

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

Sunday, March 30, 2025

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena

Duke Blue Devils

Kara Lawson

Reigan Richardson

Ashlon Jackson

Elite Eight Postgame Media Conference

South Carolina 54, Duke 50

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

KARA LAWSON: Just really proud of my team and what a battle it was. Fighting tooth and nail out there to try and see if we could finish the game on top. Played so hard, dug out of an early hole. Possession game there late in the 4th quarter and just weren't able to get it done.

I just honestly throughout the whole game I just had a great sense of pride, walking the sidelines watching them compete at the highest level. Big picture, really proud of the season overall and the things that we were able to accomplish, winning the ACC for the first time since 2013, getting to the Elite Eight for the first time since 2013. Just a lot of things that this group of able to do that our program hadn't done in a long time.

It takes a special group to do that, and that's the sadness that you feel after a loss is that you won't have a chance to coach this group together again. That's why March is euphoric when you win but crushing when you lose. I told our group to hold their heads high. They represented themselves well, Duke well, their families well. I think everyone that watched the game today that is affiliated with Duke is really proud of the team and the effort.

Q. Reigan, three years ago you're in the portal out of Georgia. What was it about Duke that spoke to you and what brought you in here?

REIGAN RICHARDSON: You know when I first came here



on my visit I really just loved the familiness, the connection that this team had. I knew coming from Georgia I wanted to have another place, another family away from home, another home away from home, and I knew I found it here at Duke.

Just being able to play for Coach Kara and knowing all the knowledge that she has and where she's been, I knew she would be able to prepare me not even just as a player on the court but as a person.

Q. For both of you, Coach spoke on it, first Elite Eight appearance since 2013, first ACC championship. What makes it special and how will you remember this season?

ASHLON JACKSON: I would say we continue to grow, but never satisfied. We were happy with the Elite Eight but never satisfied with it. Even though it's been a long time since Duke has been there, obviously, we wanted more.

But, yeah, that's one thing about this group. Our determination and like our dedication to just be the best, and our drive, like that's one thing I really, really credit this group to. I can say that, like, it's all genuine with us, too. We want to continue to get better. We want to continue to get each other better. So we won't end up in a position like we are in now.

Even though it's been a great season, like I said, we're not really satisfied with the Elite Eight, but we're happy to be here, we're blessed to be here. Yeah, we just got to continue to grow.

Q. I believe that's the lowest South Carolina scored all year. Obviously the game didn't end the way you wanted it to, but can either of you speak to the defensive game plan and your defensive effort today?

REIGAN RICHARDSON: You know, South Carolina is a tremendous, tremendous team on both ends of the floor. Our main goal was to stop them in transition. They're a tremendous team. Just getting out and running and ultimately we did a little bit of that today.



We did the best we could on the defensive end but we're happy for South Carolina.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, ladies, you're dismissed. Questions for Coach.

Q. Coach, two slow starts, I know a lot of focus on the end of games, but when you get in a hole early, it puts in you a different situation. Do you have an explanation why it happened that way?

KARA LAWSON: I just think at this stage in the tournament, the teams are going to be really good. Sometimes you're just going to be down. It's just part of the forty minutes. I didn't think it impacted us too much. We were up four going into the fourth, so the deficit in the first quarter wasn't an impact for us.

Like they always say, the other guys are good, too. The other guys are going to score, too. The other guys are good, too. You don't pitch shoutouts.

I thought our team played hard. We defended at a high level, at a level well enough to advance. Our offense was not at a level high enough to advance and certainly late it wasn't. That I think was the difference in the game.

Q. Kara, the timeout with 29 seconds left, what were you looking for and why was Toby not out on the floor for that possession?

KARA LAWSON: Just a coach's decision. Went with the ball in Ashlon's hands. She had been making plays for us in the fourth quarter out of the ball screen. She tried to make a play and just missed it.

Q. Kara, like I said to the players, I think that's the lowest points South Carolina scored this year. Obviously the game did not finish your way, but what can you say about how they executed the defensive game plan today, you guys?

KARA LAWSON: I thought they did a great job executing the game plan. You heard the players talk about they're electric in transition, and you've got to try to keep them out of it as much as you can. It says on here they had nine fast break points, I don't know how accurate this is but I thought we did a good job of keeping them out of transition and getting them in the half-court.

We really wanted to limit their second-chance opportunities, too. They have really athletic frontcourt players and they only got five second-chance points. And we outrebounded them by double digits. So a lot of the things we asked our players to do, man, they delivered.

They delivered in a big way.

Like I said I'm proud of them. It wasn't enough, but as I told them hold your head high, man, you competed. And they competed as hard as they could. And as a coach that's all you can ask when you go into a game like this, is that they're going to compete as hard as they can and that's what they did.

Q. Coach, the team had a lot of momentum going into half but it seemed like there was a new energy and life coming out at halftime. Talk about what went into that.

KARA LAWSON: We just talked about executing better. I didn't feel like in the first half we executed our offense well. They did a great job of keeping us out of transition as well. I don't just want to credit our defense, we only had five fast-break points. So I knew it was going to be a half-court execution game, and I thought in that third quarter we ran our actions and we got great looks and we finished them. Certainly having a 20-point quarter was good.

The quality of the looks we got we were pleased with. Obviously we would have loved to have made of them, 5 for 17 from three, 7 for 13 from the free-throw line. You're just going to have to make a little bit more than that. Only shot 31% from the field. You're just going to have to make more than that the more it goes on in the tournament.

That has a tinge of disappointment. I think our offense is a lot better than we've played here in Birmingham. It wasn't good against North Carolina, and it wasn't good against South Carolina. I think we are a better offensive team than we showed but welcome to basketball. Sometimes the ball doesn't go in from great looks from the players that you want taking those shots that you want. That's what happened to us tonight, particularly in the first half. We kept missing them, missing them and missing them. That's the way it goes sometimes.

They just hung in there. They didn't let it get them down and they fought their way back in the game.

Q. Coach, Ashlon comes off the bench her freshman year, now you've giving her the ball at the end of the game. How proud of her are you?

KARA LAWSON: I'm really proud of Ashlon. She has played such a pivotal role in our program. You're right, she was the 10th player in the ten-player rotation her freshman year. And then last year de Jesus gets hurt in the summer and she's a wing and we're like, Hey, you've got to play back-up point guard.

She became a leader, her knowledge of the game, and

she's so vocal. She communicates so well. We're so lucky to have her in our program and looking forward to one more year with her and seeing how she can keep getting better.

She is versatile. She can make plays for us and that's why I put the ball in her hands late because she is our best guard at making plays and I trust her to do that.

Q. Kara, the first time you played South Carolina this season down in Columbia, Toby didn't play all that well but today led you guys in scoring and it felt like she stepped up in the moment and has grown from there. Your impressions on how she met the moment?

KARA LAWSON: I thought Toby played fearlessly and we've seen that at different junctures of the season that she has been able to do that. I thought she did a great job today offensively and defensively, attacking, getting to the free-throw line, blocking shots, competing. I mean, it's tough to go against a Feagin. You're a freshman and she's a senior, really strong.

It's tough to go against Kitts who is an upperclassman and really strong. I thought our freshmen and sophomore frontcourt really fought against the experienced South Carolina frontcourt and did a good job.

So she battled. Yeah, I think this is just a small sample of what's to come for her. She has great potential and a player that we played through for a lot of the game.

Q. Coach, you got a twinkle in your eye talking about one more year of Ashlon and talking about more of Toby. This whole team is young. Talk about what this experience is going to mean to most of the same group heading into next year and then the year after that?

KARA LAWSON: I think this journey started a year ago with 8 of 11 freshmen and sophomores, and we were able to get the right mix together and make a run to the Sweet 16 last year. And this year we had more experience and were able to get to the Elite Eight.

Reigan is the only player that's graduating on our roster, so Vanessa has another year, because she has a COVID year and she was injured last year, so Reigan is the only player on our roster out of eligibility. So we lose one player.

Then coming back we have, you know, some injured players that are going to be hugely impactful to our team next year. Then we signed a great point guard out of Utah, Emily Skinner that we're excited about as well. So we feel

like we can opinion this momentum.

There's things we know we need to work on, but having the continuity of the group and having the shared hunger and desire to continue to grow hopefully helps us in the off-season.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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