

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - FDU vs TCU

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Schollmaier Arena

FDU Knights

Coach Stephanie Gaitley

Ava Renninger

Teneisia Brown

Media Conference

Q. Obviously you're playing at TCU. A lot of the attention. Talk about the is not you guys have had. 22 wins to get here in a row. Talk about being prepared for the challenge and not being content just being here.

AVA RENNINGER: Obviously having the year we had has been super historic for us, but we're not satisfied yet. We want to get as far as we can get.

I think as much as we love each other we don't want the season to end. Just winning a conference, we want to do as much as we can for the team. Winning in March Madness not only being a 15 seed would be pretty cool.

TENEISIA BROWN: Yeah, we've been having a great season, but we never lose focus. So staying focused and just being excited and understanding the opportunity we have brought upon us, and just executing Coach's plan, game plan, and have fun while we're there.

Q. Talk about preparing to face a player like Sedona Prince who is so strong inside, what she can do. Obviously a lot of pieces around her. But particularly that matchup.

TENEISIA BROWN: We always say respect everyone, fear none. So just I mean, doing what I do best, and, you know, going to have to box out. I mean she's a really great player. She's taller than everyone on the team.

I mean, just staying with our game plan and executing.

Q. Ladies, first time in the state of Texas?



AVA RENNINGER: Yeah, never been here. Ever.

TENEISIA BROWN: First time in this part of Texas. I've been to Dallas before.

Q. How was the trip over?

AVA RENNINGER: Great. Very warm here. Very cold in New Jersey. I really like this weather.

TENEISIA BROWN: I never expected this much wind. It's very windy.

Q. Kind of touch base on your seasons again. What's been the most exciting up to this point as part of your season?

AVA RENNINGER: I would say just the team chemistry we have. I have never had this much fun with a team in my life. Like on the court or off the court I think you can see it. We just have so much fun together, and that's what's been the key to our success and the key to this season, just the unselfishness and the time we have together.

None of us want to see it end, so we're going to do the best we can.

TENEISIA BROWN: I would say the same. When you're on a team and you're happy it makes everything better. It's a fun group, really fun group. Everyone loves each other. I think it's just like off the court we love each other and it transfers on the court. Playing together is just like easy.

AVA RENNINGER: Yeah.

Q. What's it like when you're on a stretch like you're on: 22 wins in a row. Swept through your conference. Won the conference title. What's it like when you get on a roll like this?

AVA RENNINGER: Just keep the focus. I think that's been key for us, is, okay, we win and we celebrate until midnight. That's Coach's saying. Celebrate or suffer until midnight and the next day you're refocused back on the



next game and next opponent. We see every opponent like they are. We don't see a better team or worse team.

We just focus on them and our game plan and we execute.

TENEISIA BROWN: Yeah, I agree with her. Just everyone having the same mindset I think is big for us. Just keeping our composure after each win and know that the job is not finished.

Q. Looks like you guys played UConn earlier this season. Playing those games, do they help prepare you for a game like tomorrow?

AVA RENNINGER: I would say for sure they definitely do, especially the atmosphere that UConn had. You can't beat that. Obviously it was sold out. Everyone was there. Everyone was yelling. You can't match that capacity anywhere.

So kind of sets us up for a big game like this in March Madness. And playing against that high level talent it gets you prepared for games like this. We went in with fear and that's what we expect to do tomorrow.

TENEISIA BROWN: Yeah, these games are added to our schedule to prepare us for these moments, and I think every game after that we've gotten better, like so much better. Yeah, those games really set us up for these moments.

STEPHANIE GAITLEY: First of all want to thank TCU for welcoming us here. We had a great time in our line dances last night, so we stomped it pretty well.

Wasn't very good at it, but it was fun. A lot of fun. This team has been one that has -- will always remain extremely close to my heart. In a year now, like the NIL, the fact that all these kids returned from last year and want to prove themselves, I think they did that and more.

It's been an exciting ride. I feel like Aladdin on my magic carpet ride. We're just enjoying one day at a time.

Q. Can you talk about the incredible run, 22 wins in a row and sweeping through the conference. Talk about what's made this group come together. I know like you said a lot of them came back, but what has been special that made it work?

STEPHANIE GAITLEY: You know, I think I have to go back to last year and Jess, my associate head coach, we laughed a lot because when we started out of conference 2-11, we were like, wow, this has been rough.

Then I knew, because I've done this a long time, that the kids stayed together. It was just a great group of kids and I knew we didn't lose them in that stretch. When we finished third in conference and they all wanted to go back, including Abby Babore, and she's actually been one of our most solid performers, I knew something special was brewing, coming around in the summer.

And then when we went on the road and won our first two road games, obviously we struggled last year, and again, the scores aren't indicative of the bigger teams we played, but I didn't feel we played with any fear. So when I saw us against UConn, found out last summer that was going to be Geno's, you know -- my friend goes, Steph, you'll never believe. I got my invitation to the game and guess who they're playing? You. I'm like, what? So Geno's record breaking game.

So the kids weren't intimidated and that was different. Last year I felt they felt a little rattled or they just didn't -- I'm not sure how much they believed. This year I felt none of that.

As the streak continued we didn't really talk about the streak. We just went about our business and took everything one day at a time.

Q. That said, talk about obviously going into an environment and playing TCU. They won ten in a row. Talk about the mindset of your girls going into this game.

STEPHANIE GAITLEY: Our mindset is pretty much respect all, fear none. You know, I don't know if everybody seen the movie -- probably a lot of young ones didn't -- Little Giants. Just takes one time. You know if you watched that movie. You know what I'm talking about.

It just takes that one time. For us, we're a big believer of eight five-minute games. Going to go five minutes at a time. We know that they're really, really good. They've got so much NCAA experience. I think Hailey Van Lith is playing her best basketball right now; Sedona is playing her best basketball. It's a very experienced team.

To be honest, it's nice that the role is underdog now and not expected to win. I think that's a role I personally relish.

Q. For those that have not seen you guys play, can you describe your style of play to everyone?

STEPHANIE GAITLEY: We're just very balanced and unselfish and defensive-oriented. Last we checked we were like 12th in the country in confidence and points allowed. I just feel if you play defense you'll be in every game.

Where we have a tall test tomorrow is keeping them off the boards with their size. But we like to shoot the three, similar to what TCU does. But it's very spread out. On any given game, somebody can be our leading scorer. It's typically not the same person every game.

Teneisia Brown has had great numbers, as well as Ava. On any given night we have had so many different stepping up.

Q. Played UConn earlier this year. Are there any other teams that you may have faced this year that might kind of closely match up to what you might see tomorrow against TCU?

STEPHANIE GAITLEY: I mean, there are some really good athletes on Rutgers and Syracuse as well. We didn't face that size. You know, Sara Strong is big and physical, but 6'7" is pretty big size. So we haven't really faced that type of size.

So that will be different, interesting. I don't think you know on the court exactly how to adapt and what to do with that. I think keeping her off the boards is hard. I have seen them against their Big XII opponents and she's having her way on the boards against the biggest kids in the conference.

Q. This is the fourth team you brought to an NCAA tournament, four different schools. You've done it from a level of smaller schools. Talk about what it's like to bring the smaller schools to the tournament, and is there -- obviously it's the same experience for everybody. Your girls want to be in it. Talk about it from a perspective of trying to do something that nobody else gets to do.

STEPHANIE GAITLEY: Means you're old, you know. You've been doing it a long time. You know what? I will tell you and my husband will attest to this, Thursday when we were playing -- because the Stonehill was not ready to be in the tournament, probably the most nervous I've ever been in my career in a game. I think that was because, one, this was a very special team and I wanted them to enjoy that.

And for our kids, I mean, like you walk around TCU you can tell it has money. With FDU I think we have a beautiful campus, great administration, people, but we are who we are.

We don't have the Austin money. We don't have the NIL. So these type of experiences are something you want more so for them because they don't get those type of

things. When we talk in and see the special gifts, they're excited. Whereas maybe some kids are just used to getting it.

For our kids it's very, very special.

Q. You mentioned you guys went line dancing last night.

STEPHANIE GAITLEY: I'm bad. I'm really bad.

Q. So not ready to teach us yet?

STEPHANIE GAITLEY: Hell no. Hell no. I have absolutely no rhythm. Absolutely none. Ty, you probably have some rhythm, right? Now, Ty, he's got some game.

Q. Obviously do that to kind of calm your team down. You guys have anything else planned this evening?

STEPHANIE GAITLEY: I think go out and watch some of the men's and women's games. The play-in games for the women, but the men's obviously is going full tilt now. So probably do that. The parents are coming in.

You want to enjoy it with everyone. It's been fun to be with the cheerleaders and seeing kids do something they typically don't get. Even from like my end, being a mother of three, my boys have been part of the journey with me. Two are coaching in the NBA now; the third one is the favorite because our has the grandchildren. He had the granddaughter last week, so now we have a third due -- the one at that coaches the Nets is due in April. It's good that they're not playing well I guess. (Laughter.)

No, I mean, that's just the way it is. He'll be ready to be a dad. (Laughter.) They're playing hard. They're just not winning. To clarify. No, I really think that -- actually I'm excited because he just took that job and I really think the Nets are going to be the turnaround like the Thunder. They're just piecing it together now. They have some main players out so I'm obviously just kidding.

They're playing hard and that's all you ask.

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