

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round -Syracuse vs UConn

Monday, March 23, 2026

Storrs, Connecticut, USA

Gampel Pavilion

Syracuse Orange

Coach Felisha

Legette-Jack

Sophie Burrows

Laila Phelia

Media Conference

UConn 98, Syracuse 45

THE MODERATOR: At this time we welcome the Syracuse orange to the press conference. We are joined by Head Coach Felisha Legette-Jack, along with student-athletes Sophie Burrows and Laila Phelia. We will begin with an opening statement from Coach.

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: I asked God to touch my heart and help me speak kindly about this opportunity, but also have a responsibility. And when I tell my players they're warming up, I think I have to do the same thing.

And for us to be coming from a 12 and 16, 18, whatever, season this year, okay, let's judge it on this season. For us to do what we've done, to continuously have to come to UConn, and every single school that I go to, from Buffalo to -- it's unfair to the young people.

I don't know what it is. Somebody said, is there something that they might have against me? If that's the case, then we need to communicate about that.

But for us to be -- what we've done and our body of work, to have to come and play the best team in the country, I mean, Geno has this thing going, and I love what he's done. But we, I thought, deserved a little more respect.

After being in this business for 37 years, and to have to come and be in this particular bracket every fricking year is unacceptable. It's wrong. It's -- somebody -- and if you're on the committee and you've been around for more than a



year or two or five to 10, 15 years, you understand what that looks like.

I have been on those committees to see how it's done, how you can put people on different lines. Put us on a 10 line, whatever. But for us to continue to come to Connecticut year after year after year is, to me, it's a personal attack, because I just think that we are way better than what we performed today.

But I think what you're going to notice, that everybody that comes through Geno and UConn is going to get the wrath of what they can bring.

I just know that this team right here had a strong chance of getting beyond this particular level, and I am hoping that I'm not disrespecting anyone. I'm hoping that I'm not bringing shame to Syracuse by crying spilled milk, but after a while -- I've never said anything in this kind of light before.

A lot of people talk about refs. I just want the young people that's in my locker room to have a fighting chance, and I am grateful to be in an NCAA Tournament, from where we've come from, but I think that we've earned the right to go anywhere outside of a four-hour radius. That's all I have.

THE MODERATOR: At this time we will open up for questions for the student-athletes.

Q. For both of you, your coach often talks about you guys don't lose, you win or you learn, and from a night like tonight, what can you take away as some learning lessons from tonight?

LAILA PHELIA: I feel like the biggest thing for us was just being able to understand that we can't get sped up like that in the first half and being able to take control over the game on the front end, because Coach pointed out to us, we tied in the third and the fourth quarter. So we need to be able to come out strong and not allow our opponents to speed us up like that and play Syracuse women's basketball.



Q. Laila, you took quite a chance coming here as your third school. I know it's right after a game, but how can you reflect on the time here at Syracuse and taking a chance of coming to SU?

LAILA PHELIA: I kind of touched on it a little in the locker room. After being at Texas and dealing with a retinal detachment, I feel like it put me in a position where it's like I questioned a lot of things. Going through eye surgery, it took a mental toll on me, and I feel like it was really hard, because I just remember nights where I was searching, like what other basketball player has dealt with a retinal detachment. Like how did they go through it, like what am I supposed to do, and it's like my life, everything was like, yeah, going uphill, Michigan, playing on Team USA, then going to Texas, wanting to finish off my senior year. Then I got hit with that.

But at the end of the day, it's like sometimes in life, everything happens for a reason. And during that time, I had to sit back and take it as a learning opportunity, where in my life did I need to grow more.

And I'm a big believer. So I put it all in God's hands, and after Texas, of course, I sat back and just tried to figure out, like, how am I supposed to get back to that player that I was. Like what am I supposed to do.

Of course, I had other schools calling and everything, but I feel like when I talked to Coach Jack and just hearing how she was the one coach that really, truly felt and understood exactly what I was going through, and her confidence in me straight off the bat, it just gave me a sense of, like, belief, like she believes that I can get back there. And I feel like sometimes that's all you need is just someone to believe that, like, they can get you back to that player that you were.

And I would just say, like, that was the biggest thing for me, just being able to, like, put that in God's hands and just trust the process and then trust her plan.

And that was like, bottom line, the reason why I was like, you know what, let's do it. And I just went under her lead and let her pave the way. So, yeah.

Q. For both of you, have you ever been stunned in a first half like that before?

SOPHIE BURROWS: No. No. We came out, we were on the back foot, and against a team like UConn, you can't come out like that. And we learnt our lesson. And I know it will never happen again.

Q. Then can you describe the mood in the locker room

at halftime?

SOPHIE BURROWS: Wasn't necessarily happy. We just had a lot of reflection to do. Coach Jack came in and told us how it was, and we needed that. We needed to come back into the second half and play our basketball. We were letting them dictate literally every single thing we did on the court, so we needed to come in and kind of just play our basketball.

And Coach Jack told us how it is, and I think that kind of shocked us back into it. And we came out in the second half, and as they said, we tied the second half. So we really just needed to clean up that first half.

Q. Sophie, you guys talked about at the beginning of this season your expectations, and not a lot of people believed in you guys for getting to this point, and now that you're back here two years later, kind of just describe the overall growth of this program that you've been here in these last three years.

SOPHIE BURROWS: Last year was a very tough year for all of us involved, and I think this year, like the culture change that we saw was just like insane. Like, I mean, Laila and a few other transfers and the freshmen and everyone coming in, like they really changed that culture, and for me that was just like the biggest thing.

Yeah, I'm just really proud of the way we kind of turned that corner and believed in ourselves from the start.

I think we were picked like 13th in the ACC. No one believed in us. But we believed in ourselves, and that was all that mattered. It was that belief in the locker room that we had and that sisterhood that we created. And yeah, I'm just really proud of every single one of them in the locker room.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions for the student-athletes? Okay. Thank you for your time.

All right. We will now start with questions for Coach. Questions for Coach?

Q. Coach, I know you've seen a lot of great players. You've had a lot of great players. Just describe, I mean, what it was like to see Azzi Fudd's first half performance specifically.

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: I saw Sophie all season, and I think that she's a special player. I think that she had a tough year at the beginning and how she grew and became a better player and a leader and a captain for us.

I think that what people don't know is that those are the people I know more about is the people in my locker room. To see Dominique Darius lead us the way she did, sat out for four years and got an opportunity to get a chance, and she came out there and did such an extreme job of growing our program, and not have her play at this level is almost -- sometimes you just want to ask God why, right, because she got us here, and then all of a sudden she can't be on the same court. And that was hard to deal with.

And you hear Laila Phelia's situation where she had just lost all hope about playing basketball, and here she is now, not only playing again, she's actually doing a situation where I think that somebody in the W is going to say I want to call her name, because she's a special player. Her best is yet to come.

So those are things I want to communicate about is my players.

I think Geno is going to speak about his players, who they're sensational; they're great, and they're amazing and shooting and making all those threes, but the locker room I'm in, the kids that I watch, from June to where we are right now, those are the answers I have for you. I don't have answers for anything outside of that.

Q. Coach, from your perspective, what can you say about that first half? What did you see from the sidelines from your point of view, talking about like your players and how they matched up defensively?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Look, we came here a year ago, two years ago, and we knew how special they were. But we matched that intensity, because Georgia Woolley and Dyaisha Fair and Kyra Wood, and they flew around the floor, and they went around the matchup zone for three years. So it was easy to offset their prowess. And, again, they still won by, I think, eight or nine points.

But I couldn't simulate what we were going to face, and I recognized that in shoot-around. I saw the distraction. I saw the looks in seeing all those Final Four championships. And I saw the weight go on the back of those young ladies' heels, and to the point where they couldn't make free throws. And so I knew that we were in trouble at around 2:30 this afternoon.

It is what it is, and I just tried to shock it out of them or tried to laugh it off, put my Motown music on the bus or any kind of way to get them to realize that they mattered, that they were enough.

And that first half was what they felt is what became, right? And then at halftime we let it loose a little bit on them and

got after them hard, and the fear of anything after halftime was of me.

And so that's kind of what we do at practice all the time anyway. So once they got to being afraid just of me and not of UConn, then their natural ability came out.

And the third quarter I think UConn had their formidable players in, and we still found a way to tie, and I think that he showed us a little grace in the last seven minutes and 30 seconds and started putting the subs in, and we were able to sustain and maintain with our subs as well.

It's a special team that I hope everyone knows how great they are. But we're coming, and we're going to get better.

Q. Coach, Sophie mentioned that you said at halftime that you told them how it is. What did you say to them?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: I just told them that they were enough and that they mattered, and what got them here is what can sustain them. But if they're going to beat us, let them see us, let them see us. Let us fly around the floor. Let's box out. Let them come up our backs if they have to. And they still may get the rebound. But let's do what we do. Let's sink into our discipline.

And I thought they did a better job. Our point guard situation was a little bit shaky, and I put Sophie at the point, took her away from scoring. Obviously it was hard for her to score bringing the ball up, too, but I just wanted to put five people out there that understood the assignment, and I thought we did a pretty good job with that.

And we probably should have adjusted a little bit earlier. I thought we threw numbers out there. But we just had to get to the locker room.

Q. Coach, you mentioned about last season, hitting the transfer portal hard, working really hard in the offseason to get good people into this locker room. How would you evaluate the moves you made from this season and then the pitch to get even more better players here for the next coming years?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: We were broken last year, and I wasn't a great coach. They weren't great players, and we didn't work hard like we needed to. And we couldn't figure out how to get out of that cycle of the rat in the little thing and it kept going in a circle and circle, and no matter what, they started coming to practice early and leave later and the same mentality was still there.

This year it was a total 360 degrees, you know, with

Dominique and Laila and Sophie as our leaders. And got new coaching staff. Everybody had 10 toes down, and I'm just so humbled and grateful that he saw to it that we deserved a little bit more, and Syracuse deserves a better showing than we did today.

I hope that they saw the second half and know that we tried and we just -- we didn't do the best job in the first half, and we'll continue to get more players and continue to take an upward swing in representing us a lot better.

Q. I noticed in the first quarter that you put three players in who didn't play against Iowa State. Why did you decide to put them in?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Because it's my prerogative. I'm one of those people that believes that you give somebody a scholarship, you gotta give them a chance, right? And the reason why they didn't play at Iowa State is because we had a rotation, and it was working and it was smooth and it was great.

It was not working, as you guys, when you got eight points to their 33, you gotta keep trying and figure out if somebody else might be ready. And I just kept saying, if you gonna tell the kids that you believe in them, you gotta put them out there and give them a chance. And we needed to see if there was anybody on that bench that could have made a difference. And in that first half it just didn't show itself.

But against Iowa State we had a rotation, and we went early to Keira Scott, and we didn't go back to her because we needed to get taller, we needed to get stronger. And that's why we went to Aurora, and we went to Big O.

This is kind of thing called basketball I'm pretty good at. It's been something I've been doing for about 40 years, and one thing that's consistent with me, if I get you a scholarship, I'm going to give you a chance.

Q. Coach, can you just describe Uche Izoje's season as a whole?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Yeah. She's special, you know. People want to question all these weird things about her. She's just a gifted young lady, who came here for an opportunity to have a chance in America.

And that's what we do. We find kids that's under the rock. And every coach that I've coached against, where did you find her? I just looked, you know.

Everyone -- I can't recruit against Geno or Dawn. Hell, I want to play for both of them, you know. They're that good.

So I have to find a different way.

And we found this young lady that was on the internet saying, hey, I want to come to America. And we followed a lead. And I just saw her grow to just a special not just a basketball player, but a human being, a great student, a caring sister.

It's got to the point where she's getting in arguments with her teammates and from being afraid to even say hello to anybody to in the middle of an argument about silly things. I'm like, wow, this is what we do. We build young people to become young women, to become phenomenal women, and maybe one day they'll reach back and grab somebody else.

That's how I got all my Australians are. Even though gave this young lady named Stephanie Reid an opportunity, and every time she played against a great player in Australia, she said, anywhere in the world that she is, you gotta go find Coach Jack, because she's going to change you for the rest of your life.

So compliments like that, yeah, you want to win a game, but man, oh, man, when you hear that, that makes you want to try a little harder to reach another soul.

Q. Coach, you mentioned the winning culture and the culture just around your team this year compared to last year. What's it going to take to continue breeding that culture and building it for the future?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: We have a new everything at Syracuse. We got a new chancellor. We got a new AD, and from what I'm hearing, we might have a new men's basketball coach. So that alone is going to change a lot of the culture, I think. And I'm going to give those people an opportunity to present how we're going to grow women's basketball.

And I certainly know that, you know, I've gotten an opportunity from the previous administration to get it to this point. In order for it to go higher, those people are going to have to help me take it higher, and I trust that it's going to happen.

And I'm all orange. I love this school. I love the snow. I love it -- I love everything about it, born and raised, my city, our city. It's going to obviously take finances, for sure. Everyone has talked about that.

But the thing about me, if I got people believing in what we're trying to do, that's half the battle, because if you believe in me, I'm going to give you 100 percent more. And so that's where it's at.

Just before I go, I just want to say thank you, UConn, for growing women's basketball to newfound heights every year. You just make it great. And our hope is that we can grow our program so that we can be competitive enough so when they bring us back here next year, we'll be more prepared. Thank you. God bless.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time, Coach.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

