

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Nebraska vs Oregon State

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Corvallis, Oregon, USA

Gill Coliseum

Nebraska Cornhuskers

Head Coach Amy Williams

Alexis Markowski

Jaz Shelley

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We will get started with questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Alexis, you're a hometown kid kind of living her dream. How does it feel to be here in this moment growing up in Lincoln and seeing the Huskers and all of that?

ALEXIS MARKOWSKI: It's super special. I remember watching the 2013 team go to I think the Sweet 16 and wanting to do that and wanting to be a part of this Husker program. Now that I'm doing it, it just doesn't feel real sometimes.

I just love playing for my home state and this program and Coach Williams and playing with just these amazing teammates that I have. It's a lot of fun.

Q. You're going to go up against another really good post player in Raegan Beers tomorrow probably. Kind of tell me about what you know about her game and how the two of your games kind of compare to each other?

ALEXIS MARKOWSKI: Yeah, I'm really excited. This is what it's about, playing the best players in the country, and I'm really excited to go up against Raegan. She's a really talented player, really physical. Finishes really well around the rim. Really good offensive rebounder. So I'm excited for that matchup.

Q. We knew it was a possibility you would see Oregon



State, but now that you are facing them, what do you remember about this building and what are you expecting?

JAZ SHELLEY: Oregon State are a really high IQ team, well-coached team. They have an insane big that Lex is about to go up against that we just looked at some film this morning. So they have a really good balance of players on and off the bench. We're excited for the matchup.

Q. Coach, this team obviously has a lot of role players that can go off on any given night. What does that do in terms of scouting, and what impresses you about this team?

AMY WILLIAMS: Yeah, I mean, what an outstanding and balanced attack. Oregon State has so many players that can really come in and contribute and really make a huge impact for their team. So I think we're fortunate that we played against some teams like that in our conference. So we know there's lots of weapons here, and it's going to take a full and complete team effort, really high IQ and disciplined defensive intensity for 40 minutes in order to give ourselves a chance.

I think we've been quite impressed the more we've been able to study and learn this team. They're a really good passing team. Because they have such great passers, I think that's why their post players are so dangerous and their shooters are so dangerous, and they can kill you in transition, and they can inside-outside you to death. They play of on ball screen action, and it doesn't matter how you defend their ball screens. They're going to find a way to attack that.

It's going to take a special defensive focus for our team.

Q. Jazz, you said Raegan Beers is insane. In what ways is she insane?

JAZ SHELLEY: I think her ability to be able to pass out of the post. She always makes really good reads. She is super efficient and uses her body really well and has really good timing. She also sets really good ball screens. We talked about if you set a good ball screen, normally most of



the time you get the shot off of it, so she's really good at that as well.

Q. Alexis, you had 11 players see the floor yesterday. Second game in three days tomorrow. How key was the depth in yesterday's win for tomorrow?

ALEXIS MARKOWSKI: I think it's been key to this season and to get us to this point. We've had people step up, different players step up at different opportunities, different moments. I think that's what helped us make a run in the Big Ten Tournament was just having that depth and playing everyone on our roster. I think it's going to be key for us again tomorrow, so...

Q. Jaz, you know when you get this draw it's a possibility that you're going to go up against Oregon State. You see that, but just having it all be here, considering your history in this state, does it feel a little surreal to have your career going through this right now?

JAZ SHELLEY: Yeah, it's a little bit of a full-circle moment for me. When the itinerary came out to say we're going to fly from Lincoln to Eugene, I was like, well, that sounds a little familiar. It's pretty cool. I'm excited to play here, and hopefully my season doesn't end here, but it's a pretty cool feeling to be back in this state.

Q. Jaz, have you crossed paths much with Kelsey Rees over your college career? Is there a kinship amongst Australian players who play college basketball in the U.S.?

JAZ SHELLEY: Yeah, I went to a couple of camps with Kelsey. She's a little younger than I am. I have more of her older sister, Darcy.

All Australians kind of are in support of each other when we're over here in the U.S., so it's pretty cool that there's a lot of Australians on most teams now. We're all in support of each other, and it's going to be cool to see a familiar face.

Q. Back to 2021, Jaz, in Eugene, Beavers-Ducks. Nobody was in the stands because it wasn't allowed. I think it might have been your last game against the Beavers. What do you remember about that day?

JAZ SHELLEY: It was a little while ago now. I just remember that whole season was kind of crazy with just having cardboard cut-outs and that sound that they tried to put on like a fake crowd. It was a crazy time, and it's pretty cool to be able to play in March Madness with the March Madness logo, and it's really cool to be able to have

probably a sell-out crowd tomorrow. The fans and everything, it's really nice to have everyone back.

Q. The three freshmen guards for Oregon State -- Donovyn, Kennedie, and then Dom Paurova -- what are your thoughts about that trio?

JAZ SHELLEY: They're really talented as well. It's pretty cool to see across the nation the freshmen that are incoming right now. We have pretty good -- three pretty good freshmen as well, so I'm really excited to see the future, and it's only going to rise women's sports.

Q. For either players, obviously the tournament style is not something very new to you guys, but just how taxing that game was last night, how quickly or what is sort of the key for players to sort of flush that game and get onto the next?

JAZ SHELLEY: Yeah, that's the thing I think we need to flush that game. We probably didn't play our best, and this is a completely different team, so we're excited to shift our focus. We're very fortunate to have that Big Ten Tournament where we played four games in four days, so we're pretty good at trying to flush things and move onto the next. Our team is pretty disciplined with that.

Q. Go back to that Big Ten title game in Minneapolis. What do you remember about that experience of playing in front of 16,000 fans and a lot of Iowa fans?

ALEXIS MARKOWSKI: Yeah, we had played Iowa twice this season. Pretty familiar with the Iowa crowd and the fans. When we were in that title game, I felt like we were really prepared to just have people rooting against us, and we really kind of tried to use that to our advantage.

We like being the underdogs, and I feel like this is kind of a similar situation. Oregon State has really a solid fan base, so just being in that position earlier this year and now having another opportunity, I'm excited. We really do like being the underdog, so...

Q. You obviously are in their gym. Do you prefer just playing in front of people, instead of smaller neutral crowd? Do you like the energy of a crowd even if it's against you?

ALEXIS MARKOWSKI: I really enjoy it. I love playing in front of a huge crowd even if they're rooting against you. It's fun. I feel like that's what March is all about, just having fun and having people watch and really enjoy watching college women's basketball.

Q. Alexis, you had a really good tournament run



personally. Do you feel like you're kind of hitting your stride right now in the postseason?

ALEXIS MARKOWSKI: Yeah, I feel like our team just really is at our peak right now. I think it's all coming together. We're all really trusting each other, relying on each other, using each other in the right way. I feel like we always find the open person. We're always willing to make that extra pass.

I feel like my team really trusts me and want to give me the ball in those big moments. I have the confidence in myself and my coaches and teammates have the confidence in me. I just feel like we're playing really confident together right now.

Q. Jaz, specifically about Scott Rueck, you have plenty of games with him. He's been such a consistent coach, and they've gone through such an impressive turnaround over the last year. What observations have you taken from Scott over the years, and what makes him such a successful coach here?

JAZ SHELLEY: I think he's a really smart coach. I had the opportunity to meet him through my recruiting process, and he met my family. We have a lot of respect for him and this program.

He's just really smart, being able to use his players in the right way. I think you can see that players stick around, and even when they're not performing, he's able to have a quick turnaround and try and develop players. He develops bigs really well, and that's pretty cool. I think he's just an all-around smart coach.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much. Now we'll open it up to questions for Coach Williams.

Q. Same question. Scott Rueck, what are your impressions of him, and what mix him so successful here at Oregon State?

AMY WILLIAMS: He's a smart coach. I think Jaz nailed it. I think he does an outstanding job of building a roster that really complements each other very well. He recruits a lot of the same type of players that we like to recruit at Nebraska. I think his staff does an outstanding job of recruiting and building their roster first, and that's kind of the first step to being a quality program and coach.

Then once you have put together and pieced together your team, being able to max them out and find a way to have every player playing to their strengths, and he does a great job of that. I think he just does a great job of finding mismatch opportunities and really trying to exploit those

and getting their players -- they don't beat themselves. Their team just does not beat themselves.

They really play smart basketball and play to their strengths. I think that's a special and unique talent for a coach to be able to consistently be able to do that.

Q. Obviously without disposing too much, but Raegan Beers I'm sure will be an emphasis of defense for you guys. What are some of the different ways you've seen teams defend her, and what do you feel like are some of the better ways?

AMY WILLIAMS: Yeah, the more games you watch, the more everybody is trying to throw the kitchen sink. It seems like everybody has tried every type of coverage that you can think of and double-teams. That's what the depth on their roster just provides because she's such a great passer out of the post.

If you try to throw quick double-teams, she can really make you pay by just finding the open player. They've got enough shooters around her to make you pay.

But she's just so smart with her positioning. So if you try to go over cross screens she's just going to wait until the next pass and seal you out. If you try to go under, she'll just bury you deep. So I think she's been really coached well, and she's very coachable to know and understand her strengths and to find ways to play to those.

We're going to have to potentially mix some things up throughout the game and not just be consistent with one way where she can get used to how we're defending.

Q. As a coach, how do you sort of coach in this tournament style where you do have that high emotion game coming down to the last basic possession last night and now you have another challenge tomorrow? How do you coach that up to your players and allow them to be able to flush this game?

AMY WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think the big thing for us is just it kind of feels like unique that we have a day off in between because we just came off a tournament where we played four games in four days, and it just -- you didn't even have that day to really kind of catch your breath and refocus and get a practice in.

For us this feels a little bit like a luxury just to kind of have a day here to kind of regroup and refocus and shift because the style of play that we played yesterday is incredibly stark contrast to what we will see tomorrow. They just feel like two very different teams, two very different style of play. For us to have this precious practice

time today to kind of shift our focus and hopefully get back to being a little crisper and sharper ourselves.

Q. In terms of that style or the personnel, does Oregon State remind you of anyone you faced early earlier this year or in previous seasons?

AMY WILLIAMS: We tried to figure that out kind of earlier. My coaching staff. We said maybe closest thing like Indiana, one of our teams in our league that's physical and tough. Maybe not quite as big size-wise as what Oregon State has, but lots of capable shooters around the perimeter, very prominent post presence inside, physical defensively. It's probably the closest thing we could think of.

Q. In terms of this Beaver character, Scott has repeatedly said this is a team that just doesn't seem to be mentally phased by getting hit by a run or being down big in the fourth quarter. They seem to always fight back no matter what they're up against. Going deep into the tournament you're going to face teams like that every night, but what's unique about this particular group, and how do you kind of message the focus of staying focused even if you go on a big run or you get up big late in the game?

AMY WILLIAMS: I think we've just got lots of experience of it. We spent a lot of time talking before yesterday's game about just the journey that our team has been on this year. We've had some incredible wins.

When I think back to our win over Iowa at home, and we took some punches in that game, and we were just ready to punch right back and made some huge plays down the stretch. It taught us a lot about ourselves about that resiliency.

We've also had some opportunities, some tough losses, and one that really stands out to me is when we lost to Rutgers at home, and it was a one-point loss at home. We had plenty of opportunities down the stretch to really get over the hump or execute. We couldn't quite make that game-winning play.

We learned just as much from that game as we maybe probably did the Iowa game. This season, this journey, has taught us a lot of lessons and brought us to the team that we are right now. It's those experiences that we're incredibly grateful for and that we're going to lean heavily on as we continue this journey together.

Q. Last night's game they held Eastern to a season low offensively. They've done it earlier in the season against Utah and Colorado. What about the Beaver

defense, what are your thoughts about that and how do you approach it?

AMY WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think I kind of touched on it a little earlier. They just don't beat themselves. They don't make mistakes. They're very, very wise. I think they have good pressure from their guards that can cause you to be disrupting, but then great size that makes things challenging in the paint.

For us we really try to emphasize paint touches and finding ways to get paint touches. They make that very, very hard for teams. So I think that is where it all starts with their defense and just being super solid defensively, making you take tough contested shots on every possession.

Q. Lots to talk about Raegan Beers and justifiably so. What about Timea Gardiner, who has such size, and her release is so quick. How do you deal with her?

AMY WILLIAMS: Well, fairly unique, as I got to see her play a lot in high school because we signed Maggie Mendelson to come play basketball and volleyball at Nebraska. They were high school teammates.

Just watching the way that she has continued to just progress as a college player and so dangerous because of how quick her release is. I think obviously we've played against forwards before that were pretty good three-point shooters, but the way that she can get her feet set and her shot off so quickly, just great size and outstanding skill from that position. She's just so versatile.

I think that's what makes her special and dangerous. They do a great job of running really good actions to take advantage of what she's good at. She's scary. She can play the three. She can play the four. She can play the five, and really be effective at all of those and cause nightmares for anybody that is trying to defend in any of those positions.

I think just such an outstanding complementary player that obviously Sixth Woman of the Year in this league is pretty tough, but if they needed her to step into the starting line-up at the five when Raegan Beers is out, she's pretty effective there too. Just a special, versatile player that can plug in in a lot of places.

Q. You mentioned paint touches. Two really good point players in Alexis and Natalie, and also some guards that can get to the basket pretty well too. How do you balance the back to the basket ability of your posts with their stretchability and giving your guards room to operate in the paint as well?

AMY WILLIAMS: Yeah. I think that's one thing that is positive for our team is that we do have post players that can be threats from behind the arc. They can be effective.

Our ability to be able to utilize that at times and open things up and force defenses to stretch out a little bit is something that we can play to and have this season, but we want to really continue to stay balanced with what we do well.

The paint touches for us is a non-negotiable, and some of that has to be our post with their back to the basket. Some of that will be our guards really trying to get in there. Balance is what makes us the best.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports