

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Duke vs Ohio State

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Value City Arena

**Duke Blue Devils**

**Coach Kara Lawson**

**Jadyn Donovan**

**Taina Mair**

Media Conference



is.

**Q. You guys have a bit of a size advantage. How do you think that's going to play in your favor tomorrow?**

JADYN DONOVAN: Yeah, I think we just have to go out there, throw the first punch really. As you said, the size advantage is really helpful. Coach Kara has told us they're equally athletic as us, so using every advantage we can against them I think is definitely something we should capitalize on.

**Q. This is obviously your first NCAA Tournament appearance. Can you talk about the differences you may have seen both in preparation and in the game yesterday from the regular season to now?**

TAINA MAIR: I would say with the teams, definitely desperation. You watch all the games, and you can see that every team is desperate. It's now or never. That's really it for every team who's playing.

For us, I feel like that's how we're going to play. It's our time, so we have to play like it.

**Q. Jadyn, one thing that's been interesting to watch all year has been your finishing, sort of development at the rim. What do you think helped you find that finesse that's been so present in you, especially the last month, month and a half?**

JADYN DONOVAN: Yeah, I think definitely the confidence from my coaches and teammates. Like T tells me all the time, no one can really mess with you, and that really helps to hear frequently because at times, especially as a freshman, you're like, I shouldn't take this shot, I should pass it up, and I think I've always been capable of finishing at the rim. That's something I've been known to do. But just being able to do that here and at this level, just having my teammates and coaches back me up.

**Q. Celeste obviously was a big part of the Duke program the prior two years. What have you heard from your teammates about going up against her and knowing that you're playing someone who has a**

**Q. Last year, I know this is early in your career, but you faced Ohio State and you faced the press when you were with Boston College. Can you talk about what you see with the press and how has it helped with preparation with such a short turnaround?**

TAINA MAIR: Yeah, for me last year, I was a freshman. I was new to college basketball, and I had never seen pressure like that in my career before. But now that I've played and I came to Duke, we pressure all the time on defense in practice, so we went over it a lot.

So now just for us, it's just patience and poise. That's really it for us.

**Q. For both of you, throughout the season, have you seen other teams that have played a similar style to what you're going to see tomorrow?**

JADYN DONOVAN: I don't really think so. I think we've definitely met some teams that are really good at defense, but a pressure like that, I think T can attest to this, that we have a really good pressure defense. I guess it's like playing against ourselves kind of, being able to see where we can get in the gaps and stuff, and as T said, just have poise and see where we can control the game.

**Q. How do you prepare with just one day of practice in between the last game and the next game for this type of press if you don't really get that time with a scout team running the same thing? How do you prepare?**

TAINA MAIR: We've prepared all year for pressure, so for us, this is just -- we're just going over it. That's all it really



## history with your team?

JADYN DONOVAN: Yeah, obviously Celeste played for Duke, and we're all very excited to play Celeste and Ohio State. No is one really Celeste, Celeste, Celeste. It's more we want to get to the Sweet 16 and beat Ohio State.

**Q. You're also a younger team. Can you talk about how the whole team has grown this year with a lot of new people, a lot of younger folks coming together and now you're one game away from the Sweet 16?**

TAINA MAIR: I feel like for us, it's been a lot of maturity, communication. I think that's just something that we've been building on since the beginning of the season, and we continue to build on it even throughout this tournament. So yeah.

KARA LAWSON: Happy to be here. Looking forward to the game tomorrow. Obviously an important day of prep for us. Well, we haven't had it yet, but we're about to have it.

I told the team last night, there's only 32 teams left after today, and we're one of them. That's a great accomplishment for our team.

Now the challenge is to try to be one of 16 left, and that cuts a little bit more severe. Everybody left is really, really good.

For us tomorrow, we're going to have to be really, really good to win the game, and we're looking forward to the challenge.

**Q. You described yesterday's game as a tale of two halves. How do you plan on carrying that momentum from the strong second half into tomorrow?**

KARA LAWSON: Well, each game is its own entity. I do believe in momentum. Like I do believe that you can carry over things.

But each team, each opponent presents different challenges.

As I said yesterday, you go into the game thinking it's going to unfold a certain way, and then it never unfolds that way. Maybe I should stop going into the game thinking that it's going to unfold a certain way. Maybe I should just be clear.

But you do think of all the possibilities as a coach. That's my job, to think about what could happen, and then have a plan for when X happens or Y happens or Z happens, have

a plan for our group of what our adjustment is going to be.

I think for us, we just try to get locked in as best we can to the opponent and what we want to try and attack offensively and defensively, and then the hard part is executing that in real time against a talented team.

**Q. You told me to ask you today about the press. Did you get a chance to look through the film? Jadyn said you guys hadn't played a press like this before. What do you see that stands out about what they do with their pressure?**

KARA LAWSON: Yeah, I think it's effective. That's the biggest thing. They force a lot of turnovers, and then they're able to convert. Their conversion rate is really high in terms of when they force them to be able to get scores out of it.

Obviously everybody that probably plays them says we've got to put a premium on taking care of the ball. That goes without saying. We've got to be really sharp taking care of it, and if we can do that and get the ball across the midline, then we have to be very disciplined in our execution.

They have really athletic players. Honestly, the thing to me that stands out is their experience. I think if you look at the 10 players that played the most minutes, I think seven are fifth-year seniors. Seven out of ten. I mean, that's a lot. That's a lot of experience.

So with experience comes wisdom, and they've been in these battles before. They've been in tournament runs before, deep tournament runs before. That I think is what stands out about their team is just they have a lot of players that have played a lot of college basketball and won a lot of big games.

That's why they're one of the best teams in the country and have been all year.

**Q. You just mentioned maybe sometimes you have to go into a game not expecting something or expecting something and then things change. Kevin McGuff this year maybe more than last year or years past decided I'm going to press and then decided I'm going to pull off the press and then flip the stingers and put it back on. How do you adjust to that on the fly when they're very good in the half court but also they can turn the press and try to speed you back up in the next possession?**

KARA LAWSON: Yeah, I mean, I don't know if that's something -- I think for our players, you expect it, and if it's there, you attack it, and if it's not, it's not. I don't think you

can try and program every possession.

What I don't want our players to be is robots. What I don't want them to be is looking over at me every time and saying what do we do.

Part of this coaching is to allow them to be independent and free thinkers and teach them to be that, and so you can't micromanage everything. I don't want to.

So you have to trust them. So what my plan would be with that is just to trust my players out there that they're going to make the right decisions and they're going to recognize is it a press, is it not, which is pretty easy to recognize, right. Then take care of the ball with that and be where they're supposed to be, depending on the pressure that we get.

**Q. You talked about Ohio State's experience. On your side you have a young team, but they've grown throughout the season. How have you seen them make strides to now be one of those final 32 teams and going up against a team like Ohio State?**

KARA LAWSON: We've made tremendous strides all year. I'm really proud of this group, to be sitting here playing for a chance to go to the Sweet 16. It's a great accomplishment for our team to this point. We're still hungry, don't get me wrong. We want to play more. We want to play in more games.

But to be sitting here winning a first-round game and looking at what our group has had to grow quickly -- we were the experienced team last year. We had a lot of seniors, and now this year we lost like seven of our top nine we lost from last year's team, and eight of our 11 are freshmen and sophomores.

It's taken time, but they've done a great job of -- I think more than anything, their coachability, their excitement, their passion for the game, their willingness to be great teammates, and just investing in them has been a lot of fun for us as a staff, and I think it's been fun for the players to feel their growth. Like they feel like themselves getting better, and we would play games early in the year and then we would struggle with certain things, and then middle of the year we're starting to figure them out and then end of the year we're actually winning those games. So that whole process has been really rewarding as a coach.

**Q. Seeing one of those players, I know playing Celeste tomorrow, you know her very well. Yesterday during your game she's walking over to talk to Duke fans because she knows them and feels part of that family. What does she do so well? What specifically have you seen her do so well that you can prepare your team**

**against looking at yesterday's performance and how strong she was offensively and defensively? What do you do to help minimize that impact?**

KARA LAWSON: Well, I think it's not just Celeste. I think it's their whole team that's just elite competitors. They're a very complete team offensively and defensively. They present a big-time challenge because they don't have too many weaknesses. They have multiple players that can score, that can be the leading scorer on their team.

Defensively we talked about how they can disrupt and then all the experience that they bring.

They're competitors. I think that's one thing that stands out when you watch them on film is how much they compete, and they want to win. I think our team does, as well. We're very much looking forward to the matchup.

**Q. Going against Ohio State, how important is it that it's not like yesterday where in the first half they get momentum and you guys have to come back? How important is it that you guys get the first punch in there?**

KARA LAWSON: Well, one thing I'm pretty confident in saying is I don't think we're going to lead the whole game. That doesn't mean I don't believe in my team, but you're going to have stretches where the other team does good stuff and you get down some amount of points. I don't know what that is. I think you've seen it through the men's and women's tournament here. Like teams are getting down and then they're coming back.

You have to -- in these games, it's going to be like that.

Hopefully, I hope we're not down at halftime tomorrow, but I also know we may be. The important thing for us is just to stay the course and to focus on when we're in the game, focus on what is breaking down and how we can fix that quickly, not being worried about that it is breaking down.

That's like a subtle mental difference but it's really important. Like you're focusing on, oh, my gosh, everything is breaking down. You're not focused on how to fix what's breaking down. That's the shift that we try to get to as quickly as we can is what needs to be fixed, and that's what we talked about at halftime with our group yesterday is I can't sit in there and yell at them for 10 minutes on them breaking down. We have to talk about how do we fix it. That's a better use of our time. That's a more efficient use of our time.

That's not to say I don't ever get angry or I don't ever yell. That would be a lie.



But I do think as a coach, too, it's a good lesson for me, you always have to be thinking as a problem solver, not someone that's bemoaning what just happened. Those people tend to be really annoying to be around when you're around someone that's just talking about how bad everything is and what happened. Y'all are laughing because you know it's true when someone is just like complaining all the time. They're annoying to be around.

So I have to remind myself don't be the annoying person. Be a problem solver, figure out how to get us where we need to go, and that's what I try and do in the games, and controlling your emotions, and that's what we try and teach our players to do, as well.

**Q. What is it like teaching such a young group of girls, that mentality, staying on that focus? What is it like teaching them early in their careers so it stays like that?**

KARA LAWSON: I mean, I think it's probably one of the most critical things of my job is to try and teach them that, to teach them how to overcome those moments where they might not be playing well or they feel maybe not as confident or navigating like the low parts of the emotions of the game because this is a microcosm of what they'll face in life after playing at Duke. So teaching them that skill is something that is really important for me. I know it's something that I focus on with them because I want them to be human beings that don't cave when stuff goes wrong. I want them to be human beings that are problem solvers and that think forward and that want to keep growing and keep improving.

Yeah, I think that's one of the things that is a big part of what I try to teach our group.

**Q. Wanted to follow up specifically on Celeste's defense. She was an ACC defensive Player of the Year, Big Ten defensive Player of the Year over here. What is it about her that you think makes her such a successful defender?**

KARA LAWSON: I think competitiveness, like I said before. I think she just competes at a really high level. Practice, games, she takes pride in it and is competitive because she wants to win.

I think that mindset is what allows her to be really good on that end.

**Q. The ACC is obviously one of the best conferences in the country. You have a lot of really good teams who obviously play a lot of different ways. How does**

**playing the schedule you play and teams that play so differently sometimes prepare you for a game like this?**

KARA LAWSON: Yeah, I think now the conferences are all getting so big, too, so it's really like a mini-tournament if you figure when you go through the three months now starting next year with all the conferences growing. Yeah, we've seen a lot of different styles, and they have to, being in their conference -- they play in a great conference, as well.

For our players, it's been particularly instructive to be in a league like the ACC because it's their first time through it. They're able to have now comps in their head of either an individual player or a team, and they can kind of remember, okay, this is how I played this player, this is how I played this team.

Some of that they're gauging maybe as the game starts because quickness -- you can see it on film, but you feel it on the court, and so that's something that I think they can process and figure out a little bit more. So that's helpful.

Honestly, we just wanted to surround them with like a really quality schedule all the way around. I think our schedule is rated really high this year. I don't know if like top 5, No. 4 in the country. Like Richmond we had already played. I think we played 18 games against teams in the field.

We felt like surrounding a young team with that quality of opponent night in and night out would pay dividends for us when we got here. We weren't surprised by Richmond's quality. We respected it, and we knew that they were capable of beating us.

That's another thing I really want to engrain in my players. When you get to this time of year, you have to respect everybody to the highest degree because they're all really good. If you do that, then you'll prepare at a really high level, and you'll put yourself in the best position to win the game. Doesn't mean you'll win it, but you'll put yourself in the best position.

I think all those things combined is what's helped our team just be able to have some confidence of knowing that we've played this caliber of team on our schedule, and now our challenge is to beat this caliber of team.

**Q. You've been around the game from a player-coach and everywhere. Ohio State has been drawing a lot of fans, growing a lot this year. What is it going to be like being in that atmosphere in March, seeing maybe a sold-out crowd, a huge crowd, just seeing the growth since you started playing to where you are now as a**



**coach?**

KARA LAWSON: I think the sport itself is just picking up new fans, and having just much more of an imprint on the sports landscape than maybe it's had in years past, and I think everyone is chronicling that and talking about that, and it's a great thing for our sport.

Certainly this university has -- I'm saying this university, Ohio State, has a great history in terms of success in women's basketball, and they've had a lot of great players and a lot of great teams. Certainly this area has supported the sport for a long time, not just college but high school, as well. We recruit in Ohio. There's a lot of good players here. There's always been good players here.

This is a great opportunity for our players to play in that type of road environment against a top team, and that atmosphere I think is what you would want. Certainly as a coach it's what you want for your players. You want them to be able to play in these types of environments as much as possible for their collegiate experience, just for their experience as a competitor, and they're excited about it.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports