

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

Friday, March 25, 2022

Spokane, Washington, USA

Veterans Memorial Arena

Texas Longhorns

Vic Schaefer

Lauren Ebo

Joanne Allen-Taylor

Aliyah Matharu

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Texas 66, Ohio State 63

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Texas here. Coach, if you have an opening statement?

COACH SCHAEFER: Give me one second. Oh, man, great day to be a Longhorn, y'all. So, so proud of this team. They just won their 29th game. 14 in a row. All they do is just work. They just play hard. I mean, they just play hard. They get through adversity. We had obviously some tremendous adversity today with Rori getting in foul trouble and these two right here stepped up like pros, like they are and got us -- not only did they kind of manage it but we actually had a lead. Were we down 7? 5, and up 2 at half. These two just really kinda kept us in it. We actually were up 2 when we came in at half.

Again, it just takes -- we are literally we are a team, y'all. We've been that way all year. We have three or four kids that average anywhere from 12 to 10 points, but we also have kids that can go off for 17 or 27. I thought Jo was -- she carried us tonight when we really needed it, not only being the point guard but scoring for us. Ebo, man, it was physical down there and she get's 8-for-9, and Aliyah made some big shot for us. Really dogged and stayed after Taylor, just really stayed after her. She was having a hard time with her.

I know she made a couple on us late and we held them to four and a half less threes than they average. We talked



about that. We said, if we knock those down, that's more points that we're scoring. Because they like to score and they're good at it.

I thought the press bothered us, I was concerned about that a little bit. The block that A-Mo made at the end, look, that's a freshman that just missed a layup to put you up three, and she comes back down on the other end and makes a heck of a play defensively. We made two big defensive plays. And it wasn't easy, y'all.

First of all, I want to congratulate Kevin and his team. Ohio State is a tremendous basketball team., they're Big Ten champions, we just beat another champion. These kids, they who is front of them, they don't care what the number is in front of them, they don't care about anything. We talk about it all the time, March doesn't care how you're ranked, March doesn't care how you've finished in your conference. It doesn't care. You've got to go play the game. We've been on the flip side of the 6-2, a year ago. We were the 6 playing the 2. So our kids knew.

But this is a gutty win for our bunch. I couldn't be more proud of them, happy for them, but it took everybody in the room. And these two getting us through, but then again, Rori makes a big shot to get us up back 3 and then makes two big free throws to get it back to three. You have to have players that can make plays, y'all. It's a whole lot easier coaching when you've got that. And we made some plays today and beat a heck of a basketball team.

Q. Joanne, 17 points today. Talk about what it feels like to step up for your team in a big game like this.

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: It doesn't feel different than maybe not scoring a lot of points in the game. I'm always doing something that's going to help us win the game. Today I had to get some buckets for our team when we needed them and that's what I had to do and I did my best, and thank God it went through the hoop, you know.

Q. Aliyah, I know Jo is not going to brag on herself but could you talk about what her leadership means to this team and her being able to step up in the second quarter the way she did?



ALIYAH MATHARU: I think it's really important. You go on a team where you don't have a lot of seniors and I know it's for all of them but all of them are pretty quiet. When Jo says something, it's a statement. You don't have a choice but to listen. She opens her mouth, everybody goes. Her having a good day is like -- I don't know. It's important for us. Her energy that she brings. She is very passionate, she is going to play to the end, she is going to give you her best. Doesn't matter what you're doing, she is going to give 1000% and I feel like today she was on. When you're on, why not give her the ball?

Q. Could you talk us through the last defensive possession that executed impeccably?

ALIYAH MATHARU: Switch everything.

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: I really didn't even see it. You have to walk me through it because I didn't see it. I was on the opposite side trying not to get screen. I knew 24 wanted to shoot the three, so I was not paying attention to the block honestly.

LAUREN EBO: We were boxing out on the backside and I'm glad that A-Mo blocked that shot. Obviously it was a big-time block, especially after missing a layup, I'm glad even as a freshman she could keep her head in it and that was extremely important. We all told her how much that meant for our team and for the win.

Q. Congratulations on the win. Lauren, going into this game your play was going to be ultra important on the outcome of this game. Can you talk about how did you get locked into knowing what your responsibilities were for this game?

LAUREN EBO: I think just working every day in practice. This week obviously we've had a lot of time to work on Ohio State and how they would guard. Even if I'm not -- even if I'm getting double-teamed or whatever the case might be, my goal is to open things up for the team and whether that's scoring or rebounding or setting a good screen to get others open, I just always want to do what I can do to help us win. I think that's my main goal going into any game, doesn't matter how many points I score, how many rebounds I get, I just want to secure the win.

Q. Jo, back to the second quarter. Ohio State gets it to 1 or 2, you hit back-to-back buckets, turned to your teammates and screamed. What were you telling them at that point?

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: I was just saying, get downhill. They were having trouble guarding me off the bounce, and

I had two back-to-back jump shots. She was sagging off of me, and that's my shot, Coach tells me every single day, that's my shot. If I can get to the pull-up, that's my shot and I rose up and shot it and it went in.

Q. At some point as a senior did you feel like it was your responsibility to will your team here?

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: I don't think like that. I'm just making plays for my team. Just making plays. Trying to do everything I can to get the win. I guess in hindsight you can say, yeah, it's my responsibility because I'm a senior but like in the game, in the moment I'm just making plays, that's it.

Q. Jo, you mentioned that final possession but guarding Taylor Mikesell the entire night, she hadn't gotten off a shot when you were matched up with her. What kind of a challenge is that defensively?

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: That's just my mindset going into every game. It centers me when I know I can perform defensively. So I went into the game saying 24 needs to have lower than her average, because her and 4 they get the team going. They're their offense. They're what makes the team get their wins. Ultimately if I could stop on 24 from getting her, I think she averaged on the season 18 points a game, if I can get her maybe 10, maybe 12 points in this game, then I knew we would have a good chance to win.

THE MODERATOR: The student-athletes are excused. We will take questions for Coach.

Q. Vic, those might be the two biggest baskets that Rori has ever scored, and she was 2-for-2 from the line but her defense on the final possession, it took Ohio State forever to get up the floor. Is that what you expected from her? Did you tell her that? And I wondered, you guys shared a long embrace when she got knocked out on that foul. What were you saying to her during that time?

COACH SCHAEFER: She was a little bit -- it was a pretty hard foul. She just needed a minute, and I was just telling her, hey, you're good. You're going to make two free throws. You're going to be up 3. And we talked about it in the timeout, something we talk about all the time is turning the ball. Somebody's gotta bring the ball up, if you can turn the ball three or four times, they're going to run out of time. And we call it defense-ing the floor. The way we do at Texas is way different than what I watch in high school when and watch them do zigzag drill. But you've got to get your nose on the ball in order to turn the ball. When you do, then the ball has got to be turned, and we knew they

were going to hang that side of the floor and get something on the backside in what we call hammer and she turned the ball.

We knew we had a foul to give, but I'm not a big foul-to-give guy. That's when things happen that are crazy. We just -- you know what, there is probably nobody else in the country better at turning the ball than Rori Harmon. And she did a tremendous job turning the ball. At the end of the day they just run out of time.

That was the plan there. The kid was disappointed being in foul trouble, comes back and makes -- that shot she makes to put us back up three is as big as there is and makes two big free throws. Again, the kid wants to be in the moment. I mean, there is just not a moment too big for her. She's done it since day one. She is just different, in a really special way. All these kids, man, they're ultimate competitors. I say this all the time, unless you come to our practice, you have no idea what our kids do.

Y'all think they show up and okay, let's do it this way. They live this every day. Like, this is how they work every day y'all. We don't go, oh let's walk through this today athletic director we're going to go half speed here but we will go full speed in a game. You can't coach that way and we don't.

What I'm telling you is as hard as our kids play, that's what they do every day in practice. So that I can tell you today our kids were tired of practicing, they were ready to play a game. They were ready to do something else besides practice. And I was ready for them to do that as well because they're like chomping at the bit to go play. I was in a good spot. I felt they were going to play well. I knew Ohio State was really good, y'all. I've seen enough film that I'm blurry-eyed, I'm sick of looking at film of them. They're good.

Q. After the missed layup and that timeout was there a message for Aliyah during that timeout? What were your thoughts of how she responded on the defensive end?

COACH SCHAEFER: We just talked about okay, this is how we like it. When it gets hard, when it gets tough, when it really gets difficult, it's about how we like it at Texas. We told her, no worries. Let's go get a stop. They're going to have to foul us, go make some free throws. We talk in timeouts all the time about stop, score, stop or score, stop, score, depending on the situation. That's all we talked about. We weren't going to harp on them.

I'll take her 99 more times out of 100 and she is going to make 99 of those layups, just didn't make that one. So no big deal. No problem. So we went out and talked about

getting a stop and boy, she made a big play, didn't she? That's a big play, y'all. Big play by a freshman, going up there and putting her hand on that ball and blocking it. Kid never got it out of her hand.

Q. Your thoughts on Jo as a senior leader and on the court?

COACH SCHAEFER: For people in the room, all Jo wants to do is win. She doesn't care about anything. If she scored 2 points tonight, she would be thrilled. She just wants to win. I've only had her two years but, man, what a wonderful young lady who plays the game the way I think it should be played. She is unselfish. Again, she is a mechanical engineering major, 3.75, kid is going to be a winner in life when basketball is over.

But just -- she's just a winner. She is unselfish and just an ultimate -- the ultimate competitor. Never gets down, never hangs her head, never had a negative juice in her body. Let me tell you something, that's not common in today's world much less in today's athletics, but that's Joanne Allen-Taylor.

Q. You just talked about Rori's ability to turn the ball, yesterday you went in depth about her motor and how that separates her, but I'm curious what it takes for a freshman to be that effective on the defensive end?

COACH SCHAEFER: I think it's a desire. It's been important to her her whole life. Her dad instilled it in her when she was a young child. I just think she knows the importance of it and for her, it's just every day life. You come to practice tomorrow and we go defense on the floor, she'll be the first one out and she'll be bustin' it.

We have a saying at Texas, it's not what we do but how we do it that separates us from the rest of the country. And with her, she lives it, every day she lives it. On the floor.

So I think, again, it's just habits, y'all. That's what we're doing as coaches, we teach habits. And for this group, this is their habits. This group is really special, y'all, been doing it a long time and these kids, what they've achieved and what they continue to do day in and day out is really fun for me to be a part of.

Q. Given everything you talked about Rori, how difficult was it to sit her down when she got that second foul and then again in the fourth quarter when she got to four?

COACH SCHAEFER: Yeah, it wasn't good. It was difficult. Yeah, I mean, you know, it's not like I didn't think about putting her back in, but we were not only -- we were not

only kinda hanging, but we were building, getting back in the game and we ended up taking the lead at the half. So we got through it. And, look, this isn't the first time this happened. And Jo steadies us. I recruited Jo to be a point guard. She is now playing the 2 for me at Texas but I recruited her a long time ago at Texas to be a point guard. She's got that mentality, she is so smart, she knows how to run stuff.

It's just -- it's nice to have a player like this, mature, calm, steady, unflappable. She's just a steady presence. It's nice to have that. Again, I didn't want to take -- when we took her out, was it 6 or 7 on the clock in the fourth quarter and then I looked up and there was 4:24 and I said, this is it, we've gotta go for it right here. And we put her back in.

She is in so many plays, think about it, you saw her tonight. She is in so many plays, but she is in every play from baseline to baseline because she is picking up the ball. She is in every play. So there's going to be some things happen. She hasn't been in foul trouble in a long time but she was tonight.

Q. Rori, we see her on the court. She is 100 miles an hour on the court all the time. How do you describe her away from the court?

COACH SCHAEFER: She is pretty -- she is still pretty even keeled. I wouldn't say she walks fast like me, but nobody does. She doesn't -- let's just say on the floor she is a little different from a speed factor. All these kids have such tremendous personalities. They're fun to be around. I tell ya, they're playing for each other right now.

They really enjoy playing for each other. They love each other. They're doing a good job of -- they've done a great job of building that chemistry with one another. It's not always been that way but this is something that's evolved over the course of the season, and their chemistry is really I think what's allowed them to do what they've done.

So they enjoy playing with each other. They feed off each other. They enjoy each other's success and that's what you want to see when you are a coach. You want kids to care about what their teammates are doing. I think our team cares about each other. Sometimes that's a unique deal. In athletics there can be jealousy and things like that but not with this group. It's a really special group.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time.

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