

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

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Spokane, Washington, USA

McCarthy Athletic Center

UC Irvine Anteaters

Coach Tamara Inoue

Nevaeh Parkinson

Déja Lee

Media Conference

Gonzaga 60, UC Irvine 39

TAMARA INOUE: You know, just thank you again to the NCAA for hosting. It was just a really good experience. They really treated us well, and I think our players, they really enjoyed and savored all the moments. Last time, my first year getting this job, we came out here and played, and they beat us 102-38, so I think we're on a little bit of an improvement from that to this game today.

But just really proud of my team and the way we battled today.

Q. Vaeh, you were a beast in the paint tonight. You had 10 rebounds. It seemed like they were looking for you every time down the floor. Was that kind of the game plan going in, or was that something you guys just noticed during the game?

NEVAEH PARKINSON: Just something that we noticed during the game. Whoever is open, whoever is hot, we try to set them up during the game. I'm just really grateful to have teammates that really just were looking for me, that I had the hot hand, and just trusting me to make the lay-up and just continue to pass to me. So yeah.

Q. Déja, for you, what would you say was the biggest takeaway from this weekend playing in your first NCAA Tournament?

DÉJA LEE: Honestly just to enjoy the moment. These moments happen so quickly, and it's just such an honor and a pleasure to even be in this situation. Not to take anything for granted, but also to not be nervous and to just



soak everything all in and the whole experience.

NEVAEH PARKINSON: I mean, this is a great experience. I've never been here before. Looking forward to being here another year with UC Irvine. Really was soaking it in, like DJ said.

Q. Talk about that first quarter. What a start for you guys.

TAMARA INOUE: Yeah, you know, look, our team, they want to play. They want to battle, and they want to be in these situations. That's what we talk about constantly. When they manned us, I thought we could really isolate and find some openings and get by them and create some mismatches, and I thought my team did a really good job of stepping up and doing that. Then defensively we did try to get them on their heels initially, and I think they weren't ready for it, but then they started to get comfortable as the game went on.

Q. Their 1-2-2 zone, it was effective?

TAMARA INOUE: Yeah, zone. I think it's 98 percent man for Gonzaga, so the 2 percent came out today, and they did a really good job in it. For us, I apologized to my team. It's been about a month since we went through anything in zone, so I thought the team did a really good job of just adjusting and finding the gaps.

I thought we had good shots. I thought the shots we took were good, they just didn't fall, and unfortunately in these type of games, those open shots, you've to have some fall for us.

Then they did a really good job of keeping us off the boards. They really held us to one shot, and they got multiple on the other end. They did what they did really well. I thought we did a good job just matching it, but at the end of the day they're a ranked team for a reason.

Q. If you had one word to describe this group, what would that be and why?

TAMARA INOUE: Ooh. That's a tough one. I just think



this team -- by far, I think resilient in the sense of they just battle through and through. I think the biggest thing for us, and I tell them all the time, is you just don't know if this is ever going to be replicated, a team like this. Next year we're going to have new players and we're going to have a new team, and for me, I'm just so grateful to have this team be the first to go to the NCAA Tournament. I can honestly tell you that this has been one of my favorite if not my favorite team, and I can go down the list as to why.

But for me, and I'm proud of my team, and I think what we did was we were able -- it's not about one person by any means, but we were able to give Diaba Konate something to really smile about and go home with because she'll never be able to play again, so I think that's something that I hang my hat on really heavily.

Q. Despite the loss tonight, how do you guys build off a historical season in terms of building the culture for this program?

TAMARA INOUE: We just continue to recruit, and we just get players that want to do what we're doing.

I think that that's really, really important. I have by far the best staff in the country that goes out and finds me the players that we know can fit into our system. I think that's a big deal. You don't want to bring players in that can disrupt that, and that's a challenge, and that's why my assistants are next to me.

But it's all about that. I think we have a good foundation. I think we've been building that foundation the last four years, and it's starting to come to where we want it to be. Being able to go postseason has been really good for us in the WNIT. I think that's been really fun for us to see that.

The fortunate piece for our team is the core is coming back. We are losing Diaba, we are losing MJ, and we're losing Caiyle Kaupu and Tarryn Ross, but other than that, we have our core coming back so I think that's something we need to build on and we need to fit the pieces in, and that's important for us to continue the success we're having.

Q. You pitched a really great defensive game despite the fact that they nailed those shots, and you only sent them to the line seven times, so you played a really physical tough game and you didn't send them to the line that often. How did you manage that balance?

TAMARA INOUE: Yeah, I think the first time we played here they ran us up to 102 and I was pretty stubborn wanting to stay in the zone, and my associate head coach, Cecilia Russell-Nava, was like, let's go man, and I'm like,

no, I don't want to give up lay-ups. She's like, but threes are more than two points. And I'm like, all right, we'll go to man.

I think that's the same thing here. They shoot the three really, really well, so for us to do what we did tonight. I thought they did a good job. They hit seven, which is too many for us, but I think just being able to disrupt it and making them think about it was the goal. We are pretty good about showing our hands and sliding. I think we're athletic enough to stay in front of people for the most part. We do a good job with that, and that's what we really pride ourselves on. Just the rebounding piece, we've got to grab and rip and hold, and I think we'll get my strength coach to work on that.

It's not my fault. It's always everybody else's if you haven't noticed.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports