

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

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San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome - Alamo

Oregon Ducks

Kelly Graves

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference



Louisville 60, Oregon 42

KELLY GRAVES: First of all, I just want to congratulate Louisville. Coach Walz had them ready. They deserved it tonight. They just played harder than us, they were a lot more aggressive, got us on our heels early. We just couldn't quite recover.

We made an effort and cut it I think to six or eight at some point later in the third quarter, early fourth. They went on a run that we just couldn't recover from.

We didn't play our best. Didn't have really all the pieces that we needed. But again, I don't want to take anything away from Louisville. They deserved to move on.

That being said, I'm really proud of my team. I don't think a month ago many people thought we would be here. We were the youngest team in the field. I think we have a championship makeup with the players that we have. We just weren't good enough in this tournament to continue on.

But I think just the fact that we were able to play three games, win a couple in this tournament, I think will do us well in the future.

Two people I really want to congratulate and let them know how much I love them and appreciate them, Erin Boley and Lydia Giomi played their last games in a Duck uniform. Those two have been very special. They've left a legacy of success.

Quite frankly, they set an example to all of our young kids as to what you're supposed to be when you're a student-athlete, how you're supposed to act, how you're supposed to go about your business. They're not just great

athletes and good basketball players. That's obvious. We've seen them do that on the court. But off the court, you're talking about two leaders in our university community and two people that are going to make this world better. They're the type of people that the world needs most, quite frankly, right now with all the issues that we have.

I'm really proud of them. Like I told them, the worst season they ever had in a Duck uniform was Sweet 16. Think about that. Went to a couple of Elite 8s, went to a Final Four, now a Sweet 16. That's quite a legacy to leave. I'm really proud of them. I just want them to know how much I appreciate and love them.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. I know you don't make excuses, but obviously when Maddie went down, that affected your defense. When Sabally went down, you were making a run. Not having her makes a difference. How much did that hurt you guys not having those two players to have a chance tonight?

KELLY GRAVES: Well, at this point in a tournament, you want every player that you can have, have available. Obviously Maddie has had a tremendous tournament. I can't give her more praise. When Te-Hina Paopao went down, people forget our point guard was First Team All Pac-12, one of the best point guards in the country. We were without her this tournament.

Maddie filled in and did a great job. That obviously hurt. And Nyara was having a great second half. I thought she came out with new commit. We were finally able to get her the basketball. When she went down, I don't know the extent of her injuries, that did not look good. That's going to be a tough one.

Yeah, that just makes it difficult. But, again, hey, can't make excuses. You play with who you have. We just, like I said, didn't have enough.

But I wish them the best. I want a speedy recovery by both. It's too bad we didn't have 'em.

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Q. I'm wondering, you mentioned Paopao, obviously Scherr played well in this tournament. What do you want them to take away from this experience going into next year? Compounding on that, you might actually have a real off-season leading into next season. What can this group take from this going into next year?

KELLY GRAVES: I know we can take it a step or two or even more further. I truly do. I think we've got a championship makeup. I think I know a little bit about that. Never have won one, but certainly have been in a position to. I really like the group that we have coming back.

You're right, this was the absolute worst season to be young. When you consider Sedona and Nyara, they're not technically freshmen, but this was their first year of basketball. They were behind the freshmen even. They hadn't played in two years. That's difficult. Then five true freshmen, nine new people on this basketball team. With very little opportunity.

You're from Oregon, so you know how little we got -- I hear these coaches bellyaching, they didn't get to work with their kids in July. We didn't really start until October in anything meaningful.

Yeah, I applaud them. I am so proud of my team. Like I said, this was a tough year. It's a tough year for everybody. But when you're young, it was even worse. I'm glad that we made it this far.

I think we can use this as a springboard.

Q. I know this is maybe a little bit weird to look at this now, but when you look at the influence and the impact that Sedona and you all had on this tournament, what kind of consolation do you take from that, you're making people pay attention to things they wouldn't have been doing a month ago?

KELLY GRAVES: Couldn't be more proud of the young lady. Just Sedona is a marvel. I'm so inspired each and every day by her. I'm glad that she stood up. She's, quite frankly, made change. That's super, super powerful.

On top of that, you guys, I know tonight wasn't her best game, she had a really good tournament. I think she's put herself into a position now to have not just a real voice but to be able to back it up as one of the best basketball players in the country.

I think that's as important as what they're doing on the basketball court. We want to win every game, we do. But

what we're trying to do is build strong young women who have a voice and feel empowered. I think that's what we're doing at the University of Oregon. It's not just Sedona, it's her teammates, too.

Think about the group we have coming back when you start with Paopao, Nyara Sabally, Sedona Prince, Taylor Mikesell. The list goes on and on. I could have mentioned all 10 or 11 players we have back. This is going to be a really good group. This group isn't going away. We're only going to get better. Now that we have an opportunity to work with each other actually, I think you're going to see huge growth. This is a team that I'll be shocked and really disappointed if they don't not only get to this point next year but even beyond.

Q. You really had a tough second quarter, but a big third quarter to respond. What was working during that period? The way you responded after Nyara left, you got it down to six. What worked when you had to figure things out on the fly like that?

KELLY GRAVES: Well, I thought we stopped turning the ball over. That helped early. We got the ball inside. Sedona and Nyara both got pretty good looks inside. We didn't shoot the ball very well from the three tonight. I thought we had some pretty good looks tonight, not a ton. Credit that defense. They sped us up. We knew they were going to try to, and they did.

It took two quarters to kind of settle down. But I just thought we relaxed a little bit more in that third quarter and got back into it.

It was just a play or two here or there that could have gotten us over the hump. We just could never get over the hump. We felt like we were playing uphill the entire time.

Then the loss to Nyara, that kind of kicks you in the gut a little bit. We didn't respond well. Just like we didn't respond well to Maddie's earlier. We're going to learn from it and move on.

Q. One of the things we talked about, you said they came -- you came -- they got you on your heels a little bit early. You did fight back. As long as there was fight, as long as you didn't get out-worked, that's what you wanted to see. When you think back on this tournament, how hard they did fight, what are you going to remember most?

KELLY GRAVES: Nothing but positives and love for my team. I'm so proud of them. We did work hard. I thought we outplayed and outworked our first two opponents. At times we outworked Louisville tonight. We just didn't do it

for 40 minutes.

I got to give Dana Evans a lot of credit. She was really good tonight. She was every bit the All-American that she was for most of the year. I know she struggled in this tournament, kind of late in the season. We got her fixed, that's for sure (laughter).

Now, they're going to run into an elite team next round, as we well know, Stanford is playing as well as anybody.

A.J., again, I can't say how proud I am of my team. I mean, seriously. Look how young this group is and look how far we got. There's 350-some-odd Division I teams. We made it to the final 16. Like I said, we're going to use this as a springboard and we're going to build on it.

Q. What is your message to the team as you talk to them as their season comes to an end here?

KELLY GRAVES: Well, just basically what I've told you. I let them know that we love them, we appreciated all their efforts this year. I think we've been the model program at the University of Oregon and elsewhere in how to deal with the pandemic. I think our kids have been so resilient, they've been diligent. They took this thing seriously. We did have one pos that cost us one weekend, that's it.

I just thought they did the best they could. Like I said, with a young team, that was difficult for them. Again, I'm so proud of them for their efforts on the court and off the court. We're looking forward now.

Q. Seems like Louisville out-shot you. A lot of shots you couldn't finish at the hoop, drives, the three-pointers. Is that some consolation, just didn't shoot as well as they did?

KELLY GRAVES: I thought early in the game, I thought we had some pretty good looks. We had the right three-point shooters shooting pretty good shots there. Like you said, we just didn't finish around the rim very well early. A few of those go in, maybe it's a different game. Then you're maybe not battling uphill. Maybe it's basket for basket.

We didn't get off to the start that we had gotten the last two games in this tournament. That kind of hurt us.

Q. You mentioned the optimism for this group, kind of this tournament experience. Playing in these games against these caliber of teams, how much can that impact a team? The tournament is a little different animal. To get this far, how much can this lead you guys into the off-season? A couple weeks ago we thought it may have been a disappointing end to the

season and it's not now.

KELLY GRAVES: Exactly. I'm going to remember a great season. It's how you finish. We got to the Sweet 16, you guys. I mean, it's incredible, especially given how we played toward the end of the year.

Listen, positives. It feels bad right now, and it should. It feels bad because it's important to us. But we're going to forget the score tonight. We're going to forget that maybe we weren't at our best. What we're going to remember is a really great run.

Again, I couldn't be more proud of this group. I love each and every one of them. They've had tremendous attitudes all year, a really strong work ethic. They've really built a chemistry and a camaraderie that has been difficult under the circumstances.

Yeah, I'm going to remember only positive things. No question about it.

Now, we got to get better okay? We got to get healthier, which I think means we got to get stronger. We got to put in the work on the court and off the court. Right for you for the next few weeks, I think our school starts tomorrow, spring quarter, they need to get back into the box and get that part of their life back in order so we in a couple weeks, maybe three weeks, really get started on not just conditioning but skill development and really all the things that we need to improve on.

I'm really excited about the future of Duck basketball. Think about it, you guys, in the last five seasons, this is what we've done: Elite 8, Elite 8, Final Four. 2020, who knows. I still think we were the best team and had a chance to win it all. Then this year the Sweet 16.

If that's not an elite basketball program, I'm not sure what is. Until we I guess cut down those final nets, there's always something out there that we're chasing. But, again, what a great season. That's what I'm going to remember.

Now, I'm going to head to Indianapolis and root on my son's team. We didn't win the national championship, maybe they will.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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