

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 2 Semifinal - Colorado vs Iowa

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Albany, New York, USA

Times Union Center

Colorado Buffaloes

Coach JR Payne

Jaylyn Sherrod

Aaronette Vonleh

Frida Formann

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



Q. To what extent could you use what West Virginia did against Iowa as any kind of defensive blueprint for that game? Obviously Clark still got 32 but they were able to frustrate her to some extent.

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I think every team's game plan should be based on their own personnel. We do have some similar pieces to West Virginia; we also are a different team in a lot of ways.

We're looking at every game that Iowa has played and trying to take bits and pieces. Maybe this is something that could be effective, maybe that's something that could be disruptive in some way. So certainly watched that game, and most of them to be honest.

Q. You guys were 11th in the country in defensive rebounding percentage this year. That's a big jump from over last season. I'm wondering how that came about and how much that's been a point of emphasis?

JR PAYNE: Well, I love to hear that. That's great. Rebounding is always a big priority for us. We try to make sure in practices -- we don't do a lot of rebounding drills per se, but we try to make sure that we finish plays, even if it's an offensive segment, make sure we finish the play with a defensive rebound.

Maybe just putting a priority on that throughout the season has allowed us to be more effective on the glass.

Q. To go back to the Pac-12 a little bit, the text that Coach VanDerVeer sent out she talked about, just how close are you all as a group and what was that conversation like?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, Tara has done an amazing job of leading the coaches in the Pac-12. She is an incredible leader, of course, of her own teams, but also of the coaches in our league. I think the Pac-12 has done a great job of staying united.

For a long time we've kind of felt like it was us against everybody just because we were the only Power Five

Q. A couple of things. First of all, just generally your approach, very infrequently do you have a second chance to kind of go back and revisit. I wonder if you treat it more that way or more as new year, new team?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I think it's a pretty healthy combination of the two. We play such great teams in our conference. Most of them we play twice every year. In some ways it feels similar. Say we're playing UCLA again this year.

They are the same team, but they also have added some new pieces or added some new dimensions to their game, so playing Iowa is very similar in that regard, very similar to what they were, but also added some new things, as well, so similar approach. A little bit of both.

Q. I don't want to call it a Pac-12 funeral because there's still a lot of teams playing, but is there a joyousness that there are so many Pac-12 teams still around, including three in this super regional?

JR PAYNE: Absolutely, yes. Those of us that have been in the Pac-12 love the Pac-12. We love the camaraderie. Not just the excellence on the court, but the camaraderie that we have amongst the coaches, the players, the teams. It's been an incredible thing to be a part of that conference.

I think in the very beginning, we all wanted to make this the best year ever, just knowing that it was the last year, and I think the coaches and players and everyone has done a really good job of that.



conference on the West Coast, and so we've always done a great job of uplifting and supporting and encouraging, celebrating each other, and Tara has led that charge and we've all bought into that.

Great relationships amongst all of coaches. The message she sent, I think everybody responded and echoed the same sentiments of just what a wonderful experience it's been and let's go out with a bang and let's keep supporting each other forever even when we're not together and things like that.

Q. On the Pac-12, just what the growth of the women's game and also just the ascension gradually over the last six, seven years of your conference, is there disappointment that it's being broken up essentially because of football?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I mean, I don't get too deep in the weeds as far as the whys of what we're doing, but there's an incredible disappointment for those of us that are women's basketball coaches for a variety of reasons.

One, because it is the strongest conference in the country and has grown and proven to be really great on the national stage and things like that.

But in the same breath, we have to be able to be appreciative of our experience and in due time be really excited for the next step, and I think all of us will do that. I know we certainly will.

To go back to the Big 12 is going to be great, but we're just playing out Pac-12. As long all of us can keep playing, that's the goal.

Q. We've talked about Aaronette quite a bit obviously throughout the year, but she had a really good weekend last weekend, going against two other posts that those were key matchups and she really played well, especially the rebounding. What have you seen out of her in the last couple weeks where she's even taken her game to another level, especially in rebounding?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, definitely. I was speaking with Netti last night and I said, you've probably played a thousand minutes this year and played so many games, and sometimes you get to a place where you just kind of are who you are at this point in the season.

I said, it's an incredible thing to see for as much success as you've had this year that you're continuing to get better. The last weekend of the season she was better, even with all of the success throughout the year.

I think the rebounding has been huge for Aaronette. I think her approach to both of those games knowing that they were key matchups for us, her focus was great, her intentionality about being really aggressive on the glass, knowing that we needed those, I thought they were game changers for us last weekend.

Q. I wondered if you could talk a little bit about Jaylyn both this season and in her career and especially going against a team that is so guard-dominant as Iowa is and just how that sort of is exciting for her facing that matchup.

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I mean, if anyone knows Jaylyn you would know she loves a challenge, whether that's in the court or in the classroom. Tell her she can't graduate in three years and get two masters degrees by the time she's done and she'll prove you wrong.

So, yeah, she loves a challenge. I think her makeup is very similar to our entire team's makeup. We love to play great competition. We love to go against great players. That challenge I think is exciting to her individually and collectively for the group.

Yeah, she just has a very businesslike approach to everything she does, so she's very locked in on scouting reports, she understands strengths and weaknesses of her opponent as well as ourselves, tries to think about ways that people can take advantage of us, ways that we can take advantage of others. I think that's everything you'd want in a point guard.

Q. My math is probably fuzzy, especially at this hour, but I think this super regional, one out of every 19 players is from Colorado, which is a pretty great ratio compared to California, Florida, what have you. Five teams have Colorado preps here including yourself, obviously. What does that say about grass-roots, about some of the hometown kids who are all here at different places?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I think it speaks to the strength of basketball continuing to grow in the state of Colorado. It's not one of the most populated states, so sometimes places like Texas, Florida, California that have bigger populations that are going to produce more high-level talent, but per capita I think that's a great stat and really cool for the grass-roots folks back in Colorado.

We love to support the young players and continue to see them be great. Of course we want them to stay at Colorado and play in the regionals for CU, but yeah, it's really great to have that many here.

Q. It's possible you could be facing almost a road atmosphere tomorrow every time Caitlin does something. How do you and your team deal with that?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, we definitely are anticipating that type of crowd. It felt like that in Seattle last year, and that was the other side of the country.

So yeah, we're expecting that. It's a great atmosphere always when you're going to play in an environment like that, very similar to Kansas State last weekend, very similar to most Pac-12 road games this year where attendance was through the roof and playing really great crowds in really hostile environments.

I don't think it'll really be any different, and it's something that we have enough experience with and we're excited about.

Q. Just in terms of what you said a year ago, you sat in Seattle and talked to us about the Sweet 16 becoming the standard. Now to be back here, does it feel like this is an opportunity not just for this team but for this program to take another step forward?

JR PAYNE: Yes, absolutely. I mean, I think every coach wants to continue to grow your program. Your players want to continue to prove themselves or outdo whatever they had accomplished the year before.

I think this is a great opportunity for that on a big stage against a great team. Of course we're trying to keep playing as long as we can.

Q. I don't know if this question has already been asked, but the strength of the Pac-12 Conference this season has just been ridiculous; six teams in the top 25. How do you think conference play really helped you guys prepare for this moment to face off against Iowa? Do you think this is the best the conference has ever been, that you've coached a part in your career?

JR PAYNE: 100 percent yes, I believe it's the best conference that we've ever had. Top to bottom, not just the top three or four teams, but I think 1 through 12 in the Pac-12 this year was really, really strong and really capable of competing and winning on any given night.

We definitely feel like playing in the Pac-12 prepares us for anything that we could see in the postseason.

One thing we've loved about the Pac-12 is it's not just great teams, but it's a variety of styles. So you'll see big bodies, slow half-court games where they're just going to pound it

inside. You're also going to see teams that are going to pick you up and press and be athletic and try to turn you over. And then everything in between.

We feel very prepared to go against a great crowd like we talked about, playing against a great team, and feel like the Pac-12 has done that for us.

Q. I'm going a little bit into the future, and as much as you love the Pac-12, is there an advantage in that Colorado is the school that's going back to a conference that it's familiar with? Obviously the Big 12 has changed some but it has a long history in the Big 8 and the Big 12. Your fans know a lot of these teams. Is there some advantage in that, in the familiarity, and even some geographical -- obviously Kansas and Kansas State, as much as you're sad about the Pac-12, that it's going to be a good fit for Colorado next year?

JR PAYNE: Yes, I definitely think so. As we keep talking about, we're sad that the Pac-12 is ending. We're also going to be very excited to join the Big 12 conference.

I think it's great for our student-athletes in that the travel is actually -- might even be easier in some regards than the Pac-12, so I think that's a great thing for our students. I think our fans, we have a lot of longtime Buff fans, people that have loved the buffs for decades, so for them to have the opportunity to renew some of those old rivalries, travel to some of the games things and things like that is going to be great for us.

I think it'll bring kind of an energized -- we have a lot of energy in Boulder right now with Prime and the success of both men's basketball and women's basketball and things like that, but I think it'll continue to grow that energy in Boulder.

Q. For each of you, when you think of this game in the lead-up to it, I'm wondering how much of your focus has been on last year and changing things from what happened last year and how much of it has been thinking of it as a fresh start in so many different ways?

FRIDA FORMANN: I can go first. I think a little bit of both. We've watched some film from last year, just a few clips, just reminding us of how they attacked us, how we can attack them.

But we also see it as a new game because it is. And we've been through a whole season since then, and I think we're just very confident where we're at right now. We're just taking it as that, just another game this season.

AARONETTE VONLEH: I think just exactly what Frida said. Of course we looked and reflected on last year's game just to get a feel for it again, but we're a much better team than we were last year and I think they arguably probably are, too, so it is a new game and we're just basing it off of this year as much as we are last.

JAYLYN SHERROD: Yeah, I think it's just all learning lessons. You learn from every game you play, so taking learning lessons, things we can do better, things we can continue to grow off of that we did well in that game.

But yeah, I think it's all learning lessons.

Q. Aaronette, can you talk about when you're facing such a guard-dominant team as Iowa is, which obviously you did last year, how you guys can maybe take advantage of that, your size and everything inside with the attack that you guys have?

AARONETTE VONLEH: Yeah, I think of course if we recognize mismatches just in the post or with our bigger-sized players, we'll obviously take advantage of that.

And then I mean, just playing bigger against guards. Of course you want to be smarter, try to match their quickness and everything, but I don't think there's anything specific that we're doing to exploit any of that.

If we see it in the game, we'll take advantage of it.

Q. Jay, can you describe what it's been like the last five years? One Power Five school recruits you to be with JR Payne and her staff for five years and the growth that you've seen.

JAYLYN SHERROD: That's a loaded question, but it's been a journey and I'm really grateful for it. I got here when I was 17, and I'm 22 now. Just realizing like the same kid that walked on this campus is not the same kid that's leaving.

But yeah, it's been a process. It's been a lot of learning to be comfortable being uncomfortable and getting outside of who my comfort is and what I operate in and just being challenged, not just by the staff but my teammates, too, to be better and to grow every year and realize the potential that I have on this team and the influence, as well.

It's just a lot of learning lessons and a lot of good experiences. But all in all, it was just a growing journey, and it's still a growing journey right now.

Q. Just to unpack what you were saying about some things you want to take from last year's game, some things you want to do better, I believe at halftime going into it -- if you identified one thing you want to do better and one thing you want to take out of last year's game?

JAYLYN SHERROD: I think overall just controlling what we can control is the biggest thing. I know we had a lot of missed opportunities in that game that were in our control, just being focused and finishing free throws, lay-ups, certain things that count and add up.

I just think controlling what we can control and focusing on the details more than anything.

Q. Frida, you guys obviously can shoot the three well. They really rely on the three-pointer. How do you try to limit a little bit of their three-point shooting and for that not to be a deciding factor in the game?

FRIDA FORMANN: Yeah, they are going to take a lot of threes. That's their offense and their transition offense, and that's not something we haven't seen this year. I think we know how to defend that, and you just really have to give them looks that they're not as comfortable with. Like you can't give up wide-open threes because they're just too good at making those.

So I think we have everything we need to go toe to toe with them, but obviously if it's a shootout, I think it's to their advantage.

Q. Talk about Coach Payne, her impact on you on and off the court.

AARONETTE VONLEH: Yeah, since I transferred here, JR has just been a great person for me on and off the court. She really cares about us just as people, even more so than as players. She's always checking in, making sure we're okay.

And then of course she just is always wanting the best for us on the court, so she always puts us in the best position to be successful, spends a lot of time preparing scouts and just making sure we're ready for any opponent.

She's definitely a really good coach.

JAYLYN SHERROD: Yeah, I think me and Coach J have really grown together throughout the five years of being with each other, and she challenges me and I challenge her. We just kind of have been through a lot together, so I think just realizing she's somebody who has my back and somebody who wants the best for me.

FRIDA FORMANN: Yeah, I think one of the major takeaways I've taken from Coach J is how humble she is and how willing she is to learn. I think me both and Jay have had instances where we've come up and said something and asked her to make an adjustment and she's listened. I don't think she has an ego at all when it comes to that.

Yeah, it's really fun to play for her and feel like you have a voice, but whenever she needs to turn it up, she will for sure.

Q. Frida, you mentioned you don't want to get into a shootout with them. Did you see in the West Virginia film, Holy Cross, they really disrupted their offense. Did you see how using your physicality is and how having plays against Caitlin before, how that can help in this matchup?

FRIDA FORMANN: Yeah, I definitely watched that game and saw how they frustrated them on defense. I think we're a really good defensive team. And we're not the same as West Virginia, but I think you could see in the K-State game that just our defense can win games.

Yeah, that's the mentality we're going in with, and hopefully we'll be able to control the physical aspect. We don't want to get in foul trouble, but obviously with a good player like Caitlin Clark you have to be some sort of physical with her, but just trying to be smart about it.

Q. Jaylyn, specific to pace out of that West Virginia game, that was the slowest paced game Iowa played all year and that game was tied with three minutes to go. As someone who drives the engine for you guys, how do you establish pace early and do you guys look to play at a slower more deliberate pace the way you guys have for most of the year?

JAYLYN SHERROD: I don't think we play at a slow pace. I think we like to push it in transition and run our offense and stuff like that. I think when we're able to get out in transition, we're pretty good at that. It's just we have so many weapons that it just opens up the floor for everybody.

I think we're at our best in transition, so I don't think it's any, I guess, different mentality going into this game about slowing the game down. It's just we're going to go out there and try to do what we do, which is push in transition and play at our pace. That's the plan.

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