

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 3 Semifinal - Gonzaga vs Texas

Thursday, March 28, 2024

Portland, Oregon, USA

Moda Center

Gonzaga Bulldogs

Coach Lisa Fortier

Brynna Maxwell

Eliza Hollingsworth

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: With us now from Gonzaga is head coach Lisa Fortier.

We'll begin with an opening statement.

LISA FORTIER: Good afternoon. I'm just really excited to be here with our team. This is such a fun experience for them. We love Portland. We love basketball. We love each other. So for us to have another weekend where we get to come out here and put the best product we can put together on the floor for one more day with each other is just very exciting for our team.

I think they've overcome a lot to get to this point, just like all the other teams who are still playing. I'm just really happy for them and excited to see what we got against our next opponent.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Texas' coach has been nicknamed the secretary of defense.

LISA FORTIER: Who named him that (laughter)?

Q. Where does Texas' defense rank among the teams you played this year?

LISA FORTIER: I mean, they're pretty good. I don't know exactly where they fall. I do know they're really good at turning teams over. They're really big, very physical. I think that's what -- they get after you in pressure.

A couple years ago I got to sit in the Texas section at the



Spokane Arena because I had a friend who was coaching with them. Got to see it up close and personal. They get after it. They're enthusiastic, passionate.

I think it's up there. I think they really know how to guard. They're really well-versed at playing all kinds of different teams. I mean, I think they're a good defensive team, for sure.

Q. Does Texas have an Alissa Pili kind of player?

LISA FORTIER: Alissa is unique. They have high-quality players. They've got good guards, strong forwards. What Booker does is very unique and amazing. It's one thing for a player who's played primarily a combo guard to go and be a point guard after injury. What she's been able to do at her position is remarkable. Their inside kids are strong.

I think different. I don't think if there are many people just like Liss. She's unique to the game. But they have a lot of quality players, as well.

Q. I know she doesn't score a lot, but talk about Esther Little's contribution on the court, things that add up to wins.

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, Esther for us is just such a smart, heady player. When she came in, it was primarily we loved how she could guard, her length. She's improved defensively, if that's possible, with some of the intelligent pieces she's worked on, just understanding people's patterns of movement.

Also, I think she doesn't put her hands down. She rarely fouls people she's not in a position to. She's become an improved rebounder. She fits in with our team really well because she's very unselfish. She will not do something that she's not supposed to do or something that's serving her. She's always trying to serve our team, which is really what our team's all about.

Those are our standards, and she's exactly what we would want in a Zag.

Q. Wes Moore was talking about the parity in the game



growing because of the transfer portal. Brynna came to you through the transfer portal. With Lynne and Leigh and Vonney having been in Spokane, it feels like for a decade, how do you think that gives you maybe a unique advantage that they have played together?

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, I think that the parity of the transfer portal is interesting. I'd like to listen to Wes' thoughts on that. I know he's smart.

I think you can achieve parity by people working through things and getting better and being committed to a place.

I think what the Truongs and Eliza, and Brynna stayed for the extra, Vonney, these guys who stayed around and worked through things -- Vonney, Lynne, Eliza, Esther, Brynna wasn't on the roster at that time, those guys barely played when they were younger players. I think they've committed to something. They're bought in. They're invested in Gonzaga and what we do.

I think it's great to acquire talent, which we're trying to do all the time, too. But there's something unique to those people who their skill set has improved, but they also care deeply about it. It's a part of them and will always be. There's not even another part.

Some people go for a couple years, now Brynna has both love for what she did at Utah and Gonzaga. These guys, they've put it all there. We've seen it happen on the men's side, those special players who stick around can achieve as much as a higher acquisition of talent could.

Q. What was your awareness about what was going on with the Utah situation going into your game? Do you have any concerns that it changes how the NCAA or anybody views Spokane as a host site?

LISA FORTIER: I didn't know anything about it until our press conference after the game actually. That's because no one came to me. People are telling me all kinds of stuff, but nobody came to me and told me that. I don't know if it was social media, but I'm trying hard to just be with my team.

Truly didn't know about it.

I don't think the NCAA -- it was a unique year with the men having their teams there and the volleyball thing. Those were set in advance. I think the NCAA committee, I don't know what they're going to do at a big picture, if they're going to put us in neutral sites of their choosing. It's based on the 16 teams who they feel were the top 16 and host ability going forward.

Next time we host, we'll try to keep it tighter towards Spokane a little bit. The Coeur D'Alene Resort was a nice hotel. That's why they were put there by the NCAA. I don't know about any of the decisions made about it.

It's a terrible situation that happened for those players and the staff. I wish it was something that will never happen again. Hopefully it doesn't ever. Student-athletes who are in this place right now are supposed to be preparing for these great games and enjoying this time. It's a horrible situation.

As far as the placement, I think the committee just chooses what it is. We'll learn from it. Next time we host, hopefully they're going to be right downtown in the Davenport and have a great experience.

Q. Obviously sports fans here in Oregon have become familiar with Kelly Graves over the past decade plus. Working with him, what was that experience like for you? How did you learn to build out a successful program from someone like Kelly?

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, working with Kelly was great. We were nine years ago, two of them when I was volunteering to do all the jobs, seven where he finally started paying me for them.

I learned a ton from him. One of the biggest things I learned is just letting the players play, then also letting the coaches coach. I was lucky because he let me coach the defense, the guards, he let me do the recruiting. Jodie, we were both there for a long time. She had some different roles.

I think that's a big part of building continuity. My coaches have stayed I think primarily because I give them a lot of flexibility and a lot of freedom to do those things. We've had players stay because they're bought into what we do, how we take care of people. I think those are some of the things that I was watching when I was a young assistant coach, trying to figure out.

His family was around all the time. I think we say it's a family environment at Gonzaga, everyone says that. Our kids are in the locker room right now. Our trainer's baby. That's kind of what it's like at GU. I think that's been a recipe for success for a long time. Not just at Gonzaga, but a lot of different places.

Q. Yvonne is a player that seems to be getting more and more attention nationally. What has impressed you the most about how she's approached this season, what she's been able to do, thinking ahead to this matchup with Texas?

LISA FORTIER: I think earlier this season when we had the March Madness road trip come to our campus, someone asked me why people weren't talking more about Yvonne. I said I didn't know. I think it's because they didn't know. At that time I said I think the most impressive thing about her is how she's been able to evolve her game.

Specifically talking about this season, she's evolved this season a ton. She used to take this kind of shot, used to do this on defense. She's not doing those things. She's not making inexperienced mistakes or decisions. She's extremely steady. She's worked on her mental approach to the game. She's so smart.

The conversations that we had, they're a little bit private, but they're hilarious and amazing and funny about, When this happens, how are we going to approach it?

Her and Alissa -- I think Vonney might have hosted Alissa on her recruiting trip. I think going forward she has less familiarity with the Texas players because they haven't been on campus.

The things she says, she's very mature. She's kind of been able to rise above things that used to bother her in the past. I think that's helped her tremendously as a player because she's able to see the game for what it is, take the situation at hand, if it's a drive, if it's a shot, if it's a pass, if it's a foul, she has to back off. She's able to see it kind of at whatever they say, 10,000 feet looking down. I think it's evident in how she's performing right now.

Q. Leigh and Lynne, most people in this room still probably can't tell them apart when they're on the floor, not because they look exactly alike, but their games are really similar. How are their games different and how do they complement one another?

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, I think they steady each other because they are so similar. For us, I think that Kayleigh typically has been a little bit more aggressive and Lynne kind of sizes the situation up a little bit more before she makes her move. If they were snakes, I think they both have bite, right? The one is going to jump on you right away, and the other is going to wait till you're not paying attention, then jump on you.

Defensively, I think they're both plus defenders now, but they do it different. Kayleigh is more likely to get into you and keep in front; Lynne is going to come in and snipe you if you bring the ball down or if you are casual.

I think the best compliment to them is that they are -- they feel like a whole. When they're playing well and they're

feeding off of each other, if this person is getting pressure, I'll throw it to that one.

I think also the compliment is that our team feels very comfortable with each other out there. I think they play a very complementary role. When we have two leaders, ball handlers like that, you're playing with two point guards who can score the ball, I think our team feels at peace with them. I think that's a complementary role they play with each other as well.

Q. Shaylee Gonzales was a very good player at BYU and is one for Texas as well. What is the challenge in defending her?

LISA FORTIER: I mean, same challenge, just different jersey, right? She's been a great three-point shooter for her whole time. She's crafty. She's an active defender, really smart player. She gets to the rim.

I think all of those things are challenging. If you let her play comfortably, not go one on one, I don't think that's an advantage to us. It never has been before at least when we've played her.

She's the same caliber of player she was there on a bigger stage. She's just doing a really good job. She's always been that smart. She was an MVP maybe her freshman or sophomore year in her conference.

She's I think just taken those skills, built some confidence. Maybe had to do a little bit more for her team when she was at BYU than where she is now. I think sometimes that helps players when they don't have the weight of everybody on their shoulders. Right now she is playing with players that she doesn't have to carry all the weight which makes her a little bit more dangerous in some ways.

Be physical, but not too physical. Make sure we ball share when she's around us. There's a lot. She's a tough player. I got to coach her at USA Basketball for just a minute. She was even tough there. Everywhere I've seen her, she's been a good person and a great player.

Q. If in the near future there are performance units on the women's side, do you feel maybe that could make schools across the country invest more in the women's game because they maybe see more financial gain for success?

LISA FORTIER: You know, yeah. We have a lot of conversations with people who say that they want their teams to do what Gonzaga has done. That's on the men's side and on the women's side.

Then the coaches then in turn say, If you want us to do what they've done, you have to invest like Gonzaga has invested in their programs.

I would guess that seems to be the case. It seems to be a point of interest or contention from the coaches with their expectations for their own programs.

I only have coached the GU. I spent one year away at Northern Colorado, that was a different situation. I would guess that would probably be something.

Probably worth the investment from what a lot of our coaches and players are able to do in showing that they're drawing that kind of positive attention.

Q. You have three common opponents. From watching video, what did you glean from that? What do you see as keys for tomorrow?

LISA FORTIER: I mean, we're still trying to figure that out. We watched a lot of film on them. They're extremely physical. I think we're going to have to match their physicality. They rebound the ball really well. They're so big out there. You're playing with three forwards at all times, at least. Definitely going to have to rebound.

We're going to have to get to our kind of shots. I just think play our game. When we're having fun and playing how we play, we can compete with anybody. If we're bogged down in the weeds and we're letting little things bother us... Like we're in the Sweet 16, these guys haven't ever got to do that, we're going to enjoy the heck out of it and see if we can have fun while we're doing it.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much and best of luck tomorrow.

LISA FORTIER: Thank you, guys.

THE MODERATOR: Joining us now Gonzaga student-athletes.

We'll go ahead and open it up to questions.

Q. Brynna, what do you see from video of Texas that impresses you? What's going to be key for you guys?

BRYNNA MAXWELL: Yeah, Texas is a very good team. They are very good rebounders. That's their biggest asset, is how many rebounds they get a game, how great they are, how physical they are. One of our biggest things is trying to box them out, take it away.

It's a tall order because they are so good. It's kind of their

superpower. But our game plan is just to kind of take away those rebounds.

Q. Eliza, what do you see in Texas? Similar to any team you played this year?

ELIZA HOLLINGSWORTH: Just trying to chat with Brynna right now (smiling).

I don't think we've seen any team, I mean, like Texas. I think Alabama early in the season is super athletic, super strong.

No, from what they look like on film, they look super athletic, super strong, rebound the ball, play super hard, a lot of three-point shooting. I'm excited to challenge us against new opponents. I think that's an important way to win throughout this tournament, is you just can't win one way, you have to win multiple ways. I'm excited to see someone new.

Q. With so many fourth- or fifth-year seniors on this team, the individual and collective experience you have together playing college basketball, what are some of the moments you're seeing that shine through, where you feel like that makes you different than other teams you might see this month?

ELIZA HOLLINGSWORTH: I think our chemistry as players on the court, you can definitely see that as a spectator. I think we're able to find each other, we share so well. I think having had a lot of experience these last few years with each other has helped us come this far in the tournament.

When you see the Truongs finishing dimes all the time, I can hit Vonney, Vonney hits me, we get Brynna all the time. I think our offensive flow does definitely stem from that chemistry and that experience, knowing each other for so long, yeah.

Q. How do you stop a point guard like Madison Booker? She's very strong, obviously really likes that pullup jump shot, she can knock people off her spot. For you guys, based on the scout, how do you plan to maybe limit her effectiveness?

BRYNNA MAXWELL: She's a really good player. Yeah, I mean, obviously you can't just take her out of the game. She's going to get some baskets. We're going to do our best to limit her best we can. She is a forward playing a point guard, so we're aware of that. We'll just try and isolate that a little bit.

Q. You are somewhat the home team, the shortest



route to play in the Portland regional. Gonzaga usually travels pretty well. Eliza, what does it mean to be able to play in the Sweet 16 game so close to home?

ELIZA HOLLINGSWORTH: As much as it is closer to home, it's still not a home game for us. We still have to travel. We haven't played in this arena before. It's an unfamiliar setting. So I know that maybe Texas, we're talking about time difference, but it is a new location for us.

The good thing for this is hopefully our fans get to come out and make the travel because for them it might be a bit easier.

But to make a Sweet 16 is super rewarding. I don't think any one of our players was surprised. We knew that we could get here. I just think all of our reactions after the game, it was just super rewarding. I think it was super surreal. I've been here for five years, and we haven't been able to get to this stage yet. To make it here, it's a testament to our program, our team, how hard we fought throughout the whole season. It wasn't just leading up till now.

Q. Last year coming off the way the post-season went, going into this year, knowing you're going to have the endless experience, players coming back, it sounds like you believed you could make this run. How does last year's experience fuel you going into this year's post-season?

BRYNNA MAXWELL: Yeah, we've all kind of had a bitter taste in our mouth since the season ended last year. We knew we kind of shot ourselves in the foot, we could have gone a lot farther than we did.

It's so special to have the core group coming back. A few new faces, but they only added to our team. It's just kind of been motivation for us the entire year. We've had a bigger goal every single game just to get past Sweet 16. This is another step on the journey.

But it's super cool to see that goal kind of come to fruition. Excited to see what comes next.

Q. Do you take pride in representing a mid-major school? Gonzaga is a power at that level, I don't want to cut it short or minimize, but just being able to represent the Sweet 16 to get the school back here, what does that mean to you all? How do you want to be an example of what other programs can do even if they're not in the Power Five?

BRYNNA MAXWELL: There's the Power Five and there's most of the teams who are outside of that. I think there's a

lot of not disrespect but there is some hesitancy to support those teams. There's a little bit of I guess an underdog feel, even if teams have the talent. It's really cool to kind of put on the stage that Gonzaga might be considered a mid-major, but they don't play like it.

Excited to see how that translates onto the court tomorrow. I think our entire team is ready, locked in.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

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