

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 2 Final - Duke vs South Carolina

Saturday, March 29, 2025

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena

Duke Blue Devils

Jadyn Donovan

Oluchi Okananwa

Delaney Thomas

Elite Eight Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are ready to begin with the Duke players.

Q. I know this will be y'all's second time facing South Carolina this season. You saw them in December. I'm curious what you remember from that match-up and what you think will be key.

JADYN DONOVAN: Yeah, I remember the game being physical and it was very a high-intensity, fast-paced game which I expect tomorrow as well. But, yeah, I think the biggest thick for us tomorrow is executing offensively and continuing our defense energy that we have had all season.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: I want to agree with Jadyn about the high-intensity part and the speed, and I think for us that's going to be key to slowing down and really getting into our pace and not allowing them to speed us up.

DELANEY THOMAS: I think there are going to be a lots of ups and downs in the game, highs and lows and I think staying together, staying connected is going to be a big piece for us.

Q. Similarly, South Carolina shot 57% in that game which is so different than what you guys normally allow. Do you remember some of the things you talked about defensively after that game and for give me, I know it's been a long time ago and you have changed but some of the things that you talked about that maybe can help when you face them tomorrow?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: I know for sure what we talked



about was that was not Duke defense, that was not us, that was not what we allow. We did not key in on the details like we usually do. So that, too, is another big emphasis for us tomorrow.

JADYN DONOVAN: I think not allowing second-chance points is a big key for us. Just getting on the boards, crashing, just being there.

DELANEY THOMAS: Also we talked about how we had given them a lot of paint points and obviously it's easy to shoot 50% over that close to the basket. So trying to make the shots more difficult and forcing them to take further out shots.

Q. That was a long time ago that you played South Carolina. It was early December. What's changed about you guys as a team, mentally, your game, what's different about you as opposed to that game?

DELANEY THOMAS: I think both teams have played a lot of games. I think playing and that experience, getting that chemistry together helps for both teams, but I think that's going to be a big key for us next game.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: I kind of agree with what Delaney said.

JADYN DONOVAN: Same.

Q. Coach said that Reigan isn't somebody that likes to answer the phone. Would you agree with that? What is she like in that sense? What is her personality like?

JADYN DONOVAN: Yeah, um, we all love Reigan very much. She is funny. She doesn't have to say anything without kind of understanding who she is as a person. She is a bit quiet, I would say. Definitely has good humor for sure. But you have to know her to get that out of her. When I first got here, I was like, she is so quiet. She doesn't talk that much but more and more I got around her I realized who she is.

But she does not text that much in our team group chat, but when she does we all get super excited and we're like,



oh my gosh, Reigan, hey.

But she's funny. Definitely a great teammate, great person to be around. I'm going to miss her for sure.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: I had my 21st birthday in February and the best birthday I got was Reigan coming to my birthday dinner. She surprised me. I don't know if she got you guys in on that, but she came and that was the best gift I could have.

DELANEY THOMAS: There are some people that you call when you're in an emergency on your team and there are some that you don't. And I think Reigan is one of those because she might not pick up the phone. So you gotta be careful.

Q. Oluchi, you and your teammates on either side of you are part of this terrific sophomore class for Duke and you're poised to do something Duke hasn't done since maybe slightly after you guys were born, 2006. What does it mean to have this group of sophomores and have you talked about the fact that you can take Duke back to a place they haven't been in a long time?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: I think we have discussed how special our class is amongst us, since last year. The four of us all coming in, including Jordan Wood we all came in with the mentality and the mindset that we want to make an impact. We didn't care how young we were. We didn't care that we were freshman. We were just bright-eyed and hungry and truly we feel like that's enough and clearly it's been shown that it is.

Q. Delaney, y'all are a 7.5 point underdog, ESPN analytics predictor says South Carolina has a 78% chance of winning. Probably not surprised to hear that, but what's your reaction to hearing stuff like that?

DELANEY THOMAS: I think the underdog is a great place to be. I think it gives you hunger and more of an edge and I'm excited to see what we can do.

Q. Delaney, you guys just talked about what Coach Lawson means to you in terms of the way she relates to everybody individually but we were talking to her about the fact that she had a long WNBA career and how walking that path can sort of help her guide you guys. Was that part of the appeal in some ways? Obviously coming to Duke is a big appeal but knowing she had that background in terms of being able to guide you?

DELANEY THOMAS: Yeah, I think that was a huge piece, knowing and trusting somebody that has been through it all

at every level in every career. Having that trust in her, I think, is a big piece of what a lot of us -- made a lot of us come to Duke.

Q. For any of you, just the start you got off to yesterday wasn't probably what you were hoping for, but how confident is having the defense you guys play, thinking that, okay, we will be all right, we will get over the hump eventually offensively, and we will keep locking in defensively. How much does that help you, knowing you can shut teams down offensively, knowing that tomorrow you will have a team that's pretty good offensively?

JADYN DONOVAN: I think it gives us confidence. Obviously there are ups and downs, as Delaney said earlier, in the game, and we expect that tomorrow, you know, offensively and defensively, but, yeah, having that consistency that our defense has been all season is definitely special for us. But, yeah, as you said, they're a great offensive team, and we're going to do our best to execute the scheme we have to win the game.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: I feel like offensively we have games where it takes us a little bit to get in rhythm, but defensively knowing that we're showing up each time, with the same rhythm, and we know what we're doing is great because that gives us time offensively to see where we are at and get us connected again.

DELANEY THOMAS: Yeah, I think our connection defensively helps us to stay steady and stay calm in the midst of whatever that may be, a deficit or being up, and I think that helps us.

Q. Obviously the Duke men play tonight for a spot in the Final Four. What's your relationship with the team, and do you have any plans to watch the game tonight?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: We basically watch every game. We basically have watch parties. We're so proud of them, and we're excited for them to be on this big stage with us. It's super cool to have the Duke men in the same position that we are and cheer them on.

DELANEY THOMAS: Yeah. I think it's a great support system. It's like a brotherhood and a sisterhood, and just being able to watch them, support them, we will probably all watch as a team together, so that will be exciting.

JADYN DONOVAN: Agree with them. I mean, it's definitely special, and we see them all in the hallways when we are passing by going to our practices and stuff, so just super proud of them and excited for tonight.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies.

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