

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Grand Canyon vs Baylor

Friday, March 21, 2025

Waco, Texas, USA

Foster Pavilion

Baylor Bears

Coach Nicki Collen

Aaronette Vonleah

Yaya Felder

Media Conference

Baylor 73, Grand Canyon 60

NICKI COLLEN: Yeah, really good basketball team. There is a reason they've won 30 in a row. I thought to start the game we were a little off. I thought they got downhill. They had 12 early paint points against us. Then I thought they settled into the game. Settled into the environment.

I thought offensively we were elite in the second half. Started to take care the ball. Played through Netty. Played inside out. You know, but I thought it was our defense. I thought Sarah did an amazing job and everyone else that got a piece of Durazo-Frescas because I think that was the difference for them when you think about her not making a three. I don't know if there is another game that year that she didn't make a three.

I don't know that, but I would guess that she has. There has been no other games. So really proud of these guys. I thought Netty stepped up; Yaya had huge and-ones and big plays late.

Q. Netty, looked like if they could get the ball to you could not be stopped. Was it a struggle? I know they were sometimes double, even tripling you. Was that frustrating at times?

AARONETTE VONLEH: Yeah, I think for sure at the beginning of the game it was just hard to get touches because they were being so aggressive defensively. But I just made it an emphasis to keep posting hard knowing like it was going to open eventually, and my teammates eventually figured out how to get it to me successfully.



Q. Yaya, Coach mentioned it, you got into the rhythm pretty consistently and easily. Was that part of the plan, and like what was working for you in your ability to just get to the rim so easily?

YAYA FELDER: Honestly, just going with the game. Just doing whatever came to me.

Q. Netty, I think Sarah said yesterday if she could pass it to you every time she would. What's it like to play with Sarah, who's such a good facilitator?

AARONETTE VONLEH: Yeah, Sarah tells me that every day, too. She's just a very unselfish player naturally, so always looking to find people in their spots they're successful.

Just really nice to play with a player who has so much experience. This is her fifth year, so she knows what she's doing and just really helps bring us along.

Q. Netty, you and Jada combined for 22 in the third quarter. She's passing to you and you can trust her to make the open shot.

AARONETTE VONLEH: Yeah, she's a very good point guard. She creates for us and also knows how to create for herself. I'm proud of her for how aggressive she was in that quarter and proud of her for finding me when I was open.

Q. Yaya, how do you get through the second quarter slump where you struggled to get the ball in the basket?

YAYA FELDER: Just getting together and just talking everything over. Just telling each other like we're good, we just got to calm down a little bit and let to come to us.

Q. What was it like to have Bugs back out there? Instantly brought the energy.

YAYA FELDER: Yes, it was amazing. She is just our energy player. She brings us up, so it was just a happy

time with her back out there.

Q. You kind of mentioned it, but looked like start of the game, I don't know that ya'll were a step slow or they were just taking it downhill over and over again.

NICKI COLLEN: Yeah, sometimes there is a little bit of -- also a lot of pressure. As great as it is to be at home, there is a lot of pressure, a lot of people, a lot of expectations. I know that Grand Canyon was picked as a bit of a bracket buster as well. They're that good.

I think that we just -- they were playing faster than we were ready for them to play. I think we weren't reading body language very well. We got back cut twice. They put their head down and went downhill.

So our ball screen coverage was a little bit lacking there. I thought once we settled in, now, some of that I will say when Trinity San Antonio gets in foul trouble and Brown, and their starters are in foul trouble, that helped us settle in as well because they didn't have that pressure in the ball screen.

The ball screen is different when TSA isn't in it, which everyone saw. I told our team after the game, I think we got our camp invite if nothing else in the WNBA for how she played in the middle ball screen.

It's crazy that she took 26 shots in 26 minutes. She was not hesitating to be the one for them. But I just thought the moment, we had some adversity and I think -- you know, I don't want to call that timeout, but I felt the nerves. I felt that we needed to settle down.

I think you tell them, like, hey, they're going to reach, claw, scrap. I told them you're going to have claw marks on your arms at the end of the day, and we do. We have blood all over us.

They play so hard, but also slapping. They're reaching and grabbing. And so like you have to get used to that. You have to play through it, and I thought we allowed that to speed us up.

Then I thought the second half, which is not surprising because when I get to be in control of the game we slow down, we relax. When they're coming to me and I can get them where I want them, all of a sudden we score 22 and we're slowing it down in the fourth quarter and running time and possessions.

I always feel good if I have our team with the lead going into the second half in front of our bench. I think we are elite offensively, but when they play away from me

sometimes I can't get them in what they really need to be in.

I thought Jada got into some step-ups and got some layups. We got into middle ball screen action that they couldn't guard. We did a better job reading the help.

I kind of told them at halftime, look, you have something that's really special. Her name is Aaronette Vonleh. The girl guarding her and the one in the help side, and whether it's ball side help, backside help, sometimes they were both.

We have to play off her. You guys are going to get great shots. I thought we were pressing too hard. Play to her, let her kick it out, repost, fake it to her, skip it; let's knock down open threes. I thought we were pressing trying to get it all at once, so I thought that was kind of the rhythm of it.

Q. Coach, I don't think Jada missed a shot in the third quarter. How crucial is she in getting you out of the gate in the second half going in strong?

NICKI COLLEN: Yeah, I thought she started really slow. I kept -- no, look, we're always better on misses, and so when that first quarter is good morning on ask they're scoring, we're taking the ball out of the net, we don't flow and play as fast.

But I thought she got two layups in step-ups in transition. There was no help side, and a lot of that is because, one, they're not set in their help yet; two, they're like, where is Netty, where is Netty. So all of a sudden she gets downhill and scores.

So just kind of getting her in that middle action, letting her hit that little pull up. I thought she got to rhythm shots for her. And then the three she knocked down. They didn't guard her. You can pick your poison. The reality is over Jada's career she hasn't been an elite three point shooter. She's shooting the best percentage on our team.

She doesn't shoot a lot them, but she will make a big one for us. So she doesn't like fire a bunch, but when she does, as long as she takes good ones, they got a shot to go in.

Q. Coach, what makes Yaya so explosive as a closer particularly if the fourth quarter?

NICKI COLLEN: I think in the best possible sense, when she doesn't overthink and just plays, she's got really good instincts. I thought there was one time when they were like deep and help side off her and up the line that I was like running down to make her cut to the rim.

But I thought this instinct to make the basket cut rather than stay at the three-point line; could have been a kick-out three, but the and-one, the pressure, the -- just kind of the energy that that gives your team is huge.

You know, I think that's it. I think it's being fearless in transition. She gets a transition layup from Sarah. She gets that and-one from Netty on a double team. I thought she just made instinctual plays.

So I thought that was it. I thought one of the biggest baskets of the game was Bella's three. Been hovering at six points, five points, seven points. That was a huge three, because we had turned it over a couple times in row trying to play out of skips.

Then I felt like they were sitting in a deep off Bugs trying to help in so we couldn't throw it inside. So I went back to Bella and she buried that three. That was a big shot.

Q. Nicki, did you get pretty much what you wanted out of Bugs? Was it good just to get a game under her belt? I don't remember how many minutes she played.

NICKI COLLEN: Yeah, she was 15 with a hard cap at 20. She played 17:56. You know, I thought they bothered her drip you will a little too high and they tackled her dribble. She was one of the ones that was bleeding. There were some bad call. The rim run if transition. As chair the rules committee, I got to somehow get that rule put in that you can't take those open floor charges. They're dangerous.

I know it's legal in our game. When I saw it on film, A, she wasn't set, and B, she was falling before Bugs hit her. I don't like those plays for our game. Until we make them not legal plays, people are going to do tournament. We don't coach that because I want the best players to be on the floor.

But I just -- she needed to get her sea legs. I thought there was some -- she had a good block, some good defense. You know, like she's going to get back in a rhythm for sure.

Q. Nicki, Durazo-Fresca did have one game without a three this year; however, led the nation with four made threes per game. Only attempted three, which probably illustrates it really well. Obviously Trinity San Antonio. What made you settle on her as the key thing that you wanted to sort of control?

NICKI COLLEN: Yeah, I think San Antonio is a three-level scorer. She is going to get to the rim, make her pull up. Her pull up is her breed and butter, but she'll make a three.

So you know you can't -- you're going to take something away from her, but you can't take away her whole bag. Durazo-Fresca is a three point shooter. To me a one level scorer. She's going to beat you from the arc.

Not that that's -- she's easy to take away when you can lock and trail and run her off the line. We just didn't want to give her any looks. Sarah Andrews did an elite job. She didn't get screened on flares. Didn't get screened on hammer screens. Did not get screened on rookie screens.

They tried to get her open. We just weren't going to leave her. So when you can make them go two by two by two and make San Antonio make pull up jump shots, she's going to miss some. She made a lot them, but still missed some.

So we just thought that was what we were capable of consistently taking away. We've done it. Maddy Connor is very, very similar, you know, and the difference is Maddy Conner can get you on the step back three. She can get you a little bit off the bounce going left.

So we just knew as long as we stayed attached that we were going to be okay. I was mad at Sarah when she fouled her on the pull up. She doesn't really make pull ups. Her shot chart is red as can be. Anywhere outside of five feet, transition layups or back cuts and the three-point line.

Who he was it that held her without a three?

Q. I don't know.

NICKI COLLEN: You don't remember? Okay. I mean, -- usually she's going to get one on a offensive rebound where you can't find her, out of rotation. Yeah, we chased her around a lot.

Q. I wanted to ask about Netty. She's been giving you a double-double, 20 points, and however many rebounds for the last month. Is this just her now?

NICKI COLLEN: Yeah, can you believe she missed three shots? They were point-blank. I mean...

Q. How could she? I mean, really.

NICKI COLLEN: Honestly, the shots she missed I was like oh, no. She literally missed two that I thought were gimmes. Then you look down and see what she did and you just kind of shake your head that you have those high expectations.

No, I think the beauty of Netty, she's figuring it out. You know, she's running really hard. She knows she can get

touches early in transition before they're all hovering in the lane.

You know, I think she's working for a second seal, kick it out, reseal. She is just not settling for the block. I think the first 20 games of the season she settled in at the block instead of the front of the rim.

And so I think that's the biggest difference. Like because now she's using the combination of touch, but strength. Obviously like they knew they didn't have anyone who could guard her. The fives that they played against have all been really effective. They've just done enough with everybody else to win those games against an Arizona or Arizona State.

But they know they don't have a one-on-one matchup, so they did a good job. I mean, they were rolling the dice and giving Sarah Andrews open threes and she just couldn't burn them. That's how much respect they had for Netty, is they were willing to roll the dice and give Sarah Andrews wide open threes. That's where her game has gone.

We're going to need it again on Sunday, whoever we play.

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