

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Richmond vs Duke

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Value City Arena

Duke Blue Devils

Coach Kara Lawson

Kennedy Brown

Reigan Richardson

Media Conference

Q. Talk about the season you guys have had to this point and the opportunity now that you have in front of you in the NCAA Tournament.

REIGAN RICHARDSON: Throughout the whole season I feel like we've grown together as a team. I feel like we've gotten closer, like chemistry wise. Going into the tournament I feel like it'll be a first for a lot of us and it'll be our last for a lot of us, so I feel like we're just really hungry and excited to compete with each other.

KENNEDY BROWN: Yeah, I feel like growth is the word for this season for us. Started out with a very young team, very new team, but have seen tremendous growth in every single person and as a collective. I think that's what I'm most excited for is just to see how we put it all together and compete at the end of the season.

Q. You've put together a lot of new pieces in the off-season. What has the journey been like and what's it like to hit this stride towards the end of the year and get prepared for the tournament?

KENNEDY BROWN: Yeah, I mean, I'd say it was difficult for me at the beginning of the season just kind of taking on a new role with this team, being one of the only -- us being one of the only vets left. It was challenging. With any new team there's ups and downs, I think, but I think we've definitely seen, like you said, we've kind of hit our stride and we're playing our best basketball now, which is what you want ultimately. I think just coming out and competing every night is our goal.

REIGAN RICHARDSON: Yeah, to jump off that, I feel like



we have grown a lot since the beginning of the season. It was tough at first just because, like Kennedy said, I am having to step into a new role being one of the veterans on the team, and that comes with a lot of responsibility, which I feel like I've stepped into pretty well coming now since the beginning of the season.

I don't know, I guess we're just really excited to compete.

Q. You guys had a little over a week off after the season ended. What did you do during that time to help prep for the NCAA Tournament?

KENNEDY BROWN: Yeah, I think it was nice just to kind of have that time to focus on ourselves and what individually we each needed to work on and then collectively as a whole some things we needed to clean up, whether that was execution on the offensive end or just staying connected on the defensive end, cleaning up some of that, some scheme stuff, different looks we might try and implement during the tournament, and then also just kind of working on situational stuff that -- anything can happen in March.

REIGAN RICHARDSON: Kennedy Brown said it all. I have no comment.

Q. We played Richmond earlier in the season, in the season opener. We're a completely different team now, they're a completely different team. What do you anticipate will be different about this matchup and what kind of -- what are you looking forward to for this matchup at this time?

REIGAN RICHARDSON: Like you said, they are a completely different team now, we are a completely different team now. I feel like Richmond is a great team, and I feel like we've just got to go in there, be able to compete with each other and not settle going into the game.

KENNEDY BROWN: I think it was kind of funny to watch film from that game because we were like, wow, who are these people. Yeah, just a lot of growth I think has taken place on both ends for both teams. I think it'll be a



competitive game for sure and a fun environment.

Q. You're both veterans on the team. What do you learn from last year versus Colorado that helps you for this year's run?

REIGAN RICHARDSON: I feel like for this year you've really got to give it all you've got. With an NCAA Tournament, it's survive and advance. You win or go home. We're not trying to go home.

KENNEDY BROWN: Yeah, I think last year that was my first NCAA Tournament actually getting to play, and so just kind of getting used to that sort of environment and the mindset you have to come into each game. Like Reigan said, it's win or go home. Knowing that now and just kind of the way you have to start every game, you can't wait until the last five minutes to really push the pace or play with that kind of urgent mindset.

Q. You guys play in one of the best conferences in the country. Night in and night out you're playing great teams. How do you think the ACC has prepared you for the NCAA Tournament?

KENNEDY BROWN: I mean, like you said, it's one of the most competitive conferences in the country, and I think there's a lot of great teams. We get to see a lot of different types of talented players. I think there's a lot of versatility in our conference, and so we're kind of ready for anything, anything that anybody can throw at us. We've kind of done everything, scheme-wise, personnel-wise. I think it's really prepared us well.

KARA LAWSON: We're excited to be here. Looking forward to what I think will be a great matchup with Richmond. We know them a little from having played them our first game of the year. Obviously both teams are a lot different, or I should say improved, a lot improved. Maybe not a lot different from the first game.

But they've had a tremendous year. 29 wins is I am PRIS he have. We've played A-10 teams a lot over the last couple years, and their quality and their competitiveness is at a high level. So it'll be a challenge for us to try and contain them, their balance, their shooting certainly. Their efficiency is at a really high level.

Q. You played Richmond the first game of the season. Obviously both teams are very different. How unique is that, and does that at all affect the way you prepare for this game?

KARA LAWSON: I think it helps it. We have some tape on them in terms of their coverages and what they did the last

time. I also think coming off the ACC Tournament where we were playing teams a second and third time, that helps, as well, because your players are used to seeing an opponent for the second time.

That probably gives a little bit of familiarity from the scouting standpoint.

The thing that's important for us is not to concern ourselves with the fact that we won the first game and think that that's a given, that we'll do it again. That's not how basketball works. You start over at the next game, and you have to be ready to play.

We've talked a lot about coming into this with as fresh an approach as we can so that we are locked in on the things we need to do to give ourselves a chance to win this game.

Q. Coach, you guys have had a little over a week off between the end of the ACC Tournament and between the start of NCAA Tournament play. What did you have a chance to work on during that week?

KARA LAWSON: The first thing we did was just take a few days off. When you get to the end of a long season, they need a little bit of a break. So that's what we did. We gave them a little bit of a break.

We were fortunate to be on spring break, so they didn't have to go to class, which was nice for them, and then we just tried to continue to layer what we do offensively and defensively and clean up some of the things that we felt like we needed to improve on so that we could be ready for the tournament.

It was a good stretch of practice, but they're ready to play. It's a long time to have a couple weeks off. I definitely think they're ready to play. Hopefully we're not too rusty out there.

Q. One of the things your players talked about was playing in the ACC, you see a lot of different styles, you see a lot of different kinds of players. If you could just talk a little bit about how that potentially helps you prepare for an NCAA Tournament situation and then also maybe preparing on a short turnaround between round 1 and round 2, as well.

KARA LAWSON: Well, we certainly hope that we'll have the chance to play on a short turnaround. That means we played well and we won the game.

I think this team this year, there was a lot of newness for them, so we lost seven of our top nine from a year ago, eight of our 11 are freshmen and sophomores, so we're



one of the youngest teams in the ACC and in the country. I think we played freshmen the most minutes in ACC play of any other school.

That's being really young in an old sport. We're an old sport right now with the COVID years. There's a lot of fifth years playing and fourth years playing.

Things came at us really fast in the beginning. It was a lot for our players, young players specifically, and then our older players were thrust into new roles. That was a challenge for them.

I just think over time we gained experience and we gained some maturity, and that has led us here.

I'm thrilled with the season that we've had. Certainly you would like to win more games. You can always look back at games and say I wish we'd have won that game or I wish we'd have won that game. But considering what we returned and what we had to build from the start, to be sitting here right now in the tournament when a lot of teams are at home and to have a chance to keep playing is something I'm proud of our group, and that makes me excited for the future and beyond, as well, with a group that gained a lot of experience this year.

Q. Coach, all but three players, this will be their first NCAA Tournament experience, so obviously there's a lot of excitement. What have you been telling them so that they remain on task and stay focused on the task at hand and Richmond on Friday?

KARA LAWSON: Well, I try not to tell anyone to curb their excitement because I think you should let people be excited. I don't want to be the coach that robs them of joy and excitement of an experience. This is an experience they'll never forget, to play in the NCAA Tournament. I think you just embrace all of those feelings and just remind them that they have a job to do. They have a role on our team, and they're going to have a role in our game plan, and it's really important that they know it and that they go out there to the best of their ability and try to execute it.

We just try to stay really focused on what their role is, what job they have, what they need to do to be able to do well and help us win the game, and that's what we've just reiterated with them.

To be honest, it's not much different than the regular season, and I think that helps, too, when you can control -- when you can control some of the things. We can't control everything in the NCAA Tournament, but the structure of our practices, how we present our scouts, like all of that is formulaic and is similar to what they've had in the regular

season and hopefully that gives them that comfort to have some of those same things.

Q. You had a lot of experience on your roster last year. You changed many pieces this season. What do you learn about yourself as a coach as you go through the growing pains of a new team, and what do you learn about some of the younger players who have come along and helped you get here, as well?

KARA LAWSON: I think as a coach to be successful in this environment, you have to be malleable. I think that's an essential quality. You can't stick to one thing, one way all the time. Each player and each team demands different things of you. You think of different people that you work with, or if you have kids, different kids they demand different things of you. There's certain things you need to give them. You need to love them, you need to challenge them, you need to do all that, but they're going to demand different things of you. Certain ones might drive you crazier a little more than others. Certain ones you might need to be much more direct to. Certain ones will take a directive and be able to execute it on their own without much help. Some need a little more oversight.

Really it's just about managing people and teaching, also. Not just managing, teaching. When you have a young team, you do more teaching.

Probably the biggest difference from last year where we had a lot of seniors to this year is in the beginning of the year especially, we taught more. That took up more time in practice than the other drills, and we had to stop and teach.

I wasn't annoyed by that. It was fun, actually. There's a joy that comes in being able to teach freshmen how to do things.

What I've learned is they can handle it. Like just because they're young, don't discount youth because they haven't been there before. If it's hungry and it's competitive, challenge it, and it will respond.

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