

PAC-12 Women's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 4 2018

Kelly Graves
Ruthy Hebard
Sabrina Ionescu
Oregon

Oregon - 77, Stanford - 57

THE MODERATOR: We welcome the Pac-12 champion Oregon Ducks, head Coach Kelly Graves, Sabrina Ionescu and Ruthy Hebard. Coach, an opening statement?

KELLY GRAVES: First of all, I want to congratulate Stanford on an amazing season. They push everybody to the limits. They're the standard by which every program in our conference is judged. Coach VanDerveer, obviously, a great Hall of Famer, has an awesome team and a team that's going to represent very well in the NCAA Tournament. Wouldn't be surprised if she goes to like her 4 millionth Final Four.

But today we were the better team. We got off to kind of a tough start, but once we got our legs underneath us, I thought defensively we were on point. That's two games in a row here -- actually three games, all three games in the tournament where I thought defensively we were terrific. The energy was great.

When you have, even though it's young leadership, great leadership from our two sophomores here, I think you saw the result. Couldn't be more proud. It's been a first. This has been a season of firsts for the Ducks, and this is the first time we've ever won a Pac-12 Tournament Championship. It feels really neat.

Q. Sabrina, what was it about playing Stanford this time where you kind of attacked offensively and did a lot of the scoring tonight?

SABRINA IONESCU: I think it was just our mindset coming in to be honest. I think we had some unfinished business, and our coaches did a great job on the scouting. We adjusted from what we did last game, and I was just ready to come out. I think our team was ready to come out from the start, and we played great basketball. We played great on the defensive end as well as offensively.

Q. So this is the Pac-12 tournament title game, but



you mentioned unfinished business, and I got a sense that you guys were pretty motivated by that loss to Stanford up at your place, and it fed a lot of what you guys had going on tonight?

SABRINA IONESCU: It for sure did. Back at home, that loss stung us badly. We came out well in the first half back at home, and the second half we let it slip away from us. I think it taught us a lot down the road, and this game showed it. I think we came out, we adjusted well, and we came out with a lot of intensity, and we did that for all the 40 minutes of the game. We played great down low. Ruthy had a great game, just against their great post players, and our guards did well as well, and I did well as well.

We just have to come out every game like that, and I think we'll be just fine.

Q. Kelly, you've seen a lot from Sabrina in the last couple years, but at what point tonight did you realize she was on fire and she was finding her game?

KELLY GRAVES: She was doing it in every phase. I thought defensively she was giving us great energy that led to obviously some great offense. Just her willingness to take late shot clock shots and just keep the ball in her hands the whole time. I was telling some people earlier that I saw a little twinkle in her eye coming off the bus today and at shoot around and at pre-game meal. She had a different look about her. I depth know what that was going to translate into, but now I know the look (laughing).

But I'll tell you, when you have somebody like Sabrina, she shines the brightest in the biggest moments, and she sure did that tonight. That's part of her competitive greatness.

Q. Kelly, were you pleasantly surprised with what you got out of Satou tonight?

KELLY GRAVES: Absolutely, absolutely. Yeah, she was not feeling good today. She was walking gingerly. Said she couldn't jump which is kind of important in a basketball game. But I figured once the game got going the adrenaline would start to flow, and she was terrific. Yeah, terrific.

She hit some key shots at a key time during that run where we started to separate. So that's great to see.

I'm really happy that she's healthier.

Q. This team had given away some leads in the last month, and I know that kind of irritated you. To put away a team like there in the second half, what fueled that and how pleased were you to see you guys close it out decisively?

KELLY GRAVES: We're starting to do that lately. We're starting to really mature. I think people forget, this is a young team. I mean, even though they've been around a long time in terms of name recognition and things like that, especially in big games and postseason, they're still young and it's been a work in progress.

But it shows me that this time of year they're starting to focus. We would just build the leads, which is great. That's a nice thing. But then give them back. A lot of that was just lack of focus, and I think they're starting to really dial in and they did really want this. You could tell.

Q. Last time Stanford really won the battle in terms of points off of turnovers. Tonight you guys almost flipped the script. What was the difference in transition tonight?

KELLY GRAVES: I thought our energy was great. We were active. Our feet and our hands were active. We didn't get out and trap much, but I just thought we were on point. We were dialled in.

We decided to play them outside in, tried to take away the three-point game the best we could and make them make baskets around the hoop, and we did that. Outside of Kiana's first three of the game, I don't know if she got another one until it was late. I just thought all night long we did a really good job of defending the three.

Q. I don't think there is a team in this conference that will forget that you're a young team. Just throwing that out there. Ruthy, do you think you guys were getting them really frustrated defensively over that stretch of time, particularly probably second quarter, third quarter?

RUTHY HEBARD: Yeah, I think we were really focusing on getting them frustrated, and we did that. Sabrina and Maite were doing a great job taking away passing lanes and getting great shots, and it was great to see them having Stanford on their heels.

Q. Sabrina, when you committed to Oregon a couple years ago, did you think this was possible? At the end of year two, is this where you thought the program would be?

SABRINA IONESCU: I didn't really think that far in advance. But I knew that we could build something great here and our coaches believed in us during the

recruiting process and believed we could achieve something like this.

But we definitely take it one day at a time and focus on ourselves. I don't think we focus too much in the future. But it's been great the fact that we achieved this so soon. Sky's the limit for us, and I'm excited to see what the future holds.

Q. With the way this team played in this tournament, does it change or maybe reinforce what you thought this team would be capable of in the NCAA Tournament?

KELLY GRAVES: Absolutely. I think we're primed and ready for that next phase. No doubt it's going to be -- we don't know yet for sure, but we're hoping that we're going to host and get off to hopefully a really good start. But I think this team is ready. We've been firing on all cylinders.

I think having Lexi Bando back, we did not lose to a league team when Lexi was in the lineup. It really changes us. It makes us a lot more potent offensively. And it gives us a senior that we can go to.

But, yeah, I think all the pieces are in place for us to continue this success.

Q. Sabrina, I'd like to say Stewy wore yellow today?

SABRINA IONESCU: I saw. I saw.

Q. But for both of you, you've brought a lot of joy to Oregon fans. It's so great to see our women's program rise up. How are you going to celebrate when you get home? I know you have a minute to do so before you get ready for the tourney?

SABRINA IONESCU: Yeah, we don't have too much time to celebrate. We have class tomorrow morning that we will be attending, Ruthy.

KELLY GRAVES: Yes, you will.

SABRINA IONESCU: Yes, we will. But we're going to let this one sink in a little, I think. It's awesome we got to this game, but we definitely wanted to win it. I knew that as a team. We weren't going to be complacent just getting to the championship game. I knew we wanted to win this. The fans were great. So happy to see them drive down. It was definitely Oregon territory out there, and they pumped us up and it was an honor to play in front of them. They definitely add fuel to the fire when we play.

Q. You guys had quite the tournament run last year in the NAAs. I guess, what were some -- when you look back on it now, what were some of the lessons you took from that that helped you in this

tournament and might help you going into the NCAAs now?

KELLY GRAVES: Well, last year's run we didn't really know what we were doing. We just kind of got hot and had some fun and stayed loose. Had three tremendous games. I think this year as you can tell by the record how we've stayed focused for the whole year. I mean, 19-2 against conference opponents. I just think we've matured and now we know what we're capable of. That's what that run last year gave us was the confidence of knowing, hey, we're pretty good.

The off-season was phenomenal. They worked so hard and got better, and we're clicking. You're watching a team just mature right before us.

Q. You talk about being loose last year. Does it change now knowing that there are expectations, there is going to be pressure this time around?

KELLY GRAVES: No. We're still loose. I think we learned something. I think we play better that way, don't you? This is a group that really gets along well. The chemistry's great. Coaches love players. Players love coaches. Players love players. It's a great dynamic. I love going to work every day with this group. I don't know if I've ever coached a group that is this close, and you can tell they play for each other. They're great teammates. They've got talent and great leadership.

So we've, I think, got all the pieces. We'll see how far we can take this. I know we're guaranteed one game. We'll see.

Q. As you're watching your team climb the ladder and cut the nets, what thoughts are going through your mind?

KELLY GRAVES: How to get the cake out of my ear and stuff. That was -- yeah, I'm going to need a shower. That's true love, I guess, right?

You know, it's really funny. I've won a few of these, and I think this is the first time I've cut down a net. I've always stayed in the background on those occasions and felt appropriate today, and I'm glad that I got up there. I tested the ladder's weight limit, for sure.

But it was really special. As a coach, I'm telling you and my whole staff feels the same way, our job is to help them realize their potential and dreams. For me to sit back there and watch them go up one by one, that's priceless. That's priceless. That's why I do what I do and I truly love each and every one of them. I'm so happy for them. This is one of their goals and dreams, and we helped make it a reality.

Q. You said it felt right to cut down the net this

year. What is it about this group that has you doing that?

KELLY GRAVES: Yeah, I just really feel close to them. I've loved each and every team that I've coached, but there is just something special about these guys. It's in the soul, and I like being part of them. I truly do. I truly do. It's been an honor to coach them, and I hope we have a longer journey this year.

Plus, I think they wanted me to do it. If you want to know the truth. The people in the Pac-12 and my administration (laughing). Which story do you want? I gave you both.