

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Fairfield vs Indiana

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Bloomington, Indiana, USA

Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall

Fairfield Stags

Coach Carly

Thibault-DuDonis

Janelle Brown

Emina Selimovic

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Joining us from Fairfield on the dais is Head Coach, Carly Thibault-DuDonis, senior Janelle Brown and junior Emina Selimovic.

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: I just want to start by saying how proud I am of what this team has accomplished. I don't think the final score is indicative of what this game was and what this season meant not only to the women in the locker room, but to our university, to this conference.

They have represented themselves unbelievably well. So thankful to our senior class who have given everything to this program over their time at Fairfield. The two next to me, I'm excited that I will get to continue to coach them, but we have a group that is hungry and wants to be in these moments and know that this is only the beginning of what it means for Fairfield women's basketball.

We are just scratching the surface and we want to continue to be in the conversation, in the national conversation in women's basketball, and I know that we can do that with these two and a bunch of the women in the locker room. I know that's just the beginning.

I'm proud of how they represented themselves all season long, and in addition to tonight. I think this is just the beginning for the Stags.

Q. I was going to ask, across the team the ball movement in the first half that extra pass, making a good shot, great shot. Did you feel maybe there was



less of that in the second half, something they did defensively, how would you rate what you were seeing in the first half versus that second half.

JANELLE BROWN: Yeah, I think the ball was sticking in the second half a little too much. Coach emphasized that in the huddle, hey, we gotta keep moving and when we pick up the ball we gotta have cutters. There was a lot of standing and very complacent, as you said, the ball did stick. But I think if we kept doing what we were doing, cut without the ball and keep the ball moving, it would have been better for us.

EMINA SELIMOVIC: She said it all.

Q. Emina, obviously you are a transfer, so playing in the MAC, what is it like to play under Coach Carly Thibault-DuDonis, who is in her second year at Fairfield?

EMINA SELIMOVIC: It's honestly amazing. I've never had more fun playing basketball. Every day coming to practice and wanting to be there. Practice goes by fast when you're having fun, and that's how I felt being coached by Coach Carly. She makes it fun. The team, we're so connected and we like being around each other, and that's a huge part of it. So I loved it. This year was, you know -- it's a long season but it didn't feel long.

It went by in the blink of an eye, and we're ready to focus on next year and what we can do next year.

Q. This would be a challenge today no matter where you played. Talk about how tough it is to come in here and play and what it's like to be out there in front of that crowd because you guys aren't accustomed to crowds that large.

JANELLE BROWN: I was going to say the atmosphere was something that was hard to compete against. Couldn't really hear plays, couldn't hear what Coach was saying on the sideline. But I think that the more that we just keep trying to practice the repetition of communicating on the court, having each other's back on the defensive side, on the offensive side, I think that we can grow as a group. I



feel like this crowd is just the beginning for us.

I know back at home for next year, it going to be bumpin', and I think that we're going to have the same crowd that Indiana had this year, too, so just looking forward to it.

EMINA SELIMOVIC: The crowd was definitely more than we are used to, but I think it makes basketball a little bit more fun. That just means we had to be more connected on the court and communicating better with one another. So it definitely gave us a different experience and made us better as a team and more connected as a team.

Q. Emina, that third quarter it was becoming a three-point shoot-out between both teams. You hit back-to-back threes. How confident were you feeling after you knocked down the second one?

EMINA SELIMOVIC: I felt pretty confident. I knew that I prepared for this game to stretch the floor out and be ready to shoot, always, and my teammates were a huge part of that, because they were able to find me and they knew that I was hot so it made a big impact that my teammates had that trust in me and confidence in me to knock that down.

Q. Janelle in that second half you went 2 for 8 after a strong first half. Did you see anything different about IU's defensive coverage of you in that second half?

JANELLE BROWN: Yeah, I saw that they definitely tried to lock down my right hand and just be more poised on offense. They definitely tried to take that right hand away, but I think that us just flowing and us continuing to move, I definitely have to be more jump stops, I know that for sure, but I think that the Indiana defense did a good job on trying to shut us down.

Q. Ladies just in the last two days we know that this group does not lack confidence and it's awesome to see. With that confidence moving into the off-season with the season that you just had what does it set up for next year for this program?

JANELLE BROWN: I think it sets up a different opportunity for us. This is just the beginning for us. I understand that we came in, we had them sweating in the first half but in the second half they caught up and they gave it their all. I'm not surprised at how we came together this year. I'm not surprised how we played this year, because like Emina said we were just having fun.

This group loves each other, day in, day out. I wouldn't want to play with anybody else and I wouldn't want to play for anybody else other than Coach Carly, and we play with our hearts. We played with a lot of heart today. I'm not

ashamed, I'm not sad about it, I'm actually grateful to be here and I think that my teammates would say the same. We have to stay up and we're prepared to be here next year.

EMINA SELIMOVIC: The beauty of this team is we're coming back next year with basically the whole roster, and that's big because we just had a year of experience and had such a successful season that we did have this season and now we can grow. It's only up from here.

We learned from this game, and the season that we did have, and, yeah, like I said, it's up from here. We learn from each other, we grow and we just continue making those connections and building on the connections that we have.

Q. For both players, obviously a historical year, what has this team meant to you and how excited are you to come back and build on it next year?

EMINA SELIMOVIC: This team is literally my whole life. Besides school I love this team so much. I think about this team day in and day out. I get so excited after class to be like, yes, I'm ready to go to practice, I'm ready to spend time with the teammates that I love. And one of our seniors, Mac, she said, you guys are my sisters. It's amazing to have these sisters by your side to help you go through anything.

You go to the gym and you're not feeling like it, you have your sisters to pick you back up and have you focus on something else. This team is a team full of sisters that I have full confidence and trust in and love so much. I'm just ready to get back to work and prepare for next season.

JANELLE BROWN: What was the question again?

Q. What has the team meant to you and how excited are you to come back next year?

JANELLE BROWN: This team has meant everything. We work for each other, we work with each other but we really work for each other. Nicki G., our senior, came in every day ready to work but ready to make the next person better. I think that that's the identity of this team that we come in ready to go but ready to make each other better and that's why we had this amazing historical season.

Just like Emina said, I'm ready to get back to it. This loss was a lesson, but you have to learn from it. This team is amazing, and I wouldn't want to do it with anybody else. This is just the beginning for us.

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: Get 'em back in the lab.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies. Questions for Coach.

Q. Coach, yesterday I asked Sara about facing you again since you all -- you coached her at Minnesota, and I asked her if she was going to do anything different that you hadn't seen since you had the scouting report on her. Talk about your relationship and did you see anything she did today that you didn't see when you coached her?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: Sara is an incredible player and even from the time I coached her, I think we're talking about five years ago, I coached her the first three years in college, she was always in the gym continuing to get better. So she added to her game when I coached her, after I coached her. And as much as you can have a game plan to stop her, she's that good.

She was able to get to her spots on the floor off of some of the floppies and pin-downs that they run, and as much as we knew it was coming, she is as good of a player as she is for a reason because she was able to separate and get some separation off those screens.

She is savvy, she has always been creative, and I'm proud of her for continuing to add to her game. And as much as I would have love to stop her, she did a great job in helping to carry her team to this win.

Q. Coach, could you tell us a little bit about just throughout the year but also this game with Kaety and Meghan specifically, as good of freshmen seasons as you can have and obviously experience means a lot here. They will definitely take lessons from here, but going forward what have they meant to the team and how have you seen them grow?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: They're pretty good freshmen, huh? Those two have not acted like freshmen since they walked through the door. They have a lot of confidence, in different ways, Meghan is a little bit quieter, and Lammy is more in your face. But they have carried themselves in a way that you feel their presence every day, not only in how they work before and after practice but how they carry themselves as teammates on and off the court.

They have given this team so much both offensively and defensively, and how exciting is that, that this is only year one? I think the sky is the limit not only for this team but for them, and we're going to continue to lean on them but -- and they would be the first to tell you they have areas to grow in. And that's what is so exciting about this team, is you heard Emina and Nelle talk about exciting to get back

to work with this team. This team loves being in the gym, much like we mentioned Sara Scalia has throughout the course of her career, so the future is really bright for those two.

Q. This is probably the biggest challenge you've had this season given who you have played. How much bigger of a challenge was this game in terms of who you have faced this season, and what can you do to move up to the 11 or 12 line in the future, scheduling or something else, just seeing the difference in the game, that you are on a neutral site and not playing the host? What can you do to get a line or two higher?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: Hats off to Indiana. They're an incredible team and now that we're past this game, I hope they take it and go win the whole thing. But they are not only an incredible team in how they play offensively, they're a great defensive team and always have been but they have their sixth man in the crowd and this was a tough environment to play in and all credit to that environment.

I think that for us, we know in scheduling, in strength of schedule it gets harder and harder as the transfer portal is what it is and you don't exactly know what the teams you schedule with will be a year later but we know our nonconference has to continue to get harder to get us in the 11 and 12 seeds.

To be honest, I thought we had done a lot to maybe earn that 12 seed. We took care of business about as well as we could have, with 29 straight wins and almost a win at Vanderbilt. But we know the nonconference we have to keep building up, and we now know the team we have in the locker room -- a year ago we didn't know how quickly this team was going to gel. So now that we have a pretty good idea of what we will have, our nonconference will certainly be a little bit harder.

Q. Coach, what has this group meant to you especially after this historic year?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: I don't know that there are enough words for that. I've said it probably in almost every interview that I do, that I don't think I've ever played or coached with a team that cares about each other and cares about showing up for one another and cares about getting better and loves the game -- the list could go on and on of things that they continue to amaze me on.

One thing that this team, that our athletic department, that our university stresses is just showing up and serving the person to your right and to your left. They do that in ways that I've never seen before in how they take care of one

another. I've become a better coach because of them. They've become better people.

They would be the first to tell you that. When we left the locker room before coming here, we talked about we're going to remember this team for forever not because we were 31-2 but because how they pushed one another, challenged one another, how they grew and brought joy to each other's lives and they have not only done that within our locker room but within our community and the campus and the little boys and girls that come to games. They bring joy and light to what they do.

I couldn't be prouder of them. As I told our team, we want to continue to fight for that and do that moving forward.

Q. This team was kind of a lot different compared to last year's teams with four freshman. You saw the chemistry was undeniable. Where does Fairfield -- you had that three-year contract extension. Where do you see this team going from here? Do you place an emphasis on the transfer portal? You have three seniors leaving. Is it like a next man up mentality looking for freshmen to step up in a bigger way?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: Absolutely. We have a couple of freshmen in Carly and Casey that the sky is the limit for them and everybody -- it translates at different times as you go from high school to college, but those two have a ton of growth and a great off-season ahead of them.

I think for us, we have gone not so much based on numbers and transfers versus freshmen, but fit and what we need and what fills that void the most. I have loved having graduate transfers like Nicole Gallagher and Izabela Nicoletti Leite. Those two have given us experience and maturity to our team, so you always keep that option open to continue to add.

I think Fairfield is a great place that we have the versatility and we are desirable that we can attract great freshmen as well as four-year players as well as transfers, because we have a great graduate program across the board in a lot of different areas. We can attract graduates, and we can attract sophomore and junior transfers, and I think we more put an emphasis on what's great fit and what do we need.

We have a couple freshmen coming in next year that we think will be a great add and as anybody would you will continue to look and see what's the best fit for our culture and our personnel.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.