

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Oklahoma vs Indiana

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Bloomington, Indiana, USA

Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall

Oklahoma Sooners

Coach Jennie Baranczyk

Lexy Keys

Skylar Vann

Media Conference

Q. Just what do you feel like last night's game says about your perseverance and steadiness as a group?

LEXY KEYS: I think it shows that we're really connected. I think we have done a really good job of learning to cover for each other.

I think that's something that, just keeps continuing to play. I think we kind of made that a precedent in our program and learned had throughout the season especially.

SKYLAR VANN: I think, yeah, the continuous fight, and I feel like that's a special thing about March, is the game is never over until the buzzer sounds. So I think we did a really good job just like playing together like Lexy said, and staying connected.

Q. What is your mindset going in playing against Indiana tomorrow night, especially here in Assembly Hall knowing what the environment will be like?

SKYLAR VANN: It's exciting. I think playing in front of that kind of crowd is going to be fun, and special, and I think we're really going to have to just focus on our bubble and what we got going on in the locker room and on the court be really connected. It's going to be loud and a lot of distractions.

Our biggest thing is really being all together and stay in our bubble.

LEXY KEYS: I think this is what you play all year for. I think just going into it, embracing and it and really enjoying the moment. I think that's going to be important for us. It's



going to be a really fun atmosphere.

Q. Short turnarounds are the whole post season. It is something everybody is used to, especially with the way the season lays out now. What have you learned about Indiana over the last 24 hours and what are you looking to do in practice today to get ready for them?

LEXY KEYS: They're a really good team first off. Really good program. We kind of just went over them a little bit before, but I think they space the floor out really well. Have a lot of really good shooters and post presence.

But I think we are going to compete and be physical I think we're going to be prepared.

SKYLAR VANN: I mean, yeah, Lexy pretty much said it all. Great shooters and post presence. Really just playing connected, being in our gaps, and knowing where the shooters are, and also being really aggressive.

Q. What would you guys say is kind of your team's calling card this season I guess?

SKYLAR VANN: Calling card, I don't know. Do you have any?

LEXY KEYS: I think we're really gritty and I think we're blue collar. We do a lot of the little things and have taken pride in that.

We've kind of always said, get better every day, and growth is a mindset.

Q. Coach said last night that last night's game was the epitome of March, it was a March Madness game. How much do you feel like that's prepared you for what's to come?

SKYLAR VANN: It's prepared us big time. I feel like kind of playing that close and having to come back, I think that kind of put us in a good situation to where other games it's probably going to happen.

So I think really that set us up to not give up and keep



fighting and scratching and clawing to get to the top.

Q. How well would you say Big XII play prepared you for those moments at places like Texas and winning?

LEXY KEYS: I think we've been prepared tremendously. The Big XII is a really respectful league in itself. You had to go in every night being prepared and not take a night off.

I think that goes into March Madness. Everyone is good and everyone comes ready. Yeah, I think it's prepared us.

Q. Now that that first game is out of the way, how do you guys feel now? You wake up today, you're preparing for your second round game and now it's -- I'm sure you're all locked in for tomorrow night.

SKYLAR VANN: Oh, yeah, for sure. I mean, there is really no days off when it comes to March. Yeah, we won that one, great. It's like, okay, now we got another good team coming up.

So I mean, it feels good but you can't get too lax. Got to be ready for the next one.

Q. Just how would you describe your coach as a person and a coach? What's your favorite thing about playing for her?

LEXY KEYS: I think she coaches with a lot of passion. She is very passionate and it's really contagious.

For me, my faith is really important and she makes that a precedent. Like it's known. Knowing I'm playing under a coach that is really important and that's centered around her life, that's something that makes me play even harder and helps me use my platform.

I think it just shows with how much she loves us as people and as players.

SKYLAR VANN: Yeah, I think Jennie does a really good job saying basketball is more than just a game. It's our livelihood pretty much. I think Jennie has really just, I don't know, instilled a different type of -- she doesn't like when I say confidence, but she really has.

Everybody on our team can say that. Jennie, her confidence brushes onto us. Something also that is really cool is in practice she'll step in and she doesn't mind banging with us on the court. So when Lexy says she plays, she does play.

Usually not on camera. I think that's just something special about Jennie and really awesome playing for her.

Q. You guys have had a difficult schedule this year. From your perspective, what have been the toughest road environments you guys have had to play?

SKYLAR VANN: The toughest one would probably have to be Texas. Yeah, that was a tough, you know, to see the energy in the gym. It's loud. I think that game is really preparing us for the game coming up.

Because when you're playing great teams on their home floor you're down ten points already. That environment was a little crazy.

LEXY KEYS: I think we play in a lot of difficult environments. I think Texas especially just with the people that they bring in and their program. I also think Iowa State a really hard place to go and win games.

Both those games have really prepared us for this next game.

Q. For Skylar, your coach was saying yesterday she didn't want to admit you played your best yesterday. Do you feel those high expectations, because she says you have so much opponent, such a talented player? Do you feed off those expectations from her?

SKYLAR VANN: I mean, yes, but also I think a lot of my success comes from my team. I think if you watch any of my games my team has put me in great position to do what I'm comfortable with.

I think that's the awesome thing about this team, is we don't just have two, three people. We have eight people that can really step on the court and do awesome things.

So I think my teammates really put me in good positions to be in my strengths.

LEXY KEYS: I think Sky is the ultimate competitor first off. She comes in every day and is willing to work and that is what makes her really special.

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Yeah, just really excited to be here. Obviously last night could go a lot of different ways so we're just excited to be here today.

Q. I from what you've learn about Indiana so far in the last 15 hours, what stands out and what's the mindset heading into this game?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Well, obviously you guys have talked, one, about their home court. Obviously the crowd is amazing. Just the feel, the sound, everything. You

know, that can really elevate a team, too, especially a really talented team.

So I don't think they're an unknown team, right, so they've been on a national level for a long time. Very well-coached. Very disciplined. Very fundamental skilled.

It's going to be a huge test for us but one we have to give everything we have.

Q. Yesterday of course Florida Gulf Coast was hitting a bunch of threes. You're going to face another team that hits a bunch of threes. Indiana hit ten yesterday. What's the game plan for defending and stopping the three?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Well, I think there is going to be a variety of different plans that we're going to have to have. You can't just stick with one, especially when there is such a dominant inside presence as well.

So that kind of changes and shifts some things. Even yesterday everybody is shooting the three from outside so your game plan has to change. This is probably a more familiar game plan in terms of having a dominant inside presence and shooters.

One that we've done really well and one that we haven't. So this is going to be something that we'll have to change up a variety of different ways. We'll have to give different looks because there is not just one way. I don't think you can just defend them. You stick with one way they're going to figure it out too fast. You've got to be able to bring a few different things.

Q. Coach, what do you guys need do to just pull out a win essentially?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: So many things. We have to score, we have to shoot well. No, I mean, I think it's March. You have to handle all the extra. You have to handle the environment. You're playing on someone else's home floor in a big game, right where you're playing for a lot. You're playing against a really experienced team. You're not playing against a teaming that hasn't been there. You're playing a team that's really hungry.

You've got to not only match that but you've got to get every loose ball, every hustle play, play really free at the same time.

As the coach in me, the mom in me, the person that watches these women grow and trust me we have had such an incredible season of growth, I'm excited to be able to see us in that, and to see us play and play together.

Because there is so much about connection that you have to have to be able to come away in this kind of a game and in this kind of environment. If you're relying on play calls from the stands, or from the -- not from the stands; hopefully that's not what we're doing -- from the bench, you know, they have a leg up on you.

So you have to be really connected on the floor. It's going to be huge for our team. I'm really excited to see us respond in this kind of situation.

Q. Coach, FGCU had 15 offensive rebounds yesterday. How do you learn and respond to that going into Indiana tomorrow with their high inside the paint?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: You're exactly right, and that's exactly the key. Because everybody, you heard Sahara Williams say that last night, nobody wants to go home right now; everybody is going to play really hard.

You can't come into someone's home floor -- that was a neutral floor and that happened. So you have to be able to step on the floor and to be able to really get those hustle plays. Florida Gulf Coast did a great job doing that so that has to be a lesson learned for us.

We've had games where we've done that and games we haven't. It's going to be really fun for us to see tomorrow.

Q. Coach, Lexy and Skylar were talking about how gritty your team is, and you talked about the importance of going for the hustle plays and diving for the ball. How important is that mindset tomorrow?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I think it is for every team that's playing right now. You know, I mean, you watch, those are the emotional commercials, right? Those are the moments that fans love. You watch the men's tournament, the women's tournament, that's what you want to be able to see. Those are the moments you remember more than -- I mean, you know, you remember a big shot, but more than a basket made, more than a defensive assignment, it's those types of plays that really separate teams, especially this time of year.

And so everybody has to step out. Everybody's mindset has to be that way. You know, it's always game of runs and so you hope you end with the last one.

Q. Coach, how well does playing on the road in the Big XII prepare you for playing at Indiana, really rowdy crowd, maybe like Texas?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: You know, we've had a couple

different crowds, but it's been an interesting journey for us this year in the Big XII. I think obviously the Big XII is such -- I mean, we were 7-0 in the first round. It was really important for us to do. Now, we've also faced a little hostility going from the Big XII to the SEC, so we've had a lot of the student sections show up and a lot of people show up and like to cheer against us.

From that standpoint you're as prepared as you can be.

Again, there is more to it than the crowd. I know the crowd is huge and like we've said, we want to be able to play in front of crowds. Women's basketball, our sport deserves these types of crowds. That's why we went back to home courts. That's so incredibly important to have a whole body of work to be able to host in the NCAA tournament these types of crowds.

We understand that. We understand we're playing on someone else's home floor. It's about the hustle plays and the little things, how connected your group really is.

That's I think when you go through the entire season you're more than prepared I think, but you still got to show up and compete when the lights go on. It's still about what your team does.

Q. The Big XII tournament you guys lose by close to 20 to Iowa State. One of the top teams...

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Felt like more than that.

Q. You guys are one of the top teams in the Big XII and then you come in right after that and able to outlast Florida Gulf Coast. What do you think a 20-point loss at that stage in the season, what kind of lessons did that bring to your team?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I don't know if I can really answer that quite yet because you're still going and you go right into the next game. You're still into that.

I've had a lot of questions about that because it's kind of been our season. I mean, a few months ago we weren't in the NCAA tournament. Weren't even in talks about the NCAA tournament, to then being able to win the Big XII, which was pretty significant for our team to be able to do, especially with the non-conference we had.

We were tested. We fell down. We had to roll up our sleeves, we had to work, we had to go. So it's been really fun to watch this team grow.

So I'm hoping I can say, yeah, that was another really pivotal moment in our season. I don't really think we liked

the way we played. We practiced really well and had to get some rust off. Florida Gulf Coast is a really good team, too. Nobody wants to play them. As much as everybody says that nobody really does want to play them in the NCAA tournament because they provide so many challenges for you.

Do I feel like we played a perfect game? Not even close. Do I feel like they played a perfect game? Probably not even close.

Again, it's March and so you just survive. You got to get better. We know that we're going to have to bring it against Indiana. We're not acting like we're coming here and completely out, but we are also not acting like we are coming in and think we're just going to walk. You got to play. Got to give everything you have.

The second round game we struggled in the last couple years. I would be more probably curious to see how we do from that perspective more so than even just the Big XII tournament game.

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