

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 8, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

UCLA Bruins

Cori Close

Lauren Betts

Londynn Jones

Postgame Press Conference

UCLA - 75, Ohio State - 46

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with the UCLA portion of our final press conference of the day. Coach Cori Close, Lauren Betts, and Londynn Jones.

Coach, if you would make an opening statement.

CORI CLOSE: First of all, Ohio State, we knew we had to play really focused and execute. Tons of respect for them, especially the way they defend.

We had some really good success versus their press early and made them take it off, and I think that really was a huge piece for us. But really have a lot of respect for what Kevin does and wish them the best of luck in the NCAA Tournament.

Just really proud of our preparation. From the very beginning of the year, we were talking about how success leaves clues, and for us the way we prepare, there can be no shortcuts. We have to be the team that's done all the little work to earn a few more inches, and I thought we did this in a very short turnaround.

I give a lot of credit to my staff. They're really spectacular in the way that they work and prepare our team. But bottom line is I thought we were ultra-prepared and we executed the game plan.

That's been my challenge to them: Can you be counted on to do your job and execute the scout? I thought we did it at a very high level today.

Q. Obviously a very dominant performance tonight. What do you think went into it? And short turnaround



to look that good and win in that fashion.

LONDYNN JONES: I think just preparation. I think we knew what we wanted and the goal that we wanted coming into it, so we knew what it would take. That's just been present every single time. We always talk about 1-0, but it really is 1-0 at the moment.

Just how can we get our team to execute and do the things that we need to do to come up with what we want.

LAUREN BETTS: I agree with that. Obviously we had a great win yesterday, but like we talked about, we just want to stay as present as possible. We moved on quickly and talked about what we can do better, then it's next game.

I thought today was just a different mentality that we came with. I think everyone just decided to dig deep. Obviously a lot of people are sore, a lot of people are tired, but it doesn't matter at this point because we're trying to win games. I'm just proud of how everyone stepped up today.

Q. Lauren, you all had talked earlier this week about wanting to see USC again, whether it was tomorrow or in the NCAA Tournament. Now you're getting what you wanted. How happy are you about that? And what needs to be different this time around?

LAUREN BETTS: A lot has to be different. I'm really excited for our team to get another opportunity to step up. I think we learned a lot from that game, and everyone's been held accountable individually, and we've had a lot of meetings.

I think that we're obviously going to watch the film, but honestly it's just that preparation. We want to go in feeling as confident as possible. I know our coaches are going to put together a really good scout.

Yeah, I just think that we obviously felt really badly about how we played them the last time and how we showed up, and we don't ever want to feel that again. So I know we're all going to change going into it.

Q. Obviously, Lauren, you had less minutes played



tonight, only 24, I believe. How important was it getting to rest for a part of that fourth quarter before a game like USC when you're playing three games in three days?

LAUREN BETTS: Obviously my coaches, they want to take care of me. I appreciate them doing that for sure. I think obviously the way that our team played today, it's just an opportunity for other players to get their moment. I thought Z coming in was really great. I thought Avery did great today, and I thought DZ had an amazing game.

It's not about me. It's about what the team needs in that moment. Obviously going into tomorrow, I want to feel as rested going into it. I just think the coaches, obviously they know what they're doing, so I trust them.

Q. Londynn, you had 22 points tonight. This is like your season high and one shy of your three years in college basketball. How important was it to have a game like this after going 0 for 6 last night from the three?

LONDYNN JONES: I try not to really pay attention to the game before and just stay focused on what I can do and contribute in any way I can moving forward. So whatever the team needs, I'm going to try to do my best to do it.

Shout out to the team for getting me the ball because those looks don't go in without them, so yeah.

CORI CLOSE: Sorry, I know it's not my turn, but I need to say something about that. Not only was she spectacular in her numbers, but her response. She had a tough start at the very beginning of the game, and to stay that mentally focused and locked in and to come out and respond the way she did, I think that puts an even bigger exclamation mark on how well she played for the sake of our team.

I just think that's not easy to do, and that showed a lot of mental toughness on her part.

LONDYNN JONES: Thanks, Coach.

Q. First of all, following up on that question to Lauren, how big of a deal was it you played most of your starters not even 20 minutes? How big was that going into tomorrow's game? And how much did you want to see USC again this weekend?

CORI CLOSE: Yeah, I really wanted to from the very beginning. I was pretty emphatic about that. I think I was asked about that right after our game that we lost at our place, and I've said, absolutely, I'd love another opportunity.

At this time of year, you want to have the best kind of dress rehearsal for March Madness and the NCAA Tournament as you can, and obviously USC -- you know, there's so many levels to this. Obviously they're our only two losses, obviously they're our cross-town rival, obviously this is for a conference tournament championship. There's just so many levels to it.

But if you're a real competitor, you want to be tested against the very best, and you want to have opportunities to conquer your previous adversities, and that's exactly what we're getting. I think it forces you to dig deep and to find new levels of growth. We call that our edge.

The edge is when your talent runs out and you're forced to develop a new level of discipline and skill and toughness that is needed to execute what you want to do. I think playing against USC requires that of us.

I'm looking forward to watching our players grab for that inch and respond to their edge.

Q. Obviously not going to give us the scouting report, but do you feel like you have to have a dramatically different game plan for USC given the results of the first two games?

CORI CLOSE: We need to execute our game plan no matter what it is. That's what I'm so pleased about today. I really -- I believe I work with some of the best scouting minds in the game, and if you ask any of our players, they are so confident in the scouts that they're given.

I have a responsibility to adjust to the adversities and changes in the games, and they have a responsibility to execute what we lay out for them. It may or may not require some different things.

You just even watch the game versus Michigan today, and what was working in the first half for Michigan, had some adjustments in the second half. Those games require that. But there will definitely be some different tactics that we employ to this game.

I think more than anything, it's a commitment to execute together. Adjustments are easy. I think I said this after the game, if it doesn't work and it was our plan, then it's our fault, but if it doesn't work and you didn't follow the plan, then it's your fault.

I think we've learned some valuable lessons together of what it takes to make the right adjustments but also to be counted on to do your job.

Q. Is there anything that has eaten at you or that's been top of mind since those two USC games, knowing you could see them again?

CORI CLOSE: You don't have enough time for the things that have been eating me.

I think the deepest thing for me and my responsibility as a leader is to put our players in positions to be their best when their best is needed. I think the biggest thing is we lost the toughness battle, and that hits me the deepest. I feel most responsible for.

We're in this together, right? I have to set the tone as a leader, and I need to put them in positions to make really good choices. But I want them to be the best version of themselves, and I want them to enjoy competitive greatness because they are leading with togetherness and toughness.

We didn't do that, and ultimately I take that to heart as a leader and really take responsibility of that and wanting to watch them have conquering moments in that. Not just for the game, not just for the championship, but for their lives.

Adversity isn't going anywhere. They're going to face different things the rest of their lives, and I want them to have a new level of confidence about how they attack lessons of adversity, and I want that lesson to be learned in a really vivid way tomorrow.

Q. This team's identity has not really been three-point shooting over the year, but over the last two games you guys have been confidently creating that shot and making that shot. What prompted this change in game plan so late into the year, especially at this stage?

CORI CLOSE: You're saying what's different in our game plan?

Q. Well, what prompted a change in the game plan considering you guys are attempting a lot more 3s than you did throughout the year?

CORI CLOSE: I actually yesterday thought we took way too many 3s. I thought we didn't take the right kind of 3s. Too many off the dribble and too many early in the shot clock when we hadn't really had a focus on the paint.

Today I thought our 3s were much more like we get it at the top, we look at the high-low, three people come, skip to corners, off the pass. Many more off the pass, less off the dribble, and just doing a good job still having a focus on the paint and making them take that away before we settle for 3s.

I just don't want us to settle for 3s. I think that's when your efficiency goes down. I think we're in a team that needs to be in maybe the 15 to 17 range, and they need to be more off the pass and less off the bounce for us to be effective.

As usual, thank you guys for being here and helping tell the stories of these great women. Thank you.

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Ajae Petty

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THE MODERATOR: I want to welcome Ohio State to this press conference -- Coach Kevin McGuff, Ajae Petty, and Taylor Thierry.

Coach, we do have one quick question for you to start this off.

Q. Obviously you guys were defeated in nearly every area of this game, but can you just talk about what you think is the biggest factor that led to this big of a defeat?

KEVIN MCGUFF: First of all, give UCLA credit. I thought they played great. They showed up focused, ready to go. They kind of jumped us early, and we didn't respond very well. We didn't coach very well. We didn't play very well.

Like I said, UCLA was ready, and we were not today. It was a disappointing loss for us.

Q. Ajae and Taylor, what was missing today that you think the team needed to compete with UCLA?

AJAE PETTY: Just like Coach McGuff said, just coming out from the beginning. I think we came out stagnant, and they came out ready to play. They punched us in the mouth, and that's what happened.

Q. For you guys, kind of two poor offensive performances here in the Big Ten Tournament. What do you guys need to work on and improve to be better in March Madness and the NCAA Tournament?

TAYLOR THIERRY: Honestly I think just our defense



contributes to our offense. So when our defense isn't good, we're not getting any good looks on offense.

I just think we have to step up on these opportunities we have to just make shots.

Q. Obviously this big of a loss, I'm guessing, came as a surprise for you guys. What do you guys kind of take from this into March Madness? What can you do with this kind of loss?

TAYLOR THIERRY: Now it's win or go home. For some of us, it's our last season, so just got to take every opportunity we have and take advantage of it and just play hard.

Like I said, it's lose or go home -- or win or go home.

Q. One last thing, was there any point in the game that you did feel like there was any chance of coming back, or after that slow of a start did it just start to feel like it was impossible to come back from that far behind?

AJAE PETTY: No, I don't think that we -- obviously when the time was running down, it's like we lost. But from the big lead that they got, I didn't think that we thought that we couldn't come back.

Once again, it was just honestly just coming out and we wasn't ready. We should have been ready, and we wasn't. UCLA is a great team, and that's what happened.

Q. First quarter, you hold Lauren Betts to no points. Defensively you're playing from earlier in the season where you're trying to stop her from even getting passes was working out, but the offense wasn't kind of matching that momentum. All season you hear them say defense turns into offense. Was it the offensive performance in the first quarter that really put the team in that mental state?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, we had -- I thought we played hard initially defensively. They did make some 3s, to their credit, because we were really trying to crowd Lauren around the basket.



But our bigger problem to start was our offensive execution, which we weren't getting good shots. We had some silly turnovers. And then when we did get shots, we didn't make them.

Q. A followup to that, you're talking about crashing into the paint. Ajae and Elsa have had previous success in the game and in the first quarter today. Is there any coaching discussion about let's try that one-on-one so those people on the edge aren't available?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, we talked about a lot of things because any adjustment we made didn't work. It was one of those nights. Like I said, everything we did differently, UCLA executed in a way that made us pay. That shows you that they were ready and they were focused. They played great, and we played very bad.

Q. To add to a bad loss, you have Jaloni and Cotie leave with injuries. How much do you know about their injuries at the moment?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Not much. I haven't talked to the trainer yet. Jaloni was walking, but with ice on her ankle. Hopefully it's nothing long term, but I'll get with the trainer a little bit more here later tonight.

Q. I guess from a loss as big as this, is there anything specific you have to do to sort of build up the confidence back going into March Madness, or is it just playing better?

KEVIN MCGUFF: We need really good, focused practices. I'm a big believer in you play how you practice. So we need to get -- we'll take a couple days off, but we need to have a great week here coming up. Then next Sunday we'll figure out who we're playing and what the path looks like and start to prepare.

Really it's got to start with really focused, spirited practices.

Q. You mentioned in the first practice that you felt like you were even outcoached. Can you talk from your end what made you feel like you were outcoached and what wasn't going right?

KEVIN MCGUFF: They looked more prepared from the start, and if our team isn't ready to go the start, that starts with me. Like I said, we won yesterday because we fought to literally the last second, and we didn't have that today. That's part of coaching and part of my job is to make sure that they're prepared and ready to fight and play together, and we didn't have that today.

Q. You just mentioned the fight. A couple years ago you had another fight against Indiana, had that huge comeback, and then again you see in the next game the next day kind of falling flat. Do you think there was maybe too much by the players potentially to put into that Iowa game, or what do you see there?

KEVIN MCGUFF: If you're on like day 3 or 4, I think maybe there's a physical element, but on day 2 that shouldn't be the case at all. We did put a lot into last night's game, but they played hard too. They had to really play hard against Nebraska. I don't think it was that. Well, it shouldn't have been. How's that?

Q. Obviously this is -- their loss against either of the top two teams in the Big Ten. How is it going into March Madness not having a marquee win on your résumé like you have had in the past few seasons?

KEVIN MCGUFF: We are where we are. So we won't dwell on that. More so, what can we do right now to make sure we're as prepared as possible when we get an opponent in our path.

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