

NCAA Women's 1st and 2nd Rounds: Stanford

Saturday, March 17, 2018
Stanford, California



Robin Pingeton Sophia Cunningham Missouri Tigers

Florida Gulf Coast 80, Missouri 70

COACH ROBIN PINGETON: Just like to congratulate FGCU. Coach has done a phenomenal job there. They have got a great program. That's a really talented team.

Obviously this time of year is hard. That last game, you know, I felt like we were really in a good place coming into the tournament. Really proud of our seniors. They have impacted our program in so many ways on and off the court and that's a tough class to say good-bye to.

Obviously put them at the free throw line way too many times. We knew we had to guard the three but we also knew they had the ability to really attack and I felt like we just allowed too many direct line drives, put them at the free throw line too many times and that came back to hurt us.

Q. Seemed like turnovers were an issue for you guys in the first half. Was it something they were doing defensively?

SOPHIA CUNNINGHAM: No, very good defensive team. We just need to value the ball more. They did push us out farther than we wanted to, credit to them but we just have to value the ball more than we did.

Q. Yesterday you had mentioned at the press conference, you mentioned that the Florida Gulf Coast defense reminded you of a mini Georgia. In what ways were the same and what ways did they present different challenges from that defense?

COACH ROBIN PINGETON: Well, we got around our average. I think we are averaging about 70 points a game but I think they are scrappy. They play hard. They have got some good athletes. They are very physical.

You know, I think it definitely hurt when you are starting four and five only played 17 minutes each, and so they didn't play half a game, and I thought really that could be where we could take advantage of some things with

their defense.

And so I think it hurt us when we had to rotate and go a little bit deeper into our bench. But give them credit. Very physical, scrappy, aggressive defensive team.

Q. Tough immediately after a loss but what do you think you're able to do that's most effective today?

SOPHIA CUNNINGHAM: I just had the size advantage down low and my teammates were getting me the ball when I needed it, and when they collapsed, I gave it right back out to them. I just think the size advantage is what allowed me to get those easy points.

Q. You maybe alluded to this with the foul trouble that your post had, they are known for taking a lot of three-pointers, and you shot seven more than they did. Is that just the way the game went or just sort of the plan going in?

COACH ROBIN PINGETON: I think there was probably a handful of those were late-game threes, so I think that's a little bit, when you just look at the box score, I think it's a little bit deceiving. Probably had five or six or seven there at the end of the game.

But we talked about what a great 3-point shooting team they were. I thought we did a great job of that part of it for the most part. But the problem was, you know, just that one-on-one direct line defense.

And they are a team that if you give much help off of, you're going to be in a tough situation, and that's where they get their good looks from the three-point line transition threes, dribble, penetrate and kick; and we just said we were going to try to make them finish tough one-on-one at the rim, and that's where we got into a lot of foul trouble.

Q. It looked like a lot of Sophia's success in the post, especially, happened from the second quarter on. Was emphasizing Sophia in the post always a plan going in or was that an adjustment that was made?

COACH ROBIN PINGETON: Well, we had to rotate some players because we had our starting four and starting five out with foul troubles early, really consistently throughout the game.

So we moved both her and Amber around a little bit

from that perimeter position to a post position, and it's something that we try to take advantage of regardless of what lineup's out there, but any time we can get a mismatch within our motion offense, to really look to get the ball inside.

But they made it tougher to catch. We had some forced passes inside to her. A couple times she caught and was swarmed, three or four defenders and made the kick outs tough. She's one heck of a player. I'm glad she's on our team.

Q. Tough immediately following the loss but how would you put into perspective the season you've had this year?

COACH ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, I think in the moment, it's just hard and all's you can think about is how disappointed you are, and I think we are all in that. But time helps and helps gain a better perspective.

It's been one heck of a year. I mean, all year long, we've been in that top 20. We were in conversations about hosting. You know, we've done some things here this season that haven't been done at Mizou in a long time, but we also have really high expectations.

I think to a certain extent, we feel like we fell short of those. We want to be a team that's competing. We felt like the next step for our program would be a Sweet 16 team, and then you hope to get to the Elite 8, a final four and win a championship.

It's just such a process, and we continue to build and grow. It's just that as you have more and more success, your expectations become higher and higher, and that's good. I wouldn't want it any other way.

So initially, the finality of it is really challenging. I think with time and perspective, we'll be able to embrace the season that we had. We had some incredible seniors on this team. We're going to miss them. We're going to miss them a lot, their leadership on and off the court. It's been a really good year. It's just hard to focus on that immediately after your Final loss.

Q. Kind of along those lines, what's the message you have to the younger players on your team? You talked about the strong senior leadership. What are you going to say to the players that they are going to have to step up to fill a leadership void soon?

COACH ROBIN PINGETON: Well, first of all, thanks for coming out. We appreciate you being out here.

We absolutely have work to do. We've got -- we're losing some really good players and great leaders, and you know, I think this is going to be a big off-season for

us; that we've got an opportunity to focus on some areas that I think were glaring weaknesses for us this year and some things we need to address that way.

But you know, our girls work really hard. It's an incredible group. I love them to death. I'm very thankful I have an opportunity to coach them. They work hard. They do things the right way. It's a special group, and I know they will be just as anxious as I am after we take a moment to exhale and catch our breath to get back off it and focus on some of those areas that we can be better and stronger moving forward.