

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - California Baptist vs UCLA

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Los Angeles, California, USA

Pauley Pavilion

UCLA Bruins

Cori Close

Angela Dugalic

Gabriela Jaquez

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're going to get started with the UCLA team. We are joined by head coach Cori Close and student-athletes Angela Dugalic and Gabriela Jaquez.

CORI CLOSE: Thank you all for being here. We're excited for another opportunity. I have so enjoyed this team and want to keep coaching them. We've earned another opportunity. Just looking forward to prepare against a really good Creighton team, so efficient offensively, so versatile. Very experienced team.

It's going to take our complete focus to earn another one. Our total focus right now is trying to be the most prepared team, the most together team, the toughest team going into tomorrow's matchup, which will not be easy because Creighton is a very formidable opponent.

Q. For both of you, I'll obviously ask Coach for an update in a minute, but if Lauren is able to come back tomorrow, what does that add to your team and just your chances of prevailing and winning a big game like this?

ANGELA DUGALIC: Lauren's presence is very known, and she makes it a lot easier to play with. I think Creighton's a very good three-point shooting team, just all around in general. But having Lauren, just her presence in the paint, maybe it will disturb a little bit of that.

So I think it will be a great presence. I don't know her status either, but if she can't, I think we're completely fine without her and even better with her.

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: Along with what Angela said, we



obviously love playing with Lauren, and we want her to play any time possible, but again, we don't know her status.

She's just a dominant force out there, rebounding, blocking shots, finishing at the rim. So yeah.

Q. Gabriela, you had a big game last night, scoring 19 points. How big was it for you to get rolling last night as you entered the tournament?

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: I think that I was just really excited to play March Madness. It's a lot of fun. It was great energy. I was just ready to play.

I knew that we had a size advantage. I knew that the post-ups would be there, so I just kind of took advantage of that and kind of helped the team with whatever I could do.

Q. I believe Coach said that Creighton has five seniors. I can't remember if they're all starters. What challenge does that present? I know you've got some veterans as well, but when you have a team that's been that veteran savvy and they're going to make smart decisions and play a good game, how do you kind of counteract that? Or do you even not think about that?

ANGELA DUGALIC: I actually didn't know they were all veterans. I mean, that's a really cool thing for them. I don't really think about that stuff. I think basically everyone on our team has some form of college experience, and we've been playing with each other for the whole year.

Yeah, I'm confident in our abilities.

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: Along with that, I didn't know they were all seniors either (laughter).

CORI CLOSE: I didn't share that with them.

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: We're just kind of more focused on how they are as players. We know they're a really good team, and we're just ready to play them.

Q. Gabriela, you mentioned the size matchup you had



yesterday. Both of you are taller than the entire Creighton roster. How does that change the way you prepare, the way you play tomorrow?

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: I think that we're just going to scout today and just continue to see what they do and just focus on being us and getting the ball inside, taking the right shots we know to take, and just continue to rebound and play good defense.

Q. Stylistically, what challenges do they present from what you've seen of them on film, and what are you expecting to have to do well to win the game?

ANGELA DUGALIC: I think everyone knows this, but they're a really great three-point shooting team. So we have to guard the three-point line. Transition defense is going to be big. Defending without fouling. They're the number one team in the nation for free-throw percentage.

We have keys that we just prepared for. I mean, they're also good two-point scorers, if you could say that too, great cutters. They set and use screens really well. So we just have to defend.

Q. Is their style similar to any teams that you faced this year? Or with the five out motion *, it's a unique challenge?

ANGELA DUGALIC: I think the closest opponent that you could relate them to that we've played is Utah. They do -- I mean, similar style. They're mainly three-point shooters in Utah, and here they're even more three-point shooters than they are. So that would be my answer, yes.

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: Similar to what Angela said, Utah with just the three-point shooting threats, just running them off the line and trying to limit their threes that they take, and just -- yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you both. Appreciate your time.

Q. Just following up on Lauren. Is she expected to practice today, and what's her status?

CORI CLOSE: We are going to hopefully get her through some drills today. I still think it will be really day to day and how she responds. But we are hopeful, and we are going to have her involved in practice today.

Q. Coach, both of them mentioned the cutting and the motion offense at Creighton. Flanery called them a very unique and difficult scout. Do you agree with that, and why do you think that is if they do?

CORI CLOSE: Absolutely. He's a very difficult and unique scout. It's their combination of off-ball cuts, flare screens, staggers. They just occupy so much of your help. They have very few people you can play off of at all.

And the other thing is a lot of teams that play five out are a little bit more scripted. You know when certain players touch the ball on certain places on the floor, that these things are going to happen. I think with them they're much more versatile and more random.

So credit to them that I've been watching them for years. I mentioned this last night, but I've had my total respect for a long time. We obviously had them here, I think it was 2019 maybe, that they were an opponent here in Pauley. Just to watch his consistency.

It's one thing to get good. It's a whole nother thing to stay really good for a long period of time. Creighton has done that. Credit to their coaching staff. Credit to their culture. But they really are a difficult scout for us, especially on a one-day turnaround.

Q. Obviously they've had a great season, but in their losses, have you seen anything that they have consistently not done well that maybe you can use to your advantage?

CORI CLOSE: I think definitely it's really about playing to our identity, and one thing that's really good is for us we really like to pick up full court. We like to pressure the basketball. We like to make them think about us for 94 feet.

When you look at the teams that have beaten them or given them trouble, that pressure on the basketball has been really, really important. And they forced them to not shoot as well from the three-point line. I just don't think you can trade threes and twos. They are a better three-point shooting team than we are.

So we have got to limit that. If we can get them -- even if they score some hard twos, that's different, but we can't compete and trade threes with them.

But I think, whether it be their games versus UConn or their most recent loss in the Big East Tournament against Georgetown, their pressure on the basketball and those other teams able to get downhill against them, defense also put them in some difficult situations. But it really comes down to ball pressure and being able to chase them off the three-point line.

Q. Cori, would Utah be a good comparison point when

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

trying to prepare for this team?

CORI CLOSE: Yes, very much so. They're the closest. They don't have as much off-ball screening action as Creighton does, but Coach Tony has this scout, and that is who he likened them to, the closest one that we've prepared for.

Q. And then you had a close second round game here last year with Oklahoma, but also with Ohio State's loss today, is that kind of good for the players with 2 seeds to know that anything can happen?

CORI CLOSE: I just think that March Madness is March Madness for a reason. Anything can happen. But I really don't want to give any credence to anybody else. I think that takes away from our ability to prepare to play our best and be our best.

Obviously, Colorado just beating Kansas State, I mean, there's all kinds of upsets happening on the men's side as well as the women's side. But I just think that's something I have zero control over. We have zero control over. I don't want anything to take away from the things we actually do have control over, and that's our preparation, that's our competitiveness, that's our enjoyment of this experience.

We actually -- Coach Tasha showed a video to them of Kobe Bryant several years ago, and the interviewer was saying -- I think it was Jemele Hill actually -- that was saying, do you hate losing more or love winning more? He said neither. Either one takes me away from my process, and either one takes me away from being the best and learning from every experience and every moment.

Coach Tasha reminded our team of that video today and said, look, our process doesn't change. We come in here. We looked at a couple of mistakes we made last night in transition defense. We made some adjustments that we need to make, and we are just falling in love with the process of what it takes to become great. We don't want to be deterred from that by anything anybody else is doing in the tournament.

Q. You talked about their offensive tendencies and their threes. Obviously guarding the three was huge against Cal Baptist. Is the way they generate their threes a lot different, Creighton, and what will the challenge be there? *?

CORI CLOSE: Cal Baptist really wants to create threes in transition a lot more. Their pace of play is higher than Creighton's, but Creighton's come a lot more out of screening actions whereas Cal Baptist comes a lot more out of drive and kick in transition.

So how we handle Creighton's screening actions and the ability to communicate through when we need to switch, when we need to stay, how we get over the top, who are you guarding -- you know, making sure that our mismatches don't get us in trouble in terms of post-ups. So we just have a lot more to communicate through in the quarter court.

Q. Yesterday Creighton was kind of content to trade three for two, letting Desi-Rae Young go for 30, while they just put up three after three. Do you think if they play that approach it plays to your advantage or theirs?

CORI CLOSE: Well, if they make as many threes as they did yesterday, it definitely plays to theirs. Like I said before, they are a better three-point shooting team than us. I mean the numbers don't lie. They've got several players that do such a good job with that. We don't want to -- we want to get stops, and we have a goal to get eight kills a game. A kill is three stops in a row.

For them, if you're going to get stops, you'd better take them off the three-point line. I don't know if we're going to get into trading threes and twos. We definitely don't want to do that. I don't want to rely on Charisma getting 30 or Lauren Betts getting 30, and they miss threes. You're hoping they miss threes. I don't want it to come down to that.

Q. On the defensive end, if they do allow Betts, if available, and then Angela and Gabriela to score the way they were allowing Desi-Rae, would you be happy with that, or would you still be looking to take more shots on the outside?

CORI CLOSE: If you don't stop us in the paint, we're going to keep going to the paint. That's how we're built, just like they're built in their motion offense and being able to shoot the three and off-ball cuts and screens. We're built from the inside out. We're built on our guards getting downhill and getting the ball inside to the post.

So if they are going to let us do that all night, which we are at our best when we're able to do that, then we're going to keep doing that and then find ways to try to keep them from being their best.

That's really what each one of these matchups come down to is which team can keep the other team from playing at their best and play to their identity and their best at the same time.

I'm not a rocket scientist, but that really is the goal.



