

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Gonzaga vs Utah

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Spokane, Washington, USA

McCarthy Athletic Center

Utah Utes

Coach Lynne Roberts

Inês Vieira

Matyson Wilke

Media Conference



of a player was she?

INÊS VIEIRA: She's a really good shooter. I think she's one of the fastest shooters that I've ever met and played with.

I don't know, I'm just excited to see her and play against her. It's going to be really fun. It's going to be loud. She's a really, really good player. So we've got to lock in on that too.

Q. Are you still friends?

INÊS VIEIRA: Yeah, we talk.

Q. Matyson, what do you feel like is a key or the challenges tomorrow playing Gonzaga?

MATYSON WILKE: Obviously the atmosphere. It's exciting to play in. We've had that experience being in the Pac-12, just playing at places that have a lot of fans. So I think that's a key. But also using that to our advantage. Like, it is fun.

And then offensively and defensively, just being aggressive. We've been able to watch a lot of games, both on the men's and women's side. And even last night, just knowing the aggressive team usually comes out on top.

And then just playing together. Utah basketball, we've been through a lot this year. Seeing that, having confidence going into the game, but being aggressive and just having fun I think is our biggest thing for tomorrow.

Q. Inês, kind of a similar question to what Maty just answered, but you look at the offensive numbers for Gonzaga, they're pretty similar to your team's. Just kind of what is the key especially defensively to tomorrow's matchup?

INÊS VIEIRA: Yeah, we talked about a lot being really aggressive on defense. That's what leads to our offense. And comparing to last game, I think we need to do a better job of pressuring every single one of them and make it hard for them and make them work.

THE MODERATOR: We have from the Utah Utes players Inês Vieira and Matyson Wilke. We'll open the questioning to our student-athletes.

Q. Obviously this isn't your first NCAA Tournament. What does it mean to be here, being able to have that opportunity for another chance at a Sweet 16 opportunity?

INÊS VIEIRA: Yeah, we're really excited. We talked about playing the best version of ourselves and just having fun and playing together. That's when we're our best. And I think, yeah, that's all we need to do.

Q. Maty, I know you came to Utah to be able to get in the NCAA Tournament. You've got that opportunity. Now that you're here, what's your focus now that that is behind you?

MATYSON WILKE: Similar to what Inês said, just being the best version of myself for the team. And having a lot of girls have been in this position before, just leaning on them.

And just having fun in the moment. It's not every day you get to play for games in March Madness. So like I said, just leaning on my teammates and trying to enjoy the moment as best as I can.

Q. Did either one of you play with Brynna Maxwell?

INÊS VIEIRA: I did.

Q. Tell me about your time with her at Utah, what kind



Q. What do you appreciate about playing with Alissa? What are aspects of being on the court with her that you really enjoy playing the game with her?

MATYSON WILKE: She's a great scorer. But off of like what she does rebounding assists, I think just when she's on the court she brings a sense of confidence to everyone. She doesn't really get high and low. She kind of is just really steady.

For me and I know for others, it kind of brings us -- especially some confidence knowing that I have one of the best players in the country on my team, and I bring that confidence on both ends of the court.

INÊS VIEIRA: And going off that, she's the leader on the court. We follow her. And she gives us a lot of confidence. And I don't know, she's so fun. She catches every single ball that we throw. I don't know. We really have really confidence in her, and she brings that, too, to us. So I think that's really important.

Q. You've got the first game out of there, and obviously Gonzaga looked very similar to you guys, especially in the three-point numbers and different things that way. How do you distance the noise of the NCAA Tournament and just kind of play basketball, knowing that you have played some of the top teams in the country in the Pac-12?

MATYSON WILKE: I think we've got to rely on each other and trust in our coaches. Like you've said, we've played the best teams in the country in the Pac-12.

Also, the noise is fun, but using that to our advantage, it's excitement. It's a new day, a new game. Everyone is going to have their best basketball.

But just staying together, staying in our circle, still having fun with each other off the court. Because as much as it's super fun, it can be a lot of stuff from the outside coming in.

So just trying to keep our circle small and just have fun together.

INÊS VIEIRA: Yeah, and going off that, I think we -- it's all going to be about second chances and whoever plays harder, we already talked about that, since we're a really similar team.

So I just think every loose ball, every O board, everything, it's going to count. And I don't know, it's March, so everyone is in the same position, so we've just got to play harder.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, you're dismissed.

Coach, give an opening statement about your thoughts for tomorrow.

LYNNE ROBERTS: Thanks for being here. It's good to see some of my Salt Lake City people. Welcome.

We're excited to be here. I know that's what everyone says. But I think last night's game was a good game for us. It wasn't easy. And we found a way to win when we weren't tremendous for 40 minutes. But we did what we needed to against a very, very good South Dakota State team.

And now we get ready for Gonzaga. And certainly know that they've had a great season, great program. Playing on the road. So pressure is on them, not on us, which is a great spot to be in.

Q. Lynne, you talked about just the adversity that you faced this year, and that's obviously something we've seen. What would a chance at getting back to the Sweet 16 mean to you, knowing that you still have everything on the table?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, it'd be awesome. You know, last year losing in the Sweet 16 in the way we did, that has been at the forefront of our minds since last April. And while we haven't talked about it a whole lot, now we're starting to in terms of the goal all along this season was to get back to that game and have a redo at that Sweet 16 game.

Obviously not same opponent or anything, but just get a chance to get back to that game. Now that's within our sights, but we know, my goodness, it's going to be hard. But it should be hard. It's the second round of the NCAA Tournament. It's supposed to be.

And we have faced a lot of adversity, a lot of injuries. But don't feel sorry for us. That's part of sports. And we've dealt with it, and we've handled it.

So the chances to get back there would be awesome, but we know it's going to be hard.

Q. You're facing a Gonzaga team that obviously looks very similar to you in terms of the offense. What does that do for you? Does that help? Does that hurt? How does that work in your mindset going forward, trying to scheme against them?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, they are similar in that they've



got a post player that is really hard to defend one-on-one. And so she's really good. And so it's like us with Pili, like you have to -- it's a risk to go one-on-one with Pili. And then they have great shooters as well. They move the ball, and they run their stuff well.

So it's like, okay, if we help off, then we might give up threes. If we stay on the three-point line, we might be giving -- you know, it is a little bit of looking in the mirror that way of game planning. And so trying to figure out what we could be most effective in defensively that might give them the most trouble.

Q. Obviously there's a familiar face in Brynna from the Gonzaga side. What did she mean to your program while she was there, and what have you seen out of her at Gonzaga?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, Brynna is a great kid, great family. She -- highly recruited out of high school. We got to coach her for three years. One of the fastest release shots I've ever been around. She can just fill it.

And she was a big part of our program for three years. And she graduated and in three years at Utah and wanted a bigger role. And so came to Gonzaga, and it's been fun to watch her succeed.

I think she's a great kid. And the way she handled the transferring was respectful, and there is no hard feelings. I mean, she's a great kid. And I -- it's been fun to see her succeed here and have fun.

That's what it's all about. Being a college athlete, it should be fun. She wanted a bigger role, and I understood that. So I don't want her to do well, but I'm glad she's had a great career.

Q. When you guys played them a couple seasons ago out in Hawaii, was there anything you can take away from that? Are they similar to that? Do you even go back and look at the scout film from that?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, we did quite a bit, and I was annoyed with myself watching that film back at how poorly a job I did executing -- the stuff we ran was just poor. So, yes, they beat us there.

And watching it back, they're very -- they're a great program, and they don't reinvent the wheel every year. They're very similar in terms of their schemes. And obviously they've added things. I'm not saying they're cookie cutter, but their defensive game planning and stuff is the same.

And, man, we were not good over there. So, yes, we scouted that, and we showed our team some of that this morning, and they were kind of -- they felt like we did, like Whoa, not good.

So hopefully we'll be better.

Q. Do you know that you are 2-0 at McCarthy against Gonzaga?

LYNNE ROBERTS: I did not know that.

Q. Last year Pacific, and I think first year Utah --

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, in the WNIT. Yeah, I guess you're right.

Q. Do you like playing here?

LYNNE ROBERTS: I do love playing here. Yeah. I think it's an incredible basketball community, Spokane is, and they are educated basketball fans. And so they understand the game. And it's loud in there. And they sell out. And I think that's awesome for our sport.

In our conference, we play in a lot of arenas like that. Arizona averages 10,000 fans and Oregon State is sold out. And loud places. USC, we played in front of, I don't know, 8,000. Our gym, we're averaging 8,000.

We're used to large crowds and the noise and all of that. So it's not a -- I don't know. It's just not intimidating by any stretch. It's just more fun.

Q. I know in tournament time things can get sped up or the emotions can be a little bit too much. How do you help your team focus on the Utah way of basketball, knowing that those emotions and everything will be there?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, I think, yeah, the tournament is emotional, but this is -- for some of our players, this is their third year in a row making it to the second round. Experience is a great thing.

So I don't sense nerves at all. There's definitely intensity and focus. I don't sense cockiness, I don't mean that way. There's just a comfort level having been there, done that.

So I think like I said a couple days ago, the key in the NCAA Tournament is to be the best version of yourself. Yes, you have to game plan, and every game plan is going to be completely unique with what the other team does, and there's no familiarity, like you don't play each other during the course of the season. But that part is fun.

You're playing a new team, and they're playing a new team. So there's a little bit of a chess match there.

But you have to be the best version of yourself. So that's what I just keep reminding our team. Alissa Pili, we don't need you to do anything different than you've done all year. Kennady McQueen, don't do anything different, just maybe just a little more intensity and hyper focus on executing.

Q. Coach, I believe you won Mid-Major Coach of the Year for CBS Sports March Madness or something, and Lisa Fortier this year is on the list of Mid-Major Coach of the Year. What's this coaching battle going to be like?

LYNNE ROBERTS: I don't know. Lisa is a great coach. She's done a really nice job here. And she was Kelly Graves' assistant for a long time. I've known Lisa forever, not forever, but 25 years.

And so she's done a really good job of taking that program that she worked hard to build with Kelly and then just taking it over and making it her own.

But a lot of respect for them. And I think they do a great job recruiting and their culture. And they certainly find kids that fit their system, which I think is a mark of a good coach and a good recruiter.

But I know her staff. It's not just her. They're very smart basketball-wise. I think my staff is too. So it probably will be a little bit of a chess match in that regard in trying to anticipate what they might do and then anticipating what we might do and then making adjustments on the fly.

So should be fun.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

LYNNE ROBERTS: Thank you, guys.

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