

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

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Moda Center

Gonzaga Bulldogs

Coach Lisa Fortier

Yvonne Ejim

Kaylunne Truong

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Texas 69, Gonzaga 47

THE MODERATOR: Joining us now Gonzaga.

Coach, we'll start with your opening statement.

LISA FORTIER: These guys, today wasn't our best day. It wasn't an indicator of the season that we had. Coaching this team has been one of the most fun things I've done in my life actually, especially the last couple weeks. They've just been such a joy.

Lynne, I've had her five years, Vonney for four, varying other times on this team. They are people who make people want to watch women's basketball. They're people who support each other and cheer for each other in life, not just on the court. They're some of the best people that I know.

I wish that we could have come up with a better game plan or executed it a little bit better or just made a few more shots today. But really I wouldn't trade that for any of those people in there, being able to be their coach.

It's a great honor to have coached these guys, everyone back in the locker room. I'm just really grateful we were able to do that, so...

THE MODERATOR: Questions now for the student-athletes.

Q. From a player's perspective, what makes playing against Texas so difficult? Is it dynamic guard play, play from the bigs?



YVONNE EJIM: I think, if anything, we just weren't running what we needed to. I think, if anything, we took ourselves a lot out of the battle, out of our flow, out of our game. Just making sure that not only are we setting the tone from the beginning, but that we're keeping that consistent. I think that was kind of not in our favor today.

When that happens, I feel like we don't have a lot of flow as well. Mostly on our part just taking ourselves out of the advantages that we could have had.

Q. Kaylynne, was that the best defense you've seen played against you guys? They were pushing your offense practically to halfcourt.

KAYLYNNE TRUONG: It's Texas ball. It's physical. Most aggressive? I don't know. There's a lot of teams we played this year that have thrown many defenses at us.

I mean, again, like Vonney said, back to what Vonne said, we took ourselves out of it. Our shooting a little bit, we kind of rely on that. It just didn't go our way today.

Q. Kaylynne, I know this is your last game, and this isn't the result you wanted, but it was your first Sweet 16 with this program. Can you reflect on the tournament run that you had this season?

KAYLYNNE TRUONG: Yeah, I mean, this is one season that I won't forget. We started as a team that was I wouldn't say broken, but disconnected a little bit in the beginning of the year. We worked our way through adversity.

I think this is the most connected team I've ever been on. I just love how we play for each other, how we care for each other on and off the court. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Just to make Sweet 16 since 2015 for Gonzaga, it's very special for me.

Q. You just mentioned the first Sweet 16 since 2015. Yvonne, what does that mean to you? What does that mean for this Gonzaga program?



YVONNE EJIM: I think, if anything, it just shows how much we're growing, how much better we're getting each year, kind of like where this program lies in the future, what we can really do with it. This team was super special. I think we did a lot this year. I think that's just the standard that we want to keep ourselves at continuously, not only this year but for the years to come as well.

I think it shows a little bit of what we're capable of, where we want to go, and kind of like the path that we can really do it, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll continue with questions for Coach Fortier.

Q. What did Texas do so well defensively?

LISA FORTIER: Well, they pressured. They're really physical. I think they took us out of position. Sometimes they try to blow up the handoffs, the ball screens. We didn't do a great job on the offensive glass at all. We've had games in the 20s on the offensive glass. That's usually when we haven't missed that many shots. We missed a bunch of them today. I think that's part of defense, defensive rebounding.

Our turnovers weren't great. I think it was more about just how physical they were coming off some of those ball screens. We've had such great success with that. We ended up with Leigh and Vonney on the bench for long stretches, which doesn't help by any means. One of those was maybe an offensive foul, the other ones were defensive.

Their pressure was a lot.

Q. Guard play is so important in the NCAA tournament. You did a good job on Booker. Here comes Shaylee Gonzales who you're familiar with. What did she do tonight that set them apart?

LISA FORTIER: Shaylee is a really good player who we've played a lot against. I think she did Shaylee things. The reason why she was a good player at BYU, and I haven't followed her as much, why she still is, is because she does a little bit of everything. She can shoot it, she can drive it. She's heady. She guards. There's not a lot of holes in her game.

With Booker out, I don't know exactly why Vic has chosen to put Booker at the one and Shaylee at the off guard -- I don't know if it's just to stretch the defense in different ways and post trap some. But she's a starting point guard at BYU. She's clearly capable of it.

I think today she played really well and she picked up the slack. She's a very, very experienced veteran, just a well-rounded player.

Q. A year ago you played a similar game against Ole Miss. Does this game feel like that one offensively?

LISA FORTIER: Maybe. I mean, I would say no, not really. I know there was pressure. I think they got to some switching things, some of that. I think in the Ole Miss game, we were shellshocked a little bit. I don't think we were shellshocked today. I think we just didn't put together enough good quarters. We can play like we played in the third offensively, and we did it all year. We didn't have two single-digit -- we barely had any one quarter that was in single digits.

I think against Ole Miss it was a little bit different. I don't think we were expecting necessarily the amount of pressure that they put on us, even though we'd seen it on film.

This time felt like we weren't getting the stops. Offensively it was hard. Really we didn't get stops either. That is something that was more frustrating at different points than the offense, to be honest with you. In all the games where we've come back, we haven't had that many of 'em, but where there was a quarter or two we weren't great, we were able to stop people, create some offense off of our defense, not steals, but pushing in transition.

We talked a lot about our offense. Don't get me wrong, we haven't scored in the 40s all year either, but that could have helped our offense, I think, and it didn't today.

Q. With Eliza going down at the end of the game, can you share about what happened to her, her status?

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, she hurt her ankle. She's had some x-rays and it's not broken. That's what we know right now. There's some doctors here who have some specialty in that area. She's going to be okay. She's in a boot. It's a bummer of a way to finish a bummer of a game.

Q. With Yvonne coming back next year, being that super piece, what do you hope to see from her as she embraces that role, can hopefully build upon what you were able to do this year?

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, I mean, Yvonne, she's such a great story. I think she's still building that story, and it's going to last long beyond her time at Gonzaga. She comes from a big basketball family. She picked Gonzaga, which is probably a great spot for her. She turned down big schools

and big conferences to come do what she's done at Gonzaga. She didn't play that much. Now she's a superstar.

I think she's going to spend time this off-season. Hopefully she'll be playing with the Olympic team in Paris. She's going to spend time in this off-season continuing to expand her game. She's been able to do that unlike any player I've ever seen each year. She's taken her game to another level. I know she wants to work on her perimeter shooting. She's become really good from the midrange. She wants to extend out further for her professional career.

She's been a leader on our team since the minute she stepped on campus. She's that kind of person. I know she's going to continue to grow in those ways.

She's good at taking the next step. She's going to take a next step probably in a lot of ways because that's what she does. I would say she's going to put us on her back, but she's kind of been doing that the last two years. A little bit more Lynne last year. I'm looking forward to seeing the player that she is when we step out on the floor again next October, November.

Q. Could you talk about the third quarter, that little surge you had.

LISA FORTIER: I mean, it ends up being 17-17. After that quarter was over, I asked Jordan, what was that quarter? He said, Tied. Dang, I was hoping we could make up a couple there. We did for a while. They scored a couple consecutive baskets. We started off getting some stops. We got stopped and they scored, stopped and they scored.

I liked we were just playing our pace. We got some transition. We made some threes at that time. I don't know how many. Not that many because there weren't many made that whole day. We got to the rim. I think we were stretching them and getting them out of position a little bit, which is not easy to do with their team.

That was fun, right? A lot more fun than the rest of it (smiling).

Q. The Truong sisters, it's their last season, can you speak to what they mean to this program and you personally?

LISA FORTIER: Yeah. There's a lot of tears in the locker room just looking at those two. I think after their freshman year, I don't know if it's freshman or sophomore year, we lost to Belmont. We were a 5 and we lost in the COVID year in patient bubble.

There were a lot of questions, people questioning if they made the right choice, how they played. They're just such loyal, committed, faith-filled, good hearted people. They've made my life better. Not on the court. Definitely they made it better on the court, but off the court just by the people that they are.

I think when there's two of them, it's very unique. We've had twins before. When there's two of them, they have an impact early in their career, it just feels like they've been there forever. We recruited them for a long time.

For me, my head coaching career has been three years recruiting the Truongs and five years coaching them. There's two years before that that nobody remembers. The trunks were there the whole time. Then it's multiplied by two.

I'm so grateful for their commitment to our program. I'm so grateful for the things that they've taught me just as a person. I love those guys deeply in my heart. They love us. They love Gonzaga.

Part of all the laughing and giggling and jokes we have here is that they are happy that they invested their five years here at Gonzaga. As a coach, that's the best that you can hope for. When it's all done, we get past the tears, they don't have any regrets about that. We definitely don't about them and they don't either. I think that's the best part of about coaching.

Q. You mentioned the Belmont loss. It's been a long time since your program has gotten to the second weekend. How does it feel to get back here and have this moment tonight?

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, I mean, we want to do more. But it's really fun. I was texting with (indiscernible), Mark Few. We were talking as a staff about UConn, all these guys who make it look like it's really easy. These are our friends. They make it look like it's easy to get to the Sweet 16.

It's not easy to do.

Then we were also talking about Chris Petersen when he was in the Rose Bowl with football and he didn't enjoy it at all. He'll tell you it was a terrible week for him.

We're coming here to enjoy what we're doing. We enjoyed playing basketball. We enjoyed hosting last week. I think that's what we need to just continue to remind ourselves. As much as we want to be the team that gets there all the time, we also definitely don't want to be the team that gets there and doesn't have fun doing it.

It's significant to our program. Of course, we want to chalk up as many of these as we can, mostly for the players in there.

I think the best thing about being here was how much fun we had. Honestly from the time we (indiscernible) against Portland until now has been the most fun I've had all year. It was more fun than beating Stanford and doing that. Most fun I've had in a lot of years because I think we all tried to be present, enjoy it.

She alluded to the fact we were a little bit disconnected. Our goal was to be the most connected team we could be, the most connected team in the country. I think we achieved that.

There's no shame in not getting to the Elite 8. I wish we did. I wish we got to the Final Four. I wish we got to do all those things. But it's been an incredible, incredible time. I'm just grateful for it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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