

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Oregon vs Duke

Sunday, March 23, 2025
Durham, North Carolina, USA
Cameron Indoor Stadium

Duke Blue Devils

Kara Lawson

Ashlon Jackson

Delaney Thomas

Media Conference

Duke 59, Oregon 53

KARA LAWSON: Just super proud of the group. I mean, it was a gritty game. It's what we expected. Obviously, we got down early and didn't play our best in the first half, and offensively struggled. I thought the second half to start in that third quarter, Ashlon just really injected us with a ton of energy and confidence and swagger by making plays, and I thought that kind of got us going a little bit.

I thought these two up here with me were the difference makers in the game for us. When you look at Ashlon's shot making and hitting five threes for us, and when you look at Delaney's total floor game, just battling all night, all night, with their center and making key plays and rebounds, making free throws, finishing plays, they all had to go a little bit longer than normally they go in terms of the number of minutes played, but they did a great job in that second half of kind of going the distance.

It's hard to do. It's hard to go to back-to-back Sweet 16s. It's not something that a lot of programs are able to do. So we're pleased to be back in the same position we were last year and just happy to keep advancing.

Q. Just kind of, what was the mood in the locker room? What was said? Who was saying it?

ASHLON JACKSON: I feel like it was just, like, our whole team just speaking out going into halftime. We knew that we just had to continue to compete and up our level a little bit as far as energy-wise and just stay the course. That's a great team. They're greatly coached. But we knew we had work to do. It really just came from everybody.



DELANEY THOMAS: I think adding on to that, we had to stay together. We had to grind it out. We were down a little bit, but if we stayed together, we knew we were going to get it done.

Q. Ash, you sort of struggled in the first half to find your shot a little bit and then really just turned around right to kick off the third quarter. What do you think changed that helped you sort of find your range?

ASHLON JACKSON: Really, just my teammates and my coaches. They just told me, if you're open, shoot the ball. We need you to shoot the ball. But having that confidence from my coaches and from my teammates, that's really what got me going there.

Q. On that note, did y'all come out a little bit earlier at halftime to get some shots up or is that your normal routine? You could see almost some relief on your face after the first two threes went down in the second half. Was that just you needed to see them go down?

ASHLON JACKSON: Halftime routine is pretty much the same. But yeah, I got tired of missing. It's simple. But yeah, just seeing the ball go in, it was a great thing.

Q. Ashlon, how do you plan to build on the performance today for the next round, both as a team and individually?

ASHLON JACKSON: As a team, we've got to continue to stay together and just continue to push our pace up, our tempo, our energy. Every single round that we will go to, it's always going to be a great team, a great coach.

I would say just staying the course, just staying Duke, and just getting to it after practice. Yeah, that's pretty much it because, like I said, we're going into -- we're going to play a great team this coming week. So yeah, that's pretty much it.

Q. Delaney, you kind of had the matchup against Oregon's center, really battling out with her. What was your mindset going into it and really holding her and



stifling her?

DELANEY THOMAS: She's a good player. She's got a lot of height, a little advantage for me. But just competing, just fighting, battling on the boards, doing as much as I could to keep her off that, and that's kind of what I went in for.

Q. For both of you, playing without Toby, how much of an adjustment did that take, and how much did you kind of learn about yourself and your team through that?

ASHLON JACKSON: I would say playing without Toby was rough, but we knew that we had to be prepared. Everyone had to be prepared because if your number was called, we've got to go win a game.

But I would say, yeah, that was pretty tough. But we stayed ready, we stayed the course, and we got it done.

DELANEY THOMAS: I'd say not having any of your teammates is kind of a loss, but we were able to adjust. We were able to play together and just back each other up to kind of make up for that.

Q. For both of you guys, just wanted to ask about the defense. Specifically in the last four and a half minutes, Oregon did not score from the field. What do you think was crucial to locking them down at the end there?

DELANEY THOMAS: I think just our desire. We really wanted it. We really wanted it for each other, just playing together, being gritty, getting down to it. I think it's just wanting it.

ASHLON JACKSON: Yeah, I agree with her, just taking the challenge. That's a great offense that they have, but just wanted to buckle down, and we knew that's what had to be in order for us to win. Yeah, pretty much what she said.

Q. Kara, what can you tell us about Toby's status and why she wasn't on the bench?

KARA LAWSON: Yeah, she wasn't feeling well, and our doctors didn't clear her. We found out right before the game. That's the way it goes. Yeah, so I don't have a diagnosis, or a timetable either.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Reigan. How important has her leadership been in just scoring during this tournament run for you all?

KARA LAWSON: I thought Reigan, in the first half, was

the -- Reigan and Oluchi were the two guards that kind of figured out what they were trying to do defensively, and were able to knife through there and make some plays. And that was critical for us because our offense was not good. So to have her being able to come in there and make enough points so that the deficit wasn't too large was huge.

She's a senior, obviously. She's someone that I have a lot of belief in, trust in. I have an understanding what she's going to do and how she'll play, and she gives it her all defensively every night, and offensively, she was 6 for 10 tonight. She attacked and she was really efficient. That was big for us.

She got six rebounds, as well, which we needed because we weren't at our best from a rebounding perspective either tonight.

Q. I know you've seen Deja Kelly a few times. Does it help facing a familiar face when you saw her against Oregon today?

KARA LAWSON: I mean, she's a terrific player. Certainly, player tendencies are player tendencies. But even if you know the tendencies, she's difficult to stop. I thought she made it hard for us in the isolation situations and made some tough plays. Our goal was just to make her take tough shots. We know she's good enough, she's going to make some of them. But we felt like if we could continue to do that over time, maybe we'd get a few misses late, and we ended up getting a couple misses late, which helped us.

Q. Just going back to Toby and the pregame, first just want to clarify, not feeling well as in an illness? Second, when somebody is unavailable like that and you're going up against 6'8" center, how do you go about game planning for that with who else you have on the roster?

KARA LAWSON: Yeah, I'm not going to clarify, but as far as how we game planned, we've been a team with a lot of depth all year. And so, obviously, it didn't change the start of the game for us. Toby doesn't start games for us.

It was really just shortened our bench a little bit and took away some length and athleticism in that center matchup. So knew that Delaney would have to almost go the distance, and then that Wood would have to play some 5. So that's kind of what it was. Then we had to play a little more four-guard lineups because we didn't have enough forwards on the court.

So, changes some play calling in terms of what actions you

want to go to, but for defensively and stuff like that, it didn't change. It didn't change our scheme and our structure and what we did.

Q. It seemed like Deja, like you mentioned, was getting a lot of those ball screens. Did you change how you were attacking those throughout the game, or was it the same sort of system the whole time do you think?

KARA LAWSON: What did it look like to you?

Q. They were setting a lot of screens for Deja Kelly, and I thought maybe in the second half you were hedging a little bit more, but I couldn't tell for sure if that was a deliberate action.

KARA LAWSON: That's a good question. We were supposed to be hedging in the first half, and we did not, so it might have looked like we changed scheme. That happens sometimes. So no, I did not change an adjustment. We just started doing what we were supposed to be doing.

Q. Non-basketball question. Your men play in about 30 minutes, but this place was still probably 70, 75 percent full. Did you kind of take that in, and did the crowd have any help for your team?

KARA LAWSON: The crowd definitely helped our team, there's no doubt. The energy in there was amazing on Friday night, and it was amazing today. When we were down, I thought they really kind of gave us a push there.

This is Duke, and what an amazing March we've had so far. I felt confident we'd get a lot of people to come out because now everybody is going to go home and rush to their television to watch the men play Baylor, and we're rooting hard for those guys, and hopefully, we can have two teams in the Sweet 16 by the end of the afternoon.

But it is exciting on campus. It is a lot of fun. We obviously share the same space, so we're around our men's team all the time, just rooting for each other. When we won the ACC Tournament, we came back and it was like, hey, guys, now you go win the ACC Tournament. It's just kind of like a lot of support between both programs.

We're excited for them, and hopefully, they'll get the job done.

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