



2019 NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

First Round · #6 UCLA vs. #11 Tennessee
XFINITY Center · College Park, Md.
Friday, March 22, 2019

PREGAME QUOTES – UCLA

Cori Close, UCLA Head Coach

Opening statement:

“Well first off thank you to guys for being here. I’ve been just really struck watching all of the games and how important this time of year is. Not only for this NCAA tournament, but for the growth of our game. So, I just appreciate you all telling the stories of these great young women and covering our great sport. We’re thrilled to be here. We have really just stayed focused on getting better each week. That’s really been our approach leading up to this game. Obviously, Tennessee is a really talented basketball program, and they have our attention and our respect. We’re excited and honored to be competing in the field and excited to get started.”

On preparing for Tennessee:

“Well I think, it is difficult because their record is not reflective of, obviously, their level of talent as well as their level of capability as a team. But I think it really comes down to, this time of year, it comes down to how do you play to your strengths and I think sometimes it is easy to get distracted by what the other team is or is not going to do instead of really thinking how can I help equip our team to play to their strengths, and to do that for forty minutes. You know, I’ve been guilty of both sides of that. Tennessee has had some ups and downs, but I think we prepare in the times in which they’ve been their best.”

On keeping team motivated during tough stretches throughout the season:

“Well, we started out the year 3-5, we lost pretty much two first round draft picks last year. There was not one player on our team to start out the year that was playing the same role. We had so many different things. I think not only is it them growing in their confidence and becoming a team rather than a collection of individuals, but it was me learning them. I think our down times were a growing into. We have a saying we that we start almost all of our practices with: ‘build it’ or ‘earn it.’ I think it takes time, and we needed that time to go ahead and build into something that was going to be consistent. I think we’re playing pretty consistent to our identity right now and that gives me a lot of confidence as their coach, but we definitely can relate to Tennessee and having their ups and downs. I think we’ve hit a stride now that we know who we are. I think I know how to put them in positions to strengthen them a little bit better and we’re excited to play our best basketball at the best time.”

On the NCAA bracket and seeing Tennessee come up as an 11 seed:

“Without hesitation, it is weird to see Tennessee on the 11 line. Holly Warlick is a friend of mine, she’s been a part of such incredible history there (Tennessee). I’m impressed how she brings that passion for the Lady Vols, year in and year out, day in and day out. I think the reality is that we found out in the middle of practice because of the unfortunate leak. It’s a credit to their history. You should’ve seen our players faces. You’re a six seed playing an 11, and oh you’re going to be playing Tennessee. There was a shock moment, there was. I could see it on their faces. I think they’ve earned that, to their credit over a long period of time they’ve have sustained excellence. That is your initial reaction, ‘Wow. Welcome to getting an upper-hand seed. You get Tennessee.’ At the same time, I think that was an initial shock, then you start to go to work and do your homework. Then you go, ‘OK this is a matchup, this is what we’re going to have to do to play our best and then it becomes a little bit more normalized.”

On the key to being successful on the road:

“If I knew for sure I would’ve done it many, many years ago because being a good road team is really hard. I do think it’s a distraction issue in some ways. We tend to be very close-knit, and block out everything else. We’ve been able to take a lot of enjoyment in silencing the crowd on the road or being the underdog a little bit. But I do think more than anything else, we have been incredibly focused and narrow in our focus, and haven’t let anybody—we call it the ‘bruin bubble’— we haven’t let anybody penetrate the bruin bubble, especially on the road.”

On losing senior leaders Jordin Canada and Japreece Dean’s leadership:

“The other one who doesn’t get talked about as much is Kelli Hayes. She was our most vocal leader. She was the glue of the team. She was most definitely, between the lines, the most communicative player and put everyone in position. So, Japreece Dean was really replacing two people. Jordin Canada obviously is number five pick in the draft and has done amazing things already, she has already won a WNBA Championship. You have that, and then you have the vocal leader in Kelli Hayes gone. There’s a really big void. But it’s been really fun to watch Japreece go.”

We always talk about how leadership is just influence and they are on a journey with a job to take people with them. Our leaders -- especially our point guard, Japreece Dean -- it’s been really fun to watch her be on that journey and learn how her personality takes people with her. I think she’s found her own unique style. She still talks to Jordin and Kelli several times a week, but she’s not trying to be in their shadow. She’s trying to create her own journey and be the best leader she can be within her own personality. That’s what I really admire. She’s gleaned from Kelli, gleaned from Jordin, but wasn’t afraid to blaze her own trail.

On Japreece Dean’s extra year with the Bruins and serving as a mentor to incoming teammates:

“That’s an excellent question and that’s exactly the conversation I had with her after the fact. My initial reaction was thank you to all of the people [involved]. This was a long process and to watch the joy on her face -- I actually had our compliance director come to practice that day -- who had really done all the work on the waiver -- so she could see the joy on her face. It was really fun to watch. But, that’s exactly what I asked her: “What lessons are you needing to learn in this next year that maybe you wouldn’t have had the opportunity to? Why is Jaden Owens and Charisma Osborne’s experience going to be different because you’re there? Think about why you were so excited to learn from Jordin Canada. What did she provide for you when you transferred here? I asked her to write it down. She’s already started thinking about, “What’s my

responsibility in that?" But right now, I just want her to think about playing really well in the NCAA tournament."

On being compared to and playing a SEC team:

"I think they are a little bit bigger than we are. They are very physical and we really respect their rebounding ability. They are one of the tops in the country for that. I think in our athleticism and our versatility; I can see that comparison. We're going to have to really buck up and be physical because we admire their physical toughness in Tennessee. You know, we've played a very national schedule. We've already played Georgia and across the power five conferences, so I don't think we'll be shocked. But we've made a very big emphasis to our team that from a physicality and rebounding standpoint that everything gets ramped up in the NCAA tournament anyway. A team like Tennessee, I think that's really their strength is their physicality and their length."

On common opponents with Tennessee:

"We always watch those games, because you have more experience and more cross over. We watched the Stanford game; I just watched the Kentucky game today, we've watched all of those common opponents. I think it's sort of an art project to put together a scouting report. That's a part of it, especially when you haven't played them before in that particular year. It's also what have they been doing in the last 10 games, what are teams that they've played that are the most like us, not necessarily just common opponents. I wouldn't say Stanford is the most like us. Actually, Kentucky may be a little bit closer. For us, the reality is a lot of preparation in a short period of time. Again, it really comes back to us."

Sophomore Forward Michaela Onyenwere

On trying to size up with Tennessee and how they've prepared:

"I think the PAC12 is one of the best conferences in the country and I think that really prepares us for these tough games against these SEC schools like Tennessee. Just doing our work early, I think they have great bigs on Tennessee, and just like Kennedy said, rebounding battles are going to be tough because we both matchup well."

On playing on the road this year versus being at home the past few years:

"I think mine is a little bit different, I haven't been here as long so last year was my first time experiencing being at home and now we're on the road but I don't think it really changes anything. I think we're still going to compete and play hard, fight together and do what we have to do. We've been actually a better road team this year than in years past so just taking it by grace, taking it one game at a time."

On the game environment on the road:

"Yeah, we are faced with a lot of adversity on the road and we have to be more locked in. I know we have been locked in at home and on the road as well, but just more locked in because we are here for a reason, we are here to win this game and I think that's our mindset going into road games."

On the historical prominence of Tennessee:

"We were in practice when the bracket actually got leaked so Coach Cori brought us together and told us the news, but I think it is a great opportunity. I mean we all hear Tennessee and we think basketball legacy and we're in such a great position to play them and I'm just really excited. Growing up you hear Tennessee; you hear about what Pat Summitt left and her legacy

so just a really exciting opportunity and we're just really excited to be playing against them tomorrow.:

On Japreece's importance to Tennessee:

"I would agree, Japreece and I have a really close relationship, she is one of my best buddies on the team I guess you could say and she has grown so much as a person and as a leader. Just from me being here for two years, she did a full 180 with her leadership and I'm just so happy that she gets to come back for another year and it's just nice to have people like that on your team who you can rely on who give you everything who has this competitive spirit about them and you're not going to find that a lot. She makes you fight and she makes you kind of go to her level and that's something that is really important to have on a team."

On the expectation of rebuilding year:

"Coach Cori at the beginning of the season, she instilled in us that it really wasn't a rebuilding year for us and yes, we lost great people and Jordan and Mo and Kelly were just great, great leaders and we miss them all, but I think she emphasized to us that it was not a rebuilding year. It's different, but we were going to find ways to win and find ways to compete together, work hard and when you have a coach that believes in you from the beginning it is easier to navigate through the season and navigate through adversity and your ups and downs."

Senior Guard Kennedy Burke

On trying to size up with Tennessee and how they've prepared:

"I think that the PAC12 Tournament really gave us an idea of what teams we are going to play against. Tennessee is a perfect example of them and I think that throughout practice this week we have been preparing well. The main thing is boxing out and guarding your own."

On the NCAA Tournament being at home the last few years, but now on the road:

"I think the main difference is the atmosphere because being at home three years in a row you are used to playing in your own gym, practicing in there, but one of the biggest things is the environment, there's going to be more people that are rooting for the home team so we just have to be prepared for that."

On the game environment on the road:

"I think that the fact that we know that a lot of things are not going to go our way is the biggest thing."

On the historical prominence of Tennessee:

"We're just excited to compete with each other and we know that it's going to be hard but we're ready for it, we're prepared for it."

On Japreece's importance to Tennessee:

"I think one of the biggest things about Japreece is that she is a huge competitor and she challenges all of us and outside of basketball she is just a good friend, she checks in on everyone and she is always that person you can rely on. You can talk to her about anything she is a great teammate and friend."

On the expectation of rebuilding year:

"At the beginning it wasn't going to be pretty, there were going to be ups and downs and we've proven through the journey that it does get better and we proved it."