

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal: Oregon vs Louisville

Sunday, March 28, 2021

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome - Alamo

Louisville Cardinals

Jeff Walz

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference



Asia and ask her to call and try to get in touch with Dana.

We've been a program here that's been pretty darn good for the past 14 years. We have players that come through here that know this is a family. They stay in touch with each other. That starts with Angel McCoughtry. Angel is the first one to send me a text, the first one you'll see things up on social media congratulating us.

JEFF WALZ:

Louisville 60, Oregon 42

JEFF WALZ: I'd first like to congratulate Kelly and Oregon on a great season. We have had some battles with them the past few years. Really got a ton of respect for Kelly and how his players compete. So I'd first like to start off with that.

Then just say how proud of our kids I am. What an unbelievable effort tonight defensively and on the backboard. We're giving up probably five inches at the five spot, then we're probably giving up about seven inches at the four spot to start the game. I thought we came out and just competed, did a great job.

Our guards did a great job of pressuring the basketball, which we had talked about for the past two days. Our ball pressure had to be elite, and it was. To force Oregon to try to start their offense further out, not let them get simple high-lows or side entries into the post. Our guards did a great job of that.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Dana was awesome today. Looked like a two-time conference Player of the Year. They talked on TV, then she spoke briefly about Asia reaching out to her, sending her a text, telling her to calm down. Did you facilitate that? If not, what does it say about the type of kids that have come through your program that they know to continue to look out for each other even after they've left campus?

JEFF WALZ: That's exactly what it is. No, I did not call

It's pretty remarkable. Our alum have tremendous pride in what this program stands for. As I've said, when I got hired 14 years ago, Tom Jurich told me that he didn't want this to be a program that had a really good team one every four or five years. He wanted us to build a program, something to be proud of year in and year out.

Now with Vince as our athletic director, he has the same vision. That's what we've done. I mean, I heard someone say that we'd been to three of the last four. I think we've been to three in a row Elite 8 games. It's not easy.

I mean, I heard Dawn Staley say it during her press conference, that it's not easy to get to this game. It takes a lot of hard work. It takes a lot of dedication. What these young women have done in all these ball clubs, all these teams across the country, is pretty amazing this season, especially with what they're going through right now here in San Antonio.

Actually, I walked a mile in my room after our pregame meal today, just walked around in circles. These kids have done an unbelievable job of handling this little bit of a quarantine and trying to make the best of it.

Now we're going to be fortunate enough to be able to continue to play.

Q. Was it in your mind just a matter of time before Dana started being Dana again and scoring for you? What was your pregame speech, since clearly your team played better in the first quarter than they did in the first two games?

JEFF WALZ: You know what, I'll start with Dana.



I told her on the walk here to the media room that I was really proud of her, especially with the way she handled things in the first half. I think that first period she was 0-for-4 from the field, 0-for-3 from three, and we're up 10-8. She took good shots. She didn't force anything. She let the game come to her.

That's one of the things I kept trying to explain to her and tell her was, you've got to let the game come to you. When you do that, you're going to be able to get shots in rhythm. When she gets shots in rhythm, she's able to knock those down.

I thought our team did a great job. We set some great screens for her. It was really, really exciting for her.

Yeah, I completely changed up the pregame speech. It was more of a plead, like, Please play hard. Basically whatever I told you to do, just do the opposite because the past two of them were not good at all. I was really happy with how we came out and defended especially in that first quarter.

Q. You mentioned the defensive performance. Dana said she thinks his the best you guys have played all year defensively. I don't think Oregon has been held under 50 points like that in years. What do you think has changed? Do you think it's an emphasis on the details or something that clicked for them?

JEFF WALZ: Our ball pressure has gotten a lot better, which is where it first has to start. It's got to start with ball pressure. Then just really proud, Olivia Cochran and Liz Dixon, you know, aren't going to get a ton of credit or a bunch of praise because everybody likes to look at what people do offensively.

But what those two did battling tonight was pretty amazing because they had their hands full. I thought they were absolutely outstanding and did a great job of making things as difficult as they could for the Oregon post players.

We followed a scout. Everything that we wanted to do our kids did. We knew exactly what players we were going over ball screens with, what players we were jamming and going under. You could see the execution coming through.

Q. You have been here plenty of times before. Can you talk about the challenge when you win a game like this the way you did today to get right back out there and play one of the best teams in the country in a couple days?

JEFF WALZ: There is no challenge. I mean, you're getting a chance to play. I mean, so we're excited for it. I mean,

Stanford has been remarkable. I was fortunate enough to be able to Coach Fran and Cameron on the U-19 national team. I could see how special they both were on that.

Kiana, I mean, just go through their entire roster. They're really, really good. I mean, really good. I think they were the No. 1 overall seed for a reason. Tara is an outstanding coach who has had a ton of, ton of success.

We're going to have our hands full. I mean, it's kind of the way we do it here at Louisville a lot. I'm not sure many people picked us to win tonight, and that's fine. Nobody is going to pick us to win - what is today? I don't even know what today is? Sunday? On Tuesday. And that's fine. We very well might not.

But I can promise you our kids are going to come out and compete and we're going to have a game plan. If we execute it, then we'll see what takes place. Then I'm going to have to make some adjustments as the game goes.

We'll see what happens.

Q. Mykasa question: The offensive rebound on the free throw, it was still such a big game right there, such a close game. It leads to Dana's basket. Once you talk about that, does anything surprise you? That pass at the end was a pretty ridiculous way to end the game.

JEFF WALZ: I mean, no, there really isn't anything that Mykasa does that surprises me. What some of you might not have even been able to see is she's coaching and helping Elizabeth Balogun the entire time ease out on the floor, helping her make sure to help her at the four. E hasn't normally played a ton at the four; she's played some. E's length, I thought she did a really nice job for us defending.

She's telling her what to do on each set, what to do on each play. Mykasa is like having a second coach out there on the floor. Then the play at the end of the game, I mean, if it's not a SportsCenter Play of the Day, that's one of the best basketball plays I've seen a kid make in a split-second. It's not like it's a fastbreak and she throws it behind her back. It was a loose ball. It was really the only pass she could make. She made a perfect pass. Dana goes in and finishes.

Just really happy for Kasa. You look at our kids, Mykasa Robinson and Hailey Van Lith lead us in rebounding with seven each. That's just the grit that those two have. Those two are as tough of competitors as I've had come through this program in a long time. That's just embracing physicality.

Both of them are willing to do that.

Q. A question about Dana: It's not like she has been playing badly. She's had a little bit of shooting struggles, if you will. When you have a player of that ability who is also so passionate, how do you help her through? It's not necessarily struggles, but she wants to do so well all the time.

JEFF WALZ: No, she does. She puts so much pressure on herself. She's always trying to prove to people that she's good. I just try to tell her before we came into this tournament, you've got nothing else to prove. You're two-time ACC Player of the Year. You're a two-time All-American. I mean, I'd put her up there as Player of the Year in the country.

I just said, Enjoy it. This is your last go-around at this. It's one of the things I try to tell all my players. As coaches, this is my 14th year as a head coach, and these players, it's like when they're in high school, they can't wait to get to college. When they're in college, they can't wait to hopefully play professionally. I just keep telling them to enjoy every second of it because it goes by so fast.

We all learned last year how quick it can all be taken away from us. I just told Dana, Just enjoy this. Enjoy the experience. Enjoy the moment with your teammates. And the game will come to you.

It did. She was really good tonight.

Q. What was it like being the only ACC school left in the tournament? You talked on the show over the weekend about three teams in the ACC still in the tournament. You guys are the only ones.

JEFF WALZ: I thought the ACC had a really good showing here in the NCAA tournament. What a great run by Nell and Georgia Tech. Wes and NC State, my heart goes out to them because I've played against them enough. When Kayla Jones went down in that first game, it really impacted the rotations that Wes is able to play.

Kayla to me was always the X factor on their team. When we played them at our place, I think she was only like 2-for-8 from the field, but she had 14 rebounds and like five or six assists. She just keeps that team going. I really felt for them.

But our league as a whole I thought played extremely well. I'm honored to still be here. I know it's probably a shock to a lot of our analysts that work at our ACC network that we're actually still playing. I'm sure they'll keep saying

we're supposed to lose. Eventually we might lose.

But I'm proud of this group. I think we have represented the ACC extremely well.

Q. For the record, you were a two-point underdog tonight. You don't pay attention to point spreads.

JEFF WALZ: So we covered (smiling).

Q. If I told you you were going to score 65 points a game in the first three games of this tournament, I don't know if you would have felt confident enough in your defense that you would still have been at this point. They've really bought in on defense, are playing the way you want them to play right now, emphasizing speed. How quickly has that come into being here in this tournament?

JEFF WALZ: No, it's really been important. I've been really impressed with Kianna Smith especially, because Kianna, it's been a complete adjustment for the physicality of how you have to play at the defensive end of the floor. She's really starting to embrace it.

Hailey loves that. Mykasa plays that way. So we've now got some guards that are willing to get out and defend. We're trying to go over some ball screens, guard the guard, we're trying to break things up. It's just how you have to play.

If you just let everybody go where they want, then it wasn't going to be a good night for us. Sedona Prince at 6'7", we did a nice job of forcing her away from the basket. She still made a couple big-time shots. The fadeaway at the elbow, there's nothing you can do about it.

Sabally was really just giving us fits. But I thought we did a great job of making it difficult for her. She ends up with three turnovers. We turned them over 14 times. I bet you two or three of them at least were three-second calls. That's because of the pressure our guards had on their guards not to make a quick entry pass.

Q. They mentioned in the broadcast that Oregon has a very tall team. You guys have a lot of speed on your team. What did you like about your offense tonight that took advantage against Oregon's tall players? How excited are you to face Stanford?

JEFF WALZ: Well, first off, I thought we did a really nice job in the second period of creating points from our defense. I mean, we ended up with 21 points off their 14 turnovers. Then I think the stat of the night was had 18 second-chance points compared to their 13. We score 28



points in the paint compared to their 24.

I just thought we moved the ball much better than we did starting the last two games. I thought we just played. We played, we made some great passes. Then I'm proud of them because they allowed me to coach. Right there at the end of the third quarter, we did a 1-2-2 press that we hadn't done the entire game. We come up with a huge steal. We missed the shot, but then Hailey Van Lith comes up with the O board.

A heady, smart, high-IQ basketball play, she doesn't go back up with the O board to score. We throw it out, so we're getting the last shot of that quarter. We get a layup from it.

Just the kids allowed me to do some things during the games, which I appreciate. That's part of the game that I really enjoy. It was just a great effort top to bottom from all of them.

Q. This has been such a weird year. Haven't really been able to leave our houses. I'm sure it's the same for you in Louisville. As a result of that, have you watched more basketball on TV? Have you seen Stanford play at all on ESPN? I don't know if you get the Pac-12 Network out there.

JEFF WALZ: Yes, we do. Yeah, I've watched them play. I've seen them play more.

I mean, I can tell you I am becoming very good at you Uno Flip, if you've ever played that. We have some great Scrabble and Junior Scrabble games. I've used this time to really be able to spend time with my family. I mean, this is a profession where to have the opportunity to come home every night for the last year and a half, and have dinner with my wife and my kids, is something that you don't get.

Sure, the pandemic and all this quarantine has been crazy, it's been tough. The dead period that we're still in recruiting has made it very difficult to recruit. But I've tried to look at the bright side and just realize the amount of time I've been able to spend with my kids and my wife and my family.

So, yeah, I've watched some more basketball. But I've spent a lot more time with my kids.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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