

PAC-12 Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 2 2018

Cori Close
Monique Billings
Kelli Hayes
Jordin Canada

UCLA

UCLA - 77, Cal - 74

CORI CLOSE: Well, as usual, media, it's so huge to have you here covering this tournament and covering our conference, and really pushing and growing our game forward, so we appreciate you and your coverage.

Really proud of our poise. We were down 7 with 6:57 left to go in the game, and then had 9 out of 11 trips where we scored. I just thought we were led by our seniors. Not only statistically, but in their poise and in their emotional leadership. But also, really complementary of Cal. We knew this was going to be a battle. They've been playing so well, and I just thought they did a great job on the boards. It was a very physical game, and I think it's a game that's going to prepare both teams really well for March.

But I just really have to call out Kelli Hayes, we've really talked all year long that this team was going to have to have an "I will" mentality, and we were always going to need to put the team above ourselves, and that's not easy to do.

Kelli has made so many selfless choices. For her to stay ready the way she was, not only shooting approximate the three well, 5 for 7 from the three-point line, but the way we were able to switch and her to be able to rebound and defending the post in that fourth quarter was just huge for us and says so much about her character.

So, in my mind, she was really the difference maker for us, and really proud of the way she stayed ready.

Q. You guys had a slow start. Shot 25% in the first quarter and then 30 on the half. What did -- did you think you were getting good looks or were they defending you well, or what changed in the second half for players and Coach?



CORI CLOSE: I think we were getting really good looks, we just weren't making them. It's a really great thing when you can say, Jordin, I didn't know if you had a great game, but you had 27. That's a luxury.

But I thought Jordin was shooting really good shots. I thought Monique was getting good shots. We just weren't making them in the first half, and I think that's where you have to have maturity and poise and stay the course.

Credit to Cal's defense, but I didn't think we were taking bad shots. I just think we weren't making them.

Q. Mo, for you personally, how did you go from a slow start in the first half to heating up in the second? What kind of was the difference of things? What did you see differently or what made you hit those shots down the stretch?

MONIQUE BILLINGS: I was feeding off of the energy from these two right here, especially Jordin. She was just attacking and attacking their post. So it was getting them in foul trouble, so I wanted to follow that and attack them too anyway that I could. I knew I needed to step up for my team. So it was just a mentality that I had to take on.

Q. Coach, this was an intense game from the outset, from beginning to end. Is this the kind of game you want to have to go into facing a team like Oregon, a top seed?

CORI CLOSE: It's such different styles of play, right? They're so physical. Where Oregon is much more spread-court oriented, want to shoot the three. They're playing mostly zone and Cal is playing mostly player-to-player. So really different styles.

But that's one of my favorite things about this conference is that there are so many high-level teams that play so many different styles, and what that does is it really prepares you for the NCAA Tournament.

I don't know if it was a very physical game. I think it was a very intense game. I definitely think the intensity level is going to be there in that semifinal game. But I think it will be a completely different game plan and completely different style of play.

Q. Kelli Hayes, a career high 18 points, a career

high 5 of 7 from three. What got into you today?

KELLI HAYES: Honestly, nothing really changed for me. I know that I put forth the work this whole summer and this year. My teammates really put in that confidence in me. They've seen me every day in practice putting up shots, and also like putting the team first. If I didn't have that mentality this whole year of, you know, I may get three shots this game, five shots the next game.

It doesn't matter how many shots I get up. It's a matter of them being good shots for the team. Most of the time Jordin will say -- they're usually good shots. Jordin says, not all the time, but usually. So when she passes me the ball, I try to shoot it. If not, I'm hitting Mo in the paint. So either way, that's what I was doing today.

It was just a good one. So I'm excited for this game and what's to happen tomorrow.

Q. The last couple times you guys played them, it wasn't really as close as this game. Did they do something differently that kind of kept it close toward the end there?

CORI CLOSE: Well, I think we didn't hit open jumpshots in both games. We actually started the game at Cal, the first one down 7-0, and then we went on a flurry. But we got a lot of steal-score opportunities. But I think that's the reality of March. I always tell our team, you're going to have to be more solid. You're not going to turn teams over as much and get as many run out lay-ups. So we were really rewarded.

In both those games they were like two and a half weeks apart or weeks apart, both in January. They're growing. Teams get better, teams adjust. They're a really talented ballclub. It didn't surprise me at all.

We didn't make as many jumpshots early in the game. I thought that was a really big thing. They had been hard-hedging all the ball screens, and this time they decided to double Monique Billings and sit deeper in the paint so our guards had open jumpshots. But we didn't knock those down.

So I think that's what kept the game close, and I think that we were getting good stops, we were rebounding. But credit to them. They've gotten better, and I think you've got to be more solid and you're not going to have as much of a steal-score mentality this point in the year.

Q. Jordin, the Oregon-UCLA game a couple weeks ago was maybe the game of the year in the Pac-12. What do you have to do differently to beat them

this time?

JORDIN CANADA: We have to focus on the details. I thought last game we didn't come out with a lot of energy. We were behind in every play, and we were playing laxadazical, and that allowed them to get on the runs. So coming into this game tomorrow, we know we have to be composed, poised, follow the game plan, be aggressive, and come out fighting because we know it's going to be a battle.

Q. Sorry to bring it back to Kelli. But I want a follow-up from Jordin and Mo, because we always hear about you too, understandably so. But Kelli Hayes is a big part of this senior class as well. So what has Kelli meant to both of you, Mo and Jordin these the past four years?

JORDIN CANADA: Well, for me, Kelli has been everything. She's our anchor. She's our glue to our team. People don't see the work that she puts in day-in and day-out, but we trust her. She's a leader on the floor. She's very vocal. She helps me day-in and day-out even in the game. Even in the game she's talking to me, communicating to me, 24-7. Just her passion for the game, I just love it.

She brings that energy that we need. When we're not focused maybe in warm-ups or we're having a little lull in the game, she's the first one to say something, she's the first one to pick us right back up.

Not a lot of people see that, but in the huddle, she's always leading our group. Leading our team in practice, and she's the glue to our team.

MONIQUE BILLINGS: I'm really happy for Kelli, and I want her to enjoy this moment because I know it's a really good feeling. A lot of people do talk about Jordin and the majority of the time, so it's nice that we're able to share some of the shine with Kelli today.

I think this is just a beginning. Tomorrow she's coming out with -- I don't know what you're coming out with, but it's going to be a lot of good things. Yeah, she's going to keep it going.

Q. For the players, over the past years that you've been at UCLA, I've noticed how you guys have sort of developed nerves of steel to stay focused in close games like this. Can you talk a little bit about that development from where you were two to three years ago and faltering down the stretch?

MONIQUE BILLINGS: I would just say it comes from being in so many critical moments. Like the overtimes that we've had in the past few games and just the years playing in different games over the years where we've had really critical moments. Those just add up and you learn from them all and you learn how to get better

from them and how you can finish out the game strong.

KELLI HAYES: It's also come with a lot of maturity, us coming in as freshman having the number one recruiting class, that's a lot of pressure. But we've faced a lot of trials and tribulations through that freshman year, sophomore year, now junior year, senior year. All that work we've been through, winning the NIT, but that's not what we wanted. It's a victory that not everyone gets.

Then getting to the Sweet Sixteen two years in a row, you realize you want more. You don't want to continue falling short. I think this year we've learned from the past three years of realizing we don't want to fall short this year. This is our last year doing it with the three of us.

Not saying it's just about us, it's about the team, but realizing we have to have that maturity and utilizing our experiences of the past to launch us forward for this year.

JORDIN CANADA: Yeah, I agree with Kelli and Monique. I think it's about experience and maturity and just wanting to get better. Wanting to work through your mistakes, day-in and day-out. Us three being the seniors, we know what it takes. We know the level of competition during this time. So just trying to lead a group of girls that are in the locker room and just trying to have fun and embrace every moment.

CORI CLOSE: Just to follow up on that, we really believe that a mentality is a skill, and they're not saying this, but they've put in work on the mental side of the game. That does not go unnoticed or unappreciated by their coaches. We put a lot of emphasis on that. We have somebody who works with us on that, and we believe they have really embraced that skill in their own individual ways and it's paying off in those critical moments.

Q. Your thoughts on facing Oregon a third time, and what you need to do differently this time?

CORI CLOSE: Yeah, how cool is that? You're in March. You're playing in the conference tournament. Two Top 10 level teams battling it out. We've obviously had two really great games in the regular season, lots to play for. It's a real privilege.

Oregon is a really good basketball team. I think both teams are really poised to make really deep runs in the NCAA Tournament. But we have a very competitive group. I think it's which team can learn from those past situations, put into place small adjustments. Players make plays in March. Both teams have really talented players. I'm going to try to stay out of the way and let them do their job.