

Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 5, 2025
Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Boston College Eagles Coach Joanna Bernabei-McNamee JaKayla Thompson

Postgame Press Conference



Boston College 76, Syracuse 73

JOANNA BERNABEI-McNAMEE: I think resilience is what comes to my mind when thinking about this team and the game today. The first half we looked really disheveled, didn't look like us. I thought we looked like we weren't seeing the open person, and they're really an unselfish team, but we didn't look like that in the first half.

Moved towards the second half, we rebounded the ball so much better. We had some sparks off the bench, J.T. being one of them. I'm telling you, this kid works her butt off every day in practice. A lot of times she ends up being on the scout team, having to play scout team, and her being ready, it should send a message to all kids out there playing basketball that be ready, stay ready. When your number is called, good things happen.

Q. Coach, this is a potential five-day run for you if you can get to the championship game. In your first game, it takes you all 40 minutes. First question: Do you think about the stamina/fatigue factor? And conversely, what does it do for your morale because you were 19 in the hole and you fought back and won?

JOANNA BERNABEI-McNAMEE: Right. A couple things. One, it's tournament time. I don't know that anybody gets tired in tournament time. You have your adrenaline flowing. It's a 40-minute basketball game. You've got a lot of time-outs, you've got a lot of dead balls.

As much as we had to fight in that game, we had a couple players that had to play a lot of the game, but a lot of players got to get in and out of that game, as well.

I'm never going to say an excuse for not playing well is fatigue because adrenaline flows, basketball players are players, and they're going to be ready as far as energy goes.

But I like the sound of that, five games.

Q. Coach, obviously execution in the second half was a lot better, but what was the biggest schematic adjustment you made at halftime?

JOANNA BERNABEI-McNAMEE: I don't even know if I made the adjustment. I think we just stuck to what we went in, and that was really on the defensive boards. We started to block out a lot better.

I thought we stuck to the game plan offensively, where at the beginning it looked like it was pickup basketball, it was just running and gunning; whereas in the second half we settled down and ran some offense.

But that's a credit to the players.

At the end of the day when they come out ready to play, especially this team that we have here at BC, I know they're going to do good things. But they've always got to stick five together as one when they're out there on the floor.

Q. It looked like Dontavia took a hit to the face. Do you know what's going on with her?

JOANNA BERNABEI-McNAMEE: I think where she fell there's a crack in the floor, but I think her head will be all right.

Q. She came eight points shy of single-handedly outscoring Syracuse in the second half. What did you see from her in her last go-around?

JOANNA BERNABEI-McNAMEE: I think that's what you saw, a young lady that was inspired because she was going to refuse to lose because this is her last go-around. She stayed at Boston College. She stuck it out with us. She wants to be a difference maker, and today she

certainly was.

Q. 7:40 in the third quarter, a big three was made. How big of a three-pointer was that, especially with zero made threes in the first half? How did your players kind of build off of that momentum to win this game?

JOANNA BERNABEI-McNAMEE: Right, to your point, any shot that went in we were pretty fired up about because it seemed like the lid was on the basket for us a little bit, and even our put-backs in that first half especially, it was like every time we grabbed some offensive boards -- we had zero second-chance points to their 15 second-chance points at the half.

I think any good play offensively or defensively, this team was just waiting for their adrenaline to get going. I hope tomorrow we start out the game with our adrenaline already flowing.

Q. You were able to stop Syracuse in the paint in the second half. What was going well on defense in the second?

JOANNA BERNABEI-McNAMEE: Yeah, I just think that was like a stick-to-itiveness gritty thing. Whenever you're playing post defense when you're tall enough to defend, and I thought they might have had a little bit of a size advantage on it, but it wasn't a huge size advantage, I think it was just being gritty and fronting and using your muscle and the person that needed to be in help side was there.

But also, that's one thing with Syracuse, they have those good shooters that you've got to try to get in help side, but you've also got to get out on the shooter. In the first half I thought we missed out on that -- I call it dancing in help side where you aren't helping and then you can also get out to the three, and we missed those opportunities in the first half, but in the second half I thought we were there.

Q. Coach, I thought there were a lot of turnovers in that game on both sides of the ball, and you spoke about the grittiness on defense that you saw the whole way through. One of the few categories Syracuse ended up better than you guys in was points off turnovers. How do you want to try and do a better job of capitalizing if you can force the same number tomorrow?

JOANNA BERNABEI-McNAMEE: Right. Yeah, I think capitalizing on -- we talk about this all the time, making bunnies. We work and we take a lot of pride in the way we run our transition, but I think we've just got to get back to having a little bit of confidence in it and finishing at the end

of a nice steal or something like that when we're going in transition.

I do think our threes are going to fall. I hope.

Q. JaKayla, give your impression of this game, this comeback. And the question I had for Coach, this is a potential five-day run for you, what's your energy level, what's your mentality like for you?

JaKAYLA THOMPSON: Yeah, I feel like coming into the locker room at halftime, we really got into it with each other and just told each other, we have to win this game. There's no way we're going to go out like this, like just being down so much at halftime.

So we just had a will to win, and I feel like we came out at halftime and really punched them in the mouth.

Q. You mentioned that halftime locker room atmosphere. What does being here and still being alive in the ACC Tournament mean to your squad and mean to a lot of the seniors and grad students on your squad, as well?

JaKAYLA THOMPSON: For me, I feel like we're supposed to be here. A lot of people counted us out, and when you count us out, it just gives us more energy to want to go out there and play hard every day and just prove people wrong.

JOANNA BERNABEI-McNAMEE: I agree. I think also having that opportunity to kind of redeem ourselves, and we didn't look like the team that was trying to redeem ourselves in that first half.

But I think what J.T. was saying, it wasn't necessarily me going in the locker room and going crazy. It was them before I even walked in the locker room already trying to hold themselves accountable and say, hey, this is like the ACC Tournament, this is what we worked all year for. Let's get our act together. And they really did a great job of doing that in the second half.

Q. Thoughts on tomorrow's big matchup against UNC. It sounds like you are hopeful that Waggoner will be able to play?

JOANNA BERNABEI-McNAMEE: Yeah, I can't really speak, but I hope she's able to play, of course. I think we're really excited to advance. That's a thing in tournament time. It's one game at a time, so now we're going to set all of our focus and efforts toward what we need to do to give UNC a better game than we did the first time we played them this year.

Q. Coach, do you think playing Syracuse back to back came as an advantage for you guys today?

JOANNA BERNABEI-McNAMEE: Yeah, for sure. I think that because we just had that very bitter taste in our mouth from the last time we played them on Sunday, it kind of, I think, fueled us to where there was no doubt I didn't have to go in at halftime and fire anybody up.

They were fired up because they knew that second opportunities in life don't always happen very often, and we had one today. So I'm glad we took advantage of it.

Q. For both Coach and JaKayla, you mentioned the practicing on the scout team or getting ready and developing on the scout team throughout the season. For both of you on a player like JaKayla, how does that develop to get her ready for this moment and be able to hit that shot and play to those roles that you need her to down the stretch and the fourth quarter?

JaKAYLA THOMPSON: Yeah, I feel like it's just a confidence builder. Being in practice and going through all those reps in-game and then coming out and playing and just being ready and staying ready to knock down that shot.

JOANNA BERNABEI-McNAMEE: I think it just says a lot to J.T.'s character and the type of person she is. She doesn't -- she's never on scout team in practice and mad about it. She understands that's where we really have needed her this year. When her number was called, she was absolutely ready.

As a coach, that just is such a good feeling, to see a player get to have her time and shine like she did.

Q. For the record, Coach, what is Dontavia's status for tomorrow, and what happened today? I know you mentioned the crack in the floor. Did she hit her head?

JOANNA BERNABEI-McNAMEE: I think she hit her head. I don't know what the status is yet because we kind of got in here right as -- she was still back at with the time trainer. So we'll see. We're all praying that she's okay, though.

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