



2019 NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Second Round · #3 Maryland vs. #6 UCLA

Xfinity Center· College Park, Md.

Monday, March 25, 2019

POSTGAME QUOTES – UCLA

Cori Close, UCLA Head Coach:

Opening Statement:

“First of all I would like to give thanks to all the people of the University of Maryland that hosted this weekend, and I do not say this all the time. They have been incredibly kind, hospitable, professional and hard working so I really want to say thank you to all the people behind the scenes that make this a great event. I also want to give a ton of credit to the University of Maryland’s women’s basketball team. I have such a deep respect for them. I think I talked about it yesterday in the press conference, but they are just an excellent basketball program. They’re not just a basketball team they’re a basketball program which is what we seek to have in LA so really this just means a lot because we have such a high respect for their program and what they do. We knew it would come down to rebounding, the biggest thing, and we struggled at times, but I thought they did a really good job at finding their post players. We played several different defenses and tried to mix up how we played, and we didn’t have an answer for their inside game for a long time. We finally brought someone in to just double and sag off and try to make other people touch it and I thought that was a turning point in the game, but we are really really happy to do what we do. The last thing I will say is that sometimes you have a group of young women that teach your heart as a coach more than you have a chance to teach theirs and this group has done that for me. We started out the year 3-5 but our word for the year is expectant but sometimes I needed to look in their eyes to be expectant, sometimes they just needed to teach me by the way that they chose to come in and grow and give to each other day after day when they weren’t being rewarded and I think that’s the key. I’m just really thankful to be the head coach of this group of young women and to work with incredible assistant coaches and support staff and I feel like I’ve grown as a coach this year because I have been able to be around them.”

On the teams rebounding and her coaching technique:

“Go get it girls! No, I think it is absolutely an effort thing. I have to give credit to Lajahna Drummer and Michaela Onyenwere first and then I think Kennedy Burke really stepped up in that way but all year long we have been in the top ten in the country in terms of offensive

rebounding percentages. That's been a huge piece for us. We are not a great shooting team, we don't rely on the three-point shot, we don't have shooters like some of the ones Maryland has. But we have to go get our misses and we have to be confident shooters and the way that you're a confident jump shooter is if you miss that someone has got your back and we talk about how we try to get at least 45% of our misses to get a second chance at our shot opportunity. I don't know how the percentages worked out yet from the stat sheet but that's our standard. We hold ourselves to that standard in fact all throughout the regular season, if we get the right amount of passion plays in a game which is a non-statistical category that we believe reflect our passion and perseverance in a game, then we get our rebounding percentages and they get an extra day off. That's something we have emphasized all year long but I don't think you can underestimate the effort because they're not rebounds that are just coming to big people, they are relentless, out of area rebounds and those are all heart and determination and I will do whatever it takes for the sake of our team and that's what those young women have shown."

On this game falling on the anniversary of UCLA's first national championship:

"And against Maryland. I just got done with the radio and I'm walking across and the two people that I saw smiling ear to ear and going like this were, Denise Curry and Debbie Haliday and both were on that team. And Debbie Haliday, her maiden name is Willie, and to have those two people be the most supportive and the most exuberant, Debbie is on our staff and Denise has come with us every single year and it means a lot. I think it means even more to me because I think about all of you sitting here and you wouldn't have been here like this 30 or 40 years ago. What they did, the trail they blazed that we get to walk in and I mentioned that yesterday, I am deeply humbled by that joy that I get to be a part of the program with so much history but they have been the also biggest celebrators. Annie Mayers as well, I have already heard from Billie Moore, all these people that have this incredible history and they have been with us the entire journey not just the destination of what we got to accomplish today and we are not done yet but they have been with us the entire journey because they believe in our mission. So, it's a long answer to a short question and I apologize but honestly it really hits my heart in such a deep way and I am really humbled to be a part of the trail that they blazed.

On playing University of Connecticut in Albany:

"We are going to stay right here; we are east coasters for a little bit. We are on spring break right now so our kids are not in school so we are going to go straight to Albany and see what adventure we can find. But I have this weird thing with UConn and regionals. I've been to 3 different places and every single regional I've been to except for 1, I've met UConn at either regionals or regional finals. I don't know how that works but somehow. I do get a bottle of wine from Gino (Auriemma) every time, so I'm hoping Gino, you remember that. Last time we went there he gave me a bottle of wine and I returned the favor when he came to LA. What can you say I mean we live in the incredible tradition of John Wooden and he is the next, on the woman's side, the one with that kind of sustained excellence so there is such incredible respect. I love not only the excellence that they have done not only in their performance, but I love the way that they play the game. I love that they share the ball, I love that they really do a great job moving it and everybody gets a chance. It's not about running plays, I think that their players are taught to play the game. I think he's an excellent coach. At the same time like I said yesterday, I

think you have to know that still players go and make plays, shirts don't make plays, the letters across your chest doesn't make plays you have to make plays together and believe what's inside of you and how you have trained. I think a lot of teams lose to UConn before they even start because they get wrapped up in that. The reality is we have a lot of confidence in what we have built and what we have earned, we have a lot of respect for them but he's tremendous, what can you say, he's earned that. But what I love is the parody of the game this year is more than it's ever been. And you know what it does? It demands your best. And for the young women that I love, and I get to coach is that's what you want. You want to be put in situations where you get to compete, and you are in the situation which will demand your best and you get to rise up to that. I'm excited for the opportunity to do that and we are going to believe greatly not in the shirts that we wear but the people that are inside those shirts and we are going to compete our butts off."

On four straight trips to Sweet Sixteen:

"Well, I haven't seen all of them. But I happen to have a moment that I came in and I saw Jordan Canada's text already from Poland. She said, 'Coach, I'm just so proud of this team. I've stayed up and watched almost every game.' She said, 'We're not just a basketball team, we're a basketball program.' For that to come from your player who was first round draft pick last year— she's so excited for these young women— and for her to recognize that we're really not just a team that is just trying to win games. We're trying to be an elite basketball program, but one that makes a difference for life beyond basketball. We really believe that culture wins. When you establish a culture that is deeper than any one individual, and everybody, including myself, including every staff member, it is more important to impact lives and give them life habits that are going to be with them long after the ball goes flat. I really trust that those same life habits are also the ones that bring you to peak performance. That's what we're trying to do. It's really a by-product of character. It's a by-product of being willing to give and to grow every single day. What I told the team before the game was, 'I just ask two things: be totally present where your feet are. All the anxiousness comes from worrying about the past or worrying about the future. You can be at your best when you are absolutely sold out to the moment that you're in, and then to finish absolutely empty. There's a young woman, she's absolutely incredible. She lives around here actually, Alana Beard, who spoke to our team a couple of years ago.' I told this story to them before the game. She said, 'You know, you can surrender the outcome when you know you've done everything under your control to master your craft and to selflessly give to each other.' And she said when she told the story of going to two back-to-back WNBA fifth games in the finals. One she won and she lost. But she said had peace either way because she had given everything to mastering her craft and to giving to her teammates. That's what I'm so proud of. I'm so proud of the way that they're grown in their character and I think it's what we saw on the court, was a by-product of that."

On her team's offensive performance:

"Well, you know, it's interesting though because they went player to player in the second half and that's when they made their run. I was pleased overall. I thought we got good shots. I think definitely my concerns at halftime were all about defense; how to keep the ball, adjustments in our post defense, and how to keep the ball out of the post. I really wasn't too worried about our zone offense, but then they come out and they come player to player and they really pressure us, and they started doing. So, they don't like to switch screens and they started switching to try to keep Japreece Dean in front and I thought she was a major key. She really, I thought, changed the momentum of the game when they took the momentum in the third quarter, I though Japreece Dean getting to the free throw line, getting into the paint, and creating for other

people that was a major turning point for us. But give them credit because I thought if they went player to player, we would really would be able to find the matchups that we want, and it was a lot harder than I thought it was going to be. So, credit their defense on that because I actually thought we were more effective against their zone then we were against their player to player.”

On what's going through her head the final minutes of the game:

“The only thing I was thinking was I’m so thankful for the learning experience that these young women got this year that will be with them the rest of their lives. I really thought that. This will teach them about perseverance and about what you can become and it’s not where you are but what you can grow into and what can happen when you commit to something over a long period of time. That’s the definition of grit, right? It’s power, passion, and perseverance over a long period of time, even when your circumstances don’t reflect it. I’m happy for the grit this team has earned. I just know that there’s going to be a time 10 years from now when they’re going to be able to refer to all these things that taught their heart and the habits they have because what they’ve gone through this year. So honestly, that’s what I’m in this for. I’m in this to impact people’s hearts and to give them tools that are going to be with them long after the ball goes flat. And I’m incredibly competitive, but I never want my competitive drive to overtake the mission of what I do this job.

Sophomore Forward Michaela Onyenwere

On extra opportunities from offensive rebounds helping UCLA settle into offensive sets:

“Yeah, I think offensive rebounds has been one of our strengths since the beginning of the season. I think that we really harp on that during practice. We have great people that really navigate the ball off the rim and I think that just gives our guards confidence to shoot the ball because they know that we’re going to get the rebound and we’re going to get extra possessions. That’s really important in games like this where we win by two or three possessions, and this is a great team that we just won against so those extra possessions are really special.”

On going 1-on-1 with Maryland's Shakira Austin:

“Yeah, she’s big, and it just pops to her. She’s young, but I think that she’s going to be a great player here at Maryland as she continues to grow. But yeah, it’s hard to go against people who are taller than me. But that’s something I’ve been doing all year. I’m a little bit undersized at my position, but I just have to find different ways to score in different ways whether that’s going around people, elevating over people, things like that.”

On UCLA turning the game around after an emotional third quarter:

“We’ve been in games where it’s like we went to triple overtime, we went to overtime how many times? We’ve been in such crazy games this year and I think that’s prepared us for moments like this. And yeah, we got frustrated and emotions got high just because we all wanted to win this game so bad. But I think that once we got in the huddle, it was easier to pause, gain clarity, and realize we’re okay.”

On preparing for UConn in the regionals:

"I think the biggest thing is to not focus on them but to focus on us. Coach [Close] has mentioned throughout the entire year that if we stay composed through everything that we do, we'll be fine."

Senior Guard Kennedy Burke

On UCLA's offensive rebounding effort:

"I think on the rebounding side, we wanted it more and it showed on the court and that was one of the keys to the game and we executed that really well."

On UCLA turning the game around after an emotional third quarter:

"Coach [Close] mentioned to pause and gain clarity and we did that. We had to look each other in the eye and say 'We've got this. We've been in situations like this,' and it showed."

On the impact of UCLA changing defenses:

"Defense is what we're known for and just being able to focus on that, it transferred to the offensive end."