

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 3 Semifinal - Ohio State vs UConn

Saturday, March 25, 2023

Seattle, Washington, USA

Climate Pledge Arena

Ohio State Buckeyes

Kevin McGuff

Cotie McMahon

Jacy Sheldon

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Ohio State - 73, UConn - 61

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

KEVIN MCGUFF: Really proud of our team, obviously. We beat an excellent team, program, coaching staff. We have tremendous respect for Connecticut and all that they have accomplished forever, but certainly this year, because I told the team, like they certainly have had incredible success that no one will ever match again as a program. But they have a really good team this year. They just started getting healthy at the right time. So I think we beat one of the best teams in the country today.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start right here.

Q. Going into this game the talk was that UConn's the heavy favorite and that it's kind of going to go UConn's way. What do you respond to now being on the other side of that and winning convincingly?

JACY SHELDON: Yeah, I think going into that game, we wanted to stay together and keep our focus and be mentally and physically ready to go. That was our focus and I don't think we shied away from that. Then we also had a ton of respect for them. They're a great team, a great program. So I think more than anything we were eager and excited to get out there.

COTIE MCMAHON: Yeah, what she said. UConn is a



great program, a great team. But we're a great team too. So staying together and being confident in ourselves, I feel like that really helped us a lot.

Q. Obviously this team loves to play defense. You guys really hang your hat on it. When things are going right and you're getting steals and diving on the floor and feel that energy, what does it feel like to you on the court?

JACY SHELDON: We feed off of each other, so when one person gets a steal and one person's doing well, we're all doing well. So that's what gets us going. I think that we rely on that press and to do that, we got to make shots, and once we did that and were able to get into it, we got excited, we got stops, and then we're all playing really well.

So we just get excited for each other. We love seeing each other do well. So that's what makes it fun.

COTIE MCMAHON: Yeah going off of what she said you know, us being excited for each other is also what helps keep that momentum going from on the court to our deep bench. There's not one person sitting down when we force a turnover. Everybody's just cheering each other on and stuff like that.

Q. Cotie, there was no one in the arena having more fun than your mother during that game. She was right behind press row, leading the chants, taunting Geno. At one point she stood up and said, I'll cheer by myself. I don't care. And when I looked on the court -- I don't know if you could hear her, but you were smiling the whole time. Like, I think you were both just having a blast. So I wondered, first of all, if you could comment on what it's like to have her as a mom and then also just how much fun you had that game.

COTIE MCMAHON: Yeah, I love my mom so much. She's very supportive. She never really was one of those who was very hard on me as far as basketball. She kind of just let me experience things on my own. So she never forced me to be in the gym if I didn't want to. She kind of let me want to do what I wanted to do.



So, yeah, she was always just the cheerleader, the supporter, for not only me, but the way she cheers for my teammates, she just shows that she just loves every single one of us. As far as me smiling on the court, I always have fun. I always smile, good or bad. I feel like that just helps me stay positive as well too. So, yeah.

Q. You talked about feeding off each other, but when you're having that kind of success with the press, can you also see it in the opposition that suddenly they're kind of nervous to make passes or do things they would normally do and do you feed off that too?

JACY SHELDON: Absolutely. I think our goal is to make teams feel uncomfortable and speed 'em up a little bit. When we get turnovers and finishes, that just gets us more excited to continue to do that throughout the game. So I would say absolutely.

Q. First couple minutes kind of played right into UConn's hand and then after that, you got on a roll and led the rest of the way. What changed for you guys after those first couple minutes?

JACY SHELDON: I think guarding. I think in transition we got a little sloppy. Just talking to each other and staying confident in each other was our main focus and, again, making shots and getting into our press.

COTIE McMAHON: Kind of same for offense, we got a little sloppy as well, but we stayed together, we talked about what needed to be talked about, and we fixed what needed to be fixed.

Q. After the last game, you said, I want to play UConn so bad. Did you feel a different level of energy today, just anything extra, knowing that you were getting the chance to play against UConn? To Cotie

COTIE McMAHON: Yeah, it did feel like, I guess, a little bit of different energy coming into the game. Like we all mentioned, UConn is a great program. They're known for so many great accomplishments and stuff like that. So I feel like coming out and being able to play UConn and come out with the win, I feel like it's really cool.

Q. Cotie the space you had to operate, were they pressing out on the shooters and that created some of the space that you had?

COTIE McMAHON: Yeah, I feel like that's usually how our team is guarded, kind of focused on our shooters. It gives me the ability to drive and create shots for myself, but not only create shots for myself, for my teammates as well. So, yeah.

Q. I'd love to hear from all of you about your confidence. What was your confidence level going into this game and how are you feeling now going into the round of 8?

JACY SHELDON: Yeah, I think, like I mentioned earlier, we feed off of each other, so I think seeing each other do well builds our confidence. To be honest, we came into this game -- obviously, UConn's a great program and they have a great team this year, but we came into this game expecting to win, and I think that alone obviously builds our confidence a lot. And then seeing the ball go in the basket and being able to get into the defense that we want to also builds our confidence.

COTIE McMAHON: I feel like coming into the game -- you know, we all believe in each other, which helps boost all of our confidence, and we just know we thrive best when we're confident. I mentioned that at halftime as well, but, yeah.

Q. Taylor Mikesell, she's played a lot of minutes this year and today it looked like she was hurting a little bit out there. Can you talk about the toughness of just Taylor and what she brought to the team tonight?

JACY SHELDON: She's a warrior, man. I mean, she will run through a brick wall for any of us, even if she's on one leg. So she's as tough as it gets. She's an amazing player. We talked about the shooters and how they pull people away, she creates driving lanes for every single person on this team because she's so dangerous offensively. So she's an incredible person, a great teammate, and she's tough as nails.

COTIE McMAHON: What she said. Very proud of T-Mike.

Q. Why did you think you were going to win? I mean UConn, to coach's point, like they have done something that intimidates the crap out of a lot of opponents. There are a lot of people that get beat by UConn before the ball even tips. Do you really understand like the magnitude of sending them home early? They had gone to 16 consecutive Elite 8s.

COTIE McMAHON: I mean, you don't, obviously, want to come into a game expecting to lose or kind of even being nervous. I feel like, we as a team, we weren't nervous. We looked at it as any other game. I feel like that's really what helped us, not to feed in -- you know, the fact that they are UConn, this great program, and not to feed into the media and how much they were hyping UConn up. We really stayed in our lane, stayed focused, and believed in each other, and I feel like that's really what set us apart

from other teams, who, like you said, you know, lose the game before it even tips off.

Q. You talked earlier this week about Cotie's fearlessness and how you enjoyed seeing her develop this year. What can you say about her performance in a game like this?

JACY SHELDON: Oh, my gosh, the level that this game was played at and how she performed was awesome. It speaks for itself. She's an amazing player, amazing teammate, and she's a freshman, which is crazy. So like coach says all the time, she's just scratching the surface of what she can do, but tonight she was outstanding.

COTIE McMAHON: Thanks, man. (Laughing.)

Q. They made a little push at the end, cut it down to, I don't know, single digits in the third quarter. What was the mentality in your huddles and the mindset of just needing to apply that final push?

COTIE McMAHON: I feel like when it got to that point, we were kind of just making silly mistakes. So kind of just regrouping and making sure we're all on the same page to finish out the game. That was really it. It just took a little huddle and that was it.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you. We'll take questions for coach.

Q. Two-parter: First off, what does it mean to get Ohio State back to the Elite 8 for the first time since '93? And conversely, you said a little bit about it, but as a coach who's been in this game for a long time, can you put in perspective what this 14 in a row that UConn's done that probably won't ever be matched again?

KEVIN McGUFF: Yeah, so first, when I had the opportunity to come to Ohio State, this was certainly the goal and the vision to go farther than they have been going, and it's not easy to get here, obviously. But I'm really proud of our team and our program of how we've evolved to be able to get to this point. Like I said, I mean, I have so much respect for Geno and his staff and all that they have accomplished. So for us to be able to win this game in the Sweet 16 is obviously extremely significant. They're just hard to beat. They're so well coached. So this is a great win for us.

Q. I'm going to put you on the spot because everyone's going to be asking this question. Do you think that this win officially means that the UConn dynasty is dead?

KEVIN McGUFF: I don't think so. They've got probably the best player in America sitting on the bench today. I think -- actually, I was talking to Chris Dailey before the game, and they're still continuing to get kids that fit their program. That's what they have done better than anybody in America, is they get kids that really fit with their program and their culture. And they're still getting 'em. They got 'em coming in recruiting, and so I think they're going to continue to be one of the very top programs in college basketball.

Q. Cotie obviously had an amazing game today. She's been great all year, but to see her shine on this stage as just a freshman, what does that say about her and not only just for the rest of the tournament, but the future of the program?

KEVIN McGUFF: No, she's an incredible kid. You guys see her mom in the stands, but it's like I'm coaching her mom every single day. (Laughing.) And she's -- I haven't been around a player in a long time that's just got such a joy for the game. She loves to play the game. I watched her in AAU in high school. You could tell that she was very talented. But I was really shocked at how hard she practices. She practices hard every day, and she really works at it, which gives me great optimism that we're just still kind of scratching the surface of the player she's going to end up being.

Q. As you're going through the scout for this game, did you anticipate that you could have the kind of success with your pressure that you had in the first half?

KEVIN McGUFF: Well, I was telling the team all week, it's like you can't let UConn walk the ball up and execute in the half court for 40 minutes. They're going to pick you apart. They're going to backdoor you and they're going to get too many easy baskets. So I said, Hey, the key is going to be our ability to disrupt them. We certainly were effective. We played really hard in the press and we executed really well, and I thought we executed some disruptive things in the half court as well.

Q. Do you feel like your win over Indiana in the Big Ten tournament, just the way you guys made that comeback, gave you some momentum coming into this tournament? And just how can you take the things you learned in that tournament and you're applying them going forward now playing in the sort of two games short turnaround kind of situation?

KEVIN McGUFF: Yeah, I think just the Big Ten -- I mean, we didn't play well in the final versus a really great Iowa team. We know that. But we played Michigan, we played



Indiana, and we had two significant wins, and it was also like we brought Jacy back. So we got her back on the court and started to get the team in the sort of rhythm that we started the year with. So I do think that was kind of a starting point to us getting back to playing the way we're capable of playing.

Q. Obviously you've been at Ohio State for 10 years. This is the first time you've gotten this far in the NCAA tournament. Just what do you think it is about this team this year that's allowed you all to have this unprecedented success?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Well, we certainly have some really talented players, but I think more than anything our culture and the way these kids love to be around each other has been the key for us. We've had so many comeback -- come from behind wins, and a lot of that has to do with when things go south, people start pointing fingers and so forth, you have no chance to make a comeback.

But that never happens with this group. They stay together, they support each other, and that's really just -- a lot has to do with we've got great kids in the program and just great chemistry.

Q. When you guys were down 10-2, mostly because you weren't making shots, but there was a couple times when the press was on and they turned it over. I mean, did you sense if you could get into some kind of offensive rhythm that those opportunities were going to be there?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, I told 'em when I called a timeout, it's like, we're getting good shots, we just got to make 'em. You could see the press was going to have a chance to be effective, but once again, you can't get in the press if you don't make shots. So once we started making some shots and were able to set the press, then I think we kind of got the game going the way we wanted it.

Q. This is just the latest in a variety of upsets this tournament. Obviously, two 1 seeds going out. Why do you think the parity is growing at this rate, like forever it was UConn and everyone else, and then also how much is UConn responsible for forcing everyone else to get better?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, I think for many years there were 10 players coming out of high school that were here, and then the rest of them were way behind, and UConn was getting three or four of 'em every year, so they just had -- and they had a great culture, and so they're adding these great players.

But now, like Jacy Sheldon wasn't ranked. She wasn't a McDonald's All-American. She wasn't even ranked in the top 30, I don't think. She was more like a top-50, 60-type player. Now she's an exceptional player, of course, but there's just a lot more good players. And so now they're getting spread around. And then there's a lot more programs around the country that are really committed to women's basketball.

Q. I asked the question to Jacy and Cotie, but can you talk about Taylor Mikesell's toughness especially today, it looks like she's obviously going through --

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, I mean especially with Jacy and Madison being out, we've asked so much of Taylor and she's done everything you could possibly do to help this program. So we've worn her out a little bit. So she was obviously a little worn out today. But she still, I thought she was really good on the defensive end, just found ways to contribute. Just by her being on the court it spaces the court and allows people like Cotie to really attack in space. So she's a great player and a great kid.

Q. How tough was it in the last few days to battle that kind of aura around UConn before even playing 'em, how tough was that?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, you know, obviously, like we've all discussed, they have such an incredible program. But I felt a sense of confidence with our kids. I thought they were really focused. We did a couple different things defensively and our kids, we had short notice, we just kind of worked on this the last couple days, and our kids executed really well. We were really good coming out of timeouts and that's when I can tell like we were really locked in and focused. And I don't think we were -- we knew how good they were, but we weren't caught up in that. We were just focused on being the best version of ourselves and trying to beat a great team.

Q. What does it mean for your program getting to the Elite 8 and also what does it mean for the Big Ten having two schools right now who are in the Elite 8?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, I mean this has been an incredible season for the Big Ten. It's as deep and as talented as it's ever been since I've been here. So I'm not surprised that we have people who have advanced. And I think one thing in particular, we have teams that can really score the ball in the Big Ten. I think that's a big part of everybody advancing.

Q. You talked about, kind of the big picture, this is what you intended to do at Ohio State. But the emotion in the moment, you're running over to the



student section on the, or to the fan section on the opposite side. What was that like?

KEVIN McGUFF: Well, it was great. I wanted to get with my wife and kids and share that moment. So that was really special. She's my biggest supporter and biggest fan. So that was an awesome opportunity to kind of share that as a family. So that was really cool.

Q. No matter who wins this next game, five of the eight teams in the Elite 8 will have played in their conference tournament championship game. Just how much does that phrase, it's not how you start it's how you finish, apply to not only every team around the country, but especially with your team, because you started hot and you got cold, just how important --

KEVIN McGUFF: Yeah, I think it's certainly reflective of playing well at the end of the year. If you're playing well at the tournament you're probably playing well. I think one interesting thing too -- and I would love for somebody to look at this closer -- because I feel like in men's basketball, because a lot of their tournaments run to the Sunday right before they start that you go to the finals and some of those teams come out of that worn out and tired. Whereas, we have a little bit of time to get some rest and kind of sharpen some things up before the tournament.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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