

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Nebraska vs Oregon State

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Corvallis, Oregon, USA

Gill Coliseum

Oregon State Beavers Talia von Oelhoffen

Timea Gardiner

Scott Rueck

Media Conference

Q. With Aleah Goodman coming back, you've played with her, what has that dynamic been like to play with somebody and have her be your coach as well?

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: Yeah, I think the dynamic is similar to when I played with her because I was still kind of in high school or my senior year, and she was the senior in college, kind of a leader on that team, so she was a coach to me when I was her teammate in many ways.

So I think the dynamic is really similar and we still have a great relationship, so it's been super cool to have a coach that you know understands what you're going through and can relate and has been in the same position and same situations. It just brings a whole other level of closeness in that relationship. So it's been amazing having her as a coach.

Q. How did it feel going out last night and being able to make the statement that your team was able to make?

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: Yeah, it was amazing. I thought our defense was phenomenal. We executed our scout really well and then obviously it was huge for one of our freshmen to have a big night like that.

I was super happy for her and shows that even though we are a young group coming into this tournament, you could talk about our inexperience, but we don't play that way. And so I think it's just a sign of great things to come and that we are ready for this tournament regardless of if we've



been here before or not.

Q. You guys were able to put it in cruise control from halfway in the third quarter and on. How nice was it to save legs for a lot of the players?

TIMEA GARDINER: Yeah, I feel like everyone contributed in the game yesterday. I'm super proud of how we played, and that's the thing about our team is anybody can step up on any given night, and so it was really fun yesterday, and we're super excited for what's next.

Q. For both of you, first impressions of Nebraska. What have you guys been keying in on so far?

TIMEA GARDINER: Yeah, we know that they are a really good team obviously. They can shoot the three and they have a really good post presence inside. We just know that if we play our game, we'll be just fine and we just key in on scout and do our own thing.

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: Yeah, I think they have some veteran players that have played for a long time and played in tournaments like this and players that want big moments, so I think it will be a challenge for us and a really good post that can finish and they play really fast.

So nothing we haven't seen before, and all the stuff that we go over in the scout is just review and I think the Pac-12 has prepared us for teams like this, so we are just excited for the opportunity.

Q. Who do they remind you of in the Pac-12?

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: I think Utah, just the way they get out and run. They kind of have shooters everywhere, and then I think defensively, they are a bit similar to Arizona. They like to get out and hedge ball screens, but just kind of different aspects of things we've seen in teams throughout the Pac-12. We've kind of seen everything, and so it might just be a different combination of looks but all stuff that we've seen before.

Q. What's the emotion after winning a first-round game? What's the emotion in the locker room?



TIMEA GARDINER: We're really excited. Obviously on to the next. We celebrated yesterday as a team and we have to make sure we go into the next moment because we play a really tough team on Sunday tomorrow. Obviously we have to have that mentality of on to the next, on to the next, and take care of business.

SCOTT RUECK: Like any matchup this time of year, it's tough. I really like their team. It's been fun watching them a little bit. I'll be honest, I spent most of my team with Eastern Washington this week to this point, or till last night's game was over.

But Nebraska, I've watched them through the season, and I watched their Iowa game a couple weeks ago, and just really impressed by how hard they play, how fast they play, the intensity, and then their skill. I mean, they are a very good basketball team, and they have inside-out. They buy into the defensive end and they rebound like crazy, you know, so it should be a great game.

Q. In regard to Aleah Goodman coming back to Oregon State and being on the staff, how did you know she was ready and what has she added to the team this year?

SCOTT RUECK: Awesome question. Aleah, perfect person, perfect time. That's how it's felt. It was really interesting how the timing worked. She was available. We had need and we have young point guards. So she was a perfect piece to the puzzle this year.

When did I know she was ready? When she was a freshman in high school. You know, I'm not actually kidding. I mean, the first time I really studied her, they played the state championship game here in Gill Coliseum, La Salle High School, and Aleah was their freshman point guard.

And early fourth quarter, mid-fourth quarter, I think the game was tied and I was sitting in the front row behind their bench and she came over to her head coach. Her dad was the assistant at the time, but she came over to the head coach and said, "I think we need to run this. I think we need to run this."

I'm thinking, man, I've got Sydney Wiese, in her sophomore year in college, and she's not suggesting plays to me yet, and here is Aleah as a freshman with that poise and that presence and that mind.

Through four years of living this experience with her as a point guard and having her play significant minutes all four years, and obviously being one of the best point guards in

the nation her senior year, you end up speaking the same language, and so that cohesiveness is so valuable to us.

So the phrases, the terminology, the way her mind works with mine, you know, it's just a real nice complement. She adds another layer to everything we do.

And then, you know, her ability to relate to our team is invaluable right now and helping bring these point guards along this year and encourage them as they are adapting. I think Aleah has played a key role in their development this year. It's been awesome.

Q. Obviously it seems like it's been forever ago now but you've obviously had your teams play against Jaz Shelley. What do you remember about her playing and how she developed over those years?

SCOTT RUECK: I remember lots about Jaz from watching her through the recruiting process. I did a home visit with her. I've been to her house and got to know her family really well and as an opponent at Oregon, and now here we are again all these years later. I've always been impressed with her as a competitor. I like her. She's a cool person. I loved her savviness, you know what I mean. We just got done talking about Aleah Goodman for us, one of the smartest, savviest players I've coached, and Jaz is like that.

Previously, I had watched her play for Australia -- not on the stats sheet, yet she was the one making the plays. When they needed her to play big, I think she put 25 on the U.S. in a game, and all of a sudden she rose to a level that nobody had seen. But if you studied her game, it didn't surprise you. She was the one that made the key defensive play; that got the key assist, or would rise and hit the big shot, even though she wasn't a primary shooter on their team.

So she played in a complementary role, I would say, at Oregon, through her time there and now is back in that primary role. So for me, it's fun to watch her step up into that scoring role and see her be so aggressive because that's who she can be, and that's what we all want for all these athletes. We want them to see themselves, and you know, it's competition, yes, but it's growth and it's just development for the human.

So it's fun for me to watch her just really rise and to not only a leadership role, running the team, but also a primary scoring role. And so I'm really happy for her and have a ton of respect for her.

Q. Your players make comparisons of Nebraska to Utah. What do you make of that comparison and what

can you take out of those games into this?

SCOTT RUECK: Yeah, you've got Pili down there and shooters everywhere and they play super fast and they are capable of putting up a ton of points and they play really hard. That's Utah.

So I think that's a valid comparison. What we learned was that we could take it to another level. I think both those games were breakthrough games for us. We knew -- we had already experienced success before both of those games but both the Utah games, we leveled up. I mean, the game here might have been the best game we played all year for three quarters, anyway. It was near flawless. You know, and I just loved our defensive intensity. I think that was really what stood out to me, aggressive offense comes from great defense in my opinion.

And so Utah brought that out of us and then on the road, that was the first time we really put it on someone on their home floor and that was a big time performance. So of course, you know, we would love to see the same tomorrow but we've got a ton of respect for this team.

Q. Obviously they are one of the better three-point shooting teams, or at least they shoot a lot, of teams you've played this year. Over your career, you guys have defended the three pretty well. How do you get a team to defend the three and what are some of the things that you feel like you guys do well to make that happen?

SCOTT RUECK: Yeah, it's a lot scout specific. We've been really blessed to have a lot of great defensive centers, and when you have a great defensive center, I don't need to double, and I think threes come a lot of time from being compromised in other ways defensively.

So that will be interesting tomorrow to see how our ability to slow Markowski down, will we be able to one-on-one; will we need to send two; will we need to -- who knows what we'll need to do.

So that's one of the things that we have been really good at over the years is being able to be in single coverage. That means you can stay home everywhere else.

Another thing that we prioritize is defensive transition, and if you look at really good teams that get a lot of threes up, a lot of them are early in the clock. So get a rebound, kick ahead, no dribble sometimes, and certainly Nebraska is very comfortable with that. They look for that.

So you know, it will take a very focused effort, the comparison to Utah we just talked about, that's what they

do. So we held them to 44 points on their home floor. That's who we are. That will be a big part of tomorrow's game is can we control the tempo like that knowing they can play so fast.

Q. In the tournament, an opponent you haven't seen before, how much goes into scout and practice versus making yourself better at what you do?

SCOTT RUECK: First off, it's just refreshing to get into a tournament and see somebody different after ten straight weeks of the same grind.

We are a scout-specific program and team. We have terminology that allows us to adjust on the fly, and so we just need a day: A day, a practice and a shootaround to put in different looks or to skew what we are going to do to whoever it is. And so this seems to me and feels like a normal conference game.

Q. Donovan Hunter and Kennedie Shuler used to play against each other in a tournament in high school. This weekend, win or lose, they will play their last games at freshmen at Gill Coliseum as a pretty important pressure in an class. Can you talk about them go from being competitors to teammates and what their relationship with each other has been like this year?

SCOTT RUECK: It's been really neat to see what was somewhat of a rivalry, even in the AAU circuit in the summer, they were on rival teams, not on the same circuit. But they would match up because they were both on great teams that wanted to play against great competition, and both play in the same position.

There was a lot of talk about that; can they coexist together and all those things. And then you find out, oh, they are actually becoming great friends, they are roommates, all those things. There was a great level of respect before, but then it turned into friendship.

And so it's been one of the cool stories of the year for us is we've got a freshman point guard out there most of the game. You know, last night, Talia played there a little bit. Martha played a little bit. But it was usually done know and Kennedy and it has been that throughout the year.

And so I think they make each other better. For sure, there's a cool, competitive thing, and that's what this whole team has, by the way, throughout our roster. It's one of the things that's made us grow so quickly and then the team has just rallied around them and encouraged them and invited them and accepted them and just expects them to play and to perform, and they have done that.



So it's been one of the probably cooler stories of the year for us, and especially for the local people, have two Oregonians play such a significant part in our success this year. Been dreamy.

Q. Going down memory lane a little bit, when you inherited this program, you had open tryouts because you didn't have any players, and I'm curious about what lessons you learned from those challenges that you still use today.

SCOTT RUECK: I thought this was the first year people had open tryouts. It happened before? I thought it was just -- (laughter).

Yeah, so August 2010, we were trying to fill our roster and we had one returner, ended up being two returners, and then four scouting report players. I think it ended up being five scouting report players and then open tryouts with 55 women showed up. We took four or five from that, and built our team out of the soccer player and the volleyball player, and that was us, year one.

So looking back on that, I had not had a losing season before as a head coach, and so that year, I learned that the scoreboard is a liar. That's what I remember learning. I'm like, okay, I'm going to go crazy. And losing was miserable, even though you're supposed to and it was inevitable most nights. But that team is still talked about as one of the most inspiring teams that we've ever had.

I mean, Carol Menken, our legend, our Olympian says that. She says that team played harder than any team that's ever played Oregon State.

And so I learned that it's not about ultimately the win or the loss. It's about how you play and I learned as a coach to focus on successes that had nothing to do with the scoreboard because that would -- it just wouldn't have worked. It's like, we boxed out better. We took care of the ball better. We played hard, more consistently, that type of thing.

And so then you just learned to enjoy the journey, and then it did teach me to really appreciate wins, you know, when they come and the blessings of them.

Yeah, I don't know. So resilience, toughness, and certainly it motivated us to recruit really hard and get to a point where we could win more often.

But the Oregon win that year was one of the greatest things I've been a part of to this day and I still have the ball in my office, and the box score in my office. And so

that story, and that team, was the foundation because that 2012 recruiting class that went to a final four their senior year, learned about our culture that year and committed to us after that season.

That was memory lane but that was fun. Thanks for asking.

Q. In your opinion, is there any advantage to coming off a game where it's a little bit less emotionally taxing compared to what Nebraska went through last night and coming down to that last possession?

SCOTT RUECK: I don't know. That's a good question. I'm not sure I'm not sure. I think there's probably a little bit of a benefit to both. I didn't think anybody on their team, I thought they were able to rest people in the game just the way it played out, so I don't think fatigue will be a factor at all. I think tomorrow is a new day.

Q. How do you attack the way teams defend Raegan? Is there a whole idea of this is how they may come at you?

SCOTT RUECK: Well, I think at this point of the year, we've played 30-some games. You know, and so we've seen it all. There's nothing they can do that we haven't seen, so then it's just adapting on the fly and that's where the terminology comes in and the experience together comes in.

It's nice to have a couple veteran guards out there a lot of time to adapt to that but by this point it's pretty veteran. We know they can do one of three things really, four things, usually one of two things. So we are anticipating both, and then we adapt as we go. Take what they give us.

Q. If you like your arena up there, what do you like about your arena and the atmosphere when you get a big crowd for a big game?

SCOTT RUECK: I love the arena. So I went here, and I was part of that arena as a student when Gary Peyton was playing and it was sold out, 10,400 every night and now it's 9,604 capacity but it's intimate. It's as good a game environment as you can find. People are close to the court. It gets hot in there, which I think is charming, and it gets really loud in there.

So there's just something about it that everybody comments on when they come for the first time. They are, man, what a great atmosphere that was to play in. We've had people play in front of big crowds say that was the loudest place I've ever played.



So Gill is special, always has been, and we're looking forward to another great environment tomorrow.

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