

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

Monday, March 24, 2025

Norman, Oklahoma, USA

Lloyd Noble Center

Oklahoma Sooners

Coach Jennie Baranczyk

Sahara Williams

Skylar Vann

Media Conference



SAHARA WILLIAMS: I'm just really grateful that the man above put us in the position to be able to do what we've done today. We've been on the other side of the coin. And it's not a fun feeling.

Just Jennie and Skylar and all 13 of the other girls, our staff have just poured in, and in the offseason getting better. That was my goal this offseason, making a deep run and doing everything I could to win. And I think it showed today.

I thought Skylar did a phenomenal job today. I thought she worked her butt off in the offseason. And this was just a day you can't take for granted. I thought we all seized the moment, and I thought it was awesome to go out there and play.

SKYLAR VANN: Sahara, I don't think anybody understands, has worked her butt off this summer getting to this point. Like, she's been in the gym since this summer, getting her shot, getting her 3 going, getting that mid-range, getting that three-level scorer. That's what you saw today.

Nobody ever sees that. Nobody sees the work we put in. To see Sahara really shine out there today, it meant so much. She held the standard from the jump. We just followed suit. So, Sahara, seriously, she's worked her butt off to get to this point.

SAHARA WILLIAMS: That goes to show you how she is. A good person.

Q. Skylar, wanted to ask you about coming off the floor, (indiscernible) is hugging and embracing you. What was your final performance -- what was it like for you just on the floor?

SKYLAR VANN: It's a lot. It's a lot to take in. Our goal this entire, since Jennie has been here, is just to win and just play with joy.

I think to leave the LNC and Sooner Nation with a win here just means so much. Like Sahara said, the man above, that was our main focus today was give it all to him. That's

Oklahoma - 96, Iowa - 62

Q. The fan turnout today, especially the students, I just wanted to get your thoughts on seeing them today?

SKYLAR VANN: I mean, Sooner Nation came out and we could not thank them more. Jennie talked about it in the locker room, from the first year we hosted to now, it's insane to see.

So my four years playing with Jennie, playing five years here, just seeing the crowd grow and grow, Jennie promised that our first year, that we were going to get this crowd going. And my senior year we did. And I couldn't thank Sooner Nation more. They helped us get that win today, no doubt.

SAHARA WILLIAMS: Feeding off Skylar, they definitely helped us carry that energy through all 40 minutes. They showed out. I don't think you can put it in any better words. And we really needed it. We played for them and each other, and it turned out the way we wanted to today.

Q. Sahara, this offseason, I know the offensive side of the ball was such a big focus for you, and getting more fluid in that way. In the first half we saw bits and pieces of every ounce of work, from the 3-point all the way inside. Just for you the full-circle moment of the work you put in in the offseason and the summer now shining in the biggest part of the season, the emotion, gratification how does it feel it's come full circle in that way?



all you can do be connected and protect our bubble. I think we did that. I can't really thank anybody but him.

Q. The depth being a difference, as part of the story line for your entire year. What's this do for you guys prior to the second weekend when the depth shows up like it did today?

SKYLAR VANN: We're hard to guard. When you have -- if you look at the stats, I mean, we have multiple scorers today. To have that, that's how connected we were. We were giving each other the ball. We were really being aggressive on offense and defense, getting rebounds, getting second opportunities to score.

When we do those things, when we're so connected that nothing else matters, we're a great team, and we're hard to beat.

Q. Sahara, you're an Iowa kid who just helped your team throttle Iowa. What was your mindset, especially early on, you had some scorers beside you who maybe were struggling a little bit, but just your mindset and what you hoped to bring to the floor, especially early on today?

SAHARA WILLIAMS: Just do whatever it takes to win. I know there's a lot of emotions going into this game but after our first media, Jennie told us, now it's a basketball game. All the emotions, take it out of it. Just play and the scoreboard will take care of itself.

I thought doing this for my team, doing it for Skylar. She'll never play here again. Giving her something to want to keep playing for. And just really doing it for my teammates. They pour into me.

I just love them so much and I just want them to do so good and do so great. Whatever that means for me, it may look different every game. I'm willing to do so in order to win and accomplish the goals that we want to.

Q. You guys have over 130 rebounds in two games.

SAHARA WILLIAMS: 130? 1-3-0?

Q. Pretty impressive in two games. Talk about it -- you didn't shoot it well early, but you were getting three or four shots at the goal sometimes. Talk about that.

SKYLAR VANN: I mean, I didn't realize we've had that many rebounds. Jennie, that's pretty good.

JENNIE BARANCZYK: That's a lot of missed shots,

Skylar. They go in the basket, not so many opportunities.

SKYLAR VANN: I think it shows how much you want it. Rebounds, you want the ball more than your competitor. And that's something that has been a big standard for us this entire year is, oh, we can rebound. We've got to crash on defense and offense.

I think to have 130 boards in two games, that's awesome. I'm really proud of this group.

Q. Can you just talk about that early moment when Iowa took an early lead and then you guys, the second unit came in, was able to make a spark. How nice is that when you guys are able to go to the bench and have players like that come in?

SAHARA WILLIAMS: I think it's really important. Our bench had 33 points today. I think that's something we've been pouring into them and making sure they know, when you come in you're just as valuable even if you don't start.

Just making sure they're confident and comfortable and understanding they can come in do what we need them to do. Just really trusting each other and understanding we've really worked hard for this moment and that we deserve to be here.

We've been here before. And just doing -- being us is what got us the win today.

Q. That first half, they take an early lead. You're dealing with some foul trouble. Just so many different players making plays -- Sahara, Zya, Liz Scott. Skylar was talking about the depth, just the amount of players that stepped up for you today, the way you guys played, what stood out about that?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I thought we settled in. They did they started on fire and they had a lot of hustle plays. We had to settle in. I think we were running all over the place. We had to steady up.

I thought Sahara did a great job keeping us steady. And Zya Vann continues to do Zya Vann things. I thought she was such a tone setter. She came in, just worked, played.

And how about Liz Scott? That was really special. I thought she did a really nice job of providing an energy spark. The thing I love about Sahara and Liz and Zya, they just played with a smile on their face.

We've had big moments where we've fallen down and not done that. Today's a big moment. There's a lot of emotions in the game. I was really proud of the steadiness

that we had.

Q. All year, you guys have had some great moments. But that's a pretty good basketball team you guys just throttled today. Talk about that a little bit and how good you guys really played today, and yet you didn't shoot it well, but you did so many other things well that you were still able to beat a pretty good team pretty bad.

JENNIE BARANCZYK: No, they're good. And you're right, I think we played really well. You could tell, we are really, really good when we're balanced like that.

When we become the one-hit wonder, and you've heard me say this time and time again, we're not nearly as efficient or as good. Especially the 3 ball wasn't really falling, especially in the first half. And we still kept kind of going to that.

I thought when we can have balance and different players stepping up do a lot of different things, like Sky said, it's hard to guard. We know that's hard to guard when you're guarding other teams.

But I think we played really, really well today because, make no mistake, they're a very good basketball team. We also knew that they can come back. They've had some big comebacks. They can shoot the ball well.

So we didn't stop. We never just, you know, rested on our laurels. We had a couple of home run plays we maybe didn't need to have. But at the same time I feel we just stayed competitive and stayed guarding for 40 minutes.

Q. Your first year here, you hosted and you guys got beat pretty good by Notre Dame. Now four years later you beat Iowa pretty good. You reached the Sweet 16 for the first time. Just tell us a little bit about how far this program has come in reaching this point for the first time. Second, where did you get the jacket?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I know. I know. I told Skylar it kind of looks like it did when I hugged her when she came out of the game because I'm soaked right now, obviously.

I don't know if I can go down reflective mode quite yet. But I do know that when they're talking, it makes me smile because that's why they played today.

I think we have tried to play to prove a lot, that we we're better than we were, or we try to prove that we're good enough, or we belong in the SEC, or that we were Big 12 champs. We've got to prove that constantly. We've got to prove I can be a starter or a nonstarter or a player of the

year. You have all these things that I think sometimes are just human nature things.

Today's, I think, one of those validation points when you play for joy and play together look at what happens. That's what we want this program to be all about is you play -- everyone says play for the front of your jersey but it's deeper than that.

You answer to one and then you get to play for and with your teammates. And I think you could tell they did that today. The connection they had on that floor was pretty darn special. So that's probably my proudest moment.

And I don't think we're done yet. We obviously get another game. And we get another opportunity to play an incredible basketball game in the Sweet 16. We haven't done that. Here's another big moment.

So I'm excited to see us continue to respond. Are we going to take that joy in or go back and be, like, the moment's big? So it will be fun to be able to see, but the journey is not over, which is awesome.

Q. Talk about the balance, but specifically defensively, have they hit the level that you've been expecting from them here? And then Sahara, too, just her -- she was everywhere in the first half defensively?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Sahara was so special. She came here to build something, and she's doing it. You can see it. She's doing it by falling down, getting up, leading, having a smile on her face, struggling in the first game, coming back and playing with this immense joy and presence. I thought it was amazing.

And defensively, they are an extremely hard team to guard. They don't stop moving. So you knew we would be tested today. We've seen some things like that in the SEC where they're just really, really challenging to guard. And we've had to learn. I think we've done a nice job.

I think one of my favorite things -- I get asked this a lot with the third quarter and how good the third quarter was -- it's no longer me going in and saying, here's how we have to adjust. It's a constant conversation. Not that it always hasn't been.

But it's so much more their input on the game and them playing the game and them reading the game live because we've played NCAA Tournament games all season. We've played first-time opponents for two months, two and a half months.

So you real, I think, we're really understanding how you

learn the game more and you're making reads more. That's why we're making some of those adjustments because we're understanding the adjustments, not because I'm telling you to go from point A to B to C.

Q. You talked about Sahara smiling out there, but she looked more as an intimidator out there, like the Terminator.

JENNIE BARANCZYK: It's an intense smile, come on. (Laughter).

Q. Obviously a tournament game. Her home state is on the front of the jersey, like your home state is. Did you feel like she had to focus any differently? And also wanted to ask, I think this is your 12th time in the NCAA Tournament as player or coach. First time you've gone beyond the second round. What's that mean for you personally?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Let me talk about Sahara first, because I think she does. She has an infectious smile and she has this intensity about her. That's what Skylar was alluding to; she raises the level of competitiveness in everybody.

I do think she made it about a basketball game today. I think she made it about her team. I don't think it was ever anything personal for her, even though a lot of the players on the other team were AAU teammates. So she knew a lot of them. But at the same time I think -- Sahara is a unique person. She's somebody that can stand on her own. She's independent. She's strong, stubborn, got a lot of courage and has an ability to face adversity head on.

So I think she made it more about her team and what she wanted to do today more so than the even the scoreboard or the opponent. And of course it's awesome.

Q. What about you?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I think it's been a long time. So it's a pretty sweet feeling -- and I didn't mean to have that pun in there. But again, I'm just excited that this team gets to keep playing. I thought it would feel different. You think, oh, it's going to be amazing once you get past and you're in the Sweet 16, and obviously we're not in Spokane yet.

I love this team. I love coaching this team. I love the lessons that we continue to learn, and they've been hard lessons and it's not always sunshine and rainbows, but that's what makes it so beautiful and amazing, and they test you every day, and we all mess up. We all get up and keep going. I'm so glad that we get another day together.

Q. Wanted to follow up on Skylar Vann's final performance at the Lloyd Noble Center. 17 points after her getting in foul trouble early and just exploding in the second half. What did you think about her tonight?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: How about her poise? I thought she shined today. She's setting the tone from a rebounding standpoint. She's doing the things she can control. Her answer yesterday or the day before about it being a hard year for her, and for her to say, this is actually my favorite year, having people around me be really good and we have so much depth. That's real.

Sky doesn't have -- she's not PC, let me just say the smart thing. That's really her. That's why I've so loved coaching her. That's why in seeing her go through so many things and then to be able to shine like that, in the NCAA Tournament where we had to have it, that was just amazing.

I'm just really proud of her. And also every single person on the team is so excited for her. And that doesn't get to happen in every locker room, but it does in ours.

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