locker room, but outside, just speaking from the East Coast perspective, we don't get to see Oregon State all the time. So everybody is now going to be seeing Oregon State at this point, because that wasn't just a normal Sweet 16 team, that was Notre Dame and Niele Ivey that you defeated. On a scale of 1 to 10, how big is that win for you guys?

TIMEA GARDNER: It's huge. We always believed in ourselves and what we could do, and a lot of people didn't know what we could do. We came in, we had nothing to lose, so we come in, we play our game, we play Oregon State basketball and we demonstrated that tonight, and we're not done yet.

Q. You talked yesterday about the trip for you guys as players you had to make across the country. What did you think of how the fans were able to make that trip too and bring the energy with them? How big of a part did that play?

RAEGAN BEERS: Our fans are phenomenal. Beaver Nation is absolutely incredible. We usually have a good traveling fan base and we saw a lot of them here tonight, but having our amazing band and cheer come along that do a phenomenal job, just helps us so much and just gives us that extra burst of energy when we hit a shot. That extra cheering in that section is just amazing. So we're thankful for each of them who made it out.

Q. Even though a lot of people on the East Coast don't understand, you guys are in the Pac-12. So you're facing JuJu and USC, you're facing UCLA, you're facing Stanford. So clearly the level of competition you're used to -- how much does that help you when you have to go into a conference tournament and then you've got to come into the big dance, and when you play a team like Notre Dame, how much does that experience help you playing those teams?

RAEGAN BEERS: I would just say it helps tremendously. Obviously you named the schools that we have to play night in and night out in the Pac-12. Some really amazing post presences and phenomenal guards, as you mentioned JuJu being one of them. So that just prepared us so well to compete with teams like Notre Dame tonight, who's another phenomenal team, who has some

phenomenal guards and that length down there.

Pac-12 is a great conference, powerful conference. We still have five of us here in the Sweet 16. So that shows what we have to play against every weekend over there. We are happy for the other teams that are here to support the Pac-12, but we were prepared for this and we're excited.

TIMEA GARDNER: Every night is the Pac-12 is a dogfight. It's so strategic, too. Every team is scouted to the T and you have to be able to counter the counters in order to be successful and to win games.

Playing so many different looks and different teams, different playing styles, too, it's prepared us for pretty much anything that is thrown our way. So I personally believe Pac-12 is the toughest conference in the country top to bottom, and it's definitely prepared us for what's to come.

Q. Raegan and Timea, at the start of the school year, basically the Pac-12 kind of broke apart, Oregon State won't have a conference home next year. How much of that is just maybe sort of the subtext of this season for you guys?

RAEGAN BEERS: That has been on our minds. Obviously we knew about the Pac-12 disbanding at the beginning of the season, but one of the most important things that we have focused on is staying present in the moment, and right now we're in the middle of the big dance, and we can't wait to play on Sunday.

TIMEA GARDNER: Yeah, touché.

Q. Maybe this is a, "are you glass half full or half empty guy" kind of question but are you more focused on shooting 60 percent from the field and outrebounding them 42-24 or the 26 to 5 turnover difference?

SCOTT RUECK: The final score, honestly. That's the thing. We are relatively young. I mean, throughout our roster. So this year has been managing things that are new.

For a teacher and a coach, that's been the joy of this entire journey for me is we've got all this talent. We've got incredible camaraderie and chemistry with this group from day one. That was evident.

Can we prepare them in a way to manage whatever is coming on whatever stage it might come? This team doesn't play young in many ways, but you've got to give Notre Dame a ton of credit for disrupting. We did look

young at times, of course, today, but the way this team has bought into the other end of the floor, like Timea was mentioning, the defense has carried us on those nights. And then the offensive execution when we do take care of the basketball. We shot 60 percent like you said and 40 from three or something like that. Those numbers are crazy against a team like Notre Dame.

We clearly -- that's been a point of emphasis all year, and it's one of those things that's just continuing to be a challenge in some ways, and certainly it's going to be tested as we go forward.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about what the defensive plan was against Hidalgo and how you executed that, and then on the offensive end, I assume you wanted to take advantage of your size and get down low, which is what you did early.

SCOTT RUECK: For sure. You're right on it. I think Hidalgo, she's their floor leader. She's got the ball in her hands more than anybody else, but man, you blink, we're getting hurt other places.

We've done a really good job this year with being disciplined in position defense, so the goal is make them miss. That's why we don't have a lot of steals. It took 39 minutes for us to get one I was told today.

But we made them miss a ton of shots and shoot below their average and score below their average because of it.

In a way, we don't pressure, but in a way we do because we're making you do something all game long you don't really want to do. That made them look as uncomfortable as they did. It made them kind of look around in the fourth quarter like, where do we go, do I shoot this, but I'm actually shooting out of the hand I don't want to shoot out of. So there's little things like that.

I hear all the time, you guys got lucky because they missed shots, and I would tell you, well, they're shooting the shots we want them to shoot and they don't normally shoot. So I would say, yeah, maybe that's lucky, but I know they're really uncomfortable shooting that. I played. I know. I know which way I want to go, and I know which way I kind of don't.

This team has bought into that.

But I've got to give our conference a ton of credit for that. That is how it is every night in our league. That's what Timea was mentioning.

On the other end of the floor, when you've got a force like

Rae, somebody with not only the strength and size that she has, but the agility and the hands that she has, you're playing through that person. There was a point where I thought we missed her too often early where we're like, just give her the ball, play through Rae, with you give them credit for making that difficult. Fortunately we have lots of other things we can go to. Lily hit huge threes, Timea was unbelievable. Just did what she does. Dono hit a couple huge shots and Talia play-made for us. We're not just the ratio for sure, but that is probably our highest percentage option.

Q. When they bottled up Beers, which wasn't often, and Timea, you guys had a nice offensive floor on the perimeter. Can you talk about the offensive flow and the offensive continuity throughout the game?

SCOTT RUECK: I wish it would have been a little cleaner. I would have loved that.

But Hidalgo is all over you. In the fourth quarter I was just thinking to myself, I wish I could help Dono a little bit more. Let's get the ball out of her hands a little bit more, and then Hannah would jump over to whoever brought it up and hound them. It wasn't easy, but great teams don't make it easy. You have to really work. Every dribble was challenged.

So the ball didn't move quite as well or as easily as I would have liked, and I don't know, that's why the game was the way it was, I guess, and the turnovers were the way they were.

This team, though, does pass very well. Last week against Nebraska we had 21 assists on 22 field goals, so the ball does move with us, and so that is who we are.

It's not just one person. That's not how we play. It's everybody, and it's spacing the floor and using the entire court to our advantage when we're playing like we want to.

Q. Do you know what happened with the nose ring because obviously where we were sitting we couldn't really tell what was happening with that. Do you think her being out of the game as long as she was combined with the way you played her defensively maybe took her out of her game?

SCOTT RUECK: That's the first I had heard about the nose ring. I was not aware of that. I didn't know any of those things until now.

I would say I thought we did a pretty good job defensively. I was really pleased. To make her go 4-of-17, those are the types of numbers that this team has forced our

opponents into all season long, and so that was in a way par for the course, and it's certainly not to take away from her. I just think our length and our discipline to stay in front of her was disruptive just like it was last week for Jaz Shelley, and has been -- I mean, JuJu went 6-of-32 in Gill Coliseum this year for the exact same reason. She's a great player, and it took everything we had to slow her down like that.

Q. Coach, can you talk to us a little bit about the 10-second violations, especially late in the game. What conversations you were having with the team to be able to stay the course given that situation.

SCOTT RUECK: Yeah, I thought my role at that time was not to be emotional for sure, not to pile on. Those were obviously unique. Did we have three? It felt like -- I know two for sure.

My comment was get it across. Let's go. They changed their press a couple of times, and that's maybe some of the youth I was mentioning. So are we running this press break or this press break? And I think that indecisiveness caused us to pause just a second too long.

And then their pressure is for real, and they did a great job of disrupting us, and when we crossed over, they were standing there waiting for us on that side. It just was tough.

That's something that we learned from, though. If we can still be learning this time of the year, and this team is, we just find something to improve upon from one game to the next, and that's certainly something we'll talk about after tonight or tomorrow.

Q. Scott, you talked about you're not a one-player show, but what does Raegan do that kind of sets the tone or gets the team going or exemplifies what you want to do?

SCOTT RUECK: Well, she causes trouble at the rim and she compromises defensive integrity is what I would say. It's really hard to defend her one-on-one, so when the ball goes inside, people typically have to help, or something good happens for us typically, she shoots 60 some percent.

So Rae not only is a good scorer down low, she's a great screener, and the pace of our offense really moves when she's out there. She's so quick. She pivots so well, maintains balance and then catches everything you throw at her. Because of that, she's a constant threat that I think teams really have to focus on from a global perspective. It's not just, hey, you've got her, take her out. It's like,

okay, how are we going to stop this kid, and we're going to have to give her different looks, and we're going to have to have to front, and maybe that hurts rebounding; we're going to have to send two, which gives up a three.

And then for us it's the challenge of moving it around and adapting as other teams adapt to us. If I were playing against her, it would give me a headache.

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