

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Four - Princeton vs Iowa State

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Purcell Pavilion

Iowa State Cyclones

Coach Bill Fennelly

Audi Crooks

Addy Brown

Media Conference

Iowa State 68, Princeton 63

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from coach and then get to questions for the student-athletes, let them go and get questions for coach.

BILL FENNELLY: I think that was a hell of a way to start the NCAA Tournament. That was one thing we told our team was we get to play in the first game and played an outstanding Princeton team. Really proud of the way we played, just second quarter, we had a little out-of-body experience, I think, but after that, these two did what these two have done for us all year and played as hard as we can play and needed to and excited and flattered that we get to come back here and play a great Michigan team on Friday.

THE MODERATOR: With that, we'll open things up for questions for the student-athletes first.

Q. Audi, what did Bill tell you guys at halftime?

AUDI CROOKS: Kind of just told us that it was on us and if this is how we wanted to go out, that would be a shame because we didn't come this far just to come this far.

ADDY BROWN: Yeah, he just kind of put the ball in our court and said it's up to you, I mean, if you guys are happy with this effort, go out there and do the same thing. If you're not, you better change it or you're going to go home so it was up to us so we took it and ran with it.

Q. What was the mood or feeling around everybody as Princeton closed out the end of that second quarter on



the run that they went on?

ADDY BROWN: I think our energy was a little low but I think we've been in that position before. I mean, a couple of people said at halftime, remember last year. We were down like 20 points at halftime, we came back and won so that kind of got people excited but we picked each other up at halftime. We kept the positive energy going and we came out. Second half is 0-0 and that's how we came out and started the half.

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah, I feel like we were a completely different team in the second quarter. Like he said, it was kind of an out-of-body experience. I think we just kind of blanked a little bit, but thankfully we were able to come back with a fresh mindset, new attitude, new energy in that second half.

Q. What changed maybe from the second quarter to the third quarter that allowed you guys to take off?

AUDI CROOKS: I don't think if anything really changed but we just, I think, started to execute better. We took our time with our offensive possessions especially. We did better defensively I thought in the third quarter, limiting their second-chance opportunities.

ADDY BROWN: Yeah, I think our effort was better overall. Just, I think we kind of came out flat and they took advantage of us there but in the second half, we turned that around and came out and hit first. I think we did good with that and then just a little bit of urgency on the defensive end. We were a item faster than we were in the first half.

Q. How much of the post-game celebration for Coach Fennelly was on your mind or planned? How much did you kind of work that out and what was that whole... what does that mean to you guys to be a part of that?

AUDI CROOKS: Truthfully, I knew we were coming up on the number but I didn't know the number was going to be today. They just kind of handed us signs and I think we all just kind of realized like yay, we're so happy for him and definitely blessed to be coached by him and part of a



program, 800 wins. I just think about all the players that calm before us and how grateful we are to be in that lineage and in that path and happy that we can get it done for him and for this program today.

Q. Audi, you guys mentioned how difficult or I guess how you got to executing in the Thursday quarter. Is there something that you guys have to get better at learning how to execute? Or is it something that kind of comes around naturally in a game like that?

AUDI CROOKS: I think we're a team that sometimes tends to have slower starts or we have lapses in judgment or there might be we play half of a good quarter and for the rest of the half we don't play a well, so I think it's just little lapses and little breaks in intensity and sometimes I think we tend to take a couple plays off and those things can't happen in March because the result is what happened at halftime. So it's just learning from that, progressing from that and coming out ready to go and aggressive from the start.

Q. And for both you guys, does getting down like that obviously you saw what that -- what happened last season at Stanford does doing that today, is there anything you can take forward moving on for Michigan on Friday?

ADDY BROWN: Come out strong, no slow starts. We can't afford to have a slow start against them. They're a really good team. We can't put ourselves in a hole we can't get out of. When the ball goes up, we got to be ready to go and we got to finish out the whole game, the whole 40 minutes.

Q. Audi, what was kind of your mindset or approach there in the second half where you really seemed to flourish.

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah, Coach Fenn just said kind of to remember how, who, and why you do what you do and I think for me that just kind of lit a spark because we all play for people that are special to us in our lives and I definitely, I'm no different so I just thought about all the people who helped me get to where I was and it just really drove me and motivated me in that moment.

Q. He said that to you or the whole team?

AUDI CROOKS: The whole team.

MODERATOR: Any other questions for our student-athletes? No? Okay. Audi and Addy, thanks for joining us.

BILL FENNELLY: Can I say something?

THE MODERATOR: Absolutely.

BILL FENNELLY: I know you have to do your job, but can we minimize the 800 stuff? These guys... I mean, we just won an NCAA Tournament game and it's 23 for them and we get to play Friday and I know that's part of it and it's a blessing and I've been blessed my family is here to share it with me, but I'd rather if we could, I'll answer anything tomorrow, but can we focus on what these guys just did? That would be... I know. Sorry. I think that would be a nice thing.

THE MODERATOR: With that, open it up for questions for Coach Fennelly.

Q. What do you think changed for you guys from the second quarter to the third quarter?

BILL FENNELLY: There was no big-time halftime speech. What the kids said, I did talk to them about this is not who we've been. And, again, you have to give Princeton a lot of credit. They defended us well, we just made some really bad decisions at both ends of the court and I just told them at some point the scoreboard is going to go dark but you're going to remember what you did, how you did it. Did you do the best that you could? I always tell our teams at Hilton when you walk up the ramp, walk up the ramp with your head up, your eyes open, a smile on your face, your heart full because you did what you can do. That's all I told them. This is not... we don't want to go out this way. I think they -- the good thing about these guys is they know that. Like, I didn't have to say anything to them they didn't already know.

The other thing was I made a huge mistake in the first half. I tried to say Emily Ryan's on a pitch count so I tried to save her minutes for the second half and it literally almost cost us the game because a lot of the time when we struggled offensively, she was out of the game. So that was a mistake on my part.

Q. Did you come close to calling that time-out during that big barrage?

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, I did. We should have -- I should have called a time out. You get so caught up in saving them. I guarantee you my father, God rest his soul, screaming... call a time out for God's sake. But, I mean, we had two layups. So it's like I thought we were getting enough but, yeah, when it went from 7 to 13 like it did so fast and then it's like you're at the end of the half and you're like, all right, we can get to halftime and that was a mistake, again, that was completely on me.

Q. I know you don't want to talk about 800, but could you maybe talk about what the moment was like coming off the court and having everybody surround you and celebrate you?

BILL FENNELLY: No, it's -- you do this job for a lot of reasons and that's one I'll remember forever. The biggest is my whole family is here to share it with me and my staff that's been with me a lot of those 800. Ironically, it happened at Notre Dame where we have the assistant coach and left here and got my first head coaching job thanks to Coach McGraw and Digger Phelps. Got me the head job at Toledo and that's kind of where it started.

Actually, my wife and my youngest son Steven was born here and Billy, they went to where we used to live this morning and maybe it was just a little bit of karma today. So it was fun. Like I said, you have certain moments that professionally you cherish and this is one that... I'll put that sign in my casket.

Q. Emily Ryan became the Big 12's all time assist leader. What do you think that means for her? I know she probably says she doesn't care about it, what do you think about the accomplishment?

BILL FENNELLY: Well, I think you're exactly right. She'll say I don't care. We won the game. She'll say I get to throw it to a lot of great players in her five years, which is correct, but you think about the Big 12 is one of the best leagues in the country and when you say you are the best ever in this league, that's pretty big when you look at the players that have played in this league. So it's just an amazing story for her. The way she played tonight I think... I mean, she kind of willed her team to winning the game and some of the plays that she made were Emily Ryan at her best and it was fun to see her celebrate and be as excited as she was because she's earned it.

Q. Bill, here I was thinking you just all of a sudden learned how to do the halftime speech but that third quarter to see your team click like that, what's it like to... I mean, you put yourself in that position. I probably asked you a similar question last year, but what's it like to see them play and execute at that level that they were for the first probably eight minutes in the third?

BILL FENNELLY: I don't know that we -- and that's the thing I kept telling them during the time-outs. It's the same opponent, same building, same teams, completely different games. We were not who we should have been in the second quarter, and you have to give Princeton credit for that. In the third quarter, I thought offensively we showed a

little more patience. We only turned the ball over four times in the second half. We got the ball reversed and just decided, I mean, it's like we were going to run the ball and give the ball to 55 every chance we could and then you get a three from someone and transition but defensively, we were much better. Their stuff is really hard to guard. I thought we did as good as job as we could guarding them. They missed a couple shots that helped us and we made a couple big plays but that's the nature of the game and that's certainly the nature of the NCAA Tournament. We scored on an in-bounds play that we put in this morning. Just stuff like that that you have to find a way but the third quarter, we were really good.

Q. Was that third quarter maybe representative of this team at its best or what you've kind of always hoped to see from them?

BILL FENNELLY: You would agree with that, especially given the time, the situation, the opponent, yes. The desperation that your season is, you know, in the back of your mind you're thinking is the NCAA going to make us fly hope tonight? You're thinking all those kind of things, like, you know -- sorry.

But, no, I thought when you put it all together, opponent, where it was, situation, desperation, it was an amazing effort by our team.

Q. Ashley Chea for Princeton scored seven points in the first two minutes and eight in the rest of the game. What did you see your team do to effectively neutralize her on offense?

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, she's really, really good and Arianna Jackson guarded her most of the night and couple times early, we got messed up on some -- they do a really good job of dribble hand-offs but I thought we did a much better job helping. AJ got into her and made it a lit tougher.

Like anything, when you play a great player, you work really hard. You help a lot and hope they miss a couple. I thought, yeah, early, I'm like oh my goodness and it's like I said to the TV people, when you play a team that you have never played, you're going off of video and you're like are they that good? Are they that big? Are they that fast? She was much better live than I thought on video. Very talented kid. The game looks -- she makes the game look easy. She doesn't force anything, all her shots were good. AJ worked adds hard as she could but it was a player and half on her the whole second half. We guarded her well, but we got lucky a couple times too.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions for coach? I think we're done. Thanks so much for joining us.

