

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Fairfield vs Kansas State

Friday, March 21, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Memorial Coliseum

Fairfield Stags

Carly Thibault-Dudonis

Kaety L'Amoreaux

Meghan Anderson

Media Conference

Kansas State 85, Fairfield 41

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: Hats off to Kansas State. That's a really, really good team. Obviously, they played a lot of their season without their All-American post, and we had the honor of playing against her today. She's a great player, but they're a great team, with and without her on the floor. I think that's a team that's capable of making a run.

So for us, I'm disappointed in -- particularly the second half, I thought we showed some fight early on. The second quarter for us is a little bit more, I think, definitive of what Fairfield basketball is about. I thought we scrapped. I thought we made everything really hard for them in the paint, but not consistently.

Again, they're going to be a handful one way or another, but for us, we know this is just the beginning of what Fairfield basketball is about. We're going to continue to work to be a team that returns to the NCAA Tournament, and we're going to show up and win these games, and we're going to continue to hold a high standard as a program.

I have incredible women in my locker room that I have no doubt in my mind that they're going to continue to work to be successful in this moment and beyond.

Q. Can you just talk about what you learned this season?

MEGHAN ANDERSEN: Yeah, I think one of the biggest things I learned was just how to grow as a person with this



team. I feel like I've changed a lot, not even just as a player, like, as a person. I think just the culture that we've built here, it's never going to change. It's just something that's -- it's who we are.

I think that it's just kind of taught me how to be a better person for my teammates, too, and just grow that way.

KAETY L'AMOREAUX: There's so many amazing people here that have taught me so much on and off the court, and some of them are leaving and that sucks, but there's so many people that are staying, and we're going to continue to learn and grow off them.

Q. You can see the emotion on both of your faces. It just goes to show how much this team cares about each other, like a family. What types of progress have you both seen from your individual and even collective games from freshman year to sophomore year?

KAETY L'AMOREAUX: I think just keeping whatever I'm doing, whatever is working, finding that and finding that within my teammates, so knowing who's got the hot hand, knowing who's doing what well, I think finding that has been particularly helpful for me throughout this season.

MEGHAN ANDERSEN: I think for me, a lot of it's been confidence, just kind of that in myself, and that comes from my teammates, I think. But also just being a better teammate for them. I still have a long ways to go with that, but I definitely think they've taught me how to really be that. We've had so many, like, standards on this team that they've helped me kind of try to achieve.

Q. You guys have a lot of senior leadership. Some of that is walking out the door after today. What is the biggest thing you're going to take away from that?

MEGHAN ANDERSEN: I mean, it hurts. I'm really going to miss them. But I think they've shown us, like, the standards of Fairfield basketball. They've kind of been exemplifying that in the way they show up every single day no matter what. Even if it's a day that they don't really want to be there, they show up and they give everything that they've got. I think that's also one of the biggest things



that I'm learning from them, is just going out there and giving everything I've got.

KAETY L'AMOREAUX: Yeah, the people we have, whether they were here one year, three years, they built this program, and they're going to be a huge step in where this program will go. Like Meg said, it's a phenomenal group of people on and off the court, and half these tears are just because they're leaving, besides the game. Seeing them leave is going to suck, but the impact they left on this program and this community we have at home is just -- it's just profound, and it's going to carry on for a long time.

Q. When you look at how they pulled away there in the third quarter, what was maybe the biggest difference in what they were doing that allowed them to stretch that advantage to make that insurmountable there?

KAETY L'AMOREAUX: Yeah, I think that was a stretch that Coach Carly mentioned where we stayed away from our principles and the game plan, and you saw them get many inside touches, whether it was a lob or we weren't denying properly, so I think that killed us. And then once we stopped rotating on defense, I think that's where they really broke away.

Q. Carly, I think a lot of folks talk about their big, but it looks like their guards have a ton of size and length. How much of that is a challenge with this team, especially when you look at the matchup going into this one?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: Yeah, they're big across the board. You mentioned their guards. They were able to score over us at times, and then I think the interesting thing is even though Lee is obviously a really good player, their posts off the bench are really, really good, as well. We kind of knew that going in. We got a large dose of film of that because she hadn't played for so long, that you just saw those post players just get better and better.

Obviously, there is a size disadvantage, and I didn't think we necessarily were able to capitalize on what we're good at, not shooting the ball well from three, and we knew we were going to have to make some shots, which we didn't see go in.

But they are built in a way that they've got a 6'2" point guard in Sundell, and for the most part, I think we did some really good things on her, but you can play really good defense and they still score over you at times. There was times that our help was a little bit late and we still got to a double, and no matter what, they were still able to score over us.

I think, like I said, they're a team that can make a run, certainly, and I think, hopefully, for them their best basketball is ahead of them.

Q. Coach, I had the pleasure of speaking with your father yesterday and he said one of the best things you can do as a person is continue to learn. How can you continue to learn and teach your young women in preparation for next year?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: I think I know the women in our locker room. This will hurt. From a motivation standpoint, last year we used the Indiana loss as a motivating factor all through the summer, and this will be no different.

I think we know to take the next step as a program, we need to keep getting a little bit bigger. It doesn't need to be across the board. I love a small, feisty point guard like Kaety and we'll continue to have some of those, but we know there is a size disadvantage in that, and we know that we're going to keep recruiting and keep growing as a program to figure out how we can be disruptive against teams that are big.

Now, what I will say about us is that I'm big on bringing in skilled, talented players no matter what. So I will never take -- I won't say never. I will always attempt to bring in women who fit the way that we play, in a five-out that are very versatile. Our road runners have given us so much success, and that's going to be something that we continue to do. But if you look at the Gonzagas of the world, the Richmonds of the world, those mid-majors, quote-unquote, that -- you're looking at Richmond, who's an 8 seed and we played them earlier in the year, they're big across the board, with the exception of some really good point guards. We know that's something we want to keep striving to do. We're excited about players that we have coming in and will continue to do.

Then as coaches, we're going to keep finding ways to fine tune our motion, how we can exploit bigger teams better. I've always admired my dad, that he -- I think even when I was in high school, he would come to my AAU practices with a note pad, so that's always been an inspiration to me to keep learning and growing for sure.

Q. Carly, Jeff was talking about he expressed a lot of concern for Ayoka coming into this game, fearing she'd have to cover a lot more territory. What was the game plan in trying to get her to move off the post? Was it something as simple as making the shots, or was it other things you were looking to do to draw her out and, hopefully, wear her down?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: Yep, certainly trying to run in transition, which to be honest, I think they did a better job of running in transition than we did today. Transition is where it starts, trying to get her up to play at our pace, but they obviously play fast, as well, and they're very comfortable doing that.

We tried to put her in some ball screens, make her make some tough decisions, if she was going to switch or not, and I didn't think we exploited it as well as we could have, and I didn't think we did as good of a job there as -- again, we look back and I'm sure we'll see we missed some opportunities.

Once we got the switch, I don't think we were able to really -- they did a great job of helping, gapping and crowding with smaller guards. I thought we got it back to Kaety a couple times with them guarding her, but then they did a great job with helping her. That was part of it.

Then just in our motion and some of our screen-aways and getting the ball moving side to side, I think we were a little -- with their length of their guards, pressured us on the perimeter in maybe some of those open windows got smaller with their length.

We had plans to move her and get her out away from the basket, and again, credit to their team defense; I thought they closed those gaps well.

Q. I know it's a different group from last year, but a lot of the bulk of the same players from last year and two championships in your first three years as a head coach. What has this group meant to you personally?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: They're my family. I also want to take a moment because I want to thank our seniors because, for me, they all chose -- I'll start with Iza. She chose to say yes to Fairfield without having any idea what we were going to do and kind of had to buy into a dream. She really is the one that I look to that really helped build this program.

But all through my roster, all four seniors and beyond, that's our family. I wake up every single day, my staff wakes up every single day to give them an experience at Fairfield that's not only winning basketball games and winning championships, but a place where you're around people that love you and care about you and help you be the best version of yourself.

It's a journey. I'm so excited to see what our four seniors do and beyond, and our returners I know are going to be fired up for what's ahead.

But they've given more to me than what I probably could give to them, just in the joy of going to the gym every single day and seeing the way that they challenge each other, pick each other up, invest in one another. This place is special, and it's full of just amazing young women that they're going to do a lot of things in the next 30, 40, 50 years that are going to change the world. So I'm excited to be a part of that and be their biggest cheerleader along the way.

Q. You have an excellent support staff from your assistant coaches to some of our administration sitting in the room. What does it mean to have all this Fairfield support for your program?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: It's unique. I get asked by every recruit's family and every media person why I stay, and they're the reason I stay. The reason I stay and why we feel like we're just scratching the surface of what we feel like we can do. We have so much support, not only from our administration, I've mentioned Dr. Nemeck, I've mentioned Paul Schlickmann, Zach Dayton, Alison Sexton, you can go through our entire administration, but we've got -- I know Shawna Toy (phonetic) is in the room. We've got some amazing people that help this and move the needle at Fairfield to be a national powerhouse, and we've got work to do, don't get me wrong. The stat sheet is staring me in the face.

But we are making Fairfield the big time and doing it in our way and doing it in a way that is rooted in our values of men and women serving others and our president in our locker room talked about a hope-filled future for young people. It's about more than just winning basketball games. I've mentioned that before. But you can't find that everywhere. Most places, I would argue.

If you get -- I think right now, our world is changing, not only just in our world, but in college athletics. More money is not always better. If you find a place and people that make you happy, stay and dig in. And let's go. Let's do some amazing things.

Q. Carly, based off that, really curious, it's been interesting seeing the men's and the women's game. We're seeing the bridge close on the men's side, especially with NIL. What do you feel like it's going to take, especially for those from mid-major conferences, to get that gap to be a little shorter so we're getting more competitive games, more competitive rosters in the first and second round of the tournament?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: I think it's a 360 approach. I think for us, I have so much faith in our administration and

what we're going to do to continue to be competitive, but I also think we can do it our own way, and I think a lot of these programs are finding ways to do it your own way.

I think having an identity and something that we -- I feel that we do have, having an identity of fit and why you fit, whether it's -- including the playing style, but the culture, really having a different sell and why Fairfield is different.

I know you mentioned the entire kind of landscape, but for us, finding your fit is something that we talk a lot about with recruits. So yes, you might be able to go to Power Four school X, Y, Z and maybe a little bit more money, but is that really going to make you a better person for the next 40 years? Is that really going to be your education? Are you really going to get the best degree? Is that money really going to change your life? Yes, sometimes the dollar sign is different. But oftentimes, it's not.

Do you want to go somewhere that you can become a young woman that can go off and get a great degree and then you can play basketball for as long as you want, but then you've got a Fairfield alum waiting to help you get a great job and be able to create a life after basketball.

So I think we are constantly searching and striving for women who value the experience. Partly that, and then partly continuing to play the style that we are. We're going to continue to challenge. While this game isn't an indication of that, we've gone and beaten SEC teams and ACC teams and Big Ten teams and Big East teams. I think for us, it's exciting to know that our style and what we're building is one that has shown across the board that can be successful.

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