

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Eastern Washington vs Oregon State

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Corvallis, Oregon, USA

Gill Coliseum

Eastern Washington Eagles

Joddie Gleason

Media Conference

JODDIE GLEASON: This is Joddie Gleason from Eastern Washington, head coach.

Is that what you wanted, or like an opening statement?

We are excited to be here. We are proud representatives of the Big Sky Conference. We feel like we have been battle tested when the regular season, went on to win the conference tournament as well and this group is really special.

They worked extremely hard. They love to play defense, which is not typical of a lot of teams and they just love to get after it and we are just excited to be able to continue our journey together and play another day.

Q. How do you like the way your team is playing coming into the tournament?

JODDIE GLEASON: I think we are playing really well. We have had some ups and downs as every team has with injuries and whatnot and now we feel like we have most of our lineup back.

We are playing our best. We have kind of had that target on our back all year as the No. 1 pick in the conference, and so we have been able to withstand everybody's best effort, and so we are just happy with how our team has done that, and you know, we are playing our best I think. So we are excited about that.

Q. In the three years you've been in charge of the program, the turnaround has been remarkable, nine wins your first year, 19 last year and 29 this year. What do you attribute that to, and can you speak to the people that you have in that locker room? Because a



lot of people have been there from the beginning for you.

JODDIE GLEASON: I think you said it. It's all about the people. We brought in a great staff when we got here. Skip and I have been coaching together for a long time. We brought in Jordan Loera and Brandon Morrison as our assistants, and they bring a ton of energy and experience and just love for the kids. They really do a great job of player development. They build the relationships. They do all the things that, you know, I like to see in the program. So they are just huge assets for us.

Starting year one, we were really young. I think there were -- the top six scorers on the team had left in the portal or were injured from the current roster, and so we were able to bring in a few people. I think we had four or five players in that class, and then you know we just played our young players, and they got a lot of experience.

You know we took our lumps. Like you said, we only got nine wins. But we were starting three freshmen and two sophomores and now they are juniors and seniors. So they just were battle-tested and have that experience.

The next year, we were able to add Jamie Loera and Aaliyah Alexander to the mix, both of which are premiere players. As we could see, Jamie ended up getting MVP at the conference this year and Aaliyah is first team. But they were just a great fit for everybody else that we already had on the roster and just complemented the depth.

Last season, year two, we only lost one player to the portal and returned 16. So I think that was just a huge, you know, sign of what was going to happen ahead; and just like a sign of their commitment to Eastern Washington, their commitment to the program, their commitment to each other. And so that was just huge for us and we knew that -- to end that year, we ended up fourth in the Big Sky and made it to the semifinals of the tournament.

We knew we had something special, and especially when everybody returned and we were ready to hit the ground running. And then this year, like I said, we hit the ground running. They have really high aspirations and they are all



very high achievers and they work really hard.

But the thing that we are most proud of is really just the chemistry and culture of our team. That was our goal was to be the No. 1 in the nation in culture and in chemistry and we feel like we have achieved that.

Q. Obviously it's a huge accomplishment getting to the tournament, second time for the program ever. How do you go past that? Obviously you guys have bigger aspirations. How much of that is going into this and then also, coming into a hostile environment, the host environment, an opponent you're familiar with, I know it's a two-parter there, but how do you make sure your players are ready for the moment tomorrow?

JODDIE GLEASON: That's probably one of the tougher things is you don't get ready without being in the moment. Jamie Loera is the only one that's been in the NCAA Tournament when she was at ASU. They made it to the Sweet 16. The others, it's their first time.

We just try not to -- not that you want to play it down, but we just try to treat it like exactly every other game. Like I said, we have had our target on our back. We played in big games. We played against really tough opponents in the preseason. The Big Sky is very challenging and we feel like we've gone into hostile environments with similar crowds and won, and so we feel like we are battle-tested and we have kind of been through everything either this season or last season, just to help get us here.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about your opponent? You've played them last year and you played them tough. A team with no seniors, a team that's a 3-seed. What about the Beavers, what's the big challenge?

JODDIE GLEASON: It's huge. The Pac-12 is arguably the best conference in the nation and they are one of the top teams, so we know that we have our hands full.

You know, they are led by Biers. She's just a prolific scorer on the inside but she can fill it up. She's a double-double machine and so you really have to focus on trying to make things tough for her and as tough as you can, just trying to slow down as much as you can. Of course good teams that have good post seniors to have shooting around them otherwise everybody would just take that away. So they have that. They have great scorers on the perimeter. They can shoot the ball really well. They can get downhill and attack.

So they can kind of mix it up and score a bunch of different ways. So we know that our hands of full.

But we also are really a good defensive team and a lot of times, defense prevails once you make it to the tournament. So we are hoping that we can apply some pressure, we can disrupt as much as we can, force turnovers and try to create offense from our defense.

Q. What was your initial reaction when you saw the tournament field here?

JODDIE GLEASON: We were a little bit surprised just because every bracket prediction had us going to Colorado and so that was really one of the things that was different was having us come over here. We thought we were either going to Colorado or potentially the Zags.

So we were happy just in the fact that we have a lot of regional players on our team. So this would be a lot easier for our family and friends to get to. So that was something really exciting. We knew we were going to travel somewhere and play some somebody's home arena. So it was going to be anywhere.

We would have hoped that we would get a 12-seed and try to be on a neutral court, but that didn't happen. And so then we just knew we would be somewhere and be on somebody else's court, so might as well be somewhere close.

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