

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

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Durham, North Carolina, USA

Cameron Indoor Stadium

Baylor Bears

Nicki Collen

Kiersten Johnson

Ella Brow

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Ella, obviously these last two games you've played a lot more now with Marcayla out. Do you feel anymore responsibility to kind of continue to grow into your role?

ELLA BROW: Yeah, I think obviously she is such a big energy play for us coming off the bench defensively. So missing that I think that I have to sort of step into her role and help the team in that way. So just being able to step in every game and be ready when my name is called to bring energy and intensity to the team is a key.

Q. You played these guys before. Does that help or is it so long ago that it kind of makes everything from that obsolete?

KIERSTEN JOHNSON: No, it helps absolutely. They're still the same team, they have just get better and we've get better. It's going to be fun being able to play on their own home court. Still going to have to do the same scout, look at some more recent games they have played. But just doing the same things and keeping it about us.

Q. Is there anything as you looked at the Duke scout ahead of this game that kind of really stands out as like, oh they did do that in Paris and they're still doing this the same way.

KIERSTEN JOHNSON: Yeah, I think defensively they're a very good defensive team. So their schemes, I know there was a lot of things we changed and having to look back at



that I think will be super important for us.

ELLA BROW: I think offensively they're a very set team. They run their stuff very, very well. Coached by a great coach. So just knowing what our scheme is defensively and being able to stop them, so, yeah.

Q. Nicki told us yesterday she took y'all outside in the fourth quarter before and said, this could be your last 10 minutes of your career. How did that impact you and how has that impacting the whole team going into tomorrow?

KIERSTEN JOHNSON: Yeah, it means a lot. Us as seniors, it means a lot to us. This team really takes that and they listen to us and we want to listen to them. As a group of seniors that have played such a big role we really had to step up and that's what we did in that fourth quarter. The game hadn't been pretty, but you have to forget the 30 minutes pass and focus on the 10 in front of you and I think that's something that we did as a group.

Q. Ella, Jana's had to play a lot of minutes this year. What does it mean to you to spell her and to give the team really good minutes running the point? The team was plus two with you out there yesterday?

ELLA BROW: Yeah, definitely. Obviously Jana's played big minutes for us the whole season. Taliah having to play that backup point guard when she's out. So being able to come in and make plays for our team is massive. Like I said, just staying ready at all times and being ready when my name is called. Then just being aggressive on defense and offensively is huge.

Q. How has this team coalesced together after Marcayla's injury?

KIERSTEN JOHNSON: We're still the same. Now we just love on her even more. Get to bother her even more. No, we love Moo, she's a part of us she brings us so much energy and it's going to make us stronger, it's going to make her stronger. We're just going to stay tight together as a team because we got here together.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you for your time.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions.

NICKI COLLEN: Yeah, just happy to be here. Excited to get to play Duke. I know the crowd will be amazing. I know people are going to talk a lot about it being a rematch, but ultimately it's just two teams competing to get to the next round of the NCAA tournament. So we've got our work cut out for us. We know Duke is an elite team. We're just going to have to be gritty to have a chance to win the game.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Mar cayla was a big emotional piece of this team. How does her absence change that and who do you need to step up in her absence?

NICKI COLLEN: Yeah, I thought even going back and watching the first Duke game and the energy that she brought. She also ran into every screen that they set. But there's a fearlessness about her. She's just someone that everyone wants to root for because she loves basketball and she loves to compete. So I don't know that anything changes from an emotional leadership perspective. I think her team is going to rally around her. But you saw like I mean probably Ella got her minutes last night, you know, when it comes to rotationally, depending upon who we're playing and whether we can play size on the perimeter or whether we need to play small, I think we can go different ways. But when you look at, Mar cayla was going to play anywhere between 15 and 20 minutes, and Ella got those minutes yesterday.

Q. So many of your players said that that first matchup proved to them that they could compete physically with Duke. Just curious what you might have taken from that matchup, being that it was months ago.

NICKI COLLEN: Yeah, I mean, I think we lost a core group of seniors a year ago. So we were facing a team that, don't get me wrong, I think Oluchi was a huge part of Duke's success the previous year, but I think they were a team full of veterans. And we were a team a little bit figuring out who we were going to be, replacing multiple starters. So I think for us it was just about knowing we were going to face an elite competition and were we physically and mentally prepared to compete with 'em. When you look at the beginning of that game, they punched first. It took us about five minutes to wake up.

But I thought after that we competed with them at a high level. I thought we were really connected in that game. I thought as the game went along -- I'm not saying our kids didn't believe when we went to Paris that we were going to win, but I think the longer you stay in a game against an elite opponent you begin to really believe that you should be out there with them. So I do think it said a lot to them about what they were capable of and have we always played at that level? Probably not. But I think that that level is in us.

Q. Ella Brow has seen her minutes go up in the conference tournament game and now the NCAA tournament. What have you seen from her in just her ability to step into that role in some big moments and have you seen bits of improvement in that short time?

NICKI COLLEN: Yeah, I think you're probably never going to be wowed by Ella, but I think she's not afraid to play with pace and she's not going to do things to beat you, you know, to get you beat. She's someone that I thought there was a possession maybe that she could have been more aggressive in the second half, but she just pulled it out and said, that's not my role, let me get it to somebody who is role that is. And I think she's someone that will take an open shot if it's there, but she, from an IQ perspective, basketball IQ, she's a, she's got a really high basketball IQ. She's a really good talker. That sounds like such a simple thing but she does a good job of getting the four people around her to do the same thing. Sometimes between get that when we need it and I think that's something that a space she thrives in. She's thinking ahead, what am I going to call as a point guard. It doesn't matter if she hasn't played in three games, she's going to know what the defensive coverage is when she's going to go in the game. So she just doesn't miss assignments. She may get beat on a back cut, she may get beat one-on-one, she's not a perfect defender, but from a scheme perspective, she's going to understand what we're doing and probably execute a scheme as well as anybody on our team.

Q. I think if there is maybe one key difference between Duke back then and now. No Jadyn Donovan, but Riley Nelson's starting instead of her. How do you think her presence, Riley, kind of changes them a little bit?

NICKI COLLEN: Yeah, I think it's advantage/disadvantage. I mean, certainly if you go back and watch the film we didn't guard Jadyn, I mean, we were able to play off and help and maybe blow up some actions and spaces. I also think Jadyn impacted them defensively at an elite level. Against us she picked up Jana and our point guards and made their life kind of miserable. So I think because of depth I'm guessing they're not trying to extend as often or

as much, so I think Riley, I mean, I remember watching her with the Fairfax Stars, she's always had a smooth stroke, really elite in the mid-range. And, you know, there's always that, she had missed the whole season before, it takes time to get into your rhythm. She made a couple shots against us in that game in transition. But I think that the advantages them offensively for her and her ability -- you got to guard all five people all the time. But Jadyn Donovan is an elite player, an elite defender, and really hard to keep off the glass. Especially when you're playing off of her and she gets a running start. So I think one way or the other there are things about it that make 'em considerably better, but I think it takes that offensive rebounding and that defensive presence. You know, she was a one-man press for them when we played 'em.

Q. You and Coach Lawson very similar paths. Coached in the pro level. What do you make of this coaching matchup tomorrow?

NICKI COLLEN: She's a little better player than me, so I'll give her that. No, I mean, I think Kara, I remember like when I was coaching in Atlanta she called our WNBA semifinal matchups when we played Washington, because I have some close friends that are huge Tennessee Volunteer fans, and when they saw Kara, I got a picture, I got 'em a picture with her. So Kara's always had an elite basketball mind, elite player, was really, really good in the analyst role in terms of explaining the game. Obviously turned that into the Celtics, and then here at Duke. I mean, she's someone that understands how to coach great players, be around great players, which explains USA Basketball. But she understands how to work with elite players and they're going to counter stuff. I mean, they do a good job of actions, having counters and playing to their strengths. She controls a lot of what they do. They're good in transition, but if they don't have something early in transition, she's going to back 'em out and she's going to try to orchestrate what she wants from them. And that's probably our biggest difference. I think we play a little bit more in flow. But I think she's a very, very good play caller. Very good play caller. Does a good job controlling tempo for her team.

Q. Yuting came in and hit a couple shots last night. Has she lost confidence over the last part of the season when she didn't see some shots fall in?

NICKI COLLEN: Oh, you know, I would say there are probably times -- I don't think Yuting's ever thought she wasn't going to make shots. I think at times she relies too much on making shots to give her confidence as opposed to doing the little things; get a rebound, be in denial. I thought the part of her game that I was most proud of her last night when she came in was not making shots. I

mean, she had the matchup we liked in the floppy action. But I thought she got up and denied, we created a turnover. It's kind of the intensity factor for her. We're obviously, it's not hard to see that when she comes in the game I'm probably going to run something to her, because I think she is an elite scorer. But what keeps, what is going to keep her on the floor consistently is her ability to -- you know, I mean, little things like this aren't going to be in a box score, but she misses assignment on a pin curl cut that she's supposed to go through on, and Buggs takes her and picks up her second foul because she made a mistake on the coverage. And it seems like a small thing and that's not in the box score, it's only in the box score as Buggs' second foul. But if anyone saw our box score last night, we were pretty good when Buggs was on the floor and not quite as good when she wasn't. So it's being locked into the details, what we're defending, why we're defending it. Are we switching, are we not switching. What ball screen coverage are we in. But, you know, I think players that are good at shooting the basketball are always going to lose a little confidence when they don't see the ball go in the basket. But to me at her age it's all about stringing good practices together. I think when she does that, she tends to perform at a high level.

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