

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

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Value City Arena

Duke Blue Devils

Kara Lawson

Reigan Richardson

Ashlon Jackson

Media Conference

Duke - 75, Ohio State - 63

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

KARA LAWSON: I'm extremely proud of our team and we keep maturing, even at this late stage in the season. We continue to grow, we continue to just trust in each other and trust in the schemes, and I think there was no better example of that than the first half. I don't know that the exact number. I think we got down 16, and these guys never flinched. In the huddles, they were locked in. They kept their belief, even though it felt like we were getting run out -- we didn't feel like it, we were getting run out of the gym at the beginning of the game, and we just possession by possession worked our way back.

I thought it was huge for us to go into the half only down four, to knock into some of that lead, the lion's share of that lead, before we went into the break, and then obviously in the second half, we kept our composure in a possession game and had a final spurt to be able to win it.

So what an incredible performance by our players. You guys know this covering this game, this game's about players and if you get a good group of players and you get them to believe in one another and sacrifice for one another, then you can do something special. It's about players, it's about their abilities, and we just had our players step up big-time. Reigan's performance was an incredible performance on the road, leading us, and Ashlon, I thought, had another great scoring effort for us. So we're happy to be advancing and excited about the opportunity in Portland.



THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Reigan, can you go through the feeling in the locker room right now after that big win.

REIGAN RICHARDSON: It's awesome, just between the team and I and the coaches. We're super proud, just how the team played today. Like Coach said, I think we were down by 16 and we didn't let it faze us. We stayed with each other and we were able to climb back.

Q. You had some big minutes from your freshmen tonight, especially Delaney Thomas. She was plus 22, 8 points, 8 rebounds. Can you talk about the impact that all of your young players had on that win?

KARA LAWSON: We are here for a couple reasons, and I think I touched on this before. We are here because players like Reigan and Ashlon and Kennedy embraced our young players early on and were patient with them, because if you had seen us in the summer, it was a train wreck a lot of days. They were patient with them and poured into them, invested in them. Sometimes older players might be jealous of younger players and not want to help, and that's not our culture, that's not our group. They did that. And they stayed patient with 'em to now to the point in March where they're ready, they're ready to make impact. You look at Delaney today, you look at Oluchi and Jadyn against Richmond, they're ready to go now and that's a testament to our veteran players, but it's also a testament to those freshmen, that they're confident, that they can make plays. We have seen did Delaney do this all year. It's becoming a trend if you've watched us. In the biggest moment in our team Delaney shines really, really bright. She is unafraid to compete against the top teams.

We needed her minutes tonight because Jadyn was saddled with foul trouble for most of the game, so that ended up being big-time for us.

Q. Reigan, your coach yesterday said that she would expect you guys to be down at some point and it was



about not breaking down in those moments and making sure you stayed focused. In halftime, what are those discussions to make sure you guys aren't breaking down, and even when you guys are down 16, what were those discussions like?

REIGAN RICHARDSON: Yeah, Ohio State, they're a great team. They're going to make runs. Coach is always telling us like, they're a great team, they have great players, they're going to make tough shots, but we can't let that break us down or get us down. We have to stay true to ourselves and just continue to play with each other.

ASHLON JACKSON: Same thing. And I think like her competitive spirit and our competitive spirit, it just mixes very well. Like Reagan said, Ohio State is a great team. We knew it was going to be up and down. We had some games like that pre-season and everything like that, so yeah, we just knew that we had to keep our poise and continue to play hard.

Q. When you see Cotie McMahon is having the type of game she had today, does your focus go to, okay, let's shut down everyone else around her or is it trying to focus on her? Where does the defensive plan go?

ASHLON JACKSON: Honestly, it was just stopping, like, them as a whole. Obviously, Cotie's a great player and she made tough shots. But it wasn't just keyed in on one player for us. We knew that whenever our defense started to work and we started to play Duke defense, then we would be good.

Q. I think it was yesterday when you talked about Ohio State's experience and your youth. This is two games in a row you've been down and you've come back. What does it say about this group? I think the first day you talked about how much of a grind it is to get a young team ready to go, but what does it say about the growth they have made from day one to now, that they have been able to come back from two deficits in three days?

KARA LAWSON: I think it speaks to their competitive spirit and it also speaks to their willingness to be coached, to be coachable, because we operate in reality in our program. So when we fall short of something, I just tell them, I tell them it. I don't sugar coat it. I'm not mean about it, but I say, hey, we're not good enough in this part of the game yet. And they're nodding their head because that's what the conversations are.

Early in the year, we would talk about, like, we weren't good enough or we weren't ready enough or whatever it was to be able to win these types of games. And we had

so many games that we lost like this. We would be honest with ourselves about it. Because I think when you experience failure, you have two options; you can either tell yourself the truth or you can lie to yourself. What happens when people fail, they will lie to themselves and they won't address the issue that's actually causing the failure. We don't want to do that in our program. We want to address the issue that's causing it. We want to tell the truth to ourselves and say, hey, we fell short here. Here's where we need to be better.

And then my job as a coach is to show them and teach them how to get better, not just say we're not good enough, my job is to help them see and help them grow in those areas. And so this is why you coach, man, I mean, to see that growth. And now on a bright stage, to be able to see them overcome something that we struggled with during the year, it's really, really satisfying.

Q. You guys had to sit on the Colorado loss last year for a full year. To lose that game there and then to now come here and kind of go full circle and now be moving on to the Sweet 16, what's that like, what's that feeling like to know you kind of have made that journey, that jump?

REIGAN RICHARDSON: Losing to Colorado last year was definitely an upsetting moment for us, but we took the lessons that we learned from that and we used them this year. The lessons that we took away from last year, I feel like we're using them this year and also incorporating them with our freshmen and just our newcomers this year, and I feel like we're just staying together as a team. We're just trusting in our coaches and following their game plan and we're just staying together.

Q. Kara, in your concepts, how would you ascribe your ability to hold them to just one made three-pointer with seconds left in the game and also their press and the interior play and the rebounding edge that you had?

KARA LAWSON: Well, I think it's a testament to our collective ability defensively because we switch a lot, if you watch us play. So the onus is on every player to be able to guard every player on their team.

Q. (No Microphone.)

KARA LAWSON: No. Yeah, we don't. No. So for us, they know on any given play they could be guarding any of the players on their team because of a switch or something that's an emergency, and they have to be competent in being able to do that, and they're all really good defenders. So that's a strength of ours, that we have multiple versatile

defenders on the court at any given time, we can switch. We play that end with great effort. We've been one of the best defensive teams in the country the last two years. We take great pride in that. The numbers say that. That's not my opinion. We take great pride in it. We want everyone to take challenged shots as many times as possible.

I thought McMahon was terrific, but we were okay with that in the sense that they were contested twos down there. I didn't like that we fouled her so much, but we were -- they weren't threes. That happened a little bit in the Richmond game too with their little point guard. We were kind of like okay with that. We felt like threes and turnovers could beat us and you're playing a math game there. Can they make enough twos to beat you. We had four more threes than them and that certainly helped us out.

Q. You knew how Ohio State plays and you knew how they were going to come out and press like that. That seemed to get you guys early. Were there adjustments that you made or what happened? How did you turn that around?

KARA LAWSON: Yeah, there is a shock factor because of their athleticism and their pressure and our players -- we haven't played them yet, so maybe teams that play them regularly get a chance to understand and feel that. We didn't. So it rattled us to start. There's no doubt. You have to credit them for that.

Once we got our bearings, once we got our rhythm, once we had some success finding scoring, I thought we just played with great poise and confidence and got to the spots we needed to get to. I was just hoping that barrage in the beginning wasn't going to put us too far down where we wouldn't be able to come back and that second quarter was big for us.

Q. Reigan, you hit Mamba mode. I seen it in your eyes and in the stroke. When did you realize you was in that -- you was kind of in that, just that area of everything you shoot goes in? And Ashlon, I saw the energy come out of you on a couple plays. When did y'all start to really understand like we can win this game? We'll start with you, Mamba.

REIGAN RICHARDSON: Well, ever since I hit my first shot, I felt that's been like the pattern over the past couple games, but like once I hit my first shot, I was kind of feeling it already. Then my teammates did a great job of setting screens or doing whatever it took to get me open and I was just able to knock down the shot.

Q. You brought the energy and it felt like you fueled the team out top as well. When did you realize we can

really take this game?

ASHLON JACKSON: Well, we went into the game thinking that, yeah, we can get this team because, obviously, they're a great team. I knew bringing some experience that wouldn't just be enough, and on top of that, we're at their house. You know what I mean? So we knew it was going to be more red than blue, so we had to feed off of ourselves a lot. So, yeah, it was just, yeah, natural going in.

Q. Coach, your experience as a champion, how have you been able to kind of give that knowledge to these players with such a young team?

KARA LAWSON: I think it goes back to what I talked about before of just being real with 'em. I am who I am. I don't try to be anybody else. They're around me every day. I think they feel that investment and the love, but they also feel that I challenge them too. That's what they want. That's why they came here. They want to reach their potential as players. So I have these daily moments with each of 'em, whether it's in practice or in the game or texting them, DM'ing them, whatever it is, of just trying to impart that wisdom. It's not something you can just do all at once. It's like you have to give it time to soak in. So I try to give 'em ones that are mini things throughout the time, and then I only get four years with 'em, so I do have a sense of urgency that I want to give 'em enough so that when they leave here, they're ready to fulfill their dreams.

Q. Some big minutes also from Camilla, only had nine minutes, but it was when Kennedy was in foul trouble down the stretch, had some big blocks. Can you talk about how she stepped up in the tournament and especially sort of late in this game to play defense?

KARA LAWSON: I thought she was awesome. Thank you for asking a question about Camilla because she's been such a key part to our team this year, her maturity, her defensive presence. I mean, that one block she got to, I don't remember when it was, along the baseline, she was rotating and she tipped that ball. It's was an amazing athletic play.

We talk about our depth a lot. Our depth and our bench wins us games. And it's not always the plays that are the eye-popping plays. It's just being solid. And so I'm really proud of Camilla. This is her first NCAA tournament and she gets an opportunity now to keep dancing. So she's been an integral part of our team and another one of those veterans that help the young players along the whole year.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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