

PAC-12 Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 7 2019

Charli Turner Thorne

Robbi Ryan

Courtney Ekmark

Arizona State

Arizona State - 66, Colorado - 49

COACH TURNER THORNE: Well, first of all, I love this venue. I vote Vegas forever (laughing). I thought it was a great crowd, great energy, just the facility, everything has been amazing. The people have been fantastic.

And then, you know, we just -- I was telling our team in the locker room, sometimes it's not the worst thing to have the play-in game because the first game I felt in my 30 years of college coaching is the hardest, even when it's not the toughest opponent. It's just that first game, and kind of the pressure and the excitement of the moment can get to you a little bit.

I thought we had great moments, but we definitely weren't at our normal selves, as connected as we usually are. So I'm really proud of our team for just staying with things and stepping up in the fourth quarter and putting a really resilient Colorado team away.

That's the third time -- it's hard to beat a team three times. JR does an amazing job, and they've had injuries, but they're just a top team and you know they're going to keep fighting. They have kids like Robinson and Leonard and just kids that can hit tough shots. Like you can play great defense and they'll still make the shot. So that's a dangerous team, so we're excited to be hanging around for another day.

Q. What changed going from the third quarter to the fourth quarter?

COACH TURNER THORNE: We made shots.

COURTNEY EKMARK: Just being aggressive. They came out and kind of jumped on us at the start of the second half, and that's not what we wanted to do at all. Just trying to get the momentum, shift it back in our way and keep the aggressiveness.

Q. Coach, in piggy-backing off of being able to get



that first game out of the way and get those first-game jitters, what can you take from the third quarter as far as it possibly being a wake-up call or not allowing a team to get back and play -- especially you talk about two different programs, from Colorado to UCLA, and what you can take from that third quarter sort of as a learning lesson for your team.

COACH TURNER THORNE: Right, we've had -- I think I just needed to say it to the camera on TV that we were going to have a great third quarter because when I did that against Oregon State, it worked really well.

But this is a veteran team, and I think -- I'll say this to these two and they can go back and say it to their team. But I think that one of our -- maybe one of the knocks on us a little bit at times is we'll kind of, okay, we got this, and we'll take our foot off the gas. They took their foot off the gas, and you can't do that in March. You can't do it in our conference.

I feel like we already kind of know that, you know, and it was a great teachable moment and reminder to us, like listen, at this point you've got to be 40 minutes all-out with your effort and your focus and your connectedness. But they know it. They know it. It's not the first tough third quarter that we've had, and it's really been more about us, to be honest, kind of taking the foot off the gas.

Q. Courtney, during that kind of rough third quarter, one of the main things was you started hitting your shots and you had a really, really good quarter just overall. What was going through your head when Colorado was making their run to fight back into it and you were hitting those big shots?

COURTNEY EKMARK: I think just keep shooting it with confidence. I knew I had a couple in-and-outs in the first half, so staying aggressive.

Q. Coach Charli, Kianna Ibis went down with an injury it looked like in about the third quarter. What was going on? What happened there?

COACH TURNER THORNE: Yeah, she's actually -- she's okay. Thanks for asking. She banged it really hard. I think it scared her a little bit. But structurally Diana Padilla, our trainer, said she's good, and she was available to go back in the game, but I didn't want to put her back in the game unless we absolutely

needed to, and we pretty much got the game under control, so got to rest her a little bit, which was good.

Q. Robbi, you guys had a put-back at the end of the third quarter to get the momentum back your way and then had a run to start the fourth. How big was it to get things going in the fourth and create some space for you guys?

ROBBI RYAN: It was really important, especially with the third quarter we had. They outscored us by almost 10 in the third quarter. Really needed to pick it up, defensively, offensively, everything, and we did that.

Q. Busload of 942 crew here; how important is that?

COACH TURNER THORNE: Yes, thank you so much for bringing that up because we want to -- obviously it's amazing how much of the Sun Devil Nation came out to support us in the Pac-12 Tournament. That big group behind our band is our 942 crew, our student fan base, for all student athletics. We're on spring break this week, so that probably helped get a few more of them here. But they're amazing and they're definitely a great X factor for us here at the tournament, so we thank them.

Q. I want to ask specifically about Jayde and her contributions not only from today's game but from the weeks leading up to it, especially when she had to fill in for Jamie because of injury and just her production coming off of the bench so far.

COACH TURNER THORNE: Yeah, Jayde just gives us energy. She plays so hard, and she'll rebound, she'll get a steal, she'll get her put-backs, she'll be in the right place at the right time. I actually didn't want to sub her out, but Jackie told me her nose was bleeding, and I think she got hit pretty hard in the nose, so I would have liked actually to leave her out there a little bit longer in that fourth quarter because I thought she just gives us such great energy. And she's a good scorer.

I mean, moving forward, we're going to lose a lot of production in the post, and yeah, Jayde the Jet is going to be a force to be reckoned with in the further the way she is now.

Q. For either one of the players, in getting that first game out of the way, getting those first day-jitters out, do you like the back to back? Do you like the fact that you'll be right back up on the court?

ROBBI RYAN: I guess it doesn't really matter if we like it because we're going to have to play tomorrow anyway.

COURTNEY EKMARK: I love it. Let's play as many games as we can.

ROBBI RYAN: Yeah, no, but we're excited for tomorrow. Just having this game today was really beneficial for us just to get our first game jitters out and kind of like feel out the arena and just get more connected.

Q. Coach, when you look at UCLA, who you last played a little over a month ago, what differences do you see in their game now when they've been on a hot streak from when you lost to them in January?

COACH TURNER THORNE: Well, I've watched them some; I haven't watched them a lot. I have a little homework to do. But they've just continued to play I think better and better. I think that they were a team that knew that they were better than they were, and they were just not hitting shots that they normally hit, and they finally just kind of settled down, and I think they started going to their bench a little bit more, which helped them.

So I think they're playing right now about as well as they've played all year. I mean, I think Cori does a great job. They've got some -- like us, some really veteran, tough, savvy upperclassmen and seniors, so they know how to peak down the stretch of the season.

I think they're peaking now. They're playing their best basketball now, so they've just gotten better and better in terms of their offensive execution and production, and also with their defense. Everybody knows they rebound. That's been good the whole season.

Q. Were you happy with the minutes distribution today? And what is your philosophy of divvying up the minutes in a tournament format like this?

COACH TURNER THORNE: Well, obviously if we would have had a little bit better third quarter, maybe we would have had them a little bit more distributed, but it's all good. It's all good. There's no -- you can't really -- I'm going to play Robbi this many minutes -- you've just got to go with the game and see how things play out.

I do think that we're built for back-to-back-to-back games. We do have really good depth. Even though maybe some of our bench didn't play as many minutes as they might in other games, they've been in against top 5 -- we've played how many one-possession games with top 5 teams, and all my freshmen and other bench players have been in in key moments in those games.

I do have a lot of confidence in our bench, and so I think -- tomorrow, you know, depending on where our legs are at, we have that to go to. But you can't really map it out. You kind of just have -- we had Nea in foul trouble. Things just happen.

Q. Obviously Kianna, not really quite her game, only six points for her. But can you talk about the contributions Robbi and Courtney, big games for both of them, as well as how Kianna will be able to bounce back tomorrow?

COACH TURNER THORNE: Yeah, and I thought we did get some great minutes -- Kiki Russell, one of our veteran guards, stepped up, and Sophia. So we did get some good bench scoring. But yeah, that's kind of our big three, Ki and Robbi and Courtney, and they kind of take turns. Obviously most of you know that Kianna has carried a huge load a lot of the season, and she's getting keyed on a lot. And she handles it really well, and she passed out of a number of traps today, and we -- we never really anticipated having to lean on Kianna the way we have, to be honest, because we do have so many great scorers and other players on our team that are capable of posting, knocking down shots and stuff.

This is good, actually. It's actually -- if I had to script it, it's like, thank you, yeah, good. Go, go, other people, take your turns, take your shots, because obviously to be an elite team in March and advance, you've got to have five scorers on the floor.

Q. You mentioned making shots. What did you make of your team going against their zone as the game went on and the pressure as they tried to speed you guys up?

COACH TURNER THORNE: Yeah, I mean, we've got to get a little bit better in the press attack at the beginning. But they're not really a pressing team, so we just kind of had to adjust to that. But I thought we got the ball centered and did -- you know, got good looks, got second shots down the stretch of the game.

We kind of know what they do. At the end of the game they're going to trap in their zone. Got caught a little bit deep on the sideline, but then we got the ball -- after a few possessions I thought we got the ball centered and we basically defused it by just getting the two-guard front and keeping the ball centered.

Q. Courtney, you hit about six three-pointers in that game. You were only about one three-pointer way from trying the school record. Did you realize how close you were or how hot you were in the moment? What was your mindset in the middle of the game when you were knocking down those tough shots?

COURTNEY EKMARK: I don't really pay attention to that stuff, but just whatever I can do to help the team win, that's what I want to do. And if hitting shots is it, then that's what I'll do.

Q. Coach, you talked a bit about how Colorado was a tough team, but when you look at the bottom half of the conference, any of those teams could maybe come in here and advance. Tara said that she feels the conference is more wide open than it has ever been as far as getting a conference champion. Do you feel that way?

COACH TURNER THORNE: A hundred percent. A hundred percent. I agree with Tara a hundred percent. I think it's wide open. We just had a tough game with a couple controversial calls at the end against Oregon, and that could have gone I guess either way, especially top six, seven, eight teams have had great games against each other.

But there's not an easy game in this conference. There's not. We are definitely -- the Pac-12 is the best women's basketball conference in the country, and I will have a discussion with anybody in the country that wants to debate that.

You know, we played other conferences enough head to head. Washington blows out Duke, on and on and on, different head to head against other top teams and top programs in other conferences.

Yes, I think it's wide open, and yes, I think this is the best the conference has ever been. I think there's an argument for eight plus -- I don't really know. I don't look at that stuff. I don't look at bracketology, just kind of live in my little bubble. But eight or nine teams in the NCAA Tournament. I don't know what is projected right now, but I know our teams and I know how they've done against other teams, and they've done really, really well. Should be a great tournament. It's going to be exciting.