

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Maryland vs Iowa State

Friday, March 22, 2024

Stanford, California, USA

Maples Pavilion

Iowa State Cyclones

Bill Fennelly

Audi Cooks

Emily Ryan

Media Conference

Iowa State 93, Maryland 86

BILL FENNELLY: First of all, I thought that was one of most entertaining games I've ever been a part of. Certainly for the NCAA Tournament, certainly so proud of our team. Ecstatic for them. A little down because of Brenda and how well her team played but just a tremendous effort and really proud of the way we showed fight in the second half and made just enough shots to beat a really good team.

Q. I saw you pointing at something on the stat sheet. What were you pointing at?

EMILY RYAN: She dropped 40 on 20 shots. That's pretty eye-popping right there. It was a special night for her but, as well as our team, but couldn't have happened to a better person and I'm glad I get to share the court with her.

Q. That's when you were pointing out to her, how many field goals?

EMILY RYAN: (Nodding.)

Q. Down by 28 in the first half, what was the conversations at halftime and as you started chipping away at it, what was your confidence level that you could pull this off?

AUDI COOKS: At halftime coach told us what we do is up to us. The way that this falls, if this is how we want to go out, that's up to us. What happens on the floor is our responsibility. It's our fault. They can't play the game for us, and it was just a matter of pride just knowing that we weren't playing to our best abilities, and then going out



there showing what we can do and we did that.

Q. I saw you before the game, you kind of were off to the side during warmups and you closed your eyes and took a breath, a moment to yourself. What's going through your mind at that point, and then as the game is going on and you're cooking, what's that feeling, what's going through your mind as you're having that much success?

AUDI COOKS: Yeah (tearing) sorry.

Before every game, I just try to take a moment, and I pray, and I am kind of seeking guidance from my father. He passed away when I was 16 in 2021. I try to take a second and ground myself and tap into my spiritual side and just know that everything is going to be okay and he's got the best seat in the house.

What was the second part of that question? I'm sorry.

Q. Just as the game was going on what was working so well and what were you feeling?

AUDI COOKS: During the second half we switched up the defense a little bit and we brought a lot more intensity and that was working for us. We started out-rebounding a lot better, and we got outrebounded in the first half and the guards did a phenomenal job. I can't praise them enough getting the ball inside. This is a big night, not for me, but for Iowa State.

Q. 14 assists today, can you talk about the passing throughout, especially in the second half, and how you were so effective getting it to Audi and the three-shooters on the perimeter, and what made you guys so effective coming back down 20?

EMILY RYAN: Yeah, I think that's just a credit to the attention that Audi draws inside. When we throw it in there, she gets it every time and she finishes it so well, and when she gets rolling, they have to suck inside, and so the skip shots were open and the shooters were knocking them down the second half. People were executing really well in the second half and that's just kind of a credit to



where the coaches put us and putting us in the right spots, and putting us in places that we can be successful.

Q. Was it a matter of getting better three-point looks in the second half or shots that maybe weren't falling in the first half were falling in the second?

EMILY RYAN: I think it's a combination of both. I thought we were getting better looks in the second half. Started when we got on offensive rebound and easy kickout threes is when our momentum started rolling for us. When we are able to make extra plays, effort plays are what really drives this team. So I thought Kelsey came in and was a huge spark for us and she made huge plays for us.

Obviously it doesn't always show up on the stat sheet everything she contributes to the team but she was a huge spark for us today and got her momentum going, and so I think that was a big part of it.

Q. How much did you know you would accomplish tonight in terms of how many field goals, how many points and stuff like that until Emily showed you?

AUDI COOKS: I pretty much had zero knowledge. We don't accomplish anything until the buzzer sounds. That's kind of how I look at it. We just need to finish the job regardless of who has how many of whatever.

Q. What's your reaction to having that type of production tonight and reach some historic levels for Iowa State?

AUDI COOKS: Sure. Just grateful. I can't say thank you enough to the people that that I'm surrounded by. When you're surrounded by people that you love, that care about you that trust you as much as they do to get me the ball, that speaks volumes to how we play as a unit and yeah, just I bow down to the guards.

Q. Just the execution rate, coming out of halftime, to erase that deficit?

EMILY RYAN: Yeah, I think more so than technical basketball, this was more shilling through the lows. We just stayed connected. There was a lot of belief throughout.

And when it comes to March, you want to keep playing and be able to show up the next day and continue to be around this team because it's something special and you don't want it to end.

That's something you want to really remember when you're playing, and you don't want the season to end for your

seniors because it's their last go-around, too. So just trying to extend the season as long as possible so you can make more memories of March.

Q. Seemed like a few times in the second half where you were almost smiling before you were inside the three-point line. What's the feeling like when you are almost so confident even without the ball, is this like a confidence thing, if you get the ball, you know it's two points?

AUDI CROOKS: Not necessarily that. Just kind of taking what Coach Fenn said in the locker room. You don't get to do this again. You don't get the time back. I mean, you can feel sorry for yourself and say we're down 20, hang your head and give up or you can smile, enjoy it, and take every play with grace and utilize that to your advantage and that's just what I tried to do.

Q. Were you nervous for this big stage? You've been playing big games for a while but you just seemed to touch on what Alex said, so calm and even if your first shot didn't go in, you created a second chance, and just didn't ever seem fazed out there by their big lead or anything?

AUDI COOKS: I pride myself on being a cool, calm collected person. The most emotion you'll see out of me is when we're celebrating, or somebody makes a big shot; I'll be going crazy in that case. It's super important, and it's not talked about enough, the body language in basketball that tells a lot about yourself, your team, your culture. And just to be able to control your emotions and fight through adversity, it's not talked about enough and that's just something that I value and that this team values and that everybody should value.

Q. We saw a quick glimpse on TV of you getting to place the nameplate on the bracket into the next round. What did that feel like?

AUDI COOKS: That was so fun. My teammates soaked me in water. I'm sorry whoever sits in this chair next. It was just a lot of fun, and I'm just excited to be able to have another game with these girls, with this group. This is a special team and I just didn't want it to end.

Q. With a young team, they don't have a lot of history or context about going down in an NCAA Tournament game and not coming back. Was this your halftime speech, was it easier with a younger team because they don't have a lot of history to go on?

BILL FENNELLY: I think that's a great point. They don't know what they don't know. You can tell with Audi's

personality, they just go play. The message at halftime was: There wasn't really a basketball discussion.

It was more about, you know, we talk, when we leave the building, is your head up, are your eyes open, do you have a smile on your face, is your heart full, because you did your best. And we did not do our best in the first half, and that's a credit to Maryland, and that's all I said.

When you walk out, the scoreboard is going to go dark, but you're going to take some things with you. And I think they just made that decision the second half. Obviously the game changes when you make some shots. But our freshmen have been that way all year, they really have. This stage just doesn't seem too big for them, and you know, we'll see what happens Sunday, or whatever day we play.

But they have handled it that way all year.

Q. Where does Audi's performance rank in terms of individual accomplishments you've seen during your time here?

BILL FENNELLY: Well, I would say it's obviously one of the best I've ever seen considering the points, the efficiency, the venue, the event. Probably the last one I saw was on the other way when Jaina Pell (ph) put 46 on us in a regional game. That was probably the last time I saw something like that. We've had a lot of great performances, but I think in its totality, it was pretty impressive.

Q. What was it like going against Coach Frese, former assistant coach, first time Maryland and Iowa State have faced off in program history for both teams? What was that like, regardless win, lose or draw what was that experience like?

BILL FENNELLY: Awful. Awful. Brenda is part of my family. As excited as you are for your players and your fans, you look down at the other bench and their emotions are a little different right now. I know that's what the tournament is about, and it's a story. But it's -- yeah, it was all of.

Q. Can you talk about the emphasis all season on your players getting the ball to awed in a position where she can be successful? The passes, they really know where to get her the ball so she's got a good look.

BILL FENNELLY: We worked really hard on that. Early in the year, we were not sure the best way to go about it. But I think what happens is, because of the positions she can

get, Audi has amazing hands. So it's like a wide receiver. It's like my man, Austin (ph), we used to throw to Iowa State receivers, like hey, I know my guy is going to catch it.

And we have multiple people that can make the passes. Obviously Emily does most of it. But Addy Brown has been really good. And when people spread the court on us.

So we spend -- and for us, it's been a learning curve because we have not had a true low-post player in our program for 25 years. And so it's been something we've all had to learn, and Audi has been really patient with us. She's patient with her teammates.

You know, we stow a lot of stuff, just simple stuff from high school. You know, how do they get rid of the ball, what's the angle. It's not anything big but it's something that we've had to really adapt into our team.

Q. Audi mentioned a defensive switch that you guys made after the first quarter. It looked like Maryland were getting a lot of open threes in that first quarter. Can you speak on what exactly that defensive switch was that shut down their offense the rest of the way?

BILL FENNELLY: In the first half, it's the scouting report. It's death for an assistant coach when Allie Kubek goes 7 for 8 from the three-point line and she's made 13 all season. That is like the worst thing ever.

So we had a hard time guarding her because they were picking and popping and Audi doesn't guard in space a lot. Second half we switched a lot more. We kept Audi around the basket. We tried to chase a couple shooters and then gapped the other guys. It wasn't anything crazy. We just made the decision to keep Audi closer to the basket and rotate around her rather than the first half, we were trying to play it a little more straight up, and Brenda ran some good stuff.

And you know, I think there was one time someone on our bench goes, "She's got to miss once." I think she was seven or seven or something. It was incredible. Two or three of them, I don't think the net moved, she was so open. That was the big adjustment.

It helps us because we can keep people close to the basket and our goal was to not let them shoot a lot of free throws and guard certain people, which means, someone else is open, and you know, the threes that Allie got, that's my fault. That was the game plan, to guard the free throw line and the other kids, and to her credit, Brenda's credit, they made us pay for it early.

Q. Audi just spoke about body language and the importance of having joy and just being a about sport out there. She showed that. How do you think she is so poised at such a young age, and to do that and honor her father and all the things she's gone through?

BILL FENNELLY: Well, I think, first of all, if you met her mother, you'd know. Her mother is an amazing woman. Audi grew up in a small town in Iowa, private school, and I think has been someone that was completely embraced by the community. She knew at an early age that she was going to be viewed and had the opportunity to do some things. She sang. Like every place we go on the road, she's playing in the drums in shootaround. She's just one of those people. I mean, you listen to her speak at 18 years old, it's incredible.

But it's her mother. It's her belief and her faith. She actually committed to us shortly after her father passed, and I think that was the thing that she really felt was something that she wanted to do. He was an Iowa State fan growing up and that probably was the big thing.

But she's like that all the time. She's always smiling. She loves life and it's been good for all of us, especially this old guy that's in the fourth quarter of his career.

So it's fun to be around someone like that every day.

Q. The question I asked Emily about three-point shots, better looks in the second half or knocking them down? And then I read that you frequented a restaurant that Audi liked as part of the recruiting process.

BILL FENNELLY: Yes.

Q. Will you share the name of the restaurant?

BILL FENNELLY: Cinco de Mayo. I don't even like Mexican food. When you recruit Audi Crooks, you go to a Mexican restaurant, a lot.

As far as the shots go, I think we did have better looks in the second half because they were kind of collapsing a little bit more, and I think the other thing that happens is, for us, you can get a transition three once in a while. We finally stopped them maybe once or twice and got a transition. It's tough to get a transition basket or good look when you're taking the ball out of the net all the time.

So when we finally got some stops, ran it up the court and hit a skip pass or two, Kelsey, Hannah hit some big ones, Emily hit some. I think it was more coming off of our

defense being better.

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