

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Eastern Washington vs Oregon State

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Corvallis, Oregon, USA

Gill Coliseum

Oregon State Beavers

Talia von Oelhoffen

AJ Marotte

Media Conference



like playing in it this year. I think just for me individually and the tournament itself, it's just very different.

But obviously having that experience playing Florida State and then I think especially with South Carolina and our region having some conversations about them and what that was like, and we talk about you know, having that mindset of, you know, every team is South Carolina, in our heads, and we are playing South Carolina tomorrow at 5, especially rebounding and defensively and having that mindset going into it.

So for me having felt that against them my first year, yeah, I'd say they are kind of the standard for that defensive rebounding and just emphasizing that. It's going to be a challenge and yeah, I'm glad that I had that experience.

Q. Following up on that, that COVID bubble was certainly a different experience in terms of the NCAA Tournament. Just how much are you looking forward to playing a full-blown NCAA Tournament environment, especially here at home?

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: I'm so excited. I'm grateful for that experience that year but for me this is my first NCAA Tournament, this is what it feels like, just because of the circumstances of that first one. So I'm super excited. Obviously we are in Gill and a high seed and just so much excitement, and this team has had a blast all year, ^ so just looking forward to continuing that in such a great tournament.

Q. You've persevered through so much. You posted about it earlier this week. How significant is it to you to get to this point and get back to the NCAA Tournament?

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: Yeah, it's incredible. I think just thinking back to last year watching this tournament in a brace in my mom's bed at home, and you know, you work all year to get here, and now it's becoming a reality. It's just super exciting, and I'm so blessed to be in this position with the people that I'm with and yeah, it's been a long journey, so I'm just looking to continue it and just have fun in this tournament.

Q. When you came here to Oregon State after the 2021, 2022 season, you had come into a program that had a lot of success. Did you have to adapt as much or what were the adjustments for you the two years that it took to get the program back to where it was for you?

AJ MAROTTE: It's definitely a huge adjustment. Coming into any college program as a freshman is a new, scary thing but Scott definitely has huge standards for like the small little details.

So having to adjust to those little things about my game that I didn't necessarily think about too much in high school was a huge adjustment but I've definitely grown into a much better player.

Q. The last time Oregon State was obviously in the March Madness Tournament, you were a part of that team. What have you told some of your teammates this week leading up to this game maybe about some of the differences that you felt in your first time playing in the March Madness Tournament and how it's different from the regular season?

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: Yeah, I think that season was unique for a lot of reasons just because I came in halfway through and you know, you go through so much over the summer in the preseason building a team and gearing up for a season and I just kind of jumped in at the end of January and that was obviously the COVID year, so we were in San Antonio in the bubble.

I think while it was the NCAA Tournament still, it's nothing



Q. You guys have talked about the rarity of sticking together as a group, nobody left after last year despite the struggles of that team. Specifically, what were the things that gave you guys a belief that this team could be special? What did you guys see internally that maybe people on the outside didn't see or expect from you guys?

AJ MAROTTE: I think starting off this season going to Italy and having a foreign trip at the beginning was a huge thing for us. Scott recruits amazing people and we all get along super well, and I think people know that by now.

We are all best friends and we are inseparable everywhere and on the court that helps us a lot, knowing my teammates. Me and Talia have played for a while, so just having that connection, and I have that with all my teammates and it's super special.

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: I think us, too, and then the other five returners that came back after last year, they were all freshmen in that same class. They were so close in going through that tough freshman year and living in the dorms together, I think that how close those five were and then kind of AJ and I are close to them as well but I think that bond you build in the dorms is a little bit different.

So all of us just coming together and the way that -- I mean, I had surgery but the way that they all approached spring last year and just having such a positive outlook and so much hope for what this year could be, even given the way that last year went, it's just incredible, and yeah, I think it's just a testament to how much we care about each other and how close we are.

Q. Building off that question, a lot of people point to that stretch you had of six games where you beat five ranked opponents as kind of the turning point of your season. But where would you guys like look at the season and say, okay, this is when we realized that we can be really good?

AJ MAROTTE: I think we thought from the beginning, we had something special. You know, a lot of people were saying different things about us. We didn't think twice about it. We knew we had something, and you know, obviously we proved that along the way in many different games. But yeah, I think from the beginning, we all had, you know -- we had all seen signs that we were going to do something special this season.

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: Yeah, I agree with that for sure but I think there's a little bit of a level of having to prove it to yourself, and so I think the Mountain cane schools coming

into Gill, Colorado was No. 3 at the time, playing them on Friday, and on paper, that was a close game, but I think we dominated that game for at least 35 minutes.

Obviously there is a couple stretches that were tough. But you know, we dominated them that game, and just played super well and then that Sunday, I mean, I think Utah, that fourth quarter, kind of got a way front of us, but those first three quarters before the best basketball we played all year, and we watched that in film the other day, too, just how impactful we were, especially defensively and just the bounce and the energy that we played with. We talked about if we play like we did that game against Utah, we think we can compete with anyone and that's when we are at our best.

So I think coming off that weekend, looking around at each other, like yeah, we are like that when we want to be. That was a turning point. Obviously you have a belief and hope but that was really, really proven, the calibre of the team that we are.

Q. Talk a little bit about each other, AJ, what makes Talia a special part of the team, and Talia, about AJ

AJ MAROTTE: Talia just has a competitive fire and drive that I've never had in a teammate. You know, even when we are having hard days, hard practices, she's pushing us all, even when she's having a hard day, it's still that fight and fire is there and it's inspiring. It's infectious. She makes us all want to work hard and push ourselves to be the best that we can, and having a teammate like that is, you know, it's priceless.

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: I think AJ, she's just one of our more -- I think her and Donna are our most consistent players, and you know what you're going to get from them every day they step in the gym, and so having that come from one of the leaders on the team and even just in her game, she gets to her pull up, you know it's going in. Certain defensive situations, you know the plays she's going to make.

I think just to step away from basketball, just the person she is and the way that she can light up rooms, you know, make everyone smile, make everyone laugh, just be that positive, vibrant energy in the locker room, I think every great team needs that and every great team has that.

And so that's who AJ is for us and I think us two being leaders on the team, like she said, I'm really competitive and sometimes that's emotional and that turns into frustration, and you know that's something I work through every day.

But AJ is just consistent. She's steady and she always makes the plays that we need her to, and she's just the same every day and that's something that's just tough to do. So that's an incredible aspect of what she brings to the team.

Q. You mentioned the other day, how well you know some of the players on Eastern Washington. What's it like playing against someone that you know so well? And do you share a scouting report with your teammates since you know so much about her game?

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: Yeah, it's a super cool opportunity. We played them last year but to play them on a stage like this is so cool. We have a couple friends that might make the drive, friends that we share that we're both super close with. So just even for our families and friends to come watch us play against each other is super cool. The coaches take care of the scout but there's a couple things, she's one of the most gifted offensive rebounders I've ever played with, especially from the perimeter, the way she follows her shot and the knack she has for tracking the ball off the rim.

So obviously the coaches emphasize that but it's just like, no, we need to box this girl out. So little things like that. But I'm super excited to see her and step on the floor with her, and her journey has been incredible, as well. She's just a really great person and yeah, I'm excited to see her.

Q. What's been the conversations between the team and the energy going into tomorrow? This is a team that you've played before, you've beat them before, but obviously this weighs a little bit more.

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: I think that I kind of alluded to this before, just going into every game, this is a 1-seed. This is -- you know, obviously they are a good team, and you have to come into it with that humility and that respect for the team.

So our mantra has been just to take it one game at a time and we know what the game should look like, and we'll take care of business and play the way we know how to play. I think just approaching it with the same level of respect that we would approach any Pac-12 team, any Top-10 team, whatever it is, that's kind of the goal throughout this whole tournament is just, you know, following the scout, respecting them, emphasizing defense, rebounding. Just who we are as a team and our identity, just keeping that consistent.

And then I think just the excitement surrounding it. You grow up dreaming of playing in this tournament, and so this is dreams to reality, and I think we owe it to each other and

to the little versions of ourselves to show up and do what we know how to do.

Q. How much of an advantage is it to play at home with the fans?

AJ MAROTTE: It's a huge advantage. We are super excited. Playing at Gill is hard for any away team coming in here. This whole season, Beaver Nation has showed up for us and it's been really exciting to play in Gill. It's something I'll never forget in my team here. So it's definitely a huge, huge thing that we get to play here.

Q. Can you give me a quick 30-second scouting report on Eastern Washington now that you know them a little bit better?

AJ MAROTTE: Yeah, they have a really good point guard. We are just trying to slow them down. Play our game. Play fast. But they are hard rebounders, so going against them and boxing out, like Talia said, that's our main thing is thinking that every team is South Carolina and being able to box out these aggressive teams and going with an underdog mindset but still ready to dominate in every aspect.

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