

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Final - Texas vs Stanford

Saturday, March 26, 2022

Spokane, Washington, USA

Veterans Memorial Arena

Texas Longhorns

Vic Schaefer

Lauren Ebo

Rori Harmon

DeYona Gaston

Shay Holle

Joanne Allen-Taylor

Elite 8 Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to our student-athletes from Texas.

We'll open it up for questions for our student-athletes.

Q. Rori, when you played Stanford in November, you torched them for 21 points. Did you expect that at any point during the game? Were you looking around thinking, I'm killing the national champ right now? Why do you think you've been able to adjust so well to college basketball?

RORI HARMON: To answer your first question, I would say it did appear to me, wow, like we are doing pretty good against the defending national champs.

No, I have learned a lot this year, especially with just being a point guard under Coach Schaefer. It's a bit challenging, but just doing what he says, doing what I got to do, limiting turnovers. With our run right now, that's all we got to stay with, so...

Q. DeYona and Shay, last year you were hurt, D, and Shay, you played limited minutes. What did you learn from the sideline about this tournament experience watching their run to the Elite Eight?

SHAY HOLLE: Yeah, I mean, it was a lot different just



because we were sort of the underdog last year. No one really thought we would get that far. With COVID and everything, it was just such a different experience.

This year has been a lot of fun. Having fans, it adds so much more to the game. Obviously actually being on the court has added a lot of fun, too.

But, yeah, I think last year just watching how hard our team played and, like, making all of the effort plays, getting all the 50/50 balls, that's what got us to the Elite Eight. I think just making sure we continue that in addition to the added talent we have this year.

DeYONA GASTON: Yeah, I've been struggling with a whole bunch of, like, injuries. Just to come back and play, it means a lot. It means to me that, like, for my teammates to play for them, just to play under the team. It's just really hard. Sorry. I'm pretty nervous (smiling). Sorry.

Q. Rori, I don't know how much you guys got to stick around and watch the game last night, but it was very clear with Lexie and Lacie being Spokane natives, there's a lot of people in this arena rooting for Stanford tomorrow. How much do you thrive on being the team not having the home-court advantage?

RORI HARMON: It's happened a lot this year, like several times. We kind of almost came to the point that we were more focused when we were away. It happened against, what was it, A&M, Stanford, Tennessee. I mean, we played pretty well. We didn't win that one.

It's a lot of focus coming to away games. That's what we're used to, so we're ready.

Q. Lauren, every time Stanford picks up another foul, they bring another 6'4", 6'2" off the bench. How do you prepare mentally for that?

LAUREN EBO: I think using our physicality. Whether it's not scoring in the post, just using us to kick out to the guards, open things up for the guards. I think just being physical. Making sure we boxed them out. Last night they had a lot of offensive rebounds. So just boxing them out



and doing whatever we need to do as post players in the paint to open ourselves up, for ourselves and then also for the rest of the team.

Q. Jo, the excitement of advancing, the thrill of last night's win, how do you enjoy that, savor it, but realize you're one step away, refocus for tomorrow?

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: Yeah, we've kind of gotten to this mindset kind of late with the championship we did win in the tournament a couple weeks ago, two weeks ago. Like, we just take one game at a time, you know.

Although we celebrate when it's time to celebrate, we know when it's time to move on because we're on a mission right now and the mission is not done, so...

Q. Rori, kind of off the wall. I have some friends that live here and were at the game last night. Their little three-year-old had a lot of fun cheering for Rori with the orange hair. Do you dye your hair to be Texas colors or is that your natural look?

RORI HARMON: No, this is not my natural look. I have black hair.

That's not the reason why I dye my hair this color. I've been wanting to dye it for a minute, even in high school. I was just too nervous to. I was a little too scared. I like to take care of my hair.

No, that's not the reason. I just like this color on my skin tone.

Q. Lauren and Jo, we get to see Rori on the floor. She's going a hundred miles an hour, really intense. How do you describe her off the court?

LAUREN EBO: Off the court, she's pretty quiet honestly. Like, she's not as hype as you see her on the court. Everybody's fun to get along with. And just her being a freshman, like, it's fun to mess with her, tease her like a little bit.

But for the most part she's pretty quiet. She can be funny at times, yeah.

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: I would say the same thing. She's pretty chill, relaxed.

Q. Lauren, how do you mess with Rori?

LAUREN EBO: We have like an ongoing joke all year that she was like the baby of the team. I don't know if this is appropriate, we would call her "Fetus" usually (laughter).

That's her name. That's what we would say, so... That's like the ongoing joke on the team.

She's so grown now, grown up so much from the beginning of the year, so it's kind of died down. Earlier on, that's what we would call her (smiling).

Q. Jo and Rori, have you noticed that much difference? The first Stanford game was four and a half months ago. From what you look at them on tape now, is it that much different in what they're doing other than the fact clearly they're playing better?

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: Yeah, I would say they're playing way harder. They look more sound as a team. A couple of players are stepping up and they're more aggressive on their team.

They are a whole different team than we saw a couple months back, so...

RORI HARMON: Yes, I agree with what Jo just said.

Q. On how you guys are ready for a hostile environment, how do you thrive on that as a team? What is it about a hostile environment that makes you guys stay more focused?

LAUREN EBO: I just think any environment, we love. Shay and I talk about this all the time. Like, sure, let us walk out the tunnel and y'all boo us. We eat that up. We love it. We eat it up (laughter).

No, seriously, we love it. We love that hostile environment. It motivates us even more to play harder, play better, really come together and play together as a team.

RORI HARMON: I think that's what it highlights when we they do boo us, when we do come out of the tunnel. It highlights we are coming together. We need to stay within each other, focus on each other, none of the outside noise, of course.

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: We love the opportunity to silence a crowd.

LAUREN EBO: That's what it is.

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: Love that (smiling).

Q. Jo, Rori talked about the feeling during that game against Stanford, but I assume you watched the tape of that this morning. What stood out looking back on that performance?

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: I think we just played really hard. We out-toughed 'em in some plays. But we look back and we saw, like, we did have a couple mistakes that we can get exposed, like, tomorrow if we're not focused. They did, they shot a lot of threes. They just missed them. We have to really be sound defensively and we have to finish the defensive possession with the box out because they do come crashing really hard. That's what we really saw on film.

Q. Rori, do you want to react to this nickname and tell us your thoughts?

RORI HARMON: Like Jo said, I am a pretty chill person. With the nickname "Fetus," it started like such a long time ago. I actually remember, like, when they were coming up with the nickname for me. But, I mean, like when they say it, it's almost like it just comes out of their mouth easily, naturally. I'm turning my head responding.

It really doesn't bother me. It's almost like a compliment in a way (laughter). They must think I'm pretty cute or whatever, so...

Q. Shay, in reality there probably could be three more of you up here talking about this team because of how deep you are. How much does that depth help this team? What are y'all's practices like?

SHAY HOLLE: Yeah, I mean, I think that's why we're in the position we are, because we have so much depth. Like, I could be up here, Audrey could be up here, Lee could be up here, anyone could be in this position.

It's just like I have trust in them, too. Like, it's so nice being on the court. Obviously I'm going to try to have my best game, play my best game. But if not, like, I know there's people that can come in and, like, they won't miss a beat.

I think that's like with almost every position, which is so nice to have. Which also makes it fun because we get to celebrate each other. You just know, like, if you're not making a shot, someone else will or someone will have your back.

I think that is a really, like, special part of this team.

Q. Joanne, earlier in the season you lost three in a row. Haven't lost since. Was there something that somebody said or did, a switch went on to say, We're not going to lose again?

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: I don't know if it was that. We just kind of put our heads down and really locked into our mistakes. We were turning over the ball so much in those

three losses. Like, we weren't sound defensively.

I think I wouldn't say we came together and said, We need to stop losing. Nobody likes to lose. Everybody plays to win at the end of the day. I think we just really locked into our mistakes.

We were in close games and we were turning over the ball so much. What if we take care of these small mistakes? What can happen if we capitalize, like, on what we're messing up so much on? We can be a really good team.

That's just what propelled us to what we are right now, so...

Q. Joanne and Lauren, as you studied Stanford for this game, have you identified any of their weaknesses that you didn't know about before?

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: Well, they're a much better team than what we saw four months ago. I don't know. It's really the coach's job to bring that to us. We just go out there and execute the game plan. That's all I'm focused on, playing my best basketball.

I think at the end of the day they're a really good team. They have great size. They don't have a lot of weaknesses to me, so...

LAUREN EBO: Yeah, I mean, just going off of Jo, we're focused on what they can do, how to stop that, how we can score, how we can be effective. I think that's our game plan going forward, not necessarily harp it. I love that (laughter). Just focusing on our game plan, what we need to do to stop them.

Q. Joanne and Rori, there is a lot of talk about Stanford's depth, size, how they have this roster where everybody can come in. Who are maybe the one or two people on your roster who you think don't get very much attention at all who could really make a huge difference in this game?

JOANNE ALLEN-TAYLOR: I think we saw it in the first game when Lee came in the fourth quarter and had 17 points. I feel like she doesn't get a lot of attention just because she doesn't really start. Man, she can come off the bench and draw probably 30 honestly. She's that type of player to me.

RORI HARMON: I was thinking the same person. It's been a pretty long season. I feel like there's not enough attention for her, so...

Q. Was there another team in the Big 12 that reminds you of Stanford in terms of their length? No?

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(Entire dais): No.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll continue with Coach Schaefer.

We welcome Coach Schaefer from Texas. We'll start with an opening statement, then take questions.

VIC SCHAEFER: Good afternoon, everybody. Appreciate y'all being here.

Obviously I'm awfully proud of our kids and how they played last night against a really good Ohio State team. Said it again last night that Kevin, they're the Big Ten champions. For us to go toe-to-toe with them last night, come out with a win in a really tough ball game, I'm really, really proud of our kids. They just continue to work and fight and compete.

You can't question their competitive spirit. We talk about that and the importance of that a lot. That really separates teams in my mind over the course of my career, is those teams that just have that competitive spirit. This group obviously has that. They're a great group of kids. They're representing the University of Texas in a real positive way. I couldn't be more proud of 'em.

We got our hands full tomorrow night obviously, playing the No. 2 team in the country, a team that might be the only team that's won more games in a row than we have right now. I think they've won 23 or 24 in a row. Obviously playing at a very high level.

So much respect and admiration for that program, for Coach VanDerveer, everything she's done for our game. You talk about her and Coach Conradt. Coaches like that, those are people that, y'all, we wouldn't even be sitting here today if it wasn't for what they did back when this all started.

For a guy like me, there's a real appreciation for that. Unfortunately in today's world, y'all, we have a lot of young people that they don't have that same -- they just don't think the same way. They don't really know the history of our game either. I certainly do.

Again, Stanford in most years they're right there knocking on the door. We're going to have to play really well tomorrow night. But obviously we played 'em earlier in the year. We were able to go in there and our kids played really special that night, real tough.

We're going to have to have the same energy and effort. I think it's fair to say they're better, but so are we. So we're

excited about the opportunity. We're back here again at it a year later with a group that really epitomizes Texas fight. That's not a slogan or a saying that we just throw around, it's something that we really embrace and hold in high regard at the University of Texas.

If your teams don't have that, that ain't good from where we're at. So you got to have that at Texas. I think our kids have proven that you got to have that, that they have that, so I'm proud of 'em.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. We just learned when your players were in here that because Rori is the baby of the group, they call her "Fetus." I wonder if you knew that and if you have a reaction to that? The more important question is, you said the other day you knew how special she was because of her motor. For her to go in in her second or third game of the season, take it to the defending champs, torch them for 21 points, was there any point you were in that game thinking, Damn, this girl is pretty good that I recruited?

VIC SCHAEFER: Well, to answer the question on the nickname, I don't think that's real appropriate. I would hope y'all wouldn't print that. That's something they do in the locker room. She's young. We probably could get a nickname for everybody in the room if we wanted to. Some might be worse than that one, or better.

She's young. I think all those freshmen are really doing a great job, and they're a big part of our success. She's proven it throughout the course of the season. Obviously she's got a tremendous skill set. We've talked about that, y'all. What separates her is the motor.

A lot of people have skill sets and don't have a motor. That's the thing, if you're going to play at the University of Texas, it's hard to play for us if you don't have a motor. So I think that's where she really separates herself really from a lot of people across the country, is how hard she plays.

In this game, you know, we went in and we talked about some things that we felt like she could do. As we did with a lot of our players. That moment wasn't too big for her at a really early stage in her career. She's proven it many times since, that she's mature beyond her years.

Again, I think a lot of it has to do with not just her skill set but her motor. That's what you get every day, y'all. I told y'all. In practice you're going to get that same motor every day.

Q. One game in November doesn't define an entire

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season. When it's that early with a new group, what did that experience in pulling out that victory do for that group that was learning to play with each other at that time?

VIC SCHAEFER: Sure. I think it showed that group early on that they could play with anyone in the country. I think when you play a team like that on a night like they had, they were passing out their national championship rings that night. It was a real emotional, I'm sure, emotional day and night for them.

So I think for our kids, just the toughness factor going in there and playing on their home floor, playing the defending national champions. I think that gave our kids some confidence early on. Quite frankly, it probably created some expectation for this group that might not have been real fair at the time just because of our youth.

We have nine new players. We have one starter back. I venture to say there's nobody in this round right now that's got that. Audrey, you can throw her in there as a starter at times a year ago. There were also times when she couldn't even walk in the gym and practice for weeks on weeks.

I think just at the time it was certainly a great win for our kids and for our program. It gave us some confidence. But it also created an expectation that, hey, if this is who we are, then we've got to learn to walk the walk and not just be the talk, and wear it.

They'll tell you, I tell them all the time, we have to wear the responsibility of being at the University of Texas. You have to wear the responsibility. If you're good enough to beat Stanford, then you're going to wear the responsibility of being that team and practice like it every day, play like it every night.

That's really hard to do with a young, inexperienced and immature team for, what have we played now, 35 games. You want to talk about one of the challenges of being a coach? Try and get your team up 35 nights out of the year, sometimes three nights a week.

To kids, it's something they've been doing all their life. It's just another game, right? They don't understand these times are fleeting. In the Elite Eight again, Jo, Audrey? These times you do not -- you don't take 'em for granted, these opportunities. Here we are again. What are we going to do today to make ourselves ready for tomorrow?

This is our team. Again, I think early in the year it was certainly a great win for us.

Q. To that point, emotional win last night again, they're all emotional at this point because you go home if you don't win, but to reset it again and get kids to think that's in the past, now we got one more chance to get to Minneapolis.

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, I didn't watch any film with them last night. We were really tired. Time we got back from scouting the game, it was late, our body time. 10:00 here is midnight back home. We let 'em go to bed. I actually gave them an extra 30 minutes to sleep in this morning. That's growth on my part, Roger.

We learn, right? You're never too old to learn. I look back in '17 we rolled into the hotel at 1:30 in the morning after beating Connecticut. Man, I had to get 'em up the next morning. We had to eat breakfast at 9, we had to be at the gym, we had to do this and this. The next year we didn't even practice the next day.

Again, it's growth I guess on my part. So this morning we let them sleep in. They had a good meal. We watched film, went through our scouting report like we always do. Then today was not much up and down. I want 'em to get in here and get a good feel for the arena, shoot a lot. Then we went through their stuff, went through some of our stuff but didn't go real hard.

I was assured last night the habits we've created up until now will continue to show up in games. One more day of practice in creating habits wasn't going to be a big deal. I trusted those telling me that.

Growth (smiling).

Q. Obviously Jo, Audrey, Lauren gained some valuable experience last year. How do you think that tournament benefited Shay and DeYona who had to watch it from the sidelines?

VIC SCHAEFER: Again, I think the three you mentioned that played, that experience, you just can't put a value on it. It's immeasurable. To have players be a part of that run a year ago, and to have 'em back, it's really, really unique and really special.

Again, that's part of the program, right? It's part of building a program. You have to stack recruiting classes and then you got to stack your success so that each class learns something. Then the next year when they're in that situation they handle it differently.

I think those three obviously had a great experience and learned a lot. We need those three to play really well tomorrow. Then DeYona and Shay both I think have

played a lot this year. They're mature beyond their years as well. I have to give them a lot of credit.

Anytime you get to this stage of the season, there's eight teams left, I mean, you're doing something right. Hopefully you can draw on things that you've been in this position before. Again, this is part of building the program.

So hopefully these kids can draw on what happened a year ago and be able to share that with our other kids to get them ready. But again, when you got a young, inexperienced team like I do, sometimes what you don't know doesn't hurt you. So I think you have to be careful about creating the moment.

It's still a basketball game. You know what? I could go out there and pull the hickory, measure her out, do that and all that, let them know that the rim is still the same and all that.

At the end of the day it's still a basketball game. We just need to go out and be Texas. That's it. I don't think we have to go play way out of our head to be successful in this tournament. We just got to be Texas. If we're Texas, I like our chances.

Q. Watching that matchup in November seemed like the stereotype is you want a lot of size to match up with Stanford. You had more success when you went smaller with Audrey at the four. Could your quickness be an advantage against their size?

VIC SCHAEFER: You hope so. When we go to that lineup, we're certainly wanting to use that to our advantage. Audrey plays bigger than her size. Obviously she's such a smart defensive player. At times now I'm really proud of her growth offensively. She can do some things offensively for us, as well.

I think our ability to kind of go small or be big, I think it's really been an advantage for this team. Again, I've got some young kids. A-Mo is coming on, Latasha Lattimore is giving us some really big minutes. We've got some other kids that have really stepped up for us and been really special depending on what lineup we want to play.

I think you'll see both tomorrow. It's kind of game to game sometimes on what's working and what's not, what's more important at the time, offense or defense.

Stanford is so big, even when they're small, when they go to their small lineup, they're still a big lineup. We've talked about that lineup. I think we have an understanding about what to do with each lineup and personnel.

They're really big, can alter a lot of shots. They get it from

me. They need to get credit for their defense. They're long, they're athletic, one through five. I mean, they're really big. They can be very disruptive. I don't know that people talk a lot about that, and they should, because they're well-coached on that end and they do a tremendous job on that end. Make it hard.

You go down and look at their scorers in ball games. There's not a lot of people getting over 60. You can count 'em on one hand how many have scored 70. I think it's a really well-balanced team. Obviously they have tremendous offensive flow, but defensively you got to give those kids credit and give coach. They are really good on that end.

Q. Going along with what you're saying right now. Seems like points might come at a premium in this game. Could you speak to how Aliyah Matharu might contribute on that end and what she brings to the offense?

VIC SCHAEFER: I think you all know that's a kid that can really be explosive. I mean, you lose her, she can hurt you in a hurry. Real confident kid, one of the top two most confident kids I've ever coached. That's not something she's short on.

I have to give her a lot of credit, too. She's really grown, come to really accept the importance of her role, which is big, on our team. She had a big game against obviously them there, made some really big shots for us down the stretch in the fourth quarter.

She's had some really big games for us this year. Made some big shots for us yesterday. So I think, you know, I've got to try to find ways to get her some looks because she does bring a lot to the table on that end. Then when she's locked in defensively, she can be a little bit of a problem, too, for the other team.

I'm really proud of Aliyah. I've learned a lot. I've coached her at Mississippi State and then here at the University of Texas. I've learned a lot coaching her. I just love the kid so much. I love Miss Brenda, her mama. They're such a special family. Grandma, too.

But I've learned a lot coaching her. I need her to be great. We need her to show up and be a big part of our success because we're really good -- when she's good, we're really good. She can really change the course of a game at the blink of an eye.

She's going to need to play well for us tomorrow night, without a doubt. She could have easily been up here with the other five that were up here before me because she



was a starter earlier in the year. We've been going with this lineup just because it's won a lot of games for us. She usually ain't over there on the bench too long. If she is, somebody is usually telling me, Hey, Aliyah.

I'm excited for the opportunity for her, as well, as I am for all our kids.

Q. (No microphone.)

VIC SCHAEFER: Victoria Vivians? Two pretty good ones. I mean, you got to have kids that are confident obviously. Those two kind of separate themselves. Victoria never met a shot they didn't like. You know what, neither has Aliyah. If you've watched her enough, 6'6", no problem, I'm going right at you. That's not always the smart thing to do. Most of the time it's not. But she is unfazed. Again, just a really confident kid when it comes to basketball and just loves the game. I mean, she just loves the game, loves to compete.

Again, I've learned a lot coaching her.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Schaefer, thank you for your time.

VIC SCHAEFER: Appreciate it. Praise the Lord and Hook 'em Horns.

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