

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Iowa vs Oklahoma

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Lloyd Noble Center

Iowa Hawkeyes

Jan Jensen

Media Conference

Q. Obviously, and I've asked Oklahoma's coach about this as well, this game is going to be a little bit personal. You've got a program veteran in her own right now coaching the opposing team for a chance to go to the Sweet 16. She said, obviously, all great things about you, the Iowa program. I'd assume it's mutual. But what's going through your mind as this is probably going to be the most close to home matchup that you guys have played this year except maybe Drake. What does it feel like?

JAN JENSEN: You do know we're not playing one-on-one, right? I think there's a lot of questions about, oh, I mean -- I'm not going to say who would win if we play one-on-one. I've still got something in my bag, Jennie, just tell her that.

But I think that's part of the story line of, you know, seems like they always like the storylines. I'd prefer to be cheering for her and I think she would be doing the same way, the same thing. You'd like to think, you know, I believe in the teams that we coached when I was part of Lisa Bluder's staff and what I'm continuing, I hope, is we have that saying, once a Hawk, always a Hawk. I believe that Jennie really feels that way.

So I think she's proud of that. But she's also an amazing coach, right. Look at the success she's had. One of the most competitive, fiery, never going to back down kids that I've ever coached, right. So she's really good. She can separate all that. She's not nostalgic or a sentimentalist. She's going to get after it and go.

But with that, I think she's really proud that she's from Iowa. I think one of the thing sun of us is going to have a really fun moment, right. We are going to go to the Sweet 16, and that's great.

But I think exactly what she said, is that, I would assume



it's been good and it's accurate, that's the only drawback is we both would have rather been there, right.

But when the ball goes up, I mean, it's been a long time since she's been in a Iowa Hawkeye uniform, right. I think it will be a really good game and I think it will be competitive, hopefully. They have a lot of size I have to contend with but we'll get to that later. I'm really proud of her. All of our former players, whether they are a doc right now or in law or whatever, it's fun to watch them grow and succeed. Lisa Bluder would feel the same way. It's really cool.

You know, you always have those bonds that are established when you get to coach these amazing young women. She's certainly a shining star.

Q. I've watched you guys play quite a bit. The Sooner style of play, talk about that, because talking about their size, they do have great size but they love to get up and down the court, too. Talk about the matchup.

JAN JENSEN: Jennie has always liked to score a lot of points, right, and we typically do, as well. Her pace of play is No. 1 in the country. She's going to go and she's got everybody on the floor can usually pull it and shoot a three at a pretty good percentage.

She has, you know, bigs that can do that, too. And that's always harder when you have a couple of her bigs that can stop and hit a trail three or if you decide not to guard them, they are able to hit it if they get on. Raegan Beers is one. That's one thing, their system, they play really, really fast, and then she's added some really good portal pieces.

Beers, I recruited the heck out of Beers in high school and tried to get her in the portal and then Jonas came along with her, and Payton tried the first time when she went to Louisville, right. So added those two. Payton plays really fast. She's one of my all-time favorite kids I ever recruited. Those, along with great players with other ones I don't know as well; I didn't recruit them.

So it's really hard because if you give them this much room (indicating an inch), any position, they are going to pull it.



And when they are on -- and I thought yesterday's game was an example of that. You know, their first game, maybe they didn't hit as well, or Florida Gulf Coast was keeping it close, and then after seven points and about two minutes it was like 30.

They are just so explosive, and they are explosive with size. That's a really hard guard. Really hard guard. And not just one girl player with size, one young woman with size. Raegan, kid off the bench, we did recruit Culliton. Just big.

So it will be a big challenge but we'll be giving it our best shot. Just happy I got the shot.

Q. You mentioned Raegan Beers. A lot of times she'll go against a team, and they won't have anybody with the size to deal with her and you guys have several. Your thoughts on that matchup and what you have to counter her.

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, I watched her -- had not watched her in person since high school, and then just when she was at Oregon State watched, and kind of like, Oh, would have been great, right.

Then seeing her in person yesterday, you know, it's like with all of your centers, especially when you don't have a body, she's going to really have their way down low. But even with size, if we put O'Grady down there, she's so good at splitting you in the middle of the paint, and if she pivots, if she gets it from anywhere where that SEC logo is on the floor up to that charge circle, it's money. It doesn't matter. You could have three hanging on her, right. She's just so strong, and she just has -- owns that area.

So there's just different ways that we're trying to -- I don't think there's anything new that she hasn't seen, right, that the SEC has not thrown at her. So you just probably tried to limit touches. I've always liked that we have had three centers with O'Grady, Heiden and Stuelke. They play different ways, but none of them are even remotely close in size to her.

So the unfortunate thing is I have all these but which one to go at which time, right. And that's been my million dollar question this whole year is when to counter with this when they do that.

I'm still kind of watching some film and trying to figure out what that might look like if she gets on a tear, who I might switch out. I'm not trying to Heiden anything from them but I have to watch to see at what points in time it might be best to go with Heiden versus O'Grady.

Q. You touched on Jennie there. What do you remember about her as a recruit and as a player, especially that transition from Drake to Iowa.

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, we recruited, you know, her really hard. We were at Drake at the time when she was a senior. So a rising senior, and she chose to go to Iowa. But then our coaching staff got the job at Iowa.

I remember one of my first calls was like, Hello, we get to coach you anyway. But we had a great rapport. She just was -- I think she would tell you that. I think she enjoyed the Drake program. We were successful at the time. But just had her heart set on a Big Ten in Iowa. We moved over.

That freshman year, Randi Peterson Henderson, my new coach on staff, she was a senior and Jennie was her freshman. So they were a really good combination of five, four; and Jennie was the four position, and Randi was the five.

Iowa had struggled a couple years before and we won the Big Ten Tournament that year. To Randi Peterson Henderson did a great job leading that group and Jennie was still competitive, fiery freshman that was the perfect person to just help turn that thing.

I just remember her fight, and it's been no surprise, if you watch her, she's got that fight on the sideline and she's going to go and she's going to attack anything that she feels is worth doing, she's going to give it everything she's got.

So I just remembered that about her. Just, you know, never would back down. Nothing was ever undoable. And I think that thought process has always served her really well.

Q. You mentioned talking about Raegan, limiting touches, but how hard is that with Jennie's style, not afraid to pull the bigs out?

JAN JENSEN: It is hard. And I'm not trying to undersell and overdeliver. I mean, everybody here in the SEC -- or they have faced before.

It's just when you are going that fast and you're trying to make transition, you're locating. You have to locate where Verhulst is because she'll stop and pull it right insight the March Madness logo and go in on you.

And then you have the fours. The fours can shoot. Williams can post up as strong per capita weight and inches as beers. So you've got to be careful on her coming

down in transition and just whipping and posting up your guard.

I have not watched all the teams in the SEC but to have a three position, a four position, and a five position that are all posting, in my opinion as strong as anybody in the country, that's what makes them so hard. Because you kind of have to help sometimes on Williams when she's posting up.

But if you're helping on her, they are so smart and they are going to kick it out, or if you are just doing a typical, I'm going to sag off the weak side, they are going to skip it and they are going to hit you with Verhulst or whoever.

Yesterday, is it Vann? Wow, her threes. And she looks like she shouldn't do that, right. She's strong, and I'm just going to post up at the block. So, difficult. High level. Like if you had to give the degree of difficulty to guard Oklahoma, if it was like a dive in the Olympics, whatever the 10 is, that's it, right.

You just -- I think you've just got to just try to be as solid as you can. But you can't be shocked if Raegan is going to hit like four in a row. If you just get down there and you can't defend it enough, that high-low look, it will be a challenge. But it's fun. I do have some things we're going to do but I'm not going to say it, right, to all of you, but I have some things we are going to try. But I don't think it's going to be anything new they haven't seen.

I just have a lot of respect. I think it would be so fun to have those four bigs, holy cow, they are just really good. The high-low game is really good.

Q. Coming to Norman, Jennie talked about pushing to get the crowd out tomorrow. What's the preparedness and the mindset as you play a home Sooner proud here?

JAN JENSEN: That's the luxury of being a four. We've been before a lot of my years, the last recent ones. But I can tell you, this particular team I've gotten to coach, I'm just so grateful that I'm here. It's hard. I know it.

But the Sooner people have done a job. The NCAA, it's been a great experience. Regardless of the outcome tomorrow, it's fun to play in front of fans.

Yeah, do I wish it was black and gold. But women's basketball, when we have great support, it's growing so much. So I hope there's a great fan base even if there's going to be a lot of them raring -- is it crimson and cream? I have to get that right. I don't need people yelling at me about that.

First and foremost, the sooner product is really good. Hopefully that will happen. Everybody asks me, oh, do you wish you were at home? Oh, yeah. But our journey has been such a special one, and me personally, I just think about my life and all my blessings, just to be in the NCAA Tournament.

And winning last night or yesterday morning was really special. I'm glad we had that locker room and it would be great to have another locker room. But man, I'm just happy to be here, and I hope they do come out, if they listen to Jennie's call.

Q. So first of all, I saw your stats in high school, and wow.

JAN JENSEN: Never met a shot I didn't like. We all had our roles. I had a fun role.

Q. Now being in the position you're in, the sport is in an unprecedented point right now. What do you think about the possibility of this tournament expanding? Is it in the right place right now, or is it something that you see possibly being a good thing to grow from a numbers standpoint?

JAN JENSEN: I think that's -- I appreciate mentioning the Iowa history. If you ever come into my office, my grandmother was the Hall of Fame MVP of the 1921 State Tournament in Iowa. I have her ball, the ball they used. I have the little trophy she got. I have it stacked with some of our Final Four memorabilia from 2023 and 2024.

And so my wonder and my amazement from, you know, she got to have that experience in 1921 and Iowa has always been pretty proactive when it comes to women's basketball. Oklahoma has, too. They have been real supportive.

I just think my ride has been amazing. Because I have a grandmother that played and was kind of a pioneer, and then I kind of followed in her footsteps.

And then I mean, I've gotten to be part of two ground zeros with Caitlin Clark and the ascension of when NIL started and then to have a player like Caitlin. No one really had that at that particular moment of what Caitlin did.

And now I'm in the rev share ground zero, right. So being at this place in time, I don't know, none of us know exactly how we are all going to do that, right. But being part of that and trying to figure it out is another cool blessing.

So as I'm looking at the men's regionals that they played,



right, they have not always been totally sold out either, some of them. I think sometimes we look and we're like, oh, gosh, always what the guys are doing.

You know, I wonder if you ever flip it back, what would it be like? There would be holy heck to pay if we made the men go through this. You know, if we were going to have the men play at a home site, because it's always the money, we can't do it. No one would watch if the women do it.

But some of those regionals, you might even spike it if you did it for that, right. So now, it's interesting. There's more money now. Much has been said about since the COVID year when Price showed the weight room, all the things, and now it's pretty marketable and Caitlin and company blew it out of the water what can happen if you invest in women's sports.

So to your question, I don't know.

I mean, it depends. It depends. Our market is pretty on fire. I mean, how blessed am I? Our fan base held and sold out again, right.

So I think it would be an interesting study of the regionals and where the men -- and I didn't want to mention the men. I just saw a couple of early ones where I didn't see a whole lot of sell-out fans those first rounds.

So I don't know which question should be asked. Is this that model that creates the excitement when you're playing at home and there's a buzz always? Or should we always be pushing; should a road to a national title really go through a home court? I don't know. I mean, that's why we are now. I just think it's really interesting.

But I would kind of like to see some feasibility studies or some fictitious numbers on what projections of the men's, flipping it the other way, and see what those dollars would be, and what the crowd support would be.

But then you probably can't really equal it because, what, Oklahoma's tickets are 13 bucks a ticket. I'm pretty sure the regionals is not 13 bucks a ticket wherever Dayton played or whoever.

That's all I got for you. My little noneducated guess at what have it would be. But I find it fascinating. I find it fascinating. I would love it if women's sports can keep growing, and I'll be working on doing my part to continue it.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

