

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

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

Oregon Ducks Kelly Graves Deja Kelly Phillipina Kyei

Media Conference

Duke 59, Oregon 53

KELLY GRAVES: Well, we're disappointed, but first of all, I just want to congratulate Duke. They earned it today. They're a great team, and coach Kara does a heck of a job with them, and I wish them the best the remainder of the tournament. I think they're the kind of team that can win a bunch more games.

I'm really proud of my team. At the start of the year, you always look maybe best case what you think your team can do. And at the start of the year, I thought if we play really well at the right time, this is a team capable of getting to the second weekend, and we almost got there. We just came up a little short today.

Usually, the third quarter has been our quarter, and today Duke came out and just kind of put their foot down a little bit to start the quarter, and it took us a little bit to kind of get back and stand up.

But then after that, it was a game that could have gone either way.

Just didn't fall our way today, but I'm really proud of this group. I'm really proud of these two. Deja has meant everything to us this year. I'm really happy that she chose to come to Oregon. She's reenergized the program. And Philli, I owe so much to this young woman. She's been with us for years and just grown, not only as a basketball player and meant a lot, she's beloved in Eugene. But I just am really proud of how she's grown as a young woman. Ms. Philli, to her kindergarten class. She's just been amazing.



Philli and Deja, I want you to know I love you and I appreciate everything you've done. Congratulations. I know you feel bad now, but listen, you guys mean a lot to this program.

Q. Deja, for you, spending one year in this program, how meaningful was it for you to be around this group, and how much do you feel like you've grown?

DEJA KELLY: I'm starting to get emotional in here. I already let my tears out.

Yeah, sorry, I'm an ugly crier, so I'm trying not to do it in here.

Yeah, this has been truly one of the best years of my career. I could not be more thankful for this group, for the staff, for the program, not only for welcoming me with open arms, but KG said I reenergized the program, they reenergized me. That's one of the main things I was looking for in my last year, and like I said in multiple press interviews, I just wanted to get back to having fun playing the game again, playing with joy, and the minute I stepped on campus, that's what it was. That's what it was all about. That's what this group was about.

I've never felt more connected with a team in my whole career. That's just the truth. I'm so, so, so grateful. This year has meant the world to me, and like I told them, I'm pretty content with leaving my college basketball career how I did and with this group of people.

Q. Deja, did you get a chance to talk to anyone from UNC or visit over there when you were here? What was it like playing here in Cameron again but in a different uniform?

DEJA KELLY: Yeah, it was a lot of fun playing here. I was really excited to just play in this area once more. Obviously, we wanted a different outcome, but that's just how the game goes.

I was really glad to do it with this group. I think we had more than enough pieces. We played our butts off this



weekend.

Again, obviously, it went the other way, but I couldn't be more proud of how we performed and how we stuck together through this weekend, and again, they had my back 100 percent, and I could feel that, and that I'm so grateful for.

They knew that coming back here was going to be fun but also a challenge, especially for me personally, and I think they just consistently let me know that they all had my back 100 percent, and I could feel that throughout the whole weekend, and I'm really appreciative of that.

Q. Philli, looking back on four years at Oregon, how much you've grown as a person, you've talked about that a lot, I'm wondering what are some of the moments that stand out to you about your time at Oregon and how valuable has it been for you really as a person?

PHILLIPINA KYEI: Obviously, it means a lot to me being here four years. I think every moment really stuck to me from my freshman year, getting to know my teammates to now being with, like, the best team I've played with. I think every moment had an impact on me, coaches, and my teammates, as well.

Q. For Deja, just your thoughts on the difficulties that Duke posed in the second half and the way they came out of the locker room and reacted to the way that y'all played in the first half.

DEJA KELLY: Yeah, they're a really good team. They were a 2 seed for a reason. They won the ACC championship for a reason. They're tough. They're gritty, and they showed that come out of that third quarter.

I was really proud of how we played in that first half, but you can't just play 20 minutes of basketball.

I think that's where our kind of defensive lapses kind of happened early on in that third quarter, and we just dug ourselves too deep of a hole.

Yeah, credit to them. Like I said, they're a really good team. Ashlon Jackson came out and really imposed her will. But I liked our fight, too. We made the right adjustments, and just some we couldn't convert on.

Q. I'm wondering what's next for Deja Kelly. I know you want to keep playing basketball, but you're also very passionate about a career in media, in TV. What's the next chapter of life look like?

DEJA KELLY: Yeah, I mean, my goal is to make a WNBA roster. I'll be, from here on out, preparing for the draft and getting ready for that while also pursuing other passions, but basketball is the same thing. And yeah, my lifetime dream, goal, is to play in the WNBA. That's where my focus will be for the next couple weeks, and kind of go from there.

Q. Kelly, just looking at what this season means for the program and where it's gotten back to, I'm wondering if you can reflect on that and your feeling of being reenergized that you talked about at the start of the season and how this group contributed to that.

KELLY GRAVES: Well, I'm really grateful to the whole team. This was as professional and fun a group as I've ever coached, and this is my 38th year of coaching. I really, really have enjoyed these guys.

We've had no drama. That's crazy. Because it's life; when you're with this many people this much, sometimes you get that. It's been just an absolute pleasure, a joy to be with them each and every day.

I think we had great senior leadership. I think it starts there. My staff, I give them a lot of credit. They've reenergized me, too.

I couldn't be happier. I'm disappointed that we weren't quite our best today. We weren't bad, but we just weren't our best. Credit the other team; they made it that way.

I think we're in a good place. We gave it everything we had. I think we emptied the tank this year, and I think we're in a good spot. We've got a great returning group, and we're going to miss these seniors, but I think we've got the program in a really good place right now. I can't wait for the future. It's going to be fun.

Q. Just your thoughts on the seniors, specifically Deja and Philli, and Peyton, as well. It was a tough go for her to go down with the injury. Just that senior class, reflecting on that group.

KELLY GRAVES: Well, Peyton has been our heart and soul for a couple of years. She gives everything she has. She's had bad knees. She's torn her ACL a couple times. We're praying and hoping that it's not that again. But she's just -- she embodies, I think, who we are and the kind of -- she exemplifies really everything that's good about a student-athlete and about collegiate basketball. I'm just sad for her that she wasn't able to be out there on the court with us at the end. She would have made a difference, no doubt.

But love her with my whole being. I'm grateful to her and Lexi Whitfield and Nani Falatea, Sali. Sali didn't get to play with us this year, unfortunately. She's a good player, and she could never get healthy. Hopefully, her 28-year-old bones, or however old she is, I don't know, heal up because I think she can be a good pro somewhere. She loves the game, and hopefully, she's going to be able to play.

But yeah, I'm really grateful. My heart is full right now. I'm disappointed, but everybody is going to be disappointed except for one team. Our locker room is going to be no different than 15 other locker rooms like that today -- I don't know, I can't do the math, but you guys know what I'm talking about. At some point, it comes to an end.

I just know in my heart they gave us everything, and that's all I can ask for.

Q. Even with the loss, what will you remember most about coaching, Deja in particular, this year, and how has she helped shape the younger players both on and off the court?

KELLY GRAVES: The thing about Deja, she is as impressive a person as she is a basketball player. She juggles so many things with her NIL obligations, TV appearances. She's just juggling so many things in her life. But number one is the team. It's just amazing to me how she can do that at that young age. I can't figure myself out most days. I'm flustered by 10:00 a.m. She's just juggling, and she's just so professional in everything she does.

But I've been most impressed with her as a teammate. I had no idea what to expect. She's such a high-profile person and player. She came here, and she was as humble and she worked harder than anybody, she led. Just an impressive young person. I think she's going to help any WNBA team. I've got several players in that league, and I think she belongs. She's going to do well for somebody.

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