

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 7, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

UCLA Bruins

Cori Close

Lauren Betts

Gabriela Jaquez

Postgame Press Conference

UCLA - 85, Nebraska - 74

THE MODERATOR: I want to welcome you to the third press conference of the day featuring UCLA, Coach Cori Close, Lauren Betts, and Gabriela Jaquez.

Coach, if you'd make an opening statement.

CORI CLOSE: First of all, what great adjustments that Nebraska made from early -- obviously we played them at the end of December. So then for them to have all this time, I thought they made great adjustments, especially having it be their third game in three days. Just credit to their team and staff.

They've got some really good players. We were just talking on the way over here how some of their players are really tough to guard. They're one of the hottest offensive teams in the country, and we knew it was going to really press us defensively.

So credit to them and wishing them luck as they go into the NCAA Tournament.

We also say that the tougher, more together team wins. We needed to earn some toughness, especially in response to how we finished the regular season. So this was about being connected. This was about response. This was about doing the little things to make each other better. This was about we over me at all costs.

I'm really proud of the way our team responded in that. Obviously these two did a great job, but I thought several people -- I thought Timea Gardiner's defense and rebounding was pivotal.



Janiah Barker, her stats aren't going to tell the story of how impactful she was, enabling us to switch a lot of screens and so on and so forth.

Really proud of the response, the toughness, and the connectivity about being ready when your number's called.

Q. For Lauren, across the board dominance tonight -- defensively, offensively, passing, five assists. Where does this kind of rank as far as -- is this one of your all time great games, would you say, across the board? How were you so locked in in every facet?

LAUREN BETTS: It's honestly, it's just another game, to be honest. I just wanted to do what I had to do to win this game today and show up for my teammates and show up for my coaches. I thought I did that. Obviously the stats will come. Obviously I learned a lot from the last game, and I just wanted to kind of earn some of that trust back for my teammates and my coaches.

I just thought today honestly more than anything, I'm just proud of my communication and my leadership. That's all I really wanted to focus on today. Like I said, the stats will come, but that was my primary focus.

Q. Lauren, you finished the game with eight offensive rebounds, just as many as Nebraska had as the entire team. You had like seven blocks, which is basically like almost double what Nebraska had. You're obviously going to score your points, but what does your effort on the glass and defense mean to like winning for your team?

LAUREN BETTS: I think honestly my main focus is to just to disrupt people's offense. I wanted to make it as difficult as possible for them. Obviously Markowski she's a great player and a lot of respect to her. I know she's their go-to. I wanted to make it as difficult for them as possible tonight knowing that's their go-to player. So if they could go to any of their other options and making it as difficult as possible.

Q. Gabriela, how much effort did you guys put into this after what happened at Pauley Pavilion in the last game? How much effort did you guys put in to make



sure that wasn't going to happen again tonight?

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: We put in a lot of effort, and I think that's what I'm most proud of my team for is that we put in the work to come out here and play like the team we know we are. We just focused on communicating and all the little things that will help us on the court because those things are a by-product of how we play.

Yeah, we put in a lot of work and just super proud of my team.

Q. Gabriela, your highest scoring game of the season. You made half your team's 3s. What is it like to step up like that in a big game here at the Big Ten Conference tournament?

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: I just want to do whatever I can to help the team win. Tonight was scoring. I put in the work all the time, and I think for me the main thing is for me to play confidently. Coach Cori has just been feeding us confidence and telling us to remind ourselves of what we've earned and the type of players we are.

Confidence is a big thing in March. People are going to get hot and all this stuff, but again, I'm just super proud of my team as a whole, of the communication we had and the leadership of Lauren and Kiki and just playing together was super huge.

Q. For both Gabriela and Lauren, did you see the things you talked about in the meeting reflected in the play on the court tonight for your team? And what were they?

LAUREN BETTS: I think so. Obviously everyone was kind of held accountable to what they need to do better. I thought from Timea like crashing the boards consistently, to me communicating, to Kiki using her voice more, I think everyone kind of stepped up to what they needed to do, and I'm really proud of everybody.

Obviously it's we over me at this point. It's March, and we need to win games, and that's all that matters right now. You've got to at this point just put your pride aside and do what the team needs you to do, and I thought everyone stepped up today. So I'm really proud of everyone.

Q. Wanted to get your thoughts on obviously being new to the Big Ten Conference, but in this conference this year, as it was, I'm sure, for you a year ago, every night meant something to every team regardless of their position in the standings because you had teams actually fighting to try to get in the conference tournament. Talk about the intensity that you believe

that your coach prepared you for and what you had to prepare for mentally to be able to compete in this league night in and night out?

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: I think that right now it's really mental. If you didn't put in the work earlier this year, you're not going to randomly get better.

I think that we have a lot of confidence in the work that we have put in and our coaches do a great job of helping us. They're always in the gym early and helping us be the best people and players we can be. So I think that's just really important. We do a lot of mental training and understanding of what it's going to take to win games in March.

LAUREN BETTS: I think being in a new conference, I think it's brought a lot out of us. For me personally, playing on the perimeter isn't something I've had to work on as much defensively. Today playing a team like Nebraska where all of their forwards can shoot, it's really pushed me to work on that and get better at that.

I think like Gab said, the amount of work we put in all season long, the coaches have not taken it easy on us, but I think it's been worth it. I'm just proud of how consistent they've been in that and they never let up. I think that it's going to show. Like I said, we just have to be consistent and just continue to get better as these games go on.

We don't have time to focus on what happened last time. We've just got to keep moving.

Q. Lauren almost indicated it was obviously a great night but nothing special for her. Did you feel otherwise? Was this a special performance for her?

CORI CLOSE: The great thing about Lauren is that she knows this was a by-product of way more important work she did in the dark all week, and she was really disappointed with herself and our team in terms of how we performed in our last game at home. It was not easy.

She really, really worked -- mentally, physically, getting her mind right to respond. To me, I already knew she was going to have a great night. Whether it showed up in the stat sheets or not, I knew she was going to be so impactful because of the work she'd done in the dark.

We have a phrase that the work done in the dark always eventually gets revealed in the light, and that's just what you saw.

Q. I just want to ask about shot selection. You took a lot of 3-pointers tonight.



CORI CLOSE: Way too many.

Q. How did you feel about that?

CORI CLOSE: Way too many, especially the ones off the bounce. The ones that were coming off of inside out that were wide open that we didn't hit, okay, we didn't hit them. But the ones off the bounce early in the shot clock, that's not what we want to do.

We'll look back. We have a very coachable team, but that was way too many 3s and especially way too many 3s off the bounce in the first 15 seconds of the shot clock.

Q. Every time you watch UCLA, Betts is always triple-teamed, everything you could think about. How important is Dugalic and Jaquez and Rice to you and their performance tonight?

CORI CLOSE: All of them are incredibly -- I think that's our phrase that we use all the time is sometimes you, sometimes me, always us. The reality is we know that Lauren is going to be double, triple-teamed. So there's going to be a lot of times where she's going to need an outlet or a cutter or the next right thing to be able to help out.

Tonight it was some different people, but it was mostly Gabs tonight, but at the same time, everybody's going to have their night. How many of you have seen March that tomorrow may be somebody totally different. We just need everybody ready because we know people are going to react to Lauren differently every night, and we've got to have her back.

But I was really pleased with their selflessness in that.

Q. Kiki had a couple of turnovers in the second quarter. It was kind of a sloppy quarter, and you went to Aarnisalo for a long stretch there. Did you feel like Kiki came back a little more focused and kind of playing her game more?

CORI CLOSE: Yeah, and she had two fouls too, so that was the other thing I wanted to be wise about. I have a lot of confidence in Elina, and Aarnisalo is going to be one of the best point guards we've had at UCLA. She's just really good, so she's earned our trust.

I did think that Kiki, we want her to play really aggressively, but I thought she was pressing a little bit. So just to take a deep breath, get her feel back. I love how steady she is. We talk a lot in our program about neutral thinking, and Kiki Rice is the epitome of that.

Yeah, she had some turnovers, but she ended up with 9 assists and 14 points and shot -- what did she shoot from the free-throw line? I can't even find it, but she's pretty darn good. 2 of 3 from the free-throw line. I just really trust her, and I thought she responded really well.

Q. I'm curious as this is your first year in the Big Ten, what you thought of the atmosphere here. And given the way that women's basketball has grown the last couple years, how important is it to see the interest maintained that there's been this season?

CORI CLOSE: I think there's three parts of interest that are really important for us to continue to grow our game. One is attendance, and obviously we've played in some great atmospheres in the Big Ten and just thrilled for the support.

I think we've played in front of four sell-outs, and I just think how great is that? And there's more to come. Obviously the atmosphere tonight is great.

But attendance is part of it, viewership is part of it. So the media is really -- a big piece of media rights deals is us increasing that engagement and viewership. And then corporate sponsorship. So thank you to the sponsors that sponsor this tournament, and we need more.

I think that I'm really thrilled to be part of the Big Ten Conference. The fan bases are excellent. The arenas are great. The varied styles of play. They're projecting 13 teams in the NCAA Tournament from the conference. It's just spectacular and really thankful to be a part.

And thank you, guys. We need you guys to continue to tell our story. So thank you guys for being here to do that.

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