

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - FGCU vs Oklahoma

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Norman, Oklahoma, USA

Lloyd Noble Center

Oklahoma Sooners Jennie Baranczyk

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions with Coach.

Q. Jennie, let's talk about the defensive assignment for your team because you've got great inside players, but you're going to be chasing all these shooters, and they go five-out, you said the other day. That was what they did last year. Talk about the defensive assignment and how critical that's going to be?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I think defense is obviously critical in every single game that you play. It's weird that you play the same team back-to-back years in the NCAA Tournament. You have so much respect because they have such a great tradition. I said it last year, and I've said it about 15 times this year. They're the team you don't really want to play in the NCAA Tournament. That's the team you circle that you don't want to play.

At the same time, I'm really excited to be able to see us step on the floor and play somebody else. We've had a couple weeks off. Also, we've played in a different conference to prepare you in a little different way too.

I don't know what the advantages will be in that or the disadvantages, but I do know that we're going to give the best shot that we have, and we'll be ready.

Q. Jennie, we've talked about Raegan developed chemistry with this basketball team. What about her attachment to the senior class? We've heard stories about her making mugs for this team. Can you talk about how she's really developed that rapport with the senior class and what she's meant to them and what they've meant to her?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Yes. Well, I think we knew that we were returning so much, right, in terms of minutes and



production and we also knew that we wanted to continue to get better.

I tell this story a lot too, that we knew that we were going to get Raegan when she came on her visit and Payton and Skylar had picked out an apartment already for her, and she hadn't even said yes yet.

Raegan is a -- she's a really great person. I think it's taken her, actually, a while because she wants to make sure that that senior class is proud of what she's doing and she's giving too. That's taken us a little bit, to be able to really find our groove.

But make no mistake, it's mutual, and this senior class, it was about January -- we had a hard January. You know that. We were coming off of some tough games and tough road trips. Every night this year has been an NCAA Tournament game because we didn't really know our opponent, and we didn't know the environment we were going into, and we had to learn that.

I think this senior class has really taken a lot of pride in making sure that they're pouring in and leaving a legacy that goes beyond wins and losses. They've cut down nets. They played in NCAA tournaments. Of course they want to go farther than they've ever gone. That class is one that's embraced Raegan, and it's enabled Raegan to be who she is. You can really start to see that right now. She can be a great person off the floor, and she can be really assertive on. And when she is and we're balanced like that, we're a really good team.

Q. You're obviously very, very familiar with Iowa's fan base. I know you're not playing Iowa yet, but they could have an impact on your game because they play in the early game so they're going to have all their people there.

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I'm sure they'll cheer for us.

Q. Right, right. I'm going to ask, what do you think having them here will do for the environment? Their fan base, in particular.



JENNIE BARANCZYK: Sure. I'm excited to see the fan base, period, here. I know Murray State will travel some. Florida Gulf Coast will travel some. This is a big deal. This is a big regional, and it's one people can travel to.

We've been talking so much from a national perspective on the sport of women's basketball and how much attention has been there. Honestly, we've tried to focus on that because we need to have more of a regional focus in terms of what the people in Oklahoma, if we're going to come out and show up.

Iowa has done a great job. Even after graduating a superstar in Caitlin Clark, they're still selling out. I'm proud of that, being from there. And at the same time, know that that's also going to challenge our fans to be able to show up as well. So I'm excited to be able to see just our sport on a national level and be highlighted here in the Lloyd Noble Center tomorrow, whether it's the 11:00 game or the 1:30 game.

Q. You talked a lot about last year being kind of rolling into this year. How do you feel like this is a culmination of a two-year cycle in a way. And is this team ready in the moment to embrace that here this weekend?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Normally, every year, it's like at the end of the season, you start the next season and there's nothing left. We knew at the end of the season last year -- and a lot of you were there with us a lot through that last season journey. You could tell that the story wasn't over and that there was more to it.

You can see us continuing to grow this year just at a different level. And I think what's really going to come to fruition here is to see the lessons that we actually did learn and a lot of the firsts this year.

You're in the SEC. We fall on our face a lot. Had to get up, had to keep going. We're not afraid of it. We're not afraid to continue to grow resiliency skills. We're not afraid to lose a close game last year like we did in the NCAA Tournament and like we did the year before too.

We have no fear. We're playing with a kind of joy. It goes back to the senior class, which has to go back to the year before. So the way that that group has continued to lead, there's a different type of depth to this team.

So you can talk about teams being close, you can talk about having a great culture, and you can put a smile on your face and you can like everybody, but there's a different kind of depth to this team when you start to challenge each other. You tell each other the truth. And,

oh, by the way, you kind of like each other.

I think that's what's been really special, to watch this team really grow. You can see it in minutes played. You can see it in production. You can see it from November to right now. But also, of course, it goes back a year.

Q. Jennie, you talked about Raegan's connection with the senior class. On the floor, how have you maybe seen that over the last couple of weeks just in terms of that chemistry building. And how much of a different factor is that for you guys heading into this year's tournament run?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I think the senior class has such strength and humility at the same time. You look at what Raegan's been able to do, but also what about how Payton Verhulst and how she's been able to lead the team and Sahara Williams from a competitive standpoint and how much she's grown as the season has gone on.

So I think the best part about this team is we're not a one-hit wonder. It's not if somebody doesn't do well, we don't win a game. We need balance from everybody. Everybody has to show up. Everybody gets to show up. There's a difference. I would say, obviously, the senior class led that.

I know Raegan coming in was a huge need for us but now she's a player on the team. It's not transactional, hey, we just needed a post. We plugged one in and now we're good. There's a lot more that goes into that. I also would be remiss if we didn't talk extensively about what Sahara Williams and Payton Verhulst have done as well.

Q. You've talked a lot about how important that week off after the first South Carolina game was for you guys to reset and all of the success you've kind of had later in the year. How does this week -- I know it's a longer week, but how does this compare in terms of how you've approached it and how they've kind of responded so far?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Yeah. Well, when you guys asked a similar question to our players before, I thought they answered it really nice.

But it was hard. It was a hard week to focus on ourselves. A lot of times, you think -- because we haven't had that off week. So it's been about two weeks, right? We haven't had that. We didn't have that in the Big 12 when we were in it. So the SEC teams are used to that extra week.

But I feel like we've been really awesome. Like coming to practice, I feel like they've played really hard. They've

competed really hard. They're ready to play somebody else because we compete against each other a lot more than we compete against even a practice squad.

And you can see that. You can see the players getting better as time has gone on because that's a huge part of what we want to be able to do as well here. At the same time, I feel like they're proud of themselves. They hit the weight room hard. They've drilled hard. They've worked on their games hard. And, yet, they've spent a lot of time working on their recovery.

A lot of times, we think recovery is just rest. Although, yes, that's a huge part of it, you have to work at it. But they're going to be ready to play in a game so I have not had to talk about their effort. I haven't had to talk about their focus. There's times I have to remind them how much fun they're having when they're running, but, you know, that's every coach and every team.

But I've been actually really impressed with the way that we've attacked practice these two weeks. Don't tell them I said that. So just don't repeat that. I don't give compliments all that well.

Q. Jennie, with the match-up that you guys have against FGCU, they don't have a lot of height. I think, obviously, people look at that and say you just feed Raegan down in the post. But with talking to Raegan, she said kind of expect them to crash hard. How important will it be for players like Lexy and Sahara, Skylar to knock down 3s for you guys in this game?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I think it's important for us just to have balance, period. We've got to guard first. We know that. When you're guarding -- when you're playing such contrasting styles, right, and personnel, you have to focus on very few things. It can't be, oh, we're just going to throw it Raegan and she's going to save the day. That's never been our approach, no matter what kind of advantage we feel like we have or don't have.

But we know we all have to guard, and we know we have to play team basketball. That's why our assists are high. That's why our ball movement is pretty good. That's why we've continued to get better. You've seen games where we've had five, six players in double figures. That's what you need to be able to do at tournament time. So, yes, it's important we, quote unquote, knock down shots but it's more important to set each other up and play the way we want to play and have fun. That's March. That's what you want to do.

So that's more of our focus is to play the style we want to play and also to continue to be able to read the game live.

Q. You've talked about this a ton this year, the SEC, having to be switched on every single night. Now that you're here in March, what does that do for the mindset of the team, knowing they have to have that edge or whatever it is every single time out and tournament setting?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Right. Again, you don't really know, but what you hope is that it's -- we've learned that. We've learned how to do that. And you have to learn the game live, as we were kind of talking.

So when you get out on the floor, even though we're playing the same team in Florida Gulf Coast, they have a couple players that really played in that game last year, but they also have new players that haven't played us. We have new players that haven't played them. So you still have to adjust live as you go and you're not familiar with a team.

Regardless of how you feel you should be doing, you still have to read that game live. So that's something that we've got to be able to figure out, how they're going to guard inside. What are they going to do? How are they going to go at us on the offensive end? What are they going to do? We have to be able to read that.

I think we have a lot of experience -- yes, our staff, obviously, but I'm talking our players have a lot of experience in having to make in-game adjustments and to be able to read things that maybe we didn't think that we would necessarily have to through a scout because you don't know until you're really in it. So I think those are the lessons you really hope come out in March.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Thank you. Thanks for being here.

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