

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - South Dakota State vs Oklahoma State

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Storrs, Connecticut, USA

Gampel Pavilion

South Dakota State Jackrabbits Coach Aaron Johnston Madison Mathiowetz

Brooklyn Meyer

Media Conference

South Dakota State 74, Oklahoma State 68

THE MODERATOR: Joining us from South Dakota State, Aaron Johnston, student-athletes Brooklyn Meyer and Maddie Mathiowetz. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

AARON JOHNSTON: Really proud of our team. Obviously you get a chance to play again in the NCAA Tournament, and to make it to the Round of 32 is an incredibly difficult thing to do any time, and we've had a chance to do it a couple of times.

It's great. Winning is fun. Winning is fun. I think know knows that and agrees with that, but just those moments of celebration, those moments of joy you get to share with people you spend a lot of time with in a locker room or wherever it might be, those are pretty special times.

A chance to play again is great. We're looking forward to it. It's obviously going to be a big challenge against Connecticut, but really happy that our group had that moment to really come together and celebrate something that they worked incredibly hard for today, but for a long period of time.

So happy we get a chance to play again.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Brooklyn, you guys are down 7 at half. I think you fell down by 11 at one point. What changed? It seemed like things turned, and then you kind of



dominated the rest of the way.

BROOKLYN MEYER: Yeah, I feel like we just had to dig in on defense and keep rebounding. Then on offense I feel like we had to, you know, move a little better without the ball and just play better together. Once it got a little smoother, I think that's when things started to work for us.

Q. Can you speak to the team's composure on the floor in those final two minutes when the game was going back and forth, Oklahoma had two or three good shots, then you guys came back? Can you just speak to how you guys held that composure?

BROOKLYN MEYER: Yeah. I mean, we work on situations like that in practice, and I feel like we have some veteran players, and we have some younger ones too. I feel like just staying together and making sure we're all on the same page is just really good for us in moments like that.

Q. Madison, in the second half you were being extra aggressive attacking the basket. Can you talk about what you were seeing from the defense that allowed you to penetrate the basket the way you were doing?

MADISON MATHIOWETZ: Yeah, I thought in the first half, we talked at halftime, maybe we weren't being as aggressive and confident as we know we can be. In that second half I think things started to open up a little bit that allowed us to be more aggressive, and we just stayed confident and did what we know how to do best. That allowed us to get to the hoop and score in ways we knew we needed to.

Q. Brooklyn, what was the post battle like, because at the beginning it seemed like you kind of struggled a little bit? You were getting pushed around and then you sort of doubled down and just really dominated for the rest of the game.

BROOKLYN MEYER: Yeah. I mean, it was physical in there. They have some really good posts. Yeah, I just feel like, yeah, it was really physical and just trying to read the defense and make the right moves.



Q. For both of you, just from a player's perspective, you come in as the No. 10 seed. You may not care. Clearly it doesn't matter. Do you feel from the inside looking out, do you feel like you're playing with house money because maybe OSU is a little bit more recognized, they get a little bit more air time, they're supposed to come in and win a game like this, whereas you guys came in and you buckled down in the second half and you showed them why you belong in this tournament? Did you feel like you were playing with house money playing this game today?

MADISON MATHIOWETZ: I think that coming into the tournament, we just knew that we were excited to get this opportunity and to play in these games, and we just wanted to come in and show what we are capable of as a team and to represent our university well. Today I thought we did that.

Q. Madison, in that third quarter could you kind of feel the momentum shifting and maybe feel that they were kind of giving it away and you guys were taking it?

MADISON MATHIOWETZ: Yeah, I think through that whole game it was a battle, and they could make shots at any time. So I don't know that I ever felt we really had it, but I do think that our confidence was on the rise and we were playing our basketball. We knew we could win it at that point.

Q. As soon as you guys won, you ran to the other side of the court to celebrate with your fans. Talk about the importance of that. There were a lot of them there, and they were really loud. Talk about what that meant to you guys.

BROOKLYN MEYER: Jackrabbit Nation travels well, and it's awesome to have all our families and our fans there. Just to hear them cheer us on, we're a long ways from home, but it's just really special to have all those people there for us.

Q. Can you tell me a little bit about the celebration in the locker room? I walked by, and you guys were really celebrating. You were ecstatic about it. Can you talk about the celebration and what it means to make it this far with this group of girls?

MADISON MATHIOWETZ: Yeah, I think we just love each other so much and have just such a tight-knit group. We wanted to come into this tournament and win a game, win a few games. That's our goal.

Coach came in and kind of surprised us a little bit. We

didn't think he was excited, and then we were. We were really excited. We're just happy to be here.

Q. Madison, I know you answered this before, but the first half you had no points. As a shooter, as a guard, what's your mindset going into this? Do you continue to shoot? Does Coach say something to you at halftime to say, Don't worry about that, just keep doing what you're doing? Is it a little bit of both? If you could just elaborate.

MADISON MATHIOWETZ: Yeah, I think in the first half a lot of our teammates were making really big plays, and Paige, Timmer, Brooklyn, everybody was making shots. In the first half it wasn't my time, but in the second half opportunities came and just took advantage of them. Coach and our whole staff just is always supportive of us throughout games trying to tell us to play our game.

Q. The offense has a lot of movement, and I saw a lot of picks being set and a lot of movement. It looked like it was causing some problems for Oklahoma State University. You can either shoot the jumper or pass it down low. Can you just talk a little bit about your offense and the movement that you guys have in it?

BROOKLYN MEYER: We try to share the ball really well, and I feel like we're playing our best when we share the ball. Yeah, I just feel like we have a lot of assets on the offensive side. Yeah, just shooting when you are open and passing when you're not.

THE MODERATOR: Maddie, Brooklyn, thank you. Questions for Coach.

Q. Someone mentioned that you guys went down by 11 at one point. It's an experienced team. Do you have to say anything to them when you guys get in a hole like that, or is it kind of a player-led team? If you did, what did you say?

AARON JOHNSTON: I don't ever feel like there's some big speech or timeout or big halftime talk that has to flip the switch with the group. I think everybody watching would say at times we didn't play well, but we were really composed. I didn't feel like there was ever a time where we looked rattled and got out of our comfort zone.

I think composure is something we've had all year. I know we've had a lot of close games. Our record might indicate differently, but we've had to win a lot of the close games. You mentioned it too. We have a lot of players that have been in this experience before, which is helpful I think. I think for us it's us trying to figure out what we feel like is going to work.



We had some things in the first half we just didn't do well. Some of that's we've got to play a little bit better, but some of this is we've got to find some better actions and better options to put ourselves in a better spot too. So I think we just are a team that always hangs in there, keeps plugging, and tries to figure out what we can get to that is going to be more effective.

Q. You guys have had a lot of strong third quarters this season. What do you think today was -- what happened in the third quarter where you guys were able to take the lead?

AARON JOHNSTON: Like I just said, I think in the first half we were probably playing in the outer thirds a lot offensively, and that just wasn't super productive. You mentioned Maddie getting going in the second half. Part of it was we got more in the middle of the floor with different ball screen actions with some different people. So we really played I think out of the middle third a lot more in the second half, and that created a little bit better spacing and some more options.

The first half they always had two people in the lane, and Brooklyn didn't have space. In the second half she had more space just because I thought we played in that middle third and just spread them out a little bit more. So I think some of her shots and some of her options were better in the second half.

Really, I think the team's mindset in the second half was really good too. In the first half we were pretty passive, hoping Paige and Brooklyn were going to make a lot of plays. Everybody else kind of maybe watching. The second half I thought we had a group of young women that all played a lot more assertively, and that helped us too.

Q. Coach, when you saw Brooklyn go out and do what she did in the latter stages of the game after Magassa had eight blocks early on, how does that speak to her as a player with what she stayed after and accomplished late in the game?

AARON JOHNSTON: Yeah, Brooklyn is really determined, really talented. That first half is not a good indicator of Brooklyn. Those that have watched her or followed her, she's one of the best post players in the country. She really is. She's had big games all year.

It's no surprise to us or to Jackrabbit fans. She is capable of really playing well and everybody saw that the second half. I think for her it's just trying to find the right space where she can feel comfortable and kind of use both sides of the lane rather than being stuck on one side. As she felt

comfortable, boy, I mean, she was a handful down there for sure.

Q. Aaron, Madison really got going there in the third quarter, and it seemed like she sort of maybe took things into her own hands a little bit almost. Then it seemed to me like you could visibly see the confidence growing... Brooklyn going in the middle, Paige taking the midrange. Did you sense that? Did you feel the players gaining their confidence and that turning the tide in the game a little bit?

AARON JOHNSTON: For sure. Maddie's play was so important for us for sure. Her getting going offensively just took pressure off of a few of our other players I thought. Maybe that sense that, hey, it's not going well. We've been down. I've got to press. I've got to do more. Just that other breath of offense was huge for us.

Then it did. It opened the doors to so many good plays. I thought we really played well. We took better care of the ball in the second half. I think we had maybe four turnovers. My math might be off. Five. A couple of them probably situational things that I have to do better. I think we only had two or three turnovers in the second half outside of the end. First half I think we had 11, if I remember right, or something that wasn't great.

So trying to find the right actions I think, but then also as you mentioned, Maddie coming out and playing really well and being more assertive helped out a bunch. You know, Paige played really well. She is just such a talented player, played every minute of the game.

Mes gave us great minutes. I know she not only had four points. She 12 rebounds, defended really well. Early in that game when they were getting up and down in transition, that's a tough matchup for Mesa out there against a guard, but the second half she was really good out there defensively too.

Maddie's plays were obvious and really important, but there were a lot of really important plays that second half.

Q. They say numbers don't lie. In the second period you were only shooting 18%. On a scale of 1 to 10, how worried were you about that going into the second half?

AARON JOHNSTON: Well, whatever worry level I have, it stays pretty much the same. I probably was equally as worried when we were up 8 or 9 in the second half. I probably don't get too up or down.

Here's what I felt like offensively. I felt like we were really



settling. I think we were really standing around, watching Paige, watching Brooklyn. I felt like we had to try and get more movement, more action, more people touching the ball. I don't know that our plan early was good enough, and we've got to be better with that, and we needed to find something different.

Again, I think our players really adjusted well, and they did a good job. The hard part with not scoring against them is, like I said earlier, it just opens up transition for them. In the second half part of us being better offensively also helped us out immensely defensively too, I think.

Q. You mentioned that your defense was better in the second half. It felt like in the first half even in their half court offense they were getting pretty much whatever looks they wanted, whether or not they were making them. What kind of adjustments did you guys make in the second half to sort of limit their shot attempts a little bit?

AARON JOHNSTON: Yeah, I don't disagree. I think that second quarter in some ways these games -- things have to go your way a little bit. They make a few more threes and it's a bigger hole and tougher task for us. Probably fortunate they missed some. I don't disagree with that.

Just trying to switch up what we were doing ball screens. I thought we were better the second half with ball screens. We were not great with it early in the game. Got a little better. Then I think in the second half we were better our ball screen coverage. Certainly they're going to get some threes. They're all really good shooters and very capable, but a lot more midrange jumpers in the second half, a lot more contested shots, and we did a better job there.

Q. You guys really controlled the glass. I think at one point they didn't have an offensive rebound. What did you think you guys did to do that to a team where they got a 6'6" center?

AARON JOHNSTON: You know, I think they do rebound very well. They don't get enough credit for that. They're a very good rebounding team. And their perimeter players are great rebounders. They're the ones that usually make the difference for them.

I thought our guards blocked out very well. Again, you see Mesa just as -- that's why I just don't know that she'll ever get as much credit as she deserves, but she had 12 rebounds, 10 of them defensive. Our point guard, Paige Meyer, had 8 rebounds, 5 of them defensive.

We just had a real mindset that that was going to be a big part of the game, and I think it was. I think how we

rebounded was a big part of the game.

Q. Can you speak to the bonding and the chemistry of the team that they've been doing since the Selection Show, and how do you feel that they have just completely gelled?

AARON JOHNSTON: I think this group, they've been incredibly close all year long. Kallie is a six-year senior. She's been around. She understands what this is all about. Played in a lot of postseason games.

Mesa and Maddie Vlastuin are six-year seniors. Paige Meyers in her fourth year. You have a ton of experience there.

Our junior class has played in a lot of big meaningful games, and they just have a good understanding of what makes us a good team. Some of it's basketball stuff and out on the court stuff, but a lot of it's just chemistry and how we play together and the joy that they play with.

So as a coach, you just appreciate that. These are moments that are hard. They're stressful. They're tough. Someone is going to win. Someone is going to lose. You just have moments that stay with you for a long time, and we've been really lucky over the years. We've had a lot of good moments, and I would imagine tonight will be another one for those players.

Q. As you prepare to play UConn, is it more being concerned about what you do, or is it more of a concern about what UConn does?

AARON JOHNSTON: Yeah, everything. I mean, you watch that game today, and they're pretty good. Yeah, we're just going to have to play well. We just are.

You can't give them easy ones. They had a lot of easy ones today. For whatever reason, they just did. You can't give them that many easy buckets. You have to make them work for things. They're certainly going to make us work for things.

Playing a team like Texas, we played South Carolina recently in the last couple of years. We've played teams certainly at that level, and it is hard. It is really hard because of how good they are offensively and defensively.

But there's no place I would rather be on Monday either, you know. That's why we do this. That's why we put so much into this to have those challenges. I know our players are going to feel the exact same way.

We're going to take that challenge on, and we're going to



play our best basketball, and we're looking forward to it.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports