

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Ole Miss vs Stanford

Sunday, March 19, 2023

Stanford, California, USA

Maples Pavilion

Stanford Cardinal
Tara VanDerveer
Cameron Brink
Haley Jones

Media Conference

Q. Ole Miss 54, Stanford 49.

TARA VanDERVEER: I thought our team really battled in the second half. We kind of dug ourselves a hole but you know, we battled back. We tied it up and we had an opportunity to win the game.

I think Mississippi, they are a very experienced and very determined team. They made plays down the stretch that we didn't make.

Having said that, I'm really proud of how our team battled, and just both Cam and Haley made big plays for us and Cam I think made all of her free throws, I didn't see a stats sheet, but she was just a workhorse in there. It was very physical. I think our team tried very hard to do the best we could today and I'm very proud of our team. Just really sad that our season is over.

Q. How depressing is this, your last time here on this court, so what's are going through your mind right now?

HALEY JONES: It's not the way I wanted my senior year to end. It's disappointing -- I wouldn't say depressing. I would say disappointing.

I think it's tough when you lose a game when you feel like as a team it wasn't your best all-around game, right.

I think they were aggressive. I think we matched their aggressiveness. I think like Tara said, we dug ourselves a hole. I was proud of the way that our team stuck together. I thought we made big plays down the stretch and it just



didn't end up in our favor.

Yeah, it's disappointing for my four years at Stanford to close in this fashion. It's not where we wanted to go. I think this team had the capability to go all the way, and sometimes it just doesn't end that way which is very frustrating to deal with.

I think it hasn't really hit me yet, I don't know, I told Ash in the locker room, "I think I'm in shock." I don't know when that will hit. It's disappointing but there's still things to be proud of this season. Yeah, I don't really have much to say.

Q. How did you feel tonight coming off of not playing the other night, and did you feel strong through the entire game?

CAMERON BRINK: I think I just -- I felt sick. I think I'm still pretty -- getting back to my normal self but I definitely got a little winded throughout the game but I tried my best.

Q. Seemed like Ole Miss's ability to contest shots inside made the simplest of layups difficult for you guys. Can you speak to what they did to make life so difficult scoring in the paint tonight?

HALEY JONES: I think Ole Miss is a great defensive team. And we heard them say that they pride themselves on their defense; they packed it in their suitcase, and they were going to come in and execute that plan. I think they did a great job.

But I think it's not Ole Miss. I think we missed a lot of monies. I think we missed shots that we usually finish. I'm at fault for that, as well. I missed a few monies that I want back; shots that I usually make.

But you know, I think that Ole Miss did a great job, and you know, they were contesting shots in a great way. But we missed a lot of shots that we usually make which is disappointing, but you know, you can't really blame it, so yeah.

Q. Could you take us through the last two



possessions or two in-bounds plays that ended up both being turnovers?

HALEY JONES: Take you through it, how?

Q. Just, what happened? They were happening on the other side of the court from where we were. Did you lose the ball out-of-bounds on the last one?

HALEY JONES: Yeah, I guess it wasn't executed. Inbounded to Hannah, she was pressured.

And then on the last one, I tried to throw a lob to the weak side but I guess I didn't throw it high enough, I'm not sure.

Q. Did you feel like you guys had -- there was conversations about the couple of losses in a row, Utah, it wasn't in a row and then the Pac-12 Tournament loss and you guys being tired and needing time to get rest. Did you feel like this was a rested team heading into this weekend? Did you guys feel good energy-wise?

HALEY JONES: Yeah, I think we felt fine. I think being tired isn't really like an excuse that you can use. You can but you have to show up for the game. I think we showed up with energy today. It just didn't end in our favor.

I think it wasn't energy that it was tonight. I think Ole Miss executed their game plan very well. I think that our defense was fine. They only ended up with 54 points, so it's not like they were just scoring, scoring, scoring. I think I think it was more so we weren't executing our offense. For us to score 7 points in a quarter is unheard of for the team that we have.

I think we felt rested. I think we just didn't rise to the occasion as we wished that we did.

Q. You were down eight with six minutes to go, and you kept them scoreless almost up until those last free throws and pushed it back to tie it. As you were making that push, did it feel like you guys were going to come back and win the game?

CAMERON BRINK: Yeah, of course. I didn't think we were going to lose but we did. Yeah, of course I thought we were going to win.

Q. They out-rebounded you guys by five. You had 13 and you rebounded well tonight. Talk about what they were doing well inside to out-rebound you tonight.

CAMERON BRINK: I think they were just more physical than us, plain and simple.

Q. Could you reflect on your time at Stanford, four incredible years, what's it meant with the team and the crowd to end like this tonight?

HALEY JONES: Yeah, my time at Stanford has been interesting, I guess, you know, COVID, freshman year, that played into a lot of different things, and then the COVID season that's unheard of. I never expected that to be part of my college experience.

So then winning a National Championship, three Pac-12 Championships, 2 Pac-12 Tournament Championships; so I have a lot to be proud of for my Stanford career. It's hard to feel that way right now, but I know at some point that will hit and sink in. I'm happy with my time at Stanford and the relationships I've made that are going to carry on past my playing days here. I've made a lot of great friendships. Yeah, I think my time at Stanford, I have a lot to be proud of.

Q. You guys knew this run was the end but to have this group that you won a National Championship with, have their careers come to an end, can you speak to what they mean to you with that 'Funky Four' quartet?

CAMERON BRINK: Yeah, the 'Funky Four,' they were some of my closest friends my freshman year, and then they have taught me everything I know pretty much. They helped me figure out the plays and whatever we're doing. So it's going to be really weird not having them by my side.

I still feel like a kid honestly, so I'm really going to miss all of them telling me what to do and encouraging me and telling me to calm down and all that stuff. Yeah, they are just amazing. I think I'm like Haley, I'm still in shock, still processing that; that was my last game with all of them, so yeah.

Q. Losses like this are really rare in the first two rounds. What does this say about the depth of the women's game. Does it speak to that?

HALEY JONES: Yeah, I mean, I think that the women's tournament was very deep this year, deeper than it was last year, which is great to see for the growth of the women's game.

You know, we hate to be the ones for it to happen to us, which is very -- it leaves a fat, sore taste in the mouth. But it says a lot for women's basketball to have an 8-seed like Ole Miss, to be as talented as they are; they beat a very talented Gonzaga team. The other day, Iowa State loss to a very talented team as well, in Toledo.

So I think there's just a lot of depth throughout the tournament and we knew it was going to be like this. So yeah, it's definitely growth for the women's game but it sucks that we have to be on the other side of it.

Q. You guys are going to want to turn lemons into lemonade from this. What lessons can you turn from this tournament not going the way that it did and motivating you guys for a deeper stronger run next year?

CAMERON BRINK: I feel like I'm a senior next year, which is bring, but got to bring that leadership and just tell the freshmen and underclassmen that nothing is guaranteed. We can't be soft. We have to always play with a chip on our shoulders, and just be gritty. I feel like we were lacking some of that this year, so always room to improve.

Q. 30 percent them shooting for the game, you guys were 32, 33 percent. How do you explain that -- even though she shot less percentage than you guys did from the field?

TARA VanDERVEER: I think that we struggled offensively, and I think that I give them credit for working hard defensively. But I think some of the things that we did were self-inflicted. Some of the turnovers, I think the turnovers really hurt us. Just times where the ball just slipped out of people's hands or just making some maybe poor decisions.

But our turnovers hurt us. They got out on the boards but it wasn't -- there was some long rebounds and then they got some second shots. I just think that sometimes, I think they are really a tough team. I think they are much better than a lot of 8-(seed) teams than we've played before and sometimes you don't have a really good matchup. I think for us with two freshmen guards, basically, Talana and Indya playing against their experience and their athleticism, I thought they did really well. But we needed to play better.

Q. You haven't had a team lose this early in the playoffs in over a decade. Emotionally, how are you processing this feeling?

TARA VanDERVEER: I think that this last month has been really hard. I do think that we try to rest our team as much as possible. But you know, we needed to be playing better than we are right now.

I think our offense really struggled and when that happens, then people try to do it by themselves and I saw that throughout the whole game. You know, just the ability -- even if you're not shooting well, just keep moving the ball, just not feeling like you have to do it by yourselves, and I

think both Cam and Haley felt, "I have to do it by myself." I think that's on me. We've worked really hard every day to run offense, move the ball, set screens, and we struggled with it.

Part of it is, again, trying to fit the right people out there together. We didn't get the ball to Cam when we needed to, especially in the first half. We had some real bad passes, and then people did struggle on the block. It was very physical.

Q. You touched on with Talana and Indya, but how good of a learning experience is this for them as freshmen guards to have this experience? What do you expect to see going forward next year?

TARA VanDERVEER: Talana was guarding, let me look, 15, Angel Baker, who has scored over 2,000 points, and she's 5-for-18. I think Talana did a phenomenal job defensively. She works really hard.

And Indya was out there. You know, again, our defense was not the problem. I thought defensively, if you hold a team to 54 points, they weren't getting in transition. We did put them at the free throw line a little bit too much, but I just think we struggled offensively.

And we did get some boards, Cam sometimes got boards, sometimes it was her own shot right in there. But we struggled. We had good shots and at the basket, Cam and Haley both, and we didn't finish the way we want to or need to. And it is disappointing.

I think it was a great experience, for our freshmen, for Talana, for Indya, for Lauren to be out there. I thought Fran gave us some real good minutes. We needed to take care of the basketball better. We needed to have some flow to what we are doing and finish at the rim.

Q. Why do you think the last month and a half was so hard? Was it a specific loss where you think maybe there was a loss of confidence in what you guys were doing? What made it such a grind?

TARA VanDERVEER: I really think the traveling. I personally feel like the schedule of playing, basically, four weekends, two in a row, Mondays, Thursdays, I think the schedule really put us in a hole that this team, maybe other Stanford teams that maybe have more experience, or, you know, are further along in their development.

Then we had the problem in Colorado with our flight, and the competition in the conference is great. But we did not do what -- and I think in our team meeting, like people said, you know, it's harder than they thought it was or

remembered it. You go 18-0, you win the Pac-12 Tournament and you forget how hard that really was.

I think that we have a lot coming back as far as, this is great for Lauren, for Cam. Cam wasn't 100 percent today but I thought she really battled. But we need to build on the good things we did and really look and identify how we can do better offensively. We really struggled moving the ball, sharing the ball, getting the shots. We did get some really good shots and miss them, but getting even better shots.

Q. Following up on that, you said your offense today haven't wasn't very good and it seems like at times offensively you struggled to space the floor and make things easy for your whole team. Was there some point this year where that changed and you felt like the offense was more difficult, and what do you need to look at in the off-season to make some more open space for your team?

TARA VanDERVEER: I think we have a great inside game with Cam on the block, and I think Cam can be more versatile. I think with Lauren, I think we that struggled with perimeter shooting, and maybe shot selection, but I think it's just really -- there's some young people that were thrown right into the deep end of the pool. Talana, even Agnes who is a young player, she's older but I'm really proud of how hard our young players worked and the contributions they made.

But it's a lot harder than people think when they watch it. So we have a lot of work to do.

Q. Do you put any credence to when you guys won the Championship, you were going through all kinds of adversity, you were nomads and there were a lot of things going on and it was a wild circumstance; and last year, closer to normal and you lose in the Final Four and this year you lose in the second round. Do you see any differences in what was going on around you when you guys won it all as up to now?

TARA VanDERVEER: I'm not going to fall into the trap of saying, wow, we had a horrible season. I know that our men's team would be ecstatic to be playing two games in the NCAA Tournament, and Bernard would be happy about that, too.

This is a very young backcourt. I think that we had Lexie and Lacey and Anna Wilson, we had a lot of experience, and tournament wins are about your backcourt. They are about your ability to run offense and the leadership that comes from those positions.

So I think we did really well. Part of the -- I think part of the stuff for this team is because people scheme so much, we have to shoot the ball better, and we have to pass the ball better. Our defense was, all year, I think our defense has been phenomenal, and that's effort and that's -- Talana has been a warrior for us.

I'm thrilled with her progress. You know, she had a bad pass tonight and missed some open shots but she will just get better and better. Same with Indya. Hannah Jump has never been a stater for us and made some big shots for us all year long. There were some turnovers we would like to have back. You know, Cam inside.

Trying to figure out kind of how to get a head start on it a little bit, the backcourt, when you lose the experience of -- like in this game last year, Lexie had 36 points. It wasn't an easy game. I think it was like a tie game at halftime or something. But we needed that. Kind of hey, put that team on my back.

People tried, but it was a struggle.

Q. For Cameron to put up 20 points, 13 rebounds, 7 block, coming off an illness, what does that say about her and the player that she is?

TARA VanDERVEER: She's a battler. It was extremely physical in there. I mean, she just was going up through hands, arms, bodies, I'm proud of Cam and I love coaching Cam. She plays hard. It's tough, but again, some of it, I think she did the best she could today and I don't think we could ask much more from her.

Q. Cam said that maybe the grit and toughness, the grit was lacking this season compared to other teams that she was part of. Curious, moving forward, how do you as a coaching staff try to go about getting that grit to kind of be more present and getting that toughness to come out? Does that come from the players or how do you as a coaching staff try to go about that?

TARA VanDERVEER: I think in some ways she might be confusing grit with experience. I don't think you can ask for a more gritty player than Talana or Indya or Agnes. But they don't have the experience that a Lacey had or Anna Wilson had. Talana, honestly, is light years ahead of Anna Wilson in terms of where she's at right now compared to where Anna was but Anna had that time to grow and develop.

Are there things that we can learn? I definitely think so. But a lot of it is, you know, just sometimes you have to go through different steps, and this is a team that, you know, we did struggle down the stretch and we have to address

that with our team and figure out why.

Q. Obviously you've had players, you mentioned Anna who have used the COVID extra year of eligibility. Would you welcome any of the seniors back if they wanted to return?

TARA VanDERVEER: I think that they are -- they have made some decisions. Hannah Jump is planning to come back. So you know we are excited about that.

I always meet the fourth-year seniors before every game and I just said, hey, here, this is your last game and she goes, not for me, but I knew that. We're excited that she'll be coming back. Ashten already has her master's degree and she wants to play professionally. Haley wants to play professionally, and I think Fran has been accepted in a program at Harvard and will play -- I'm not sure she gets to play there but if this is another program for her, I would love to have her come back. But she's been accepted there and I believe she's going to go there next year.

All right. Thank you all very much.

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