

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

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Spokane, Washington, USA

McCarthy Athletic Center

Gonzaga Bulldogs

Maud Huijbens

Kayleigh Truong

Lisa Fortier

Media Conference



MAUD HUIJBENS: Well, if people didn't know what a home advantage meant, then they know now. Because that was insane. Just out of this world. Never experienced anything like it. And I definitely think it helps. The energy is just almost like -- it like touches you. Like it's incredible. So I think it does help. It shows that people want to watch women's sports, and that is just amazing to be a part of, and yeah, I hope for the same atmosphere on Monday.

Q. You guys found yourselves down early last game and nothing seemed to go right but turned it around. Does that help against a game in Utah where you might find yourself at the wrong end of a run, where you're like, okay, we have been here before and we know how to right the ship, and does that help at all?

KAYLEIGH TRUONG: I definitely think it does help. The majority of our season, I think we could say that it was in a way challenging just because we were up in conference so much, and so nobody -- we were down, I guess at Pacific, you could say, but then we fought our way back and still won by double-digits, and then NCAA, everybody knows it's one-and-done. We just have to learn from the first half and make sure we make adjustments throughout the whole game. Not trying to dig ourselves like in a deeper hole than we should and then help each other get out of it.

Q. You answered the question about Utah looking similar to you guys, but is there anything in particular that you guys see on tape that you haven't seen this year or things that maybe you're focusing on more knowing that this isn't a team that you're usually facing because of the West Coast conference stuff?

MAUD HUIJBENS: They are primarily focused on like three-pointers and layups. So it's less of that mid-range area, which we haven't really seen before, like at least, like this, I guess. So I guess that's something that's different.

But I wouldn't say that we like were not prepared for it. It's things that we have been doing all year. So I think we'll be okay.

LISA FORTIER: Excited for our team, happy how we

Q. Just when you look at the matchup here between Gonzaga and Utah, there's a lot of offensive numbers that are very similar, three-point assists, shooting, just what are some of the keys that you see for tomorrow's game?

KAYLEIGH TRUONG: I think the most important thing probably is just to lock in on defense that might separate us and getting the boards so we can maybe have more possessions to play offense or something like that. So defense and boards.

Q. What about Alissa Pili makes her so difficult to stop and what have you guys thought about how you'll approach that?

MAUD HUIJBENS: I think she's physical and pretty versatile. She has a range at the three which makes it harder. You have to guard her all ends of the floor. So I think a big focus on her is really limiting her touches and getting -- limiting her boards. If we are able to do that, that is going to help us tremendously.

KAYLEIGH TRUONG: Yeah, she's a really great player. I think we can't hold anyone to zeros, obviously, so we are just going to have to limit, or Coach Lisa said in the locker room, neutralize her somehow. As a team, I think we'll do okay.

Q. Playing on your own floor, talk about the importance of that, particularly yesterday, you were able to use that momentum of your home floor and get the win. How much is it going to play a factor in the game against Utah?



played yesterday. Totally different game tomorrow, and short prep time, but I'm excited. I think that both teams have challenges and strengths, areas that they can be strong against each other and areas that they are going to have work through.

Hopefully we do a better job of our strengths and minimizing theirs. But I'm excited. It was a good game to watch yesterday. Those are two really good teams and so just looking forward to seeing what our team has tomorrow.

Q. You had some common opponents that both teams have played and other things in common but one that's common is Maxwell. She played at Utah and she's here. Has she been able to give you any inside knowledge about what they do?

LISA FORTIER: We've seen them play. She has a little bit of that. We are trying to not put it ^ on her shoulders. We are the coaches, right, so we are supposed to figure it out. We have more commonalities than just her. Erika played for them, Naya (ph) played for them.

But no, we have not wanted to do that. We all know that they shoot threes and lay-ins and she would agree to that. She's played with some of those players. Some of them were her teammates but she never played with Alissa, and that's a huge part of what they are doing now. Jenna that was a freshman, Kennady was there, their point guard was there. So there are some common players there.

But no we have just tried to make it about, your job is to prepare for the game, how you prepare as a player and our job is to prepare for the game as we do as coaches. That's been at least our approach to the situation. Erika, though, Erika's given us all the secrets.

Q. Both teams, I mean, you've got -- loaded with offensive players. What do you think the game is going to boil down to, defense, who plays the hardest?

LISA FORTIER: Defense, I'm an old defensive coach who has a really good offensive team who is constantly trying to get us to play the best defense that we can. In the games where we have been at our best we have been connected defensively.

I think that's partially because it's a little bit less natural to us and so naturally we are going to usually find enough baskets. They are a good defensive team, however, but that just comes a little bit more second nature to our team and so the defense we have to work together. We have to communicate. We have some really good communicators.

I think they understand the game plan, and so I'm always

going to say that we are going to have to be connected defensively with this team in order to have great success.

Q. As media, it's easy for us to see the stats and say, okay, these teams look similar. Do you see that? Is that something that you see and does it help you? What do you see in this matchup that's similar or different that allows you to go into this game thinking about that stuff?

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, I mean, we both have Eliza and Yvonne. They are a load. I don't think anyone enjoys preparing for either of those two. Having so many weapons out there, their starting five is not dissimilar to our starting five. Everybody can shoot it. Everybody can score the ball in a variety of different ways. They play unselfish just like us.

You know, both teams play hard. Both teams are veteran. I think there's all those similarities. Both teams run a lot of sets. There's a lot of different actions that we can get to and lots of ball screens in the game. So those are definitely similar. I think we approach it in a different way. I think defensively there's some strengths that we have. We are having to pick matchups. They have to pick matchups, too, and figure out who they want to guard, which Truong, who they want to guard Brynna and Yvonne, and there's a lot of that that's similar.

I think it plays into the game plan. You know, I don't know if I'm old or young but somewhere along the line, I've tried to stop thinking through what they are going to do and just tried to focus on us. Because every time I thought I was going to out think Paul Thomas did, he just did what he did. That's how every time I'm like, oh, they are probably going to do this on us and I spend all this wasted energy thinking about what they are going to do against us versus trying to think about how we are going to be strong and what our strengths are. I'm just trying to figure out how to best prepare for them and hopefully we have a good game plan.

Q. You mentioned Alissa Pili earlier and you talked about defense. How do you game plan for a player like that and what does she do that's so special?

LISA FORTIER: Well, she can shoot it and she's dominant inside. I mean, I'm sure she can shoot the mid-range if that's what they asked her to do. That's not what they asked her to do but a forward that shoots that many threes, I don't know how many Eliza has shot but Alissa has probably shot more an lies. She takes a lot of baskets and she's focused.

We see that sometimes where she draws attention and then you have good perimeter players who are willing to

pass it to their teammates, and then the ball doesn't get stuck and that causes problems for people. Defensively, you know, you game plan the best you can. We have good individual defenders who I think can give her some different looks. Sometimes you double. Sometimes you front her. Sometimes you play behind her. I don't think you can settle in on any one thing with her.

You've got to maybe try to keep her off ball a little bit and unsure of what's coming next to slow her down but it's a team effort and that's how we defend best is with each other. I don't -- I don't know how many great individual defenders we have. We have some. But not a team full of them, and so we are going to try to defend Alissa as a team just like we would try to defend Kennedy and just like we are going to try to defend general in a and anyone else we have to see.

Q. Looking at their personnel, their scheme, do they remind you of anyone that you've played previous this year?

LISA FORTIER: I don't know. I mean, I would say some similarity, they have two forwards who can be effective, and they like to go high low, they like to pass it to each other. That's what Stanford does. The shooters, they have more shooters on the perimeter than Stanford maybe did. There's forwards who can shoot it. Cal had forwards who can shoot it, so that's something similar there.

I think there's pieces here and there. Guards who love to attack. We played a lot of teams with guards who love to attack to the glass or get all the way to the rim so that's similar. I don't know if we have played a team exactly like them but certainly we have seen the different parts, at least maybe not all together, right, the deeper you go, the more likely you are to see players who can drive and shoot. They are not just limited players who can only play one side of the ball. They can guard, also.

So I think that's what happens, the better teams you play as you get deeper into this tournament. But we've seen a little bit of each of those things I think at different times.

Q. How big was the home floor for you in your opening game after the start that you had, how much did that play a factor and how big can it be for you tomorrow?

LISA FORTIER: Well, you know, it's really fun to play in this building when it's full like that, and we face it -- we see it a lot but the student section was amazing. Our student section has been pretty good all year but having them right there next to us, I think that fueled us. We got a couple stops and they got behind us which was nice because we

needed those stops to start a run in the second quarter.

You know, the building was very loud as I'm told. I don't know if I had like these weird earplugs in or something. I didn't notice it but I did notice that it gave our team a lift. And it's a special place to play with a special crowd of people who love their Zags. It's called Hoop Town for a reason. I'm hopeful if we need a boost tomorrow that it's going to feel the same way for our players.

Q. You've been bitten with the injury bug a little bit but yesterday all three of your bench players, Maud, Esther and Claire, I all thought played and gave valuable minutes to the team. What is their role going to look like in this upcoming against Utah?

LISA FORTIER: I think it's the same. Our players, as you get to this time of year, I believe -- and that's why we sub how we do, even when we are healthy. We try to play a lot of players. It helps them with development. Maud is a potential -- Maud and Esther are going to be seniors next year. They are going to play a ton of minutes. They already are this year; Maud already is, she's been doing it all year.

And Claire is a freshman who has gotten herself into some opportunities that she may or may not have had had we had a full roster and she's doing great.

So I think they are valuable opportunities for those guys to improve and get experience in the NCAA Tournament but also, our players can't -- we are not designed to play 40. They could do it if we had to but I don't believe that's the right way to have a fresh team and be effective.

So I think that hopefully similar. Hopefully they come in and give us energy and hopefully they come in and run things how they are supposed to, defend the scout well and play tough. Our team is better, when, again, we don't get bogged down with Linnie takes all the shots and Brynna gets all the threes and Vonne gets all the rebounds. We've got to do it collectively, and so hopefully they are going to come in and give us some in all of those categories.

Q. If the game boils down to one or two things, what do you think it will be?

LISA FORTIER: I think it's going to come down to who makes -- which team makes the other team play more to their weaknesses. I think that's a big thing.

So I think if we guard them and make them play to their weaknesses, then that's going to be an advantage to us. I think who can make in-game adjustments is always in a

better position, and players have to make plays. You know, we have to set them up and put them in a^ position and see who can make the plays.

I think a big emphasis for us is getting our players to internalize the scout in the amount of time that they have and then do it physically because I think -- like I said, we have a good game plan. We always do, but it's how connected can you be when there's adversity and how well can you execute those things that we're trying to do.

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