

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Creighton vs UCLA

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Los Angeles, California, USA

Pauley Pavilion

UCLA Bruins

Cori Close

Kiki Rice

Lauren Betts

Media Conference



sending two and three people to Lauren, and we knew we had to attack off the bounce and I thought Charisma and Kiki were just tremendous in some real critical moments.

But it was all done with our defense in the second half, and just our -- we have a phrase, you've heard me say it a lot of times but sometimes me, sometimes you, always us. This was an "us" kind of win, and I'm so proud of the selflessness of this team.

Q. What was the defensive adjustment or change in the second half and in the third quarter, I think you had 13 points, you had that look of determination on your face. What were you feeling that allowed you to take over the game at that point?

KIKI RICE: Yeah, first, defensively, I think we had a great game plan, Coach put together a great scout, and I think in the first half we didn't completely follow that to the best of our ability.

So the second half we got together as a team and talked about transition defense and communicating on all their actions and getting back to defending and executing the scout, and that helped us in the second half.

In terms of the third quarter for me, I just felt like this is obviously at this point of the season, it's one game, and you're out. So I just knew that I needed to do whatever I had to do to help my team win, whether that was feeding the ball to Lauren, Lauren was so great in there, scoring, doing whatever, and I think I was just focused on that.

Q. How did it feel being back in the lineup, and what was it like in the second half when they just kept sending two and three at you, and it seemed like it was really tough traffic there in the paint?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, at some point they are not going to let me play one-on-one. We saw how that was going. So I think that -- obviously we knew at some point they were going to change their game plan.

But I have so much trust and faith in my teammates that they are going to get open. And we work on that all the

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CORI CLOSE: You know, I want to just -- Jim is such an excellent coach. Creighton is such a good team, so well-coached.. when that bracket came out, I thought this could be our hardest game. I know what they are capable of. I've watched them several times this year, but also through the years, and I knew that their style of play would really challenge us, and it obviously did.

And so those seniors for Creighton have accomplished so much and they are such a good basketball team, and I just really want to give a shoutout to how much respect we have for the way they play and just how competitive they are. They are a really about team.

Secondly, I want to just say, wow, with our crowd. They carried us. I thought in the third quarter, the energy that they gave us was so key, and I just -- I just know how much goes into that from everybody in our support staff, marketing, you know, sports information, everybody that poured into us having that opportunity to have such a great crowd, 5:30 on a Monday night is not easy, and they got it done. But I thought the crowd was a total difference-maker.

And lastly, I'm just so proud of our team. I'm proud of their selflessness. I'm proud of their growth mindset. I'm proud of their ability to have a next play speed mentality when things were not going our way. To respond and hold them to 21 points in the second half was tremendous.

And we knew it was going to have to come with our defense, and then they had to adjust and then they started



time. Like that's everyone's game plan against me. They are going to double-team, triple team me. I just think that that's what we work on in practice, and obviously it showed today and my teammates did a really good job cutting off for me^ .

Q. How much did that open the paint up to you to drive because they were flooding the paint going after Lauren?

KIKI RICE: Totally changed the game. When Lauren is in there, they are sending multiple people to her. Every time, any guard on the perimeter really can drive, Lauren is going to steal or get open, and we are going to have a good attack lane.

Q. Felt like there was an adjustment in the second half -- how did that impact your ability to protect the rim when you were not having to go out and guard --

LAUREN BETTS: 14? Coach put together a really great game plan, and obviously like she's more of a passer than a scorer. So I think that's just -- we worked on in practice, and yeah, I think that was just my whole job is to protect the paint, not let them get easy layups. I think in the first half, I didn't do a great job of that, but in the second half I did a lot better.

Q. I know limiting the three-point attempts was a big emphasis for you guys tonight. How do you feel like did you in that area, especially in that first half compared to the second half? They got off 16 tonight, I think.

KIKI RICE: Yeah, they are a fantastic three-point shooting team. They hit contested threes and open threes. So we knew we had to really run them off the line and force them into tough two-way player jumpers. In the first half we didn't really do that well. They got a lot of transition threes and good looks but in the second half we forced them into tougher shots. I don't know how many they got off, but I definitely think it was less.

LAUREN BETTS: What she said pretty much. It was just communication at the end of the day. We can do it. We work on it all the time. We are one of the best defensive teams in the nation. We just have to put our minds to it and communicate and that's all there is to it.

Q. I just want to say, great game tonight, back-to-back. What are you going to do for these two victories to keep the momentum going?

KIKI RICE: I think we watch film. We'll watch film from this game. See the areas that we can do better and then

prepare for our next opponent which is LSU, and I think we are going to have good focused practices and scouts over these next few days and get prepared to play another really good team.

LAUREN BETTS: Like she said, I don't think we have a lot of time to focus on each win. We just have to move on. Like it feels good right now what we have to focus on, our next game, and get ready for that. I know our coaches are doing to do a really good job of just keeping us present and making sure we work hard every day in practice.

Q. Could you just talk about sort of Charisma's ability to lead by example? It felt like throughout the game she was full-court pressing almost on her own forcing turnovers, she had that one jump ball, and even in a night where she only made two shots, just talk about her impact on the floor.

KIKI RICE: Yeah, I think that's one of the best things about her is that she doesn't need to score to impact the game. In the first half, especially, she was struggling with making some shots, shots she knows she can make and normally makes. But her defensive intensity really carried us.

LAUREN BETTS: Keep stealing my answers. Yeah, that's just Charisma, she's a tough player. She doesn't need a scorer. She works so hard, and she's such a great example for the rest of the sophomores that are trying to get like her.

I just think she brings so much energy, and so it doesn't really matter what she's doing out there. You know she's going to bring something to the team no matter if it's points or whatever, yeah.

Q. Coach mentioned how the crowd impacted the game. What was it like on the court when the crowd was getting it into the third, early fourth quarter?

KIKI RICE: It was so great. I mean, playing in front of all the incredible fans that came out, it was just so much fun and made the come back that much better and the energy felt great in the gym. Sometimes it was hard to hear our own play calls but that was fun. It was just a great, like, support, and we really enjoyed that.

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, just super thankful for everyone who came to show out on a Monday night, it's not easy. So I'm just thankful for everyone that got here.

Yeah, it was so loud at one point that I could not hear what she was saying. So I was trying to guess the play we were running at that point. Yeah, really great crowd and I'm thankful for all the fans.

Q. In the second half, you guys were trailing by ten, and what was going through your mindset as you kind of went off 17 points in the second half, what was going on there?

KIKI RICE: I think it was just finding a way to take it possession by possession, get a stop and get a score, and I think that's what we did in the second half. We string together stops and got in transition and were able to play our game. It was just not letting the deficit at halftime take away from our focus and what we needed to execute in the second half.

Q. Coach, it felt like Creighton was scoring rapidly, like five seconds, seven seconds, especially getting on the perimeter and shooting threes. Seemed like the bench was upset with the inability to locate players. What changed as the game went on? Was it a matter of getting back and how much of it was them having a lot of perimeter players and having two bigs on the floor?

CORI CLOSE: We are used to playing with four guards. I consider Lina and Angela like big guards. But that matchup, when they played 14, we knew we could play Lauren and that was going to allow us to do that. But then when they sub her out and they put in five shooters, we knew that was going to pull her out.

And I thought for a long time she did a really good job, and she got hesitant for the last three we gave up. But overall, I think she can do it. She is surprisingly quick. I think she was a little doubting herself after coming back from her injury, whether she could do it.

And I looked her in the eye, and I just said, "You've got to make her drive. Hard twos are not going to hurt us. Make her drive. Get your heels on the three-point line."

I think more than anything, it was just a will. Like the system is not going to do it. You've got to go make plays together, and if you need to emergency switch something that we maybe didn't plan for, you do it. No layups, no threes.

And how bad do you want this? You've got 20 minutes to prove it. And at halftime, I really laid into them about the choices. We don't give up that many points in a half to anybody. So we needed to just get back to doing things with our defense. I knew if we could get enough stops we would score enough points and I thought Cam was huge. And what happens is, is when she -- we got jumpers when she went in because we knew we needed her to cut to the basket so you really are having two bigs right around the

blocks but that's when Angela got those threes, right.

And then when we were able to play, take her out and we were playing different lineups, that's when Kiki was able to get downhill. So I thought Cam, our ability to go offense/defense with her because she's such an anchor for us defensively, but holding that team to 21 points in the second half, that was truly remarkable.

Q. About Gabriela, double-double watch tonight, continuing her performance from Saturday. What can you say, it seemed like you were trusting her on the three. Obviously she's really skilled inside. Her versatility, her intensity; the spark she brings to you all.

CORI CLOSE: I think that it's really the intensity and her defense and her rebounding. She wasn't having a good night, and even as we were coming off for a time-out two of her teammates come up and -- "tell Gabs to keep shooting, we trust her work."

It didn't go in but she never let her missing threes affect her defense and rebounding and I think that shows such a mental toughness, when things don't go your way on the offensive end and shots that you usually make at a good percentage, and say, you know what that's not going to keep me from making a winning play in another area.

And that's not easy to do. She is such a tough competitor. These kinds of games, they show you who loves to compete, and Gabrielle Jaquez loves to compete, and I thought she was huge in that.

Q. We talked about the crowd a little bit but there was some UCLA basketball royalty out there tonight. What does that mean to have the support of those who came before?

CORI CLOSE: Canada, Earl Watson, Russell and Nina came out to the last game. Alyssia Brewer, Morris, all of our alumni that come back. I mean, whether you're royalty or you just have Bruin in your blood, you're family. And ^ to have our family in the building, Earl is going to New York to support us in Albany.

We have just got a amazing alumni, and it's just an honor to represent them. Mary Haggerty met me going into the hallway and was just so passionate and proud. Debbie Halliday.

Was here -- the list, it's always scary when you start naming people but I just really appreciate the Bruin bubble, the pride, the alumni, whether you're mens or women's. Perez was here -- softball was here. There's just so many

things.

It's probably one of my favorite things about being the coach at UCLA is the family; that it really means something. If you represent the four letters across your chest, you are family for life. And so it's an honor to see those people and it's an honor to play for them as we represent them on and off the court.

Q. You're now the fourth Pac-12 team to get to the Sweet 16. Could be six by the end of the night. What does it mean that in the Final year of the conference, to be balling like this?

CORI CLOSE: Yeah, it's just like, you know, every coach is campaigning that their conference is the best in the country. I don't know how many times I've heard that. Well, I'm going to say it, and I'm going to say our numbers are backing it up; that I just think we have prepared each other to be ready for big moments. The intensity that you have to come and be ready to play with and the solutions you have to find with all the different styles of play, it's an honor.

And it was interesting, just the other day, Tara Vanderveer who is the least person who would need to do this, sent a text message to all the other coaches and talked about what an honor it's been to coach in this conference and then everybody was piping in back-and-forth. But I just thought, you know, it used to be Stanford and the 11 dwarfs, and now look at it, and who is the first person to champion that balance? Tara. And I just think it really has been a very special experience. We've built this together taking off our institutional hats and choosing to grow the game and grow the conference was more important and that was a real big honor to be a part of.

Q. Two games in L.A. tonight. Two big crowds. What does this mean?

CORI CLOSE: I don't know what there was but we had almost 9,000 the first night and we had almost 8,000 on a Monday night at 5:30. Women's sports is here. It's doing something. Southern California basketball for women is amazing, and get on board. It's a growth stock, people. Like you better get in now because it is spectacular. But I am so proud that southern corn is coming out to support these great players. Their working their tails off.

I remember back in the summer we were playing open gyms with each other and it was competitive as all get=out. But this is a special time in southern California women's basketball. And really thankful to you all that are telling these stories, creating the buzz. This is a culmination of your work, as well as it is ours. And so we've got to keep

this thing going because these are two really young teams, and this is something that we have a really special trail to blaze over the next several years.

Thank you all for being here, we really appreciate you.

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