

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

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Lloyd Noble Center

FGCU Eagles

Chelsea Lyles

Lauryn Taylor

Dolly Cairns

Media Conference



but we're also game planning for the whole team, so we just lock into the game plan as a whole.

The game is full of runs, so we'll adjust as we need to, but we're just worried about getting in there, seeing how the game starts off, how it looks, and then once we figure out the balance of attack between them, we can probably change our game plan just a little bit depending upon that.

DOLLY CAIRNS: Yeah, it's going to be about team defense. It's not just singling out one person down there to guard. It's going to be about all of us trying to make plays, get in there, and then go convert on the offensive end.

Q. I know you guys obviously have been on the run that you guys have for the last couple weeks, months. Offensively what would you say heading into the tournament has really worked for you guys? Obviously, you guys run a spread offense, but what would you say for both of you two has really helped and led to the success over the past couple of weeks heading into tomorrow?

DOLLY CAIRNS: I think knowing our strengths, what we can take advantage of, obviously, other teams are going to scout us and take away what our strengths are, but just being able to adjust to that, and we have a lot of great players on this team that can do a lot of great things. We're going to share the ball, we're going to get the best shot for our offense, and hopefully we can come out with a win.

LAURYN TAYLOR: We've spent a lot of time trusting in each other and each other's abilities, so when we're practicing and looking for the best shot available, it's not about just the individual play. The one thing that we can tip our hats to is everyone gets involved in our offense, so we use that to our advantage. We stretch the floor out. We allow people to figure out who they're going to guard, and if you take one person away, you have to guard the next one. We just take pride in having our teammates doing their jobs and all of us working together.

Q. Thinking of this journey, what would you say has been the favorite part, especially over conference play,

Q. When you guys look to see the matchup, look back, obviously, at the matchup last year in the first round, to see you guys back here, what would you say has been the biggest growth that OU has had in you guys' approach to the game last year to where you are now?

LAURYN TAYLOR: Okay, so I wasn't part of FGCU last year, but of course, I was one of the people who was watching the game live. And also, since being here, we've went back and watched that game preparing for this game. I'll say the biggest difference is definitely their post presence on the inside now with Reagan Beers being a transfer in. So that's something that we worry about in terms of just a size difference. But they are very physical, and I feel like they play a little harder than they did last year just knowing that they have the size advantage. So I'd say that's probably where the biggest difference comes in from last year.

DOLLY CAIRNS: Yeah, similar. Obviously, they've added some skill, some great players. Their style is similar as it was last year. But we're adjusting, have a game plan in place, and we're ready to get out there.

Q. You talk about, obviously, Reagan being a part of the mix for them now. Given she has that post presence, how do you balance against, say, blitzing on the block versus not helping to get their shooters open? How would you say an early preview of that looks like?

LAURYN TAYLOR: We're obviously going to give props to her. She's an amazing player, and she's an All-American for a reason. We, of course, are game planning for her,



you guys heading into the NCAA Tournament? What would you say has been the favorite part of the last two weeks of basketball for you guys heading into tomorrow's game?

LAURYN TAYLOR: I would say mine would be doing it with my teammates and with our coaching staff. This year, we've become super close just due to the adversity that we've faced. It's really good winning, but it feels even better when you do it with people that you enjoy winning with. It's been a cool experience for me overall. This is my first time coming to March Madness, so I'm really blessed to do it, but I'm even more blessed for the people that I've done it with and the people that will help these memories last even longer, so yeah.

DOLLY CAIRNS: I completely agree. Just being around my teammates, this group of people, this coaching staff, going through all the highs and lows together, and when we do face adversity how we're going to respond to that. We're ready to embrace this moment. It's going to be a high-energy game. We're all very excited and super thankful and grateful that we're able to be here.

Q. Dolly, you played in the NCAA Tournament game last year. What is the message that you and the girls coming back are trying to keep your newcomers calm and ready to play? What have you been telling them?

DOLLY CAIRNS: Yeah, just being a returner, just setting the example for them, knowing that we all have each other's back. Emani and I specifically just leading by example, doing whatever we can to ensure that we're all there for each other. We know it's going to be a tough game. It's going to be difficult. There's going to be a lot of energy. It's going to be very loud. We're on their home court. But yeah, we can face any challenge. We're ready for it. We can't wait to get out there.

Q. 14 seed is the lowest seed that FGCU has ever gotten in the NCAA Tournament, and no 14 seed has ever won an opening-round game. Does that give you guys any extra chip on your shoulder going into tomorrow?

DOLLY CAIRNS: Honestly, no. For us, it's just another game. We don't pay attention too much to the seeding. We're taking it like it's any other opponent.

LAURYN TAYLOR: To piggyback off of Dolly, same thing she said. Every team that makes it to the tournament has won their last game to get here most of the time. It's just about us playing the game that's ahead of us. It's not really about what we've done in the past, and that's pretty much what seeding is based on up to this point. We're not

really worried too much about where we're seeded, just who we're facing and how we can beat them so we can continue playing.

Q. Rebounding is going to be a big key for tomorrow's game and you guys actually out-rebounded them last year despite the size disparity. How do you as a shorter team mostly of guards and shooters, which is the FGCU way, how do you still win the rebounding battle against teams that are a little taller than you?

DOLLY CAIRNS: Yeah, it's going to be a team effort, not letting our teammates down. If one person doesn't do their job, it makes a big difference. Yeah, just not letting our teammates down, holding each other accountable, and securing every possession we can.

Q. Obviously last year, you guys came up short by three points in the end, and execution down the stretch obviously was a big part of that. Obviously, throughout this 23-game run that you guys are on, you have executed really well down the stretch even when you have gotten those games.

Dolly, given that you were here last year, what have you seen a lot from you guys this year and the way that you guys, again, have just executed down the stretch in comparison to where you guys were a year ago?

DOLLY CAIRNS: Well, like Lauryn said, it's going to be a game of runs. We just have to keep a steady mindset throughout the entire game. We jumped on them early last year. They came right back. It's going to be a fight for a full 40 minutes. But we fall back on our defense this year. We're going to stick to that. We're going to try to make as many plays as we can.

Q. What gives you the confidence to go up against these Power Four top-20 ranked teams in the biggest brightest lights?

LAURYN TAYLOR: I feel like for me, the confidence definitely comes from our coaching staff and Coach Lawson specific. She does a really good job preparing us for any game ahead of us, so we just lock into what she says and then on top of that we've worked really hard all year. We have prepared for March since day one, so we told ourselves we were going to be the most prepared team when it came to March, and I feel like it starts from day one.

We've done this since we've gotten here. We know what it takes. We've faced adversity. We just have the confidence in just the preparation that we've had.

Q. You guys are obviously on their home court, so you'll have to be dealing with their fans. Is there anything that you've done to try to prepare for that beforehand?

LAURYN TAYLOR: We're definitely going to be on their court. They definitely have some great fans. But I'm pretty sure we have some really good fans, as well. We have some people that have traveled with us. We also have some people watching. Whether they're here or not, we know we have the support we need to compete in such a tough game like this.

DOLLY CAIRNS: Along with some crowd music playing in every drill in practice playing at full volume.

CHELSEA LYLES: Just appreciate everybody being here. We are really excited about our opportunity to compete tomorrow and throughout this tournament, and we look forward to seeing what we can do.

Q. Same first-round matchup as last year but a lot has changed with OU women's basketball and obviously now, they have a post presence down there. For you in your initial, I guess you could say, overlook of what the team has brought to the team now and to see where they are from a year ago, what would you say has most impressed you about the OU women's basketball team this year?

CHELSEA LYLES: One, they're bringing back the majority of their players from last season and then they added an All-American post player in Beers. And so, they are really well-coached. She does an amazing job. Then you have players who trust and play in her system, and so you can tell what they're trying to accomplish. You can tell what they're trying to get a shot up quickly. They run hard in transition. I'm just all around impressed with the way they share the ball, the way that they score at a high -- they're very efficient with the way that they score, and then defensively, you can tell that they are quick to help, and they help each other out and play together.

Q. I asked a similar question to the girls, but obviously, now with one of the best -- with Reagan down there now, how does it change the game plan when you think back last year when you guys just came up short by three points to where you guys are now today, how does it change the defensive game plan -- obviously don't spill the beans, but --

CHELSEA LYLES: Yeah, I won't tell you that. Not just her, but all of their players post-up. It's not just one player.

You definitely -- honestly, I think we've been undersized in

about 100 percent of our games this year. You've got to change things up defensively. You've got to know when you can help and when you can't. It does cause some issues for us defensively, but I think we are still one of the top defensive teams in the country. So, we're going to have to figure some things out, but I like our team, and I like their focus in on what we're trying to accomplish.

Q. You guys got off to a really fast start last year, leading 21-8 at one point, leading them at halftime. Oklahoma didn't get their first lead until the third quarter. How important is the fast start this year in trying to control the game?

CHELSEA LYLES: Yeah, and you made a good point, that's another layer of what you're trying to get over is the fact that they're playing on their home floor with their home fans. We're going to -- it's kind of our philosophy to get out and try and start fast and get our players going early. But you're going to be playing on their home court, so the biggest thing is that you stick together, you make sure that you're sticking to the game plan, and then we're going to try and get out fast and make sure that we're executing everything we need to execute.

Q. Being 30-3 this year and seeing that 14 seed come across the board late, not many people were expecting that because FGCU is the winningest 12 seed in the NCAA history. What's your message to the team been after that?

CHELSEA LYLES: You know, you can't really rely on a seed or anything else. No matter who we were going to play, we're going to go out, do what we've done all year, make sure that we're sticking together, playing hard.

But the seeding, it is what it is. You've got to change your mindset, have a sense of gratitude for being in the tournament, being able to compete. A lot of teams aren't even playing right now.

We're excited. We played Oklahoma last year, and it's just another opportunity for us to be together and compete together.

If you dwell on your seed or dwell on the negative, you won't have the right mindset going into the preparation.

We see it as a good thing. We're excited to be here. We're excited to compete. That's how we've moved forward.

Q. I know you don't love talking about yourself, but first NCAA Tournament as a head coach; where are your nerves and emotions at right now?

CHELSEA LYLES: You know, I try not to make it, like you say, about me. This program has always been built on the players, and it's never really been about me or Coach Smesko. It's always been about the players in this program. I'm just trying to empower them, make sure they feel loose and confident going into this game, and making sure that they understand I'm going to be as prepared as possible as their coach as we go into this game.

Q. As for the actual -- your game plan, you talked about defensively and how you match up against them, but offensively, how much do you have to change what you do since you played them 365 days ago?

CHELSEA LYLES: Yeah, we have different players, as well. Our personnel is different in the different areas that we can attack and the different areas that we can take advantage of. You know, but again, Beers is down there and she's a big shot blocker. You just have to be smart about your shot selection and making sure you're taking high-return shots against them.

Q. How would you describe the last five days? Obviously, you punch a ticket, get here to Oklahoma. What has been the preparation and what has it been like to just punch your ticket back here and to be with the girls the past couple of days heading into another tournament game tomorrow?

CHELSEA LYLES: Yeah, like I said before, I love this team. I love being around them. They love being around each other. Any time you get to spend with each other is good. They're a competitive group, so they're not just excited to be in the NCAA Tournament and happy to be here. They want to be here, and they want to compete. They've been taking the preparation seriously. We've been watching a lot of film. We've been doing a lot of things that -- just working on different things to execute throughout the game. I think mentally they're excited. They're loose. They're having fun.

But they also compete when we step on that court, whether it's for practice or we're doing a walk through. They're locked in and they're trying to accomplish something.

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