

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Gonzaga vs Louisville

Sunday, March 20, 2022

Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Gonzaga Bulldogs

Coach Lisa Fortier

Kayleigh Truong

Kaylynne Truong

Media Conference

Louisville 68, Gonzaga 59

Q. Talk about just how this felt. Obviously a big hole at the beginning, you guys dug out of it, so you certainly didn't quit.

KAYLYNNE TRUONG: Yeah, they took a first hard punch at us, but we recovered, and that's what I'm proud of with this team. We're just so relentless. You don't know what's going to happen, especially -- we did really good for playing a No. 1 seed. I'm not disappointed at all.

KAYLEIGH TRUONG: I totally agree. I'm so proud of this team. We didn't just roll over and die, but they did swing pretty hard in the beginning. But digging ourselves out of that hole, it just comes to show that we're more than willing to fight, whatever it is. We're not backing down from anybody. For them to be playing -- we're playing in front of so many people at their home court. I think a lot of teams would just kind of back off and slow down or be afraid of all the cheering, but I'm super proud of this team. I can't really say any more about that.

Q. Your thoughts on Hailey Van Lith against y'all tonight?

KAYLEIGH TRUONG: Yeah, she's a great player. Three-level scorer. She can shoot the three, get to the mid-range, a strong guard, get to the rim. Yeah, I mean, she did a good job. She went off.

KAYLYNNE TRUONG: Yeah, I thought we could have done a better job limiting her, but because she's such a good player, she did what she did.



Q. You talk about that punch that they threw there at the beginning of the game; what did you all look to do, especially after that media time-out that led to the 12 over? Kaylynne, I think you had a runner that kind of helped to start that. What adjustments did you all make to that to counter that and get back in the game?

KAYLYNNE TRUONG: We had to get on the boards. I know they were kind of killing us on the boards, and that's why they got that 14-0 run, and then we just had to talk to each other on defense. We just had some miscommunications, and once we got locked in with our scout, y'all saw the score, we were back in the game.

KAYLEIGH TRUONG: Yeah, they came out obviously with a very aggressive press, so like limiting turnovers, being sure of our passes, and obviously looking at this stat sheet, I'm not super proud of how I handled the ball, or like limited my turnovers. I for sure take full responsibility for being really careless with the ball.

It was just really getting the jitters out. Coach Lisa even said in the time-out, okay, this is it, we're good now. We're good. Let's refocus and get back into it.

Q. The end of the season is never a good feeling, but when you think back on kind of the run you guys went on, the win in the semis, the win over BYU, the win over Nebraska, does looking back on that kind of stuff kind of soften the blow of the season ending here?

KAYLEIGH TRUONG: It's never easy, obviously, to take a loss. You always want to keep playing. But looking back on the season, it's been a phenomenal season. I love the seniors to death, love this group. We're willing to run through a brick wall for each other.

I mean, a lot of people doubted us from the get-go. We just kept hearing like, Gonzaga is losing 50 percent of their scorers, rebounding, which that isn't wrong, but I think people believed that we weren't going to be as good as last year. We had a lot to prove, and I'm super proud of this team because we definitely did prove that we belong here, and we definitely could have taken this game if we had, again, great starts.



KAYLYNNE TRUONG: Yeah, I mean, again, going off of her, it's tough to lose and then have that season ending for the seniors at least. I definitely wanted it bad for them. I know we all wanted it bad for each other.

But again, I told them in the locker room, I said, y'all don't have anything to be sad about because people doubted us right from the beginning and we proved people wrong, especially, again, going off of lost 50 percent of our scoring and our rebounding and people thought we were rebuilding, but we weren't a rebuild year. If you look at the sheets, it was more like a reload.

Q. Do you feel like you were wearing down a little bit in the second half? It was a pretty physical game even in the backcourt. They just kept coming it looked like.

KAYLYNNE TRUONG: It was tough for sure, but I think we just -- we did lose a little gas, especially on the boards, and then I think -- from what I remembered, we committed a couple like ticky-tack fouls and that's what got them to the free-throw line. Yeah, I think we ran out of gas a little bit.

KAYLEIGH TRUONG: Yeah, to add to Lynne, I think we were also very careless with the ball. There was some where I just remember one play, I think I threw -- it was like a lob pass and obviously it was not the greatest pass to Lynne, so obviously taking care of the ball out of half was something that prevented us from keeping the momentum that we got from then.

Q. Taking a No. 1 seed deep into the game, what kind of motivation does that give you for next year knowing that you can compete and play with the best?

KAYLEIGH TRUONG: Yeah, on their home court playing the No. 1 seed, that's what you want as an athlete. That's all you can ask for. You want to be put against the top because that's how you come out and know that, hey, I can compete with the top.

It's a really big motivator. It comes to show that we're going to fight, regardless of what the number is.

KAYLYNNE TRUONG: Yeah, big motivator for sure. Again, we were a 9 seed, they were a 1 seed, and everyone I feel like expected the game to go a little differently. Again, I'm proud of this team. I'm proud of what we accomplished, and next year is going to be a big run for us.

Q. I was wondering if both of you could just share kind of what this senior group means to you guys and

if you had a chance to talk with any of them yet. I know the game just ended.

KAYLYNNE TRUONG: I mean, I told them in the beginning of the season I would run to the ends of the earth for them, and I still would. I love this group to death.

We all understood what it's like to be doubted, so we took that together, and it just built a bond with the whole team. But the seniors especially, I know they worked so hard. I'm going to point out Mel. I know her shot when we first came in, I don't know if she'll hate me for this, but it was like a catapult when we first arrived on campus. Sorry, Mel. Yeah, and she made major improvements to her jump shot, and look at her now, hitting middies like nothing. Ana I know took a big leap. I love seeing her development over the years. C, you can't ask for a better shooter. Come on now. And Abby, she'll work. She's a workhorse. She'll work for the boards. She'll do the little things that doesn't really show up on the stat sheets.

Yeah, I'm definitely going to miss playing with them. I'm going to miss them a lot.

KAYLEIGH TRUONG: Yeah, our strength and conditioning coach, Coach Mike, always said this line, our destinies are wrapped up in each other, and all the seniors, they all have different stories, but to be in the same place and play on the same team, I will always be grateful, and it's nice to kind of sit back and see that they're all different. But their work ethic, each and every one of them, they're -- what's there more to say? They will put their foot down and work as hard. You can't ask for anything more from a great group of seniors.

Q. There were several possessions in the first half and I think even a couple in the second where you all had to go deep into the shot clock before taking a shot. What was it about Louisville's defense that created that, and was it something that you all were able to see in the scout or something different?

KAYLEIGH TRUONG: So some plays are called from the sideline. Coach would want us to like oh, run out 10 seconds and stuff like that. Some of it's set up. But they did speed us up on some possessions. We knew that from the jump. Other than that, I feel like the majority of the shots, especially in the first half, were rushed because we just couldn't get the flow just yet because they're super disruptive on defense.

KAYLYNNE TRUONG: Yeah, I think the fans had to play a part in it, too, and definitely I'm taking responsibility for that. I remember I looked at Coach Lisa after we were on the far end in the first half, and I had a feeling that the shot

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

clock was going down because I was trying to call for a high, and it was just so loud that I couldn't really hear, and our team usually counts down for us. That's on me not knowing what the number on the shot clock was.

LISA FORTIER: I love coaching our team, and I thought they really battled today. I think that's part of the reason why I love coaching them. They are just a bunch of fighters. Louisville did a great job of starting both halves, and then it just became too much for us to overcome, unfortunately. I wish we would have come back from 14-0 to be down 4, and then to get that one -- tie the second, did a nice job, and then we came out at halftime and again we let their pressure get to us. I think -- I'm trying to analyze the stats but my brain is spinning and I think a lot of the turnovers kind of came in those bunches.

That third quarter was the big difference in the game. We just -- too many turnovers, didn't shoot it all that well, and these guys are really good at accepting more than their share. I think it was a team situation, and their defense is really good. It's designed -- whoever asked the question was there a reason why you guys were late in the shot clock, yeah, because they're pressuring you in the backcourt and they pressure you in the full court. And their defense is good.

They're not overly disciplined in all the areas, but if you get shook or get on your heels, then it is hard to find your teammates.

Unfortunately for us, we didn't have enough in the package to overcome it today.

Q. Coach, just talk a little bit about what Kayleigh and Kaylynne have meant to this team this year and during their time here.

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, those guys have done a really nice job in transitioning from role players into impact players. Leigh started some her freshman year due to injuries and she started all last year, and we had three seniors who had graduated and another senior who -- Cierra, who ends up being a sixth-year senior with the redshirt transfer and the COVID and all that stuff. So last year her role was different. She was more of a distributor. She is a great passer.

And then Lynny came off the bench, which she did this year, too. But when we graduated what we graduated last year, we really changed the offense. We went to a lot more ball screens because those two are phenomenal in ball screens. They're great passers. They're good shooters, and they just are good at running the team.

So they've made a huge jump for us. Not only in output but also in usage. The usage has gone way up for them.

So I think on the court, we feel very comfortable. We're lucky that -- people say, how is it like with twins? Well, sometimes it's a negative to have two players who are the same position in the same class just for recruiting purposes, but I don't think it's ever been a negative with those guys because they're so well-rounded. They can both shoot it. So really they're point guards but they're easily two guards -- with Kayleigh's improved defense, when she first came in she wasn't all that interested. I don't think either of those guys had taken a charge until I started recruiting them and told them that I'd give them candy when they came to Gonzaga if they took charges. Now they lead us in charges taken.

So as they've improved and evolved over the years, they've just become more and more valuable to our team, and then that's just on-the-court stuff. They're solid, solid kids. They're great students. They love their teammates. They bring them to the gym, they go to ice cream. They will do basically whatever you need.

So they mean a lot to our team. I'm really happy -- I'm trying to convince them for two more years but I'm really happy we've got them again because as we graduate this great group of seniors they're going to be in the hole ready to go.

Q. Lisa, obviously everyone knows the kind of player Hailey is, but you hold her to six points there in the first half, but she gets going there, scores eight points in less than two minutes. What is it about her that makes her so difficult to defend against, and what did you hope to do to kind of keep her from having a run like that?

LISA FORTIER: Well, I didn't get to say good job to her. She's a local kid, so she played a really tough game. She's so intense. Some people intensity takes them out of it, and I haven't watched -- I've watched a lot of film in two days, but I haven't watched enough film and I haven't followed her career closely enough to know this, but I think based on today the intensity rose and she rose to that occasion.

I think that she is that intense all the time. I remember her as a high schooler when she would come to camp, and she worked just like that. She worked very hard. She was constantly focused on her fitness and her individuals and everything that she could.

We were trying to keep her off of her left hand even though we know she can go both ways. We were trying to keep

her out of the paint. We were trying to give her nothing easy. Unfortunately she got to the rim, and she got some easy jumpers that were uncontested, and I think that that is never good.

With the really good players you have to take away as many easies as you can so that -- I think I've said this maybe even since we've been in Louisville, so if they get a couple that are tough shots but you limit the easies, then okay, but the good players get a couple that are tough shots, so then you give them a couple easies, as well, and next thing you know she has 10 in a quarter and 21 on the game or whatever she ended up with.

It's not an easy job, but if we were going to be successful we needed to limit her more than we did.

Q. How are the seniors after this game, and what did you say to them in the locker room?

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, they're sad. I mean, they left their heart out there. You know, I think they left their heart out there on the floor. Those guys have given us everything this they could this year, and there's been a lot of talk about just the different paths.

Sixth-year Cierra Walker, who transferred from Vanderbilt; fifth-year Abby O'Connor who transferred from Loyola Chicago; fifth-year Ana Virjoghe who's from Romania and transferred from a D-II or NAIA school in Oregon; Melody Kempton, who's been with us, she's right down the road, and she committed to us long, long ago; and then Kylee who never played a game for us in uniform.

So the group is varied. But they really came together. They encompass all the parts of being a Zag with all our leadership characteristics, and they gave everything they could to each other and to the team.

I think they're grateful. The game, it didn't go how we had it planned, but they did go down fighting, and I think they're proud of that, and they had a great career at Gonzaga, and I think they're all happy for their time spent.

I just told them that I love them, and they're leaving our program better than it was before they got there, that I'm thankful that I got to coach them, which are all very true.

Q. I have to imagine that anytime players like Melody Kempton and Cierra Walker are leaving there's going to be another off-season of wondering about scoring. I was wondering if you saw something out of Kayleigh in this tournament that makes you think she can make the next step as a scorer. I know she's a talented all-around player.

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, I mean, she's going to have the ball in her hands, and I think that she or Lynne, they were vying -- it's like they're back in the womb trying to figure out who was the leading scorer on our team this year. I think they were toggling back and forth, and then sometimes Mel would pop in there and sometimes C would pop in there.

I think that she's aggressive and confident. I think the confidence is the big thing for those guys as they move into a new role, and every year it's a new role. I think that Leigh has a lot of potential for whatever that is.

The thing is with our team, we don't need Leigh to score 20. We just need her to score one or two more and then Lynne to score one or two more and Vonny to score one or two more and then KK to play a few more minutes and score a few more. It's just whatever you graduate just kind of shifts into everybody's role most of the time. Not always.

But I think they're both going to come back better. I think that all of our players who are not graduating are going to come back better. We love the off-season because it's the development time, and I think they're all ready for that.

Q. The girls mentioned that the Louisville crowd was really loud at one point and hard to communicate with each other, and I just wondered, you've been on both sides of this because you've been at GU for so long. You were there when Courtney Vandersloot was playing and you guys hosted as a double-digit seed and then you've gone on the road as a double-digit seed. Do you think we're at the point in the women's tournament where we need to be playing on neutral floors for all rounds? And will it give us more upsets if we do that?

LISA FORTIER: I don't know. I don't know if this is going to be very popular. I don't know if I have a definitive answer because I know for a long time in the women's game it's been about parity, and as we've achieved parity, I don't know what the numbers say, I know there have been several upsets both big and small in this year's NCAA Tournament, in March Madness.

I don't know -- it would be easier to upset people when you weren't playing at their home floor, but at the same time I don't know if we're at the point yet -- you can't tell until you try maybe, but I don't know if we're at the point yet where you would have a student-athlete experience like this in a neutral site.

I'm conflicted back and forth. I think the best part about it, I would rather play in a situation like this -- I mean, our team gave them what we had, than play in an empty arena. If it

meant we were going to win the game maybe I'd rather play in an empty arena.

I think it's something to look at. I think that really we're lucky at Gonzaga because our players play in front of a sold-out crowd all the time but so many people don't, and the fan experience and the student-athlete experience is really important.

I hate playing on the road. I love playing at home. But I'm not sure if we're there yet or not. So maybe if they try it out -- I know a lot of times you think you want one thing or you do one thing, you think you want something else and then you realize that the first thing wasn't so bad. Probably they should let teams bid for home sites again like they used to when we were at Gonzaga and we won several times as a lower seed. I think that's what I'm pulling for right now.

Q. Apologies if I missed this over the craziness of the last few weeks, but I seem to recall you saying that you were trying to convince Melody to come back for one more year. Do you know what her status is for next season, if she's considering coming back?

LISA FORTIER: Well, I told her she had to leave the door open and I haven't asked her in the last half hour or so. But I think she's engaged, and I think she's had a great career, tournament MVP. I think she's definitely leaning towards moving on, and unless Coach Craig has some heroics up his sleeve or her mom can convince her, then I think she's probably leaving, but we haven't had that final, final, final conversation.

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