

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Lehigh vs Duke

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Durham, North Carolina, USA

Cameron Indoor Stadium

Duke Blue Devils

Coach Kara Lawson

Media Conference



understanding of what we're trying to do has grown.

That's what I would say has probably been the biggest change from when she first got here till now.

Q. Coach, congratulations on the ACC championship. Can you speak on what you're telling your team coming off such a high win and coming off that championship and preparing them for the next steps?

KARA LAWSON: That means nothing. I mean, it's not like we're going to start the game up 10-0 because we one an SEC title. Nobody in this tournament cares that we one the conference tournament. You just have to be prepared to play your best.

It was great, I'm not saying nobody cares to diminish the accomplishment. In the moment and in the immediate aftermath, we celebrated and we were excited about it, as we should be. I do believe in celebrating in the moment. I don't believe you should all wait until the end of the year and then reflect on it. To me, like, celebrate it. If you have big moments in your life, celebrate them in the moment. Tell people you appreciate them in the moment.

But then at some point, the moment passes and there's the next moment that you have to chase and that you have to pursue. So that's what we're focused on, what's next, and what's next is to try and win a first round game and get to where there's 32 teams left. And that's a big cut to go from 64 to 32. You have to play well to make that cut.

So that's kind of what we're focused on.

Q. Hey, Coach. How big is it for women's basketball to have units for the tournament? You guys make money for every game that you play in this tournament, which was not the case till this year.

Also, how big is it to this area having three women's sites here and the men's sites. So you have North Carolina, this area, being sort of the hotbed of basketball right now.

KARA LAWSON: Well, I kind of look at it as like the units is -- I guess it's good. It is good. I just think it should be

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Kara Lawson. We'll open questions after an opening statement from Coach to the room first, then we'll go to Zoom.

KARA LAWSON: Excited that the first game is upon us. Obviously our group is, you know, feels good about being at home and being able to work. Leading up to the week it's been good. You know, I can't say that much has changed for us. I mean, we're excited, we're ready to go and, you know, looking forward to playing a good Lehigh team.

Understand that everybody in this tournament is really good. Everybody can present issues and if you don't come ready to play, you'll lose. I think that's what we all like about March, is that it's unpredictable. You can't put your finger on it. You have to play well to win. That's how it should be. So our focus all week has been playing well. Knowing that if you don't play well, you'll lose, and that's how it should be in competition.

Hopefully our group is ready to play well tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions from the room.

Q. Kara, this site has the SEC Freshman of the Year and the ACC Freshman of the Year in it. Just wanted to ask you about Toby and kind of from the moment she stepped on campus till now, where have you seen her grow the most?

KARA LAWSON: I think just understanding the scheme and the play book, terminology is all those things that are, for most players, much more layered in college than they are in high school. She has an understanding of what we're trying to do on every play and an understanding of where she needs to be. So that has grown as the season has gone along. I think her confidence has grown as her



more. So I think we need more money with the units than what we have now. So I think the first step is good that there's actually something in place that allows for more revenue generation. That's a step in the right direction, but I think the revenue coming into this sport should be higher.

As far as your second question, I mean, we know what we have here. We play these guys all the time. They're really good teams. I think they've been rewarded for the years that they've had, and there was a time that this was the best area in the country for women's college basketball, and I think we can get back to that.

I think the three programs are strong. I think they have really good players. I think they have really good followings, fan followings and this is a special place. I mean, think about it, how many Metropolitan areas do you know of that could have three teams like that in one area and draw? Most people draw because they have a whole state that is behind them, or just an entire city. So they can draw from one hour east and one hour north and one hour south and one hour west, and like everyone can converge upon this town that supports the one team. And this place has three in 30 minutes. There's nothing like it in the country.

I mean, it will take you two hours to get from UCLA to USC, and the traffic on the 405, brother, right? They're two hours from each other, right? We're 30 minutes.

So I think it speaks to the passion of the basketball in this area. There's -- I just think, like, if you went and knocked on doors in the neighborhood, everybody is a basketball fan. Per household or per neighborhood, we just have more fans here of college basketball. That's just what it is. I know it because wherever I go, people come up to me, and they're not even all the times Duke fans. They're other school's fans, but they talk about the season, they talk about this. They'll wish you luck if you're not playing their team, but everywhere you go around here is basketball, college basketball.

That's more unique than you think in the country. Where this sport is the number one sport in this area. Think about all the cities you know, where is college basketball the number one sport? It's not, but here it is. So I think being a part of that is really, really cool.

Q. We spoke to your players about the rivalry of Lehigh. Can you tell us what you told them coming into this game and how they've been comparing and practicing or what they may have changed or what you may have suggested they change?

KARA LAWSON: Well, we haven't changed how we

prepare. We try to prepare the same way for each team. We don't have the same scheme for each team, but in terms of the amount of respect that you show every opponent should be high. And so that's how we've prepared. They're a really good team. We've watched a lot of film on them. We've prepared how we want to play them offensively and defensively and with how much energy we need to play to win. It's not more energy than we normally need to play with, but it's a lot. If you watch us play, we play with a lot of energy, so we have to bring that. That's what it is.

You have to have the appropriate fear every time you go into the game. Like, you have to know that you can be beaten. You don't have to necessarily know that you will be beaten, but you have to know that it's possible. If you don't think it's possible at all, you'll slip in your preparation. If you don't think something is possible then you won't prepare as hard, but if you think something is possible or immanent... why does everybody go buy milk and eggs when the hurricane is coming?

Toilet paper. There's my guy.

All of a sudden, it's immanent. All of a sudden, you're worried. My house has a lot of milk and eggs and toilet paper. I'm always ready, you know what I'm saying? I'm ready, appropriate fear. If it happens, I'm ready. I ain't running out. I use it as a silly analogy, but that's an example of how you have to be as a competitor. You have to always be ready no matter who you're playing. If you can train yourself to be that, then you're going to put yourself in a good position. Doesn't mean you're going to win all the time. Just because you're ready, doesn't mean you're winning. It's the mindset. You have to be prepared.

That's what we try to teach them and get them to light the fire under them to understand that. That ultimately comes down to respect that you have. If you respect somebody you'll prepare hard for them. If you don't respect them, you won't. So the first baseline thing you have is respect for all your opponents, respect for all the people you're competing against. We have that for Lehigh and we've had it for every team this year, but we have to make sure we continue to have that and we'll prepare appropriately.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions?

Q. In preparing for Lehigh, when you watch them on film, what stuck out to you about them? What do they do really well?

KARA LAWSON: Well, they do a lot of things well. They space the floor really well. They make reads very well. They take advantage of your mistakes defensively very

well. They have a number of 3-point shooters on the court. They can put four and five 3-point shooters on at the same time to space you out. I think they're second in the country in free throw percentage so they get to the line and they make them, and then defensively, they force you to take the type of shots that they want you to take, not the ones that you want to take.

Very experienced team, as well. A team that wins. They win. They seem to, on film, have a lot of connectivity, they have a good chemistry with one other.

It's going to be a big challenge for our defense. There's no doubt. We're going to have to work to be disruptive. If you watch us play, we always try to be disruptive, but you have to work to be there. You don't just start the game and say, boo, we're disruptive. You have to work to be disruptive and different teams make it work for it in different ways. They're going to make us work for it a little bit to be disruptive. So we're going to have to see if we can be that tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time. Best of luck tomorrow.

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