

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Oregon State vs North Carolina

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

Carmichael Arena

Oregon State Beavers
Coach Scott Rueck

Kelsey Rees

AJ Marotte

Sela Heide

Media Conference

North Carolina 70, Oregon State 49

THE MODERATOR: We have Oregon State. We'll start with a statement from the Head Coach Scott Rueck.

SCOTT RUECK: Well, credit North Carolina. They played a great second half especially. Great game overall, but you know, we knew they were a good team. Transitioned well. Defends well. They were disruptive all day, which we expected. So lots of credit to them and all the officials as well running a great event.

You know, for this team for it to end here today, nobody would have predicted it. You know, those who have been paying attention know the story and know how significant it is. Because of that, I told them after the game I'm just filled with gratitude for being a part of it, gratitude to each of them for the way not just saying yes to being a part of it, but the way they handled themselves throughout the year is just remarkable.

This has been one of the most special things I've been a part of. So, of course, we all wanted it to continue, but if it's going to end, not a bad way to have it end.

A really good team, having to play great on their home floor, and then they were fighting until the very end. This team deserves every accolade they get, and they've been nothing but an inspiration.

So while I'm sad it's over, I couldn't be happier for what we've accomplished, more proud, and it's just been an



absolute joy. I'm talking 1 through 12, including every staff member that we have. It's just been magical. So really proud of them.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for our student-athletes. We have Kelsey Rees, AJ Marotte, and Sela Heide.

Q. Losing hurts, but when you kind of reflect, is there a level of appreciation that comes with what you guys accomplished and what you overcame this season?

KELSEY REES: Definitely. I think when you look back at it, there are so many college women's basketball players that go through their whole five-year career and never make it to March Madness, so it's definitely something to be proud of.

We won the WCC. That's an amazing accomplishment. As the days go by and as the weeks go by, we'll be able to look back and reflect, but this one hurts. We know we're a good team, and they played really well, but say we come back and play them three, four, five more times, I think we could definitely get the win.

So it's hard because it's March, and obviously it's whoever plays best on the day. Credit to them. They played amazingly. Especially that third quarter. Definitely proud of our accomplishments, but definitely hurts initially.

AJ MAROTTE: Yeah. I mean, we already did what nobody thought we could do, and that's a huge accomplishment in itself. Obviously we wish we could have gone further, but this was a big deal for us to get here, so we're really proud.

Q. The first half was really close and hard-fought. What worked so well for you all early that maybe didn't in the second half?

SELA HEIDE: I think that one of the big things that we really focused on coming into this game was our rebounding. If I double-check, we won on the boards by eight, so I think just coming out and having that intensity was a really big thing for us and kind of what helped fuel



our fire a little bit in that first half. So I'm really proud of our rebounding effort today.

Q. For all three of you, what did you learn about yourself the past couple of months? You're below .500 at the end of January. It was a three- or four-game losing streak, and then to be here, what have you learned about yourselves and what will you take with you?

KELSEY REES: Yeah, just the hard work and no-quit attitude. I think every player on our team had that in them, but through the adversity it was able to really come out and just show how much more they wanted it, how much they could give in to what the program was and what we were about.

I think you saw it towards the end just how much everyone has grown. Like Kennedy, she came in this year and had a huge upgrade in her role, let's say, and then just how she started really well, but as the season went on, you just saw her grow and grow in the confidence. There's just so much more confidence throughout the team now and throughout every player than there was at the start of the year.

I can't wait to see what Scott does with the team next year and how far they can go.

AJ MAROTTE: For me I think just gaining confidence playing at this level and then seeing each other of my teammates gain their confidence. All of us are stepping into new roles, and it's a pretty scary thing to do. New conference, that was also pretty tough.

I think it was just really fun to figure it out and figure ourselves out and figure each other out. It was a fun puzzle the whole year. Yeah, obviously we finished out pretty good.

SELA HEIDE: Yeah, not to beat a dead horse, but finding confidence in myself ask just believing in myself every time I stepped on the floor. I mean, this group has worked incredibly hard every day, and I think you can see how much we've grown through our grind, each of us individually and as a group. Just continuing to grow and get better every single day, so yeah.

Q. This program, Oregon State, has a well-established track record of success in women's college basketball. You know, Elite Eight last year, Final Four several years ago. Lots of wins along the way. For y'all to be a part of this team, to go through what you had to go through, to change conferences and all that, what did it mean to you to be a part of this particular Oregon State team and get to this point, the '24/'25 season?

KELSEY REES: It was huge. We all came to Oregon State for a reason. We believed in what they've done in the past, and we believed in what they're doing now.

This year I think we showed the whole world who perhaps stopped believing that, hey, Oregon State is still here. It doesn't matter what changes in the world, what changes in the conference, what changes in the team, but there's always that same product and those same people. Yeah, it was a lot of fun.

AJ MAROTTE: Yeah, the three of us were on that Elite Eight team last year, so having been through that, I think this year was just spectacular. Like, it was so fun. None of us thought it would end this way, and I think it was really fun to fight and get here.

SELA HEIDE: Yeah, I mean, I had a meeting with Coach Scott at the beginning of the season. We all did. He told me that adversity can be an asset if you let it be. That's kind of just something that I've carried with myself every day.

I think that our whole group has really shown that through everything that we've done, and we've gotten to this point where we're cutting down nets with our best friends. What could be better than that?

Q. I was just wondering, when Lexi started getting those threes in the third, I was wondering what you guys thought about that when you were on the court? Kind of happened during the first half.

SELA HEIDE: Coach Scott mentioned in the huddle after the game that it took a big player playing a big game and rising to that occasion to put on such a show in front of a sold-out crowd on home floor in March Madness, so a lot of props to Lexi for playing really well. They played a great game altogether too.

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

Q. Speaking of Lexi, how much of her third quarter was just running into a hot shooter, or how much of it was things you guys could have done different defensively?

SCOTT RUECK: We didn't do anything defensively differently. You know, I think the momentum swing at the end of the first half, you know, we're up two, and then they take the lead, four straight points. Then they come out and hit two threes and then a two. You know, it's a 12-0 run.

Probably just being -- maybe wanting to ease into the third quarter instead of remembering that this game is -- every possession is pivotal in this third quarter was probably the difference. We know what she's capable of. I mean, she's been talked about for five straight days, six straight days. No. 20, No. 20, No. 20, No. 20. That's all that's been said. I don't know.

It's just with the pace that they played at, you could tell them wanting to push the tempo more about the second half of the second quarter. You know, you could just see that was kind of their plan. Of course, their defense changed. They pressed us to start that third quarter. So the combination of a couple of turnovers and then just maybe, you know, just losing concentration for a moment allowed her to get free. You're rolling the dice if you let someone like that get free.

We know what she's playing for as well, so she wanted to play big. She need to do play big. They probably weren't happy with their first half. So you look to a player like that to step up for you, and she did for them. So we just made a couple too many mistakes, got her going, and then it snowballed from there once we were rattled a little bit.

Q. (Indiscernible) is that something you can sell to recruits how you guys put this thing together and the standard is still the standard?

SCOTT RUECK: Yeah, it's interesting you use that word because that was the word we used to start the year. You know, just standard. It was a word that resonated with this group as we were preparing off of our team retreat. They used that word.

For me I know what my standard is. As long as I'm the coach here, it's like it's going to be the same. It's going to be the expectation to get the most out of who we are and to build a tight-knit group that does special things. So while a lot of people I think were doubting what that could look like this year, I was confident that -- I didn't know how good we were going to be or what our ceiling was going to be, but I was confident it would look right eventually. It would look like a team that's cohesive, that plays right, and is gritty and tough.

So that will be the case going forward. I think, you know, the circumstances around us in regards to conference and those types of things as those are becoming and have become way more clear, I think what this group this year probably just -- what they did just sped everything up. It's like, okay, if you wondered what it was going to be like, now you know what it's going to be like. It doesn't matter what conference we're in.

As I said last week, Oregon State is going to be Oregon State. We're going to be a team that takes care of you and is competitive every night and makes pros. That won't change. So I think everybody just has evidence now if they were wondering previously.

Q. Just to kind of piggyback off of that and sort of what I asked the players. You know, you've won a lot of big games in your career, had a lot of really good seasons. This season strikes me as maybe the most unique and just in terms of what you had to deal with. Is this kind of up there with the most proud you've been of a team to get to this point after all that?

SCOTT RUECK: Yeah. I think my first year at Oregon State was so chaotic. I mean, we had open try-outs and all that stuff 15 years ago. So that year was very unique. People will still say that was my favorite team you've ever coached because of what they had to overcome.

This group had people that chose to stay when every bit of momentum was moving away from us as people, you know, went other places. So the courage that it took for them to stay amidst the very well-documented adversity that we were facing, you know, puts this right up there with -- I guess I don't love the word pride because I don't think that's always good, but I'm very proud of this group.

I have been asked about the word fun. I guess I've used that word a lot this year, and I say it's fun, I'm having fun, you know, we're having fun, all these things. Well, that's what it's been. It's been, like, I love these guys. I've loved the journey of taking them from -- I think anybody that watched us in November would say we're dysfunctional competitively. We're dysfunctional as a basketball team.

The ball doesn't move right. We're giving up layups. We're not boxing out. We're turning it over right and left. It didn't look like Oregon State, and it didn't. So to go from that to where we were today and to do all the things that we've done over the last, you know, month and a half where it does look like Oregon State out there.

I couldn't be more proud of everyone in this program for just rising to it, taking it on, and believing when we had some tough losses and we had every reason to go, eh, it's not our year and wait until the offseason. They never did that. Like every day was just a locked-in, focused practice forgetting what happened yesterday, whether it was a win or a loss, and going, okay, how do we get a little bit better today?

So for a teacher/coach, really there's nothing cooler than that. For this group this year what you got to see today, obviously we came up short, but man, you saw a gritty,

tough effort especially the first half before it snowballed on us. That's who we are. I've had a blast with this group.

Q. On that note, with what I asked the players, did you learn anything new about yourself this year through all this?

SCOTT RUECK: Well, I think what I learned this year was that all the hell that I've been through -- and we all go through in life, right. Every single. Nobody is immune to going through hard things in life. The tough lessons and the tough moments I've had professionally, personally, they all had a reason because this year I had this crazy calm and this peace from the first defection last year on.

I don't mean that in any sort of negative way, but the first player that walked out on April 1st a year ago and told me, okay, I'm not coming back. Okay. Then another one. Okay. Okay. All right. Okay. This is going to be a challenge. This kind of sucks. It doesn't feel great. However, I get it.

I've had this peace the entire time, and I've just learned. I said it a year ago at the press conference for the Elite Eight. I was asked if people might leave. I said, Yeah, they might. That's absolutely a possibility. Have I thought of it? Yeah, I thought of it. What if it happens? I don't know.

What I do know, life has taught me that God provides. That's what I said. My faith journey in my life has taught me that. It's just like hang in there and stay the same, keep doing what you are doing, take care of people, and just roll with it. There are certain things out of your control, but what I can control is to stay the course. That's what we've done.

So I felt like those lessons all were just rewarded this year. You know, so personally it's been a -- I will just tell you, it's been a massive blessing to do what we did this year and to be a part of what we've done this year. So I've been encouraged more than anything.

So I'm just honestly -- that's why I started this whole thing with the word gratitude. I seriously sit here with a grateful -- I'm just grateful for what I've been a part of this year and the way we've been supported and loved throughout the year. Yeah, so I've learned just to hang in there, I guess, and everything is going to be okay.

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