

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

Friday, March 22, 2024

Corvallis, Oregon, USA

Gill Coliseum

Oregon State Beavers Coach Scott Rueck Dominika Paurová Raegan Beers

Media Conference

Oregon State University - 73, Eastern Washington
University - 51

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to a statement from Coach Rueck, following with questions for the student-athletes.

SCOTT RUECK: I would say happy birthday to Dom, first off. Just want to say that. Family showed up from the Czech today. So very special day for her, and what a way to celebrate for all of us.

Eastern is a really good team. I think the word I want to use, because of the circumstances, annoyingly good. We're supposed to win this game, of course, we're at home, we're a 3 seed, all that. And all week long I'm watching, and I'm like, man, this team causes trouble.

I love the way they play, I love the way they compete. I love how gritty and tough they are. They've got an elite point guard. It's a great decision-maker. They can change the way they play. They can go small and cause us trouble.

And so I knew this was going to be a really tough game. So hat's off to them for not only a great game but a great year. Obviously very well coached.

And so it was what I thought it was. It was -- they disrupted everything early, turned us over eight times in the first quarter.



It's been a couple weeks since we've played. It looked like it. And then we settled in. And I really liked the way we rebounded. I liked the way we got inside. That was obviously the plan.

And so that second quarter was special. Dom was a big part of that. Talia moved to the 1 for a stretch and showed her leadership. And it was a calming presence for us, and then we established ourself.

And so, you know, I thought today was just -- ultimately, it was what we needed to do. And it was a gritty, tough win, and really proud of the team.

And obviously it was fantastic to play in front of Beaver Nation. What a great crowd. So it was just a feel-good day for us, and one down.

Q. Dom, happy birthday. So supposedly that's not the only thing you're celebrating. You're turning 19.

DOMINIKA PAUROVÁ: Yes.

Q. But also your family is here for the first time. Can you tell us about that. Were you surprised, or did you know they were coming?

DOMINIKA PAUROVÁ: So thank you. I knew they were coming. They told me like five days ago. So I was so excited. They always supported me. So I was so happy they could come and watch me because they enjoy it a lot.

So I'm having great time. And I'm excited to play in front of them one more time before they leave.

Q. Dominika, when did you know you were going to have an incredible day today? How early in this game did you feel like you had the hot hand in this one?

DOMINIKA PAUROVÁ: I mean, I just came in, I did what I was supposed to do, mostly. And then the first chuck came in -- fall in, and my teammate just created wide-open shots for me. So I just shot them. That's it.

I feel like this was teamwork. So I'm proud of my



teammates and happy to play another game.

Q. Raegan, you put a fear into the entire Gill Coliseum when you went down. Talk about what happened, and how does the ankle feel?

RAEGAN BEERS: Ankle feels good. I just stepped wrong. It happens sometimes. Ankles are like that. I'm feeling better. Just going to ice it up and get ready for practice tomorrow.

Q. Dominika, you just had probably your best game so far in a Beavers uniform, on your birthday, with your family in the stands, in your first NCAA Tournament game. Where does this day just rank in terms of days that you've had in your life?

DOMINIKA PAUROVÁ: Well, this was amazing. The crowd here, never played in front of crowd big like this. So I was enjoying every moment of this game. And it was big game for sure.

Q. Raegan, you're just smiling ear to ear now. You always are, but especially right now listening to Dominika answer some of those questions. Seems like a hallmark of this team, you don't know who is going to step up any given night. What does Dominika mean to this team, and what did her performance mean tonight?

RAEGAN BEERS: Oh, my goodness. You all just witnessed it. I feel like Dom is the one that when we go into a drought of some sort offensively, defensively, she just shows up, and the next thing you know she's blowing by her person and taking it to the rim and giving us a layup when we need it.

We saw that especially when we played Cal earlier this year. She was a just a spark when we needed it.

That's how we describe her off the court too, is just this energetic spark that she brings to our team. Everybody saw that tonight, Dom coming off and causing all kinds of havoc offensively and defensively.

So we're lucky to have her here and have her on her birthday and get a W for her today.

Q. Before today, what was your best birthday ever? Can you tell us about it?

DOMINIKA PAUROVÁ: Well, that's a hard question. I don't know really. Last birthday -- I feel like this one actually, because last birthday I was in the States, but my family couldn't come. So now here, they are here, and I

can play basketball, they can be here, they can watch me. So I would say this is the best birthday I had so far.

Q. Raegan, it seemed obvious during the first half that the plan was to get the ball to you inside. Was there -- it seemed like you guys are so intent to give the ball, the windows were so small on those passes, were you surprised at all at some of passes that came into you, just given how closely guarded you were?

RAEGAN BEERS: The goal of the game was to get the ball to the X. We've been talking about that all week, get it to the X, get it to that spot on the court where we can just create layups for one another, whether that's someone driving and dumping it off to me or someone driving and no help is there and so they take it themselves.

Whatever that was, that was our goal this week. And so obviously you said it, that we started that way and just tried our best to pound it in there. Obviously keeping the ball high was super important because they are really scrappy guards that can just come in and take it from you whenever they want.

So that was super important, just catching high and finishing high throughout this game. I got blocked once, you saw one of those guards come in. It was just scrappy. It was a fight down there.

That was the goal, to get it there off the dribble, we saw Dom do obviously, and then my guard just gave me great passing up high and keeping it high.

Q. Raegan, Coach was saying the other day that this just feels normal for you guys, even though this was your first NCAA Tournament game for a lot of you. What about this felt just like a normal environment for you guys to be playing in and ready for this?

RAEGAN BEERS: Obviously playing in Gill helps. We're one of the lucky teams that worked hard all season and that we get this opportunity to play in front of our fan base here, which is absolutely incredible. You heard them tonight, they are so loud, and they aren't scared to share their opinions about a call.

It's so fun to be engaged with them throughout the game. That's one advantage that kind of makes it normal is that home game feeling.

And then obviously just playing together. I mean, we all saw everybody step up tonight, just about everybody scored. Obviously Dom having a great night, and then Timea, and then Kelsey coming in like she did in that fourth quarter and just killing it.

And so it just felt normal where everybody was contributing, and everybody was stepping up. Of course March Madness hits, and there's a dial that needs to be cranked because it is March and your season could end at any given night.

At the same time, you don't want to switch up anything with it if it's been working all year. And so just continuing to have everybody contribute offensively, defensively. Keeping the energy up is has been super important, and we're excited to do that on Sunday again.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, guys. You're good to head to the locker room.

All right. Now we can open up to questions for Coach Rueck.

Q. Coach, you talked about the slow start, turnovers early, then your team went on an 18-2 run. What do you think spurred that?

SCOTT RUECK: Just remembering what we were doing. I think Talia had a big role during that stretch. Dono picked up her second foul, and I just pushed T to the 1 during that stretch.

And I think just her -- she had a calm presence during that. And I think that's what we all needed at the time, was settle down, see the floor a little more clearly. We were forcing passes, as was mentioned earlier, inside, and then we just executed better.

Our defense, you know, picked up as well. I thought the combination of AJ and Dom was long, they were very accurate, Rae. We were controlling the boards, and then we established ourself inside. So I thought we executed better overall during that stretch.

Q. Curious, just your take on after not hosting for a couple years, being back here in Gill. Obviously you talked about it a little bit in the leading up, just being back, did it feel like déjà vu to a few years ago?

SCOTT RUECK: Little bit. The game was closer a few years ago. It felt good today. No, it's nice to have this back in Gill. And we were blessed to be able to do this for several years in a row. And it just felt like this is going to keep rolling, and then things happen.

And so to be back feels normal in a way. But I'm really excited for our fans that have stuck with us through a couple down years and, man, they came back en force this year. I think we set -- we're on pace to set an attendance

record this year.

And so for being down, there's something about this team that is so endearing that has just brought everybody out. And so looking forward to getting to do it one more time.

Q. You never really know who's going to step up and explode for a huge game. Tonight it was Dominika. What is it about this team that allows for that, that allows for it to be a different person each time that could step up for you?

SCOTT RUECK: Well, talent throughout the roster is number one. Everybody has a strength, and everybody has a gift. Then that allows us as coaches to kind of manipulate things towards what the defense is giving us or taking away.

And sometimes people are going, sometimes they're not, sometimes it's a certain type of game, sometimes it's a different type of game. We're so versatile in the way we can operate.

So this game, transition was a thing for us. We were looking to run a little bit. Inside out was a thing. They had to double. And so that created opportunities on the perimeter. And Dom's great in transition, and then she's great on inside-out kickout pass.

And so who knows who it will be the next night. But great teams I think have that, have the ability to hurt you in many different ways, and that's been a strength of our program and our team this year in particular.

Q. What's going through your mind as you watch Dominika have the game that she has? You know it's her birthday, her parents are watching her play basketball for the first time.

SCOTT RUECK: Dreamy scenario. It's these types of moments that we hope for for everyone. And so just to know that.

And I just got to see them before the game today and to get to welcome them. I just happened to see them in the tunnel. And I knew they were here, but I just happened to get to see them. And they were so excited to be here. And for Dom being away from home for most of the last three years, they're such a tight family, they stayed so close. They came and supported us in Italy in August. We got to see them and meet them over there, so it was like a reunion a little bit.

But you just hope that for someone that those moments won't be too big or they won't overthink it. Dom is just



aggressive. That's just her personality. That's what we needed today. We needed an aggressive mindset overall. And she gave us that.

So it was -- that's as good as it gets for. Best birthday ever. That's pretty special for somebody to be able to say that, and for all of us to share it with her.

Q. Unless I'm mistaken, you're unbeaten in first round NCAA tournament games, 8-0?

SCOTT RUECK: All right.

Q. What is the secret to not showing up on the upset list on the opening day of the tournament?

SCOTT RUECK: Yeah. Execution. You know, everybody's good this time of year. And I think those of you who were around the last time we hosted, it came down to we had to upset Boise State that night the way they played. It was a fantastic finish. I think we were down four or something with 15 seconds, something like that, and found a way that night.

I can't remember exactly because I haven't wanted to think about it anymore.

These games are the hardest for a coach. There's no question. This is more of a relief than joy for me. In the right mindset it's joy, but my actual emotion is we have to win this one. You can't lose tonight.

But you could. And so that's what makes it that. And so I think the team just coming out and executing. Having a week to prepare, I think helps as well. And being at home. I mean, all those things add up to, I guess, wins.

Q. Excuse me if you've already answered this, but you've been a coach who lays your hat on your teams being defensive stalwarts. Six steals, six blocks tonight. What did you make of their collective performance?

SCOTT RUECK: Of whose?

Q. Yours.

SCOTT RUECK: Ours. Okay. I loved it. I mean, the goal before I -- I don't know if it was the team's goal, but I threw it at them. I'm like let's do our best to hold them to their lowest point total. I think it was 52 going into today, and they got to 51 I think. Or 50. One of the two. Oh, they got to 53? Dang it. All right. So we were close. But I knew going into it --

Q. (Off microphone.)

SCOTT RUECK: Thank you, thank you. So anyway, that was -- I mean, we talked about how difficult that was going to be because of who they are and their ability to all play one-on-one and create their own shot.

That's what makes that team what they are. So it was going to take a gritty, tough effort, and you're going to have to win all those individual battles and do what we do, which is keep everybody in front of us, make them take a bad shot or a tough shot, anyway, and then rebound.

So I thought we would need to do that, but we would really need to be accurate. And the way they use ball screens and the way they can manipulate a defense, not easy.

So I really thought our defensive intensity and our effort overall was outstanding against a really difficult team to defend.

And so it's who we are, though, like you mentioned. It's been our identity all year, and it's the reason we are where we are. It's this team's commitment to that end of the floor. So it made me happy.

Q. The other thing that struck me up on the podium was the smile on Raegan's face when Dominika was talking. How does it strike you when you see that huge smile on Raegan's face?

SCOTT RUECK: You're focused on the cool stuff. This is why I do what I do. It's actually the core of what I do. It's what I've learned is the thing that matters most.

I'm certainly a teacher and all that, but creating an atmosphere where people can reach their potential is what I do. And it's what I work so hard at, and our staff does, and finding the right people to add to the roster that are going to complement each other so well.

What you see in Rae is an outward focus what she lives with. It's what makes her who she is. She is like that every day. She's happier for others than herself. She will deflect everything to her teammates. And that's not an act. That's who she is at her core.

That's also true of this team. That's who this team is at its core. They celebrate each other more than anything about themselves. And they're selfless.

And that right there is what's allowed me to be as confident as I am in this group, knowing that, and it's also allowed us to grow like we have.

This team doesn't look like a young team very often and doesn't look inexperienced. Yet, we are fairly young. And at this point, we are fairly inexperienced. But they overcome it because they're fighting so hard for each other, and they care so much.

So what you just witnessed in Rae is what it's all about to me. It's creating the best atmosphere for your teammate every day, and that leads to people and teams reaching their potential.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for being here, Coach.

SCOTT RUECK: Thank you.

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