

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Iowa State vs Stanford

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Stanford, California, USA

Maples Pavilion

Iowa State Cyclones
Coach Bill Fennelly
Audi Crooks
Addy Brown
Emily Ryan
Media Conference



Q. Emily, any thoughts? Is that a way that maybe without even realizing it, more eyes could come to your team?

EMILY RYAN: Yeah, yeah, I echo what Audi said. Any time you can bring different eyes to the women's game specifically it's special. There is a lot of momentum around the women's game right now, and so to see this continue and have Audi be a big part of that is really special.

We just want to continue to move the ball forward.

Q. Emily, looked like over behind the bench you had a ton of family. How many people made the trek? And I understand your dad made quite the haul driving.

EMILY RYAN: I think I filled out nine tickets, so nine family members here. My dad isn't a fan of flying, so he made the 25-hour drive by himself while the others flew.

So I'm just super grateful to have a family that supports me like that and they're always right behind me. Just be able to experience all this with them and for them to come along on the ride, it's something special and something that we cherish.

Throughout the years I've been here we have been able to see a lot of different places that we never would've been able to see. I'm just glad that they get to experience it as well.

Q. You said nine. Is that all family or just some friends, too? What's the makeup of the group?

BILL FENNELLY: That's my four siblings, mom, dad, and soon-to-be sister-in-law, and then Godfather.

Q. Audi, what did you think about the matchup with Cam Brink and Kiki Iriafen, and what do you think about their games? Are you looking forward to going up against them?

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah, they're both really good players. Stanford is obviously a great program. It'll be interesting. I

Q. Audi, just curious, how do you possibly follow up a performance like last night?

AUDI CROOKS: I'm just going to stick to the game plan. I say this in every interview. Do whatever I can, and take whatever opportunities that come to me. Last night obviously that was interesting, so I'm -- not every game is going to be like that.

However, I'm just going to take what the team gives.

Q. The Des Moines police, their post, you know, Audi, we can laugh about it, but just talking to Tara VanDerveer that could reach some non-basketball fans. That could bring some eyes or maybe an audience that brings even more attention to your sport and program. I guess I'm thinking big picture here.

It was clever, right?

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah.

Q. What was your thoughts on that and what did that mean to you?

AUDI CROOKS: I thought it was pretty funny.

Cool that the police department is watching and is noticing. And like you said, that does draw a lot attention to our program and to women's basketball.

So I think it's just a positive thing overall.



think it'll be a fun matchup because Maryland didn't necessarily have a lot of size down low or on their team in general, and this team is kind of the opposite of that.

We'll just have to adjust and I'm just going to continue to do what I do.

Q. Along those lines, even Emily, for not just in the post, but players who are attacking the basket, and your team likes to do that, Addy as well. How do you brace for the shot blocking ability in the paint on that team with two premier shot blockers and just continuing to focus on what you do to attack without necessarily letting them fluster you or alter what your plan.

ADDY BROWN: Kind of reminds me growing up playing against my sister who was way taller than me and swatted my shot all over the place. No, they're really good shot blockers inside, especially Cameron. Just got to be smart and ready for that. Know she's going to come over.

Can't be afraid of that. Got to stay aggressive and also be ready to find kicks to the outside for open shots. Kennedy Brown.

Q. For any of you guys, obviously this year you have five freshmen in your nine-player rotation that is out there every game. Been through all this adversity, down 20, make the comeback, into the round of 32. Is there any sense -- obviously the confidence has grown -- but you're playing with house money and got nothing to lose going into the game on Sunday?

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah, I think that's kind of how we view every matchup. Go into it and just know you got to give your all regardless of what might happen, regardless of the number next to your name. Doesn't matter if you're ranked or not. You just got to continue to do what you do and we just try to approach every game with the mindset of the result should be -- should represent just us being our best selves, playing our game, and we just try to do that every night.

Q. Addy, the Big XII is a deep conference. The way that Stanford brings two post players that are elite level talents, is there anybody you can think of that you guys have faced this season that compares to them in that way?

ADDY BROWN: I wouldn't say, no, not in the Big XII, as far as two. We definitely see one. They're unique in having two post players and kind of do the same thing, so it'll be a new look for us.

Q. Emily, since they're freshmen, anybody you can think of in your career that has come close to what they can present as a challenge inside?

EMILY RYAN: Yeah, I think my early years Texas had a couple bigs at one time, so I think that's kind of something that is similar. But there is not another player that's like Cameron Brink. She's kind of one-of-one. That's something that will be interesting to play against and something we'll have to adjust to on the fly.

Once you're in the NCAA tournament you're oftentimes playing teams you've never seen before and in conferences where they play a little bit different. That's the fun part of this time of the season, it's a different game is you're seeing different people. We will definitely have to embrace that challenge tomorrow.

Q. Audi, what have the last 12 hours or whatever since the game been like for you? Because seemed like there was a ton of people on social media praising you, you end up on Sports Center. What's your reaction been like to the impact it had, and then what's some of the coolest things you've seen online. Like Aaliyah Boston.

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah, like you said, social media, once they get ahold of something it's out there and it kind of went all over all the platforms. It's been cool to see the support and just people starting to recognize the greatness of our program, of women's basketball as a whole.

I'm not going to take too much credit, because like I said, none of that would've happened without these people here. But, yeah, like Aliyah Boston, Candace Parker, Isiah Thomas. Those are really big people, great names, just to know that they're watching and they notice us hooping.

Like I feel like the world is paying a lot more attention to women's basketball, as they should. I'm just happy to be a part of that.

Q. Audi, I think Maryland, they were kind of playing you, fronted you a little bit, and maybe providing help from the backside. Do you expect Stanford to maybe play you a little bit differently now that obviously you had the game you had?

AUDI CROOKS: Sure. We've seen multiple things from them. They front other players, but I've also seen them try to do one-on-one in the paint. Early on we're just going to look and see what they do and we'll adjust accordingly.

Q. Emily, want to ask, Addy just mentioned when they're going to be packing the paint there will

opportunities for kickouts. Out on the perimeter, what's your mindset? Kind of what do you think to be best prepared when you know there will be those opportunities?

EMILY RYAN: Yeah, I think all year we played best when we play inside-out, trying to get the ball inside, and then when they double in and send a lot to the post, they do a great job kicking it out. That's when we get our best looks from the three-point line. That will be important for us to try to get it inside out.

If they are sending in two right way, just skip passes a lot of time are open. I think a big thing is staying shot ready. We have a lot of people that can hit shots, so just shooting it with confidence.

Q. I'll make this a question for Addy. Just from your perspective, how nice is it to have a game under your belt in this gym, this environment? How much does that help psychologically to already have played a game in Maples and get a feel for the place?

ADDY BROWN: It helps a lot. We had some nerves early on and I think that helped kind of get some of those nerves out for the first game. Definitely feel more confidence going into the second game in the arena with the lights and all the different atmosphere.

It's a big part just to have that one under our belt moving onto the next game.

Q. When new players come in and freshmen and mix with upperclassmen, it doesn't always come together right way. This group seems to have just the right balance of great chemistry. Just watching you for one night. But how has that all been so seamless I guess? Or has it been over the months to incorporate some freshmen starters and for everybody to take on their roles?

EMILY RYAN: Yeah, I don't think "seamless" is the right word to put on this type of the season. It's one of those seasons where you just show up every day and do what we can to improve.

There has been a lot of ups and a lot of downs. That's what's fun about this team, we embrace each challenge with each other rather than embracing it by ourselves.

So I think that's made us grow a lot throughout the season. Honestly, age on this team it's not an important thing. That's part of what comes with having five freshmen. Everyone shows up every day and does their part regardless if you're a senior or a freshmen or how long

you've been in this program.

So I think it's just a matter of doing your job every single day. Everyone has embraced their role and not trying to do too much or shy away from their spot.

I think that's super important for us. The coaches have done an excellent job putting us in places we can be successful.

Q. Audi, it was pretty hilarious, to me, maybe to others too, when Nyamer was coming with you to the TV table after the game and is screaming to the announcer. What was that like when she was doing that for you to the people who were probably aware that you had 40 points?

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah, no, it just means a lot. Like everybody has their night once in a while, you know, so that just happened to be my night. Ny was probably, I don't know, maybe even more excited than anybody else in that gym. She was happy. She was giving me hugs. She was letting everybody know, even though I think the announcers, like you said, already knew.

She is just a lot of fun. It just feels good to have that support from teammates.

Q. This is up for grabs. I don't care who answers this question. Like rebound grab it. Talk about what is your favorite part about being an Iowa State Cyclone, something people here in the Bay Area don't know about Iowa State that they should know?

ADDY BROWN: I'll say my favorite part is the culture. I don't know if you guys have seen our home game crowds. They pack it every night in Hilton. Just being able to like go to Walmart and have five fans come up to you and tell you how much they love seeing you play, it's a big thing for us, and that's kind of why I picked Iowa State was because of fans and the coaching staff.

They just go a great job and it's fun to play in front of that crowd night in, day out. Yeah.

AUDI CROOKS: Juicy wiggling.

ADDY BROWN: Can we get it queued? Somewhere around the third quarter preferably.

Q. Bill, I was just kind of wondering, the spotlight shined so much towards Audi last night after what she was able to accomplish. Do you think she -- that type of play and just the type of person she has gives her an opportunity to maybe become one of the next big

faces of women's basketball?

BILL FENNELLY: Wow.

Q. That's pretty powerful.

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, I don't think there is any question that Audi has the opportunity and the platform to impact our sport. She's a very talented player, very well spoken, I think understands the opportunity in front of her. She's kind of been that way through high school and stuff.

So, yeah, that's a pretty big bar to think about but I do think the sport is always looking for people like that. There is a lot of great freshmen in our country. But her numbers warrant that. Her play warrants that. Her personality.

So I think she's someone that could step into that spotlight and handle it really well.

Q. How are you guys doing health-wise? Looked like Hannah was loading up last night. She good to go and everybody else?

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, everyone is pretty good. Hannah is going to have a mask on. She got hit pretty good at the end of the game. It's not broken, but it's pretty sore, so she'll -- the nose thing. So she'll have her little mask on. Not real happy about that.

Everyone else is pretty good. Obviously tired and the pace of game and we played a lot of kids a lot minutes, but everyone is ready to go.

Q. Random question: I know you're a big fan of Brock Purdy's. You still have Purdy in the playbook, right?

BILL FENNELLY: Yes, sir.

Q. Have you talked to him since you've been out here?

BILL FENNELLY: No. We contacted the football office, but we have not -- my grandson got the opportunity last night to go see Tyrese Haliburton play, so that was kind of cool. Got a picture with Tyrese.

No, Austen Arnaud was here last night, dear friend of our family's and a great athlete at Iowa State. Lives in the Bay Area, and so he was here. That was kind of cool to see him and his bride Chelsea. That was nice of him to come.

Q. I'm just wondering how not many people in the country who are like Cam Brink and they have such a presence in the paint that it makes people question whether or not they can get their shots around the rim.

How do you sort of, I don't want to say alter your offense around that, but how do you communicate to your players that there is this big shot block being presence, but you still have to go up with your shots either way?

BILL FENNELLY: No, it's a great question. We talked about it a lot today in our meeting, and basically Cameron Brink blocks a lot of shots and she's going to block them tomorrow. Don't feel about bad about it. You got to go to the basket. Got to make plays.

Can you get a fall on her if she blocks it out of bounds our run an in-bounds play? I think we've always tried to balance that a little bit. Kind of goes back to when we played against Brittney Griner for four years. You have to be smart about it, but you cannot shy away from that, because once you do that, then it's one thing to block shots, it's another thing to change the game thinking people are going to block shots.

So we don't want to play that way. You know, she'll get a few tomorrow and hopefully not too many.

Q. I know you have heard us write it in every which way possible through the season, but playing five freshmen with all the adversity you went through, especially in the non-conference, to be here, to come off a game where you came back from a 20-point deficit, does it feel like, or I guess could it loosen up your team a little bit more kind of playing with house money right now at this point in the season?

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, that's probably true, but I would say -- and you guys have seen them -- our team is pretty loose. It's just their personality. I do think when you get into the NCAA tournament, the pressure to win the first game is really, really hard.

Obviously we didn't win the first game last year. No matter what you do, obviously I'm not a big, you know, you have nothing to lose. Yeah you do. You have a game to lose and seasons to ends.

I don't buy into that, but I do think our kids, they understand. They're smart. We're playing one of the best teams in the country in their building. I don't think anyone is going to go into it besides my grandson probably picking us to win. That's what this tournament is about.

We have to play 40 really good minutes. It's not a best four out of seven. Our kids are excited. They know the opportunity in front of them. We'll show up and compete and try and find a way to score on them and guard them. We haven't really figure that had one out yet. We'll keep

trying.

Q. Is that looseness a characteristic of the newage athlete or did you just find five really loose freshmen that come in with the chemistry they have?

BILL FENNELLY: I don't know. That's a good -- I don't know if it's the new way, but or five freshmen, that's their personality. And obviously Audi's is really that way.

All of them just I think really understand and enjoy the opportunity to play. So, yeah, that's who they are as human beings and they've transferred it to the court.

It's been a fun experience for all of us, and you can tell. End of practice they're all out there dancing and other kids, all they want to do is shoot. You know, that's the nature of the beast.

But the freshmen are definitely enjoying life.

Q. Last night you talked a little bit about Audi's ability to catch those entry passes and her good hands. Are there other aspects of her game that are underrated?

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, I think her footwork is really good. You know, I think for a young post player, when you talk about can you catch it and can you do your work -- we say do your work ahead of time. You know, get your angle, post up, know where you want the ball. She does a really good job of that.

There is times we've had to work with her really hard about we got to roll her into the post a little bit more. Trying to move her around a little bit more. You know, make her -- set a screen and receive a screen kind of thing. Her footwork and positioning is really good.

She came to us with that. God blessed her with great hands and great feet. These are two pretty good things to have if you're a big kid.

Q. I was told by somebody who was watching on broadcast that they mentioned you're trying to fight to keep your voice in as good of shape as possible.

BILL FENNELLY: Yes, sir.

Q. Would you mind telling us the story behind this and what those methods are?

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, usually at the end of the year my voice isn't the best, like most coaches. I had throat cancer a few years ago, and at the end the year I have some issues. So I tried -- on selection day I really couldn't talk at

all and everyone was really excited and happy. It's like, good.

But, I mean, we use a lot of dry erase boards. My doctor at home is like texting me like don't talk unless you have to.

I use a microphone at practice. I usually don't when by myself if my wife isn't there, but when she is there I do so she sees it. I got introduced to -- I don't do coffee, hot drinks. Got introduced to medicine ball at Starbucks. It's called a medicine ball. It's like a hot tea kind of thing. It's awful.

But I chugged about four or five of those a day, and then on St. Patrick's day, you know, probably thought about a little Irish whiskey. Whatever I can -- you know, and I'm living on cough drops which really stinks.

Q. (No microphone.)

BILL FENNELLY: I'm not supposed to drink diet soda during the games, but, yes, I do. (Laughter.) I probably consume about -- God, my wife is going to kill me. I drink about 12 plus diet Mountain Dew's a day on a normal day. So, yeah. That's --

Q. Do you sleep?

BILL FENNELLY: Not much. No, I don't sleep much. No. I keep my wife up a lot. Yeah. I'm going to be in trouble.

Q. I was curious, looking at your bio, you went to William Penn University, which is a Quaker religious institution. Just how did kind of your experience in a Quaker university and that unique environment shape you as person and a coach and your overall kind of philosophy? Sounds like a unique kind of place to study at.

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, honest with you, I went to William Penn. I'm not of the Quaker faith. I went there because I had the chance to be a student assistant coach.

But it's very small, private school. I really enjoyed tournament. I went to a really -- for Iowa I went to a really large high school, so really small private school. Really enjoyed it, and got exposed to my current profession.

So I think not so much the Quaker influence, but the influence of being in a really small, close-knit university community was good for me.

Probably good thing I didn't go to a major university. I don't know if I would've graduated. A lot of my buddies took a long time to get through college. What it cost me, I had to

get through it quick. It was more the closeness of the community there.

Q. Coach, I think for Stanford, a lot of times they like to get in and out of transition, do a lot of rim running. In the Norfolk State game hit a lot threes in transition before the defense was set.

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, thanks a lot. You're making me feel really good right now. Anything else they don't do well?

Q. You know, I guess is there sort of a plan to maybe stop them from that transition and fast break offense?

BILL FENNELLY: I think the best way -- at least for us -- is when we talk about transition defense, it starts with your offense.

So good shot selection, no live ball turnovers, hopefully make a few shots where they have to take the ball out of the net.

But, yeah, it's a hard thing because they're going to get some stuff, but I do think our offense has to be really efficient. They're so precise in what they do, how they defend. Their length is a real problem inside and outside.

So, yeah, we're going to have to do some things and gamble a little bit, and like any game, you hope that the kids that are great shooters don't have a great night and you hope a couple of the guys on your team that maybe have struggled a little knock a few in.

That's the nature of this event. That's what we're hoping for tomorrow.

Q. How would you possibly use all the information you just gave you so we don't get your doctors and wife and everybody else. Do you have an NIL with a cough drop company?

BILL FENNELLY: No, I'm the only one that doesn't have an NIL anymore. No, I've been married a long time, so thank God there was no portal when I was first married. Damn, my wife would've been gone a long time ago. She might have had the first NIL deal ever. She's doing okay.

No, it's okay. We're used to it.

Q. On a different lighthearted note, the Des Moines police posted this. You saw that?

BILL FENNELLY: Yes, ma'am.

Q. Audi got a kick out of it and her teammates. Tara also kind of touched on how maybe this brings this kind of attention brings some fresh eyes to the women's games and to your program, draw in some more fans for women's basketball.

BILL FENNELLY: I agree. In our state we have a kid name Caitlin Clark, so we've seen that. Now you have Audi, and the person who did it for the Des Moines Police Department is a really good friend of ours and does a great marketing thing. They come came up with that idea.

Those are the things that I think transcend just the game and you see people in a different light, people get a kick out of it, and it loosens people up.

I just think that you can have fun with it in such a way that I think everyone can benefit from. Yeah, anything -- I've always said the greatest thing about the NCAA tournament is not the way stated women's basketball team or our players are if the tournament, it's a showcase on a national stage for our university and community.

And so when you have stuff like that that people mention, it's nothing but positive. Not just for Audi, certainly, but for our community and our state.

Q. Which give us a name on your friend?

BILL FENNELLY: It's Paul Parizek is his name. We call him 5-0, that's his nickname. Great dude.

Q. Are you always this did he light.

BILL FENNELLY: Sure. Can we get that in the minutes?

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