

UConn Basketball Media Conference

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Geno Auriemma

Women's Basketball Press Conference



UConn 86, BU 32

GENO AURIEMMA: There's a frustration level when things don't go her way. There's a lot of angst in her game. So I think just playing more games, being in more situations, getting feel, not going too fast, I thought she had a pretty good pace about her today. So that was a great start for her.

Q. You've talked a lot of times about wanting others other than Paige to come out and play and them playing well without her. Are you pretty happy with the contributions you got from a lot of players today?

GENO AURIEMMA: I think, but you have to look at it in one big picture, you know. If you have Paige on the floor, everybody gets better immediately. Then if you don't have her on the floor, that doesn't mean that they're not able to; they just don't have someone setting it up for them. So that's going to take somebody to do that. Some players just need people to set them up, so we need to find somebody -- I think obviously Paige does that for everybody, and Sarah does that quite a bit.

But that first half we played a half like we had hoped we would play, and then we wanted to work on some things in the second half, and it showed up that we have a lot to work on, which is good. That's what you want to come out of these games. This is what we're really good at, and this is what we need a lot of work on.

We did get great contributions from a lot of people, and that's a great sign. We're going to need it because this weekend we play a really good team that makes it tough on you to do some of the things you want to do. It was a good start all around.

Q. You've played 10 players, five have never played here before. When you came in, did you have an idea of what it was going to look like or did you just throw it up against the wall to see what happens?

GENO AURIEMMA: I was surprised we shot it as well as we did that first half. We had two kids go out there, Morgan and Ali, that the first time they touched it they shot it, and it's not like we practice here a lot. We had shootaround here today.

We know what these players can do. Some of the stuff that they're going to have to do is going to take some time, but that's half your team that's never played.

I mentioned this either yesterday or some other time with you guys. We have too big of a gap between where Paige is right now and her level of development and too many young guys, and we need to bridge that gap in the middle somehow. Maybe when Azzi comes back that helps or when Aubrey comes back that helps. But right now, it's going to look like amazing cohesiveness, and it's going to look like we just met each other on 84 West coming out this way.

Q. You guys' defense in the first half completely took Boston out of the game. What is it about this team's current makeup, even with all the newcomers that makes you feel comfortable using a press so early?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, when you have a lot of young players, you can get some defensive work done because it's just effort and repetition, effort and repetition, and believe me, it's not always good in practice.

The offensive end is a little more difficult because it involves the ball, and you've got to execute, and there's got to be a lot of good stuff that you have to be able to do.

I thought there was enough really good stuff. Two great entry passes back to back, one by KK, one by Ash to Jana. I think those are the kinds of things that you can build on, being able to help your team without necessarily shooting the ball.

It's going to take some time. It's going to take some time. This isn't the kind of team that just comes out of training camp and goes on the road against a top-5 team in the country like we have in the past and is up 30 at halftime. This is not that team.



But for the first time-out, encouraging. Encouraging.

Q. Sarah obviously came in highly touted, but what do you see as her role on this team? What does she need to do for this team to get to where you all want to go, and related to that, with her and Jana being able to share the front court together, how can that give you a different dynamic than you've had in previous years?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, we haven't had that kind of -- that size. We haven't had Jana's size in a while. That's one.

Sarah is able to contribute so many different ways. Having her on the court is like having two or three players because she fills so many roles. So when you say what role on the team does she have to play to get us to where we want to go, she has to play like she's an All-American. She has to come in here and act like it and play like it.

I don't ever remember winning the National Championship with just one player or winning a Big East championship with one really good player getting 40 points a game. She's able to contribute in so many ways, and she's only going to get better from here.

But some of the steals that she gets are ridiculous, too. She just has such great hands and a great feel for the game, and she's so quick. She's so quick with the ball, without the ball, and has a great feel.

So yeah, we need her to play like an All-American. You say, well, that's a lot to ask. Well, in today's day and age, I don't know any other way to do it. Kids come out of high school, they all have these great aspirations and they all feel like they're going to be great. We just don't have the luxury of waiting for her to be great, so we're going to force it on her.

Q. Regarding Sarah's potential this year specifically, what do you think she'll be capable of say 20, 25 games in that maybe she's not capable yet? What's that progression typically look like?

GENO AURIEMMA: I just take it one day at a time and see what are the things that she's doing. What is she doing and she's having success with that we can build on and what is she not doing that she has to do. Right now she's doing more things that she's having success with that we can build on than she's not doing that we need her to do more of.

Will she become an even better defender? Yes, when she gets used to the whole scheme of things and how we're

doing it. Will she become a more aggressive scorer? Yeah, she will be. Will we use her as another play maker and having her and Paige out there together and the chemistry I think they can create together? Yeah, she's going to keep getting better at the things you saw today, tonight, and the other stuff will come because she just hasn't experienced those things yet. But they'll come. They'll come.

Q. Was there any one thing you saw tonight that you liked that you weren't expecting to see and was there anything you saw that you didn't like that you weren't expecting to see?

GENO AURIEMMA: I would say that the way we will approached the defensive part of the game in the first half, I didn't know whether or not we had that in us because again, when you lose somebody like Nika and Aaliyah, those were two really, really good defenders, and you don't know whether you're going to be able to replace that. So that was a big unknown, and I was pretty pleased with that.

Then the thing that I was -- not that I didn't know, but I know that it's part of who we are because I see it every day, is when you have certain combinations and you're just going to play half court and Paige is not in the game -- and we work on that a lot in practice, like she's not in the game and we have to get big baskets with her not in the game, and we're not very good at that right now. I kind of knew that, but it was proven today, that we have to get a lot better at that.

Other than that, again, the biggest surprise I think is that we didn't struggle as much as I thought we would that first half because usually the opening games are like that.

Q. Six steals for ash Lynn today. She had four in the exhibition. Do you feel like she's taken a jump on the defensive end coming into this year?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, more so than last year, as a matter of fact a lot more than last year. And I do believe that's her natural mentality, to be aggressive. Aggressive and cautious, I don't know that those two things go together. We've got to keep amping up the aggressive part and whistling away at the cautious part, and I think she's done a good job with that, both in practice, and like you said, in the exhibition game and today, that hopefully gives her more confidence to take risks.

We haven't spent -- you look out there, I wouldn't say this ranks among the top five most athletic teams we've ever had at UConn. We're always very careful at practice in what kind of schemes are we going to use that doesn't put a lot of these guys in bad positions and makes them look

not as good as they need to look.

The more we can get better team-wise defensively by doing what Ash did and hopefully KK and Kaitlyn -- Paige is already doing that. She's always been like that.

Yeah, sometimes it's easy to look at your team and go, we can do this, and you just go out and do it. And sometimes you look at your team and go, I think we can do that, I think we can do that, and I was wrong, we can't do that; we'll never be able to do that.

Every team is different, and you've got to put them in positions to be successful.

Q. Last night at the men's game Liam McNeeley who was a freshman looked like he'd been playing here for 10 years. Tonight Sarah, same thing. How hard is that, coming here with a lot of expectations? I know they're great players, they're supposed to be great, but people want them to act like the players whose numbers are up on the wall in the first game. How much is that on them to handle all the expectations?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, some players don't have it in them to be able to do it, and they get overwhelmed by the bigness of it. Players like Liam and players like Sarah, I think they prove in high school that they are made for the moments, that they show their best stuff when people most expect it of them. That's what makes them who they are. That's why everyone covets them coming to your school. We certainly had our share of those.

I don't think you go into the season thinking that this freshman is going to come and blow everybody away, but it has happened. We have had that. So every once in a while you get some real unique guys that come along, and from what I heard on the men's side, Liam is that kind of guy, and certainly Sarah is that kind of player. They come along every once in a while.

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