

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Richmond vs Duke

Friday, March 22, 2024

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Value City Arena

Duke Blue Devils

Kara Lawson

Reigan Richardson

Ashlon Jackson

Media Conference

Duke 72, Richmond 61

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us. Coach Lawson, a couple of opening statements perhaps?

KARA LAWSON: Tale of two halves for us. That first half I thought Richmond did a great job of executing, to be honest with you. We had some breakdowns, as well.

They did a great job of executing. We had far too many defensive breakdowns, and that led to the eight threes at the half. Really that was the issue. I mean, there were other things we talked about cleaning up, but the main thing was the open three-point shots.

I was proud of our group for making the adjustment, and in the second half to hold them to two threes, I thought that changed the game. We were able to put together more defensive scoring quarters like we're used to. It's been a long time since I remember giving up 26 points in a quarter.

I'm proud of our group. This is what the tournament is about. Teams are really good, and you have to make adjustments, and you have to kind of forget a bad quarter or bad half and then come out and execute. With our group, first time doing this together, this group together, I'm just really proud of how they responded.

These two up here really led us in every way tonight. Not just scoring. I thought their experience obviously being in the tournament for us last year helped. Their presence, very calming for our team. Especially when we were down. I think that was a big part of it.



THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Coach, you had 19 offensive rebounds tonight. 22 second chance points, I believe. Can you talk about in the second half especially what led you to be able to crash the glass so hard and succeed down there?

KARA LAWSON: It's one of the things we talked about at halftime. If I remember correctly, I think we were getting out-rebounded 15-14 at the half. We talked about that we needed to get some extra opportunities.

Our shots weren't falling in that first half. The way you safeguard a poor offensive performance if your shots aren't falling is you get more of them, you get second chances.

Yeah, to see Kennedy, I thought she had great effort. Jayden and Oluchi as well, to both lead us in rebounding. Those extra efforts made a big difference for us when we did miss shots in the second half.

Q. Coach, one thing I always hear about Ohio State is how hard it is to prepare for that press, especially when you only had a day or two to prepare. How do you prepare for a press like that, especially when they can do so many different things with that press?

KARA LAWSON: You probably have to ask me that tomorrow. I'm sorry. I just hadn't watched them yet. My staff has. These guys haven't even watched them yet. Not trying to avoid your question. I'll answer that tomorrow when I can answer it better.

Q. Defensively obviously was not an ideal first quarter for you guys, but then sort of bounceback. What do you think it was? The Richmond shot-making was impressive, but what do you think it was that sort of helped you guys clamp down down the stretch into the third and fourth quarters?

KARA LAWSON: Each game has its own rhythm. When you are playing a team -- I know we had played them before, but it was the first game of the year. You're kind of measuring speed and length and quickness and how



quickly people get their shots up.

I just thought as the game wore on we got into our rhythm and kind of had an idea of their actions and kind of knew what was going on, so we were able to combat those.

We made some adjustments too. I think that took away the threes, but more than anything, I just think we got comfortable defensively. Our goal when we're comfortable defensively is that the offensive team is uncomfortable. I thought we did a good job of that in the second half.

Q. Kara, you're going to be playing against one of your former players tomorrow, or on Sunday, Celeste Taylor. What's that like for you to go against her in an NCAA Tournament game?

KARA LAWSON: Yeah, I think it's just the nature of our sport right now. We played Jordyn Oliver earlier this year. We played Shy earlier this year. It's something that happens with everybody kind of bouncing around.

So it doesn't change our approach or anything like that. They're a great team. She's a great player. We've got our hands full, I'm sure, when I look at them of what we're trying to do. But we're aware of it. It's not something that's going to be at the forefront.

Q. A similar question for you. What's it like going against a former teammate in this game, and kind of what do you think it will be like just playing against her?

ASHLON JACKSON: Kind of piggybacking off of coach, being in that environment, that's a great team. Celeste is great. I think the biggest thing will be just how competitive we are. She's very competitive. That team is very competitive.

Like she said, that's just the nature of the game, but I think it will be a great turnout.

Q. For Reigan and Ashlon, you had big performances. What do you think was clicking shooting-wise?

REIGAN RICHARDSON: I feel like once I saw that first shot go in, the room just kind of got bigger for me. I feel like I kind of just read the defense and what they were giving me, and I just took the opportunity to take the open shot.

ASHLON JACKSON: Same. It's very simple.

KARA LAWSON: I'll say because they won't talk about themselves.

I thought they got more rhythm against the zone. They zoned us a lot, so once they kind of figured out where everybody was coming from, they got some rhythm.

I thought we got great threes in the first half. I thought we got open looks. We just didn't make them. I thought Ash knocking down four threes I think it was in the second half was huge for us because we knew they were kind of packed in there. We would have to hit some outside shots.

So I think they just got a feel for where the rotations were coming from and what we could get against that zone.

Q. Talked about having a young team, Coach. That's one of the big things in the NCAA Tournament is overcoming adversity. When you score just five points in the second quarter, what does it say about this group that you were able to put that behind you and you scored 23 in the third and 21 in the fourth?

KARA LAWSON: That's such an important thing. The game never goes exactly how you want it to go. The other teams certainly at this stage are really good, so they're going to have great quarters or great runs.

One of the things that we talk about a lot with our group is handling adversity and being able to forget about an individual poor performance or a team poor performance and focus on what's next.

We talked about that at halftime. We were down nine. It probably felt to some of us that it was a lot more than that. The people wearing blue in the stands probably felt more than that.

I try to just speak the reality to them of, Okay, we're down nine. We have 20 minutes left. Let's have a good start. Let's have a good first two, three minutes.

In the first two, three minutes I think we scored five or six points, and now it's a one-possession game. It's, like, Oh, my goodness. I think I said that in the huddle too. Guys, we're down two. This is a ballgame.

That's what you just have to keep reminding because you don't want to dig a hole mentally for yourself. You want to just stay positive.

Q. Coach, you had four players that had seven or more rebounds tonight, and two of them were guards in Reigan and Oluchi. Can you talk about how important it is for you...

KARA LAWSON: Reigan had seven rebounds?

REIGAN RICHARDSON: Seven rebounds.

ASHLON JACKSON: Let's go, Reigan.

KARA LAWSON: I've never seen that before in my life. I didn't know that until you said that. Wow. I'm impressed.

Oluchi has been our leading rebounder all year, and her ability to get those extra possessions, I don't know how she does it. I mean, she just goes in there against players that are bigger than her. It's her will. It's her competitiveness. She makes winning plays for us, and that energy, we all feed off of it.

Reigan, she's a capable rebounder. So to see her in our biggest game of the year be able to put up that many rebounds is awesome to see. I'm proud of her for it.

We have so many capable rebounders, and that's an important part of our team this year. It has been, and those extra opportunities really help us.

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