

PAC-12 Women's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 9 2019

Cori Close

Japreece Dean

Kennedy Burke

UCLA

Oregon - 88, UCLA - 83

COACH CLOSE: Sorry. I love these young ladies. I'm so proud of their fight. We have a saying in our program that you're not born for this, you're built for this, and we talk about building a house all year long, and what do we want our house to look like? And I think about how deeply they believed, and I talked about this after the last press conference, but it hits me so deeply, is that they are fighters.

I told them in the locker room after the game that in November, December, when we were starting out 3-and-5, I told them they were going to be playing at this level on a consistent basis and be in this position would they have thought that was okay, and they were like, yeah.

I just, you know, it's a game of inches. I wish -- me as a coach, I wish I wouldn't have gotten that T. I wish I had switched how we were playing the pick-and-roll sooner, but it's a game of inches, and I just want to fight like crazy just like they fought for me.

Q. Great game by you guys. I know you came up short, but really great game for women's basketball. That final possession that Kennedy drove on, what was that supposed to be?

COACH CLOSE: Yeah, we were trying to spread the floor, and we wanted to get the ball to Japreece and come off the backside screen and give her space to get to a three-point shot and spread them out as far as we could, and we didn't execute the way we wanted to. We had executed really well on a lot of our special situations, but that wasn't what we had in mind. So we would love to have done that one differently.

Q. Japreece, like Coach said, you started the season, it was pretty bumpy. You put it together and you end up in this place. How long is it going to take you to find the silver linings in this game, the way you fought against one of the top teams in the country, and that kind of momentum heading



into the NCAA Tournament?

JAPREECE DEAN: Coach Cori just always emphasizes just responding to whatever happens, win or loss, we just have to get better and look at what happened on film, and go back and practice and get better. So I think we will respond quickly, and get ready for the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Cori, you hold Sabrina to 4 of 19 shooting from the field. Just what goes into game planning, preparing for a player of her caliber?

COACH CLOSE: Well, she's spectacular. I mean, it's not just her ability to shoot, it's really her ability to run the team and her passing. She's an elite player. Most of the time that fell on Kennedy Burke, and Kennedy Burke is an elite defender. She proved that in the way she contested shots, moved her feet, kept people in front, blocked shots.

So I credit Sabrina. I've been watching her since she was a little kid. She's a phenomenal player. And so is Kennedy Burke, who is a phenomenal defender.

But it's team basketball. Everyone playing what we call the who, we had to play the who, what were their tendencies and know that in advance and try to anticipate those. They're very difficult to stop. Their approach was to try to go inside to Ruthy, and they did that well. We had to take something away, and we were able to take that away.

Q. Kennedy, you've had some real battles with this team over the years. Getting late into a game against a team that a lot of teams just can't even get that far against. What about this match-up brings so much out of players on both sides as you continue to just rise to the occasion time and time again?

KENNEDY BURKE: Specifically with this team it just shows that we can compete with any team in the country. It just comes from loving each other and just being invested in each other, and just focusing on a game plan, and we did that. We still have more to go.

COACH CLOSE: The reality is we've got a great battle going, and all the respect to what Oregon has built on their team. But also I think we showed we've built something pretty darn special too. So proud of the level of basketball we are playing for the nation on

multiple occasions back and forth. I'm really hopeful that not only is it great for our two teams, but it's great to inspire little kids. It's great to grow our game, and we're proud to be a part of that.

Q. You came in projected as an 8 seed. What do you think you've proved to the committee with your performance in this tournament, and actually for all of you guys, really?

COACH CLOSE: Well, I asked them to not even think about that. Their job is to look at every day through a microscope and to think about the inches and how they can improve. And it's my job to look at the telescope. So I'm going to let them pass on that.

I just think that from the eye test to how we've been playing the last 15 games to what we did, some people said, oh, it wasn't that big a deal. You went into mat court and beat them at No. 2 because they didn't have Ruthy. I think we proved today that we can play at a pretty high level when they've got Ruthy. We've got a lot of people to contend with as well.

So I'm very hopeful that not only our body of work, but our trajectory in the last several games, as well as how we passed the eye test in the last several games, I'm very hopeful the committee will see that and seed us accordingly.

Q. Japreece, you were pretty emotional after the game, and Coach Cori and Coach Kelly came up to you afterwards. Do you want to shed some light on what they said to you?

JAPREECE DEAN: Coach Cori just told me to move on and keep leading the team because it was a great game, and we just have more basketball to play, and I think that's what she really emphasizes is that this is not the end.

And Coach Kelly just -- I mean, he just said that I brought this team a long way.

Q. There's a lot of emotion up here tonight, and it looks like a little bit of hurt. Why do you think this one hurts?

COACH CLOSE: Because we believed, and we didn't come in happy to be here. We didn't come in -- that's a credit to Oregon, but we didn't come in being, oh, we've come so far. We expected to win. And, you know, the chemistry of this team is what has been our backbone the entire year.

Even back -- I remember at Pac-12 Media Day that Kennedy and Lajahna talked about how the closeness of this team and the commitment to relationships, and that has been what you built.

What I told them in the locker room is when you love deeply, it hurts more. But would you have it any other way? When you invest deeply, it's going to really sting when you're disappointed, but that's how you have peace, because you finished empty.

I'm very proud of the way they have finished empty and the commitment to themselves and the way that they fought and the way that they believed. We will respond and we will let this experience propel us to even something greater. And we will let this experience teach our hearts, and I believe that we'll be possessions and inches better because of the way we will respond from the hurt.

Q. I know obviously it hurts right now, but was this a fun game to be part of? It was exciting and thrilling. And obviously you came up short, but was it fun to be out there playing in this game?

KENNEDY BURKE: Yeah, I think it was a lot of fun on both ends of the floor, even though both teams were up and down. It was just a lot of fun just fighting together and just being there for each other.

JAPREECE DEAN: Yeah, I would agree with KB. It's a great game, great team, and I think it's going to prepare us for March.