

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - South Dakota State vs Utah

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Spokane, Washington, USA

McCarthy Athletic Center

Utah Utes

Lynne Roberts

Media Conference

LYNNE ROBERTS: Thanks for being here, appreciate seeing you all covering this regional here in Spokane. We are excited to be here. Excited to still be playing. Looking forward to a great couple days. We know that if you make it this far and you're in this tournament that everybody is good. I know everybody says the same thing. All of the coaches say the same thing but that's for a reason.

And I think the parity on the women's side, it makes this tournament and these first couple rounds more exciting than it's been, which is great for our sport. We are excited to be here. We know we have a big challenge front of us with South Dakota State. So one at a time. We've got a tough game ahead of us tomorrow but we're ready to roll.

Q. I asked your players about just the gauntlet of the Pac-12 this year and how battle-tested they may feel after having done that. So I'll ask you the same thing, how do you feel with the Pac-12 regular season has prepared you for postseason play, because you guys do enter this tournament as a 5-seed but it feels like a much different type of 5-seed after the schedule you guys have played.

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, I think that's a huge thing with every team that made it in our league. It's interesting, across the country, I think there was no dispute it was the toughest conference from top to bottom on the women's basketball side and it almost kind of hurt us all in seeding because we just beat the crap out of each other for two and a half months. UCLA, USC -- UCLA is a 2-seed. Stanford is a 2-seed. Any other year, those guys are 1-seeds. I mean, they are good.

Arizona barely making it in, made it in the playoff game beat Auburn last night, but I think every weekend in the Pac-12 you're playing an NCAA Tournament-calibre game. All of us that made it, we won more than we lost but they



were all hard. Every single one. So there was not a comfortable win, not one, for any of us.

I think in the last ten years, before this tournament, the Pac-12 winning percentage in the NCAA Tournament was 72 percent, which is -- crushes any other league that's close. I think that's because we just, you know, to your point, in games, I mean, in conference games, you're playing against elite coaching, the best players, and you know, the games come down to a couple possessions.

So that does feel like NCAA Tournament play. And so I don't think from our team, I can speak for our team, and I'm sure it's across the league, there's not the nerves of a big game. Certainly there's consciousness that it's the NCAA Tournament in terms of it's different in terms of if you lose, it's over. But the type of games, we're battle-tested and ready.

Q. As far as South Dakota State has built a reputation under Aaron Johnston, being that team that whoever they play in the first round, it's always going to be a tough one. Would you agree with that sentiment that he always gets his team ready?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, he does an amazing job and always as. He has his team so prepared. What I really respect about them in preparing for them is I always think a team that knows who they are, are hard to beat. They definitely know who they are, what they are good at, what they are not, what they stay away from, what they, you know, hone in on. They have got a couple players that could play for any team in the country.

The thing with them, too, watching their games, it doesn't matter. I think this is a sign of a really good team, too. They play the same in terms of their effort, intensity, focus, all that, no matter what the score is.

So if you don't know what the score was, how they are playing is exactly the same all the time, which I really respect. So we know we have a hands full. We are not -- I think with what I said earlier about the parity and the women's game, where it's at now, just because we are the 5 and they are the 12, that doesn't mean anything,



especially when you are playing a well-coached team like them.

Q. A lot of the big names in the women's game, I think Alissa Pili is right up there. If you can speak on her but also on the other sighted, Brooklyn Meyer, Player of the Year, Defensive Player of the Year, I'm sure it's going to be a really good matchup. How excited are to you see one of the best players for certain in the country go against another really good player, probably one of the best players in the mid major conferences?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, I'll start with Brooklyn. She's good. Watching her, I haven't seen them in person, obviously, but watching her on film, her physicality and her ability to finish with both hands and she understands ceiling and angles and has great footwork, great hands, and you know, she's listed at 6-2. So is Alissa Pili. I don't know if Alissa Pili is 6-2. So I don't know how tall Brooklyn really is. But she plays bigger than her height, is my point.

She's good. We have got to have a game plan for her. They run a lot of really good stuff for her that's hard to defend. A lot of respect for her as a player. She's a talent.

In terms of Alissa, I've often described her as a unicorn. There's nobody like her. And I've talked to every WNBA GM and coach, and they cannot find a comparable of a former or current WNBA player that's like her, which is kind of her intrigue, and I think kind of her secret sauce a little bit. She is so powerful. I know she's the strongest player in the country; I won't bore you with the weight room statistics. But she is so powerful but it's a cool balance of grace and athleticism, as well.

So she is so unique. She can shoot the three, put the ball on the floor, score wither had back to the basket. If she gets into your body, it's over. So as much as we have to prepare for Brooklyn Meyer, they have to prepare for Alissa Pili. You're right. She is in that conversations with Angel Reece and all those guys, and JuJu and Caitlin, and she has been all year, and so you know, this is her final run as an amateur.

Do we still call them amateurs now? As a collegiate player. So I know she wants to make a deep run.

Q. I asked your players, coming in as a 5-seed, you talk about the Pac-12 and how hard it was, you said it, in most years, Stanford, 2-seeds, they are probably 1 seeds in other seasons. You guys as a 5-seed, do you have a chip on your shoulder considering that you know who you played and who you've beaten? USC is a 1-seed and you beat them twice. How do you go into

this postseason?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, we've beaten four Top-10 teams. We've been in the top 20 all season, and to be a 5-seed, that speaks to our conference.

Chip on our shoulder not really. I think you can't control what you can't control, and we don't focus on things that I can't control. I certainly wasn't in the selection committee room. We'll play anyone, anywhere, any time. If it's here, great. Let's go.

Q. I want to take you back to your days at Seattle Pacific. Back then, 30 -- 20 -- 24 years ago --

LYNNE ROBERTS: Don't age me that much. Thank you.

Q. The women's game is arguably the best product in college athletics right now. Did you see that coming? Is that something that's just like a dream or a hope? Where was it?

LYNNE ROBERTS: I don't think -- I mean, I know I'm old but I don't feel that old. But the question is fair. Back then, you know, late 90s, early 2000s, no, I don't think I saw it where it is today.

But I've told the story before. I remember going up to Western Washington to play a doubleheader with our men on the same bus, and on the way back we stopped and the men got out at Pizza Hut and ate pizza. And we had peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on the bus, and we knew it was weird but we're just like, that's the way it is.

And so for me in my journey, as a coach, to see how far it's come, is incredibly rewarding for these student athletes. And to see the national recognition that these teams and players are getting, and it's -- it's from everybody. It's not just women's sports fans, right. It's people that are -- it's the dude at 24-Hour Fitness now. He actually knows who women's basketball players are, right. I think that's really, really cool.

Did I see it -- how old am I, did you say 24 years ago? No. But it's exciting to think about what in 20 years it's going to look like from now, right. It's pretty exciting, and I'm honored and humbled to be a part of it.

Q. You've got a little bit of a South Dakota pipeline going. What's she meant with your team this year and how do you think she's reacting to the fact that Reese Ross going to play in her first NCAA Tournament against her home state team?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, it's kind of ironic, right. The



paragraph par so when that popped up on Selection Sunday, it was kind of funny. I immediately thought of her, and Dru. Dru Gylten was a great player for us for five years and then she had that COVID year. She got engaged so she moved home and played her Final year there, and I supported that and thought it was awesome.

You know, I talked with Aaron before that, and you know, just I have a tremendous amount of respect for their program, right. And so in terms of Reese, you know, I think this is -- this is a positive about Reese and a little bit of a concern about tomorrow. Reese is just tough, fearless. She's been roping cows her whole life, truly, and doesn't back down from anybody or anything, I love that about her as a competitor.

But we're going to face a bunch of those guys tomorrow. Dru was the same way. Hard-nosed, blue-collar, doesn't care, just want to win, and that's what Reese is.

So we've got to match their toughness tomorrow for sure.

Q. I was going to say real quickly, is it concerning even more tomorrow, you know their reputation but they have been up against it even more this year because they have had four players go down with injuries, and it's the old cliché about the caged animal, you put their backs to the wall and they keep coming back at you.

LYNNE ROBERTS: We've had the same thing. We lost our second- and third leading scorer in November. So we've done the same thing. I think at this point you are who you are as a team. I don't know that, being I think the fact that they have kept coming back is part of their culture of just being tough and I think that's why we do, too. I think that's part of our culture, too. So I think what you'll see tomorrow is two really hard-nosed, competitive teams going at it.

Q. Take me inside the X's and O's tomorrow. Where is game going to be won and lost?

LYNNE ROBERTS: I can't give you all our secrets, man. We are usually in our games in the Pac-12 undersized. I mean, we have size. We've got 6-7 and 6-3 and 6-3 and all that. But in the Pac-12, we are undersized and so I think for us, to not be undersized, I'm looking forward to that. So I think, you know, we've got -- at this point, and I'm not trying to dodge the question, I think if you're in that tournament, you've got to be the best version of yourself.

You've got to be the best you, and so when we are the best us, we are getting out in transition, we're shooting without fear. We're defending like a connected energy. So for me,

our team is very prepared for South Dakota State but we've got to be the best version of us. That's the honest truth. So I think that's -- and I'm sure they are going to try to be the best version of themselves, too. So I anticipate a very competitive game.

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