

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - UC Irvine vs Gonzaga

Friday, March 22, 2024

Spokane, Washington, USA

McCarthy Athletic Center

UC Irvine Anteaters

Tamara Inoue

Deja Lee

Nikki Tom

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have with us from UC Irvine, Nikki Tom, a junior from Fresno, California, and Deja Lee, a junior from British Columbia. She's almost home.

Q. Deja, I'm sure you guys have watched a lot of film on Gonzaga. What impresses you about Gonzaga?

DEJA LEE: Their rebounding, the way they get after it on defense and offensively, but especially their offensive boards. That's been something that we've been honing in on in practice and even just watching film on the road, making sure we box out and making sure they don't get any second and third chance opportunities.

Q. When you guys started the season, did you think that being here today was a possibility?

DEJA LEE: Definitely. This has been something we've been working towards, even just from last season and all the injuries we had. We kind of had shortcomings last season.

Coming into this season knowing we were healthy, we were ready to go, and we were prepared for this moment.

NIKKI TOM: Just kind of the same thing, like that was always our end goal, and we were trying really hard to get here. So all the hours in practice we put, it just grew our chemistry, grew our culture, and it got us to this game today.

Q. You guys are ranked 11th in the nation in points allowed. Is that the strength of your team, do you guys feel, is defense?



DEJA LEE: 100 percent. It's definitely one of our anchors. Our coach always tells us our defense is what drives our offense. That's something that we kind of have as our mentality going into each game.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by UC Irvine Coach Tamara Inoue.

TAMARA INOUE: It's been a great tournament so far. The NCAA has done a phenomenal job of taking care of our team. It's been a long time, first time for me as a head coach.

We're just really thrilled to be part of this experience. What better time for women's basketball than it is now.

Q. Coach, tell me what has impressed you about watching film on Gonzaga.

TAMARA INOUE: They don't have a lot of weaknesses, that's for sure. They can shoot extremely well. They're a high scoring team. Their efficiency is pretty good. Defensively they do a great job.

For us, it's just a lot of things have got to go right. We're just looking at that. They're a veteran team. They're undefeated until the last game.

I think they've got a lot of confidence coming in and being at home. I'm assuming it's going to be soldout. I saw 100 tickets were left yesterday. We would call that a soldout crowd in our world.

I'm going to try not to lose my voice because I don't know if they'll even hear my name.

Q. You guys rank, I think, 11th in the nation in points allowed. Talk about your defense. That's what you hang your hat on, I assume.

TAMARA INOUE: Absolutely. I think with our athletes we can get after it. I think that's something we've been pushing forward. I've got great assistants that can run a really good system.



So just staying in tune and staying focused on what we're doing. I think we take a lot of pride in getting after it. We're not the tallest out there, but we do have that blue collar work ethic, and we won't step down to anybody.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

