

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Ohio State vs Texas

Thursday, March 24, 2022

Spokane, Washington, USA

Veterans Memorial Arena

**Texas Longhorns**

**Vic Schaefer**

**Rori Harmon**

**Joanne Allen-Taylor**

**Audrey Warren**

Sweet 16 Media Conference

VIC SCHAEFER: I haven't played Ohio State ever (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for Coach Schaefer.

**Q. I thought Rori might be up here with you. Could you talk about her a little bit. Obviously she came in with a lot of accolades. Did you think she would be this good right away? Be honest.**

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, first of all, thanks everybody for being here.

I did. We needed a point guard at my previous school. I had identified three that I really felt like were the best in the country, and she was certainly one of them. She was the one that I really wanted. No disrespect to the other two. But she was the one that I really felt like was a great fit for us and our style of play.

The thing about a point guard is certainly her skill set is really, really good, especially for a young player like herself. I think what separates her is her motor. She just has an unbelievable energy level and effort level that, let's face it, even seniors don't have.

I think that's what separates her from so many people, not just point guards, I'm talking about players in the game. She plays both ends of the floor. She commands your



respect offensively. She creates for her teammates.

Again, I think she would tell you, as any point guard would, you're only as good as the people around you that can finish. If you have people that can't finish, your assists aren't going to be as good and you don't look near as good running a team.

With her, what she does for us in setting the tone as well as setting the table is critical to our success. What I mean by 'setting the tone', obviously we press and pick up 94 feet. She just has so much energy on the ball. If you're playing with a person like that, with a player like that, you're behind them, you can't help but look at her and go, She's playing pretty hard, I guess I'll play hard, too. I just think that's infectious.

That was the part for me. You go recruiting, you see a lot of kids, they can score the ball, they do this and do that. How many of them when you walk out of the gym going, Man, that kid plays her guts out. She plays so hard.

Again, when you make that statement about a player, it's very rarely you're talking about their offense. Like playing hard, being tough, being physical, being aggressive, those are descriptions of somebody that's probably playing pretty hard defensively.

If somebody describes your team as a tough, physical, aggressive basketball team, that doesn't say anything about your skill set. Yet that's the way I love my team to be described. I think that's the way any athlete, let's forget about basketball, you can say that about a quarterback, a running back, a split end, a baseball pitcher, track. If that's the description of you, you're probably going to like that as a coach and I think you'll like that as an athlete, too.

I think that's the description for her. She's a tough, physical, aggressive basketball player with an incredible skill set. But what separates her is her motor. She just plays relentless for usually most of the game, if not all the game.

**Q. Just wondering what you've seen from Aaliyah Moore these last three games, the contributions she's**

**been able to provide for you during this stretch.**

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, we've seen the kid that we thought we were getting. Her injury was pretty significant and it really set her back. When you have an injury that sets you back six, seven weeks, there's other things that then compound just the injury and the comeback.

It's one thing to be a senior, you've been playing your whole life, career, you got a little setback, a six-, seven-week setback, you've been playing. It's a little bit easier to get back faster, if that makes sense.

You're talking about a young player, a freshman, trying to adapt to this level. All of a sudden she's over there spending more time with your strength coach and trainer than she is with a basketball in her hands for seven weeks. You can build up quite a bit of rust. It's hard to knock that rust off in a short period of time.

I think that's what happened with A-Mo. She just accumulated some rust and we had some other factors that got compounded during the course of her sitting out. So it took her awhile.

Again, you're seeing a kid that plays extremely hard, is tough, is physical, is aggressive, is smart, and really is a real tough kid and a competitor. That's the thing I think, again, her and Rori, you could go down the list. I have a team full of competitors, y'all.

We had one starter back, one and a half if you count Audrey. Audrey would go weeks last year without even practicing. I think with A-Mo, you see now in these last few games a really confident kid, a kid that's happy, that's excited about getting back to her old self.

I think she's really brought a lot to our team. Again, we shot the ball Sunday, I mean, we played probably as good as we can play Sunday. We had to play really well to beat Baylor in the championship. But we might have played better on Sunday.

Here is the thing, y'all. Your field goal percentage goes way up when you get some layups in transition, which we got four. Then you've got A-Mo going 9 for 10 down there in the hole. That helps you a bunch. It helps to have her and Lauren. Lauren might be our most improved player on our entire team. When you have an inside game like we do, it commands the other team's respect, then it opens things up for the rest, everybody else.

A-Mo has been playing well, playing with a lot of confidence. Again, she started our first three games. She started our game at Stanford, might have had 10 or 12

there, played 27 minutes. She's really come on. It's fun to see because she's got her smile back and her pep in her step.

When you're a competitor, you want to play, it's all you've ever known, when you're over there sitting on the side, mentally that can be a little bit exhausting and a little draining. I'm really proud of her. She's really, really figured it out.

**Q. I know this past game, like you mentioned, it was such a stellar performance. You even got a little emotional right at the end there. Could you tell us what you told your players after that game and sort of how you approach trying to follow up such a complete performance. Is there any pressure there?**

VIC SCHAEFER: Well, quite frankly, I don't think there's any pressure on us. My kids know, but I've been paying attention to what's been published the last couple days. There ain't a whole lot of mention about Texas. Media's talked about just about everybody else in the tournament. I hadn't read a whole lot about Texas in the national media.

That's okay. But I told our kids after the game how proud I was of 'em. I just thought one thing we've been on the road, we've been really focused all year. This team is really locked in on the road.

Friday night we played a championship team in Fairfield. They won their conference tournament, they won their regular season. They're champions. They lost one game since December 9th, with a bunch of seniors and grad transfers. And we didn't play very well. Yet we still won by 18.

After the game, my job obviously is to be real with 'em and get 'em ready for the next game. The reality was, yes, we just won an NCAA tournament game by 18. That's all great. We walk around and do this, and be excited. The reality is, you're fixing to play, in my mind, a top-25 team from a Power 5 conference who just played for their conference championship. If you play like you played on Friday night, there won't be another one after Sunday.

So what that allowed me to do is get their attention. Saturday's practice was good. They were locked in. Compared to Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday practice coming off the Big 12 championship, which wasn't very good. That's typical. You come off an emotional win, a team you've had a hard time beating in years past, and you win a championship. We're still a very young, inexperienced, and at times immature basketball team. That hasn't changed. So it's sometimes hard to overcome that.

I knew it all week. I saw it coming. I was just hoping we could get through Fairfield. If we could, I knew I'd have their attention on Saturday. Then Sunday, y'all, we were so locked in, had laser focus from the jump. We had to. We were playing a really good team, a well-coached team, lots of really good players, young players, competitors.

After the game I told them, Hey, the way we played today, if we can bottle that up, we can play as long as you want. But we got to find a way to continue to do that. I thought we had some kids that really, really were special on Sunday. There's certain players on our team that we have to have every night in order for us to have a chance to win. But I thought we had some others step up that were really, really special on Sunday. That's why we looked so dominating and played such a great game.

Again, we'll have to do that obviously from here on out. We're playing the Big Ten champions tomorrow. Kevin has a heck of a team. They just really command so much attention at every spot on the floor. We're going to have to be on point, again, defensively. But then offensively we got to find a way to score some points. Just like going into the Utah game, I was really shocked we held them under 60. In fact, Saturday afternoon I gave up looking at defense. I was trying to figure out ways to score.

So that's about where I'm at right now with Ohio State. They're just really, really talented. Kevin's got a great plan for those kids. They're well-coached.

**Q. Your team has been really effective at forcing turnovers, especially in these first two tournament games. How much has your press defense been critical in your success this year? What do you think about the matchup against Ohio State's backcourt?**

VIC SCHAEFER: The matchup piece I think is really key. I think he's probably talking about guard play like I am. But I don't think you can take your eyes off of inside players either. I think he's got players at four and five that are really, really special, and can really attack you in some different ways.

The pressing piece, the defensive piece that they do and we do. Our press is just who we are. It's just what we do, right? So we may get two or three turnovers off of it, but our deal is we're going to wear you down in the fourth quarter. You might be giving it to us at that point because you're just tired of messing with us.

Utah I think turned it over seven times in the first half, and 12 in the second. I think we both have similar teams and we have certain players we don't want to bring off the floor.

So it's going to be -- probably be a game of attrition a little bit, stamina, and that kind of thing.

But it's just who we are. I mean, I'm not going to sit here and tell you we're going to play 2-3 zone and hope you miss, because that probably ain't happening. I'll tell you that if you want to tell Kevin (smiling).

This time of year we are who we are, right? That's what we've done all year long. Our kids love it. They're bought into it. They know the importance of it. For us, to me, it's the only way to build a program, to build a fan base, to do our game justice. To me that's what makes women's basketball fun to watch. It's how I built our program at the school I was at before. It's how we're building it at Texas.

Again, I think our fan base enjoys watching kids play hard and play in the game, honoring the game, and respecting the game like we do.

**Q. Jacy Sheldon and Taylor Mikesell have some very similar numbers. You're familiar with Taylor. What do you see in the similarities and differences in their games?**

VIC SCHAEFER: I think both of them have tremendous presence on the floor. I think they both command your respect. I think they're different players. I think they're both explosive players. I think you can't lose 'em. I think you better know where both of 'em are at all times.

But I think you defend each of them uniquely. We'll have to really be on point defensively with those two. They're both very, very talented, very skilled players.

You know what? Both of them play extremely hard as well. I have a tremendous amount of respect for kids when I watch 'em on film and see that. You don't always see that when you're watching film. But when you watch really that entire team, they play really hard. I think that's the thing that jumps at you.

On film, I say this a lot, in the old days they would let us have one in-person scouting. When you go scout, you would go scout, you're not writing down plays, you're scouting quickness and speed. That's two things you cannot tell on film.

When I watched the film of their team, I can tell quickness and speed. I think that's what really jumps out at you, for me, when I'm watching Ohio State, is just how hard they play the game. Again, I think they're not only well-balanced, obviously they, just like any team, have leading scorers. You take your eyes off a couple of them, they can go get you in a hurry. I just think they play the

game extremely hard.

I think Kevin has done an incredible job with them. They're Big Ten champions. Just that in and of itself warrants your attention and respect. We'll have to be on point.

But, listen, I love my team. They have really accomplished a lot this year. They play the game extremely hard. They've gotten better and better throughout the course of the season, which I think I take great pride in as a coach. I think all my teams have always consistently gotten better throughout the year, even into March.

This team has really embraced the getting better and work ethic. This is what we do at Texas mentality. I think the turning point for us was when you have kids like we do, we just don't have a whole lot of kids from the state. We got 'em from everywhere. You know, because you've been at Texas for a long time, we found out during the course of the season, y'all, this is life at Texas. Everybody wants to beat Texas. I don't care if they're playing jacks on the sidewalk or hopscotch. They don't just want to beat you, they want to beat the dog out of you. When they do, they celebrate like it's the national championship.

I had two teams in my own building throwing water on each other in January. We had to learn to embrace the fact that everybody's coming for you. I think the kids would say they're coming for your cookies or something like that. Everybody is coming for you. You better get ready because you're going to get everybody's best shot, you're going to get everybody's best two days of practice before they play you, you're going to get everybody's best shootaround, and then you're going to get their best game.

Once we understood to embrace that, that's when we got better. So this is where we are today. Again, I couldn't be more proud of 'em. They have absolutely earned this where they are today. I'm excited, just like I always am. I'm excited to see them play tomorrow.

**Q. You gave us such a nice, long answer on Rori. You didn't mention that she has great hair. I wanted to ask you, I was curious, are you aware of Tara's challenge to other coaches, has she cornered you while you've been here and got you to commit to it?**

VIC SCHAEFER: I am aware of it. It's something that I think is admirable for all of us to be a part of. I'm sure I'll find a time to talk to her about it and get some more information of it.

I would certainly consider doing that with her. I think that's the thing, y'all, we're all sitting in here right now, we're talking about basketball. There's some real life stuff going

on that ain't mean much good. It's not much fun.

Really, I try to read up on it every day. My father was a bird colonel in the Army 32 years, fought over in the European theater. I'm really aware. I grew up in that home. I'm really aware of what war is. Not that I've been involved in one, but I know my father was, and he shared with me some of those things.

It warrants all of our attention, anything we can do, if we have an opportunity, we need to do it. I'm certainly glad to help Tara in that endeavor. Thanks for bringing that up.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, coach.

VIC SCHAEFER: All right. Praise the Lord and Hook 'em Horns.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome Texas student-athletes. We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Rori, here is your first March Madness. What has it been like so far just to walk around? This is new for you.**

RORI HARMON: Thank you for that. Yes, it is new. Having the team that you have and the coach that you have, they just play so experienced. You kind of pick up from that. It's been so exciting. I love playing with this team. I love playing basketball here at Texas.

**Q. In the little bit that you have been able to watch film on Ohio State, what jumps out at you, what are you excited about? You love to mix it up, play physical.**

AUDREY WARREN: Yeah, the film we watched, they're an extremely good team. Everybody is that's in the tournament right now. We just need to play our basketball. We don't want to change much that we've been working on. We looked at their guards, their personnel, just to make sure we know what their go-to is, how we're going to stop it.

**Q. Audrey, what has Aaliyah provided you these last three games? Can you describe what you've seen from her season as a whole up until now.**

AUDREY WARREN: Are you talking about Aaliyah Moore?

**Q. Yes.**

AUDREY WARREN: She's a great player. As a freshman she's really learned to take criticism and to listen. She's so coachable. To come off the bench and score as much as



she has been has really helped the team. Everything she's been doing has helped the team. She brings so much energy before the game, during the game. I think we're all excited to see what kind of player she's going to grow in to be because she's already at a high level, yeah.

**Q. Rori, you kind of exploded onto the scene early in the season when you beat Stanford. How much does that game, that experience, help when you started playing in the NCAA tournament, that you've slayed the defending national champion. Not afraid of anything, I'm guessing.**

RORI HARMON: That was like a pretty long time ago (smiling). Was it our first, second game? Second game.

It's completely different now. We've had so many practices in between now and then with all the teams here. All the teams here are great. They're here for a reason. But we've learned from those type of games.

We've had a pretty good experience with playing teams away. I'm pretty sure we'll be focused now.

**Q. This is for Joanne and Audrey. Last year you came in as the underdogs, walked away with a win most people weren't expecting. This year you're coming in with a little bit much an advantage with the higher seed. How do you keep the chip-on-the-shoulder mentality coming into this game?**

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: I would say games are not won on paper. So, like, you know, for last season, a lot of people had UCLA and Maryland knocking us out. But you have to come to play. Games are not won on paper. Just like we're taking that into this season. We might be the higher seed, but games are not won on paper. We have to play our game to beat the team we're playing, so yeah.

AUDREY WARREN: She said it all (smiling).

**Q. Jo, I asked you yesterday about number of games left. You said you prefer to put your head down, drive forward. I'm interested in, Audrey, your thoughts as players who have been here and been through this, been through this, did you see and have you seen the younger players, not just Rori, start to figure this out now, what it takes, especially in the second half of the season, what it takes to get to this point?**

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: Yeah, definitely. Just like we came out so hot at the beginning of the season, then we dropped a couple games that probably we shouldn't have. Like, I think we start to notice a change as a team, like, every day is a grind. Every team is trying to beat you.

Especially wearing 'Texas' on your chest, people are coming for you every single game. There's no time to relax.

It doesn't matter what you've done before, like, you have to show up every single game. I think we've really learned to embrace, like, it's us against the world, us against everybody. That's probably the biggest growth I've seen out of this team.

AUDREY WARREN: Yeah, to piggyback off that, I think the younger players have come to realize it's not high school anymore, everybody's coming for you. I don't care what your name was in high school. They're coming to win. They are not coming to beat you, they're coming to beat Texas. Not just Texas basketball, but Texas a program. I think everyone on this team has come to be one and realize we have to work together and play together to win.

**Q. Coach was talking to us, he said your press defense is who you are. How much is that ingrained in practices and throughout the year? Is it something that's a huge priority for you?**

AUDREY WARREN: Yeah. Defense wins games ultimately. I think our press is not something that a lot of teams see. We use that to our advantage. We work on it every day in practice, multiple drills. Every time we scrimmage, it's get into the press, get into the press. It's ingrained in our mind, definitely.

**Q. Coach Schaefer was talking about the really high energy that you guys bring. I think that's been obvious through the tournament so far. Is there anything you tell each other while you're on the floor, if you see somebody dragging, to get them to pep up a little bit?**

RORI HARMON: I would say one of the first things we do say before the game even starts is to punch first. We actually say that before the game, before every single quarter. We always just say we need to punch first. When you punch first, the game is in your favor pretty much.

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: Just to go off of that, I don't want to say it's like rare, but it's kind of unusual to see one of us dragging when we're, like, celebrating each other. That doesn't happen. Like, we feed off each other's energy. It gets electric between us. Doesn't matter who is in the gym, we're feeding off each other's energy. It's hard for somebody on the team to be dragging.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for taking the time.

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