



2017 NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

First Practice Day · UCLA
Pauley Pavilion · Los Angeles, Calif.
Friday, March 17

FIRST PRACTICE DAY QUOTES – UCLA

Cori Close, UCLA Head Coach:

on if team's positioned to make a deep run

"Absolutely. I think we are positioned to make a deep run, but in order to be able to do that, you can't think about making a deep run. That's the reality of the situation. I always say that performance equals potential minus interferences... We're only guaranteed 40 more minutes to our season. I love our team. I believe in our team and I've enjoyed watching them grow. I believe that we have a lot of great pieces, individually, but who we are collectively has really been fun to watch for. The reality is, I can't even think about that and I won't even really let [the players] talk about it, because it really becomes an interference if we're not focused on the task at hand, the possession at hand, the rep at hand."

on team's strengths

"I think when you're committed to each other, when there's a sisterhood—and when I say a sisterhood, it's not like "Kumbaya", like we're around the campfire... it's a commitment to each other. We've worked for this and we know each other, we care about each other. It's really hard to go to war for someone you don't really know and care about. We're about to go into war together and I believe their biggest strength is that they worked really hard at the commitments of the relationship. And as a result, they're going into battle. I think they know how to have each other's back, they have an emotional connection that makes them not want to let each other down. I think that's probably their biggest strength. I think it's why we consistently play hard and are committed to those things. And I think it's really our versatility. We're getting really different contributions from different people on a fairly consistent basis. I think Oregon State was an exception to that. We really didn't have sort of a spark from someone outside of Jordin Canada or Monique Billings, which has been a real key factor for us down the stretch. I think our versatility overall—obviously it starts with Jordin Canada and Monique Billings. They really are so versatile and consistent, but I think where we've really emerged to become a better team is to see Kennedy Burke become a consistent force, Nicole Kornet, Kelli Hayes, Paulina Hersler and, of course, Kari Korver—those other people, you look at all of our stat sheets over the last 10 games and there's going to be a significant spark from one of those other people and I think our versatility and our ability to get those contribution, I think, gives us a lot of confidence going into the NCAA Tournament."

on team's chemistry

"For us, when you choose to be a part of our family, you're choosing to work at that chemistry every single day. I think, probably when it really turned, even to another level was after our Oregon game. It was not easy. There were hard conversations, there were difficult moments and we felt like we were not playing to our best and really reaping the best of our chemistry to the way that we should. And we really took a step. We held the mirror up, coaches included, and said we need to go to another level here. We need to be able to count on our emotion. We need to count on how hard we're playing on a consistent basis and we need to honestly look at each other in the eye and say 'We let each other down tonight, and that's not going to happen again.' So, I think that was a real turning point."

on Boise State

"I have a lot of respect for Gordy (Presnell) and the way he runs his program. I've watched him for many, many years. He's a really good coach. They really play to their strengths well. They've got a moxie about them that's really fun to watch. They've got a confidence. They've won 10 games in a row. They really are hot right now. They really are, I think, feeling confident... They shoot the three incredibly well and they shoot a high volume of them and shoot it consistently well. They're versatile from their guard spots. They play four guards a lot of the time, just like we do. Their ability to not only shoot the three, but really attack the midrange game, they get themselves to the free throw line. Defensively, they mix their defenses a lot. It's going to be really important that we are on the same page and that we're not confused, that we're able to attack things together. I feel like we've got a really good sense of Boise State, now, after watching film and watching as a staff. For our players, it's really foreign, because they're not on TV as much and those kinds of things. I think we've really done our homework and they have our attention. I have a lot of respect for the way they play and the way they run their program."

on team's confidence, especially after Sweet Sixteen appearance last season

"They've really worked hard. They come early, they stay late, they do the extra work, they do individual film sessions. They are a very committed basketball team. Not only to our collective growth, but to their own individual growth. I think that has earned them a lot of confidence... As we say, 'I've done the work in the dark to be ready for the light,' and when the bright lights are on, all it's going to do is reveal the habits and the commitments we've had in the dark. I think this group has been very committed to building really good habits. So, I think they are confident and I think they have just earned themselves a chance to earn some more."

Jordin Canada, UCLA Guard:

on what team learned from Pac-12 Tournament

"I think we've learned a lot; having the number-one conference in the country, we definitely learned a lot, whether that be playing hard for 40 minutes and playing different styles, different teams. That's what you're going to see in the NCAA tournament and every game is going to be a hard-fought game and that definitely prepared us coming into the NCAA Tournament, so hopefully we can keep that going."

on taking the next step

"Obviously we want to do better than we did last year, but right now we're just focusing on one day at a time. If we play well and we play to our potential, obviously we can go very far. So, definitely I think we can go further than we went last year; we just have to play to our potential and focus on one game at a time."

on Boise State

"Yesterday was the first day we watched film of them. I haven't seen them play on TV or anything, I haven't seen any of their games, but just watching their film, we know they're very aggressive and they like to pressure and that's what they do in their conference, and we know that defensive rebounding is going to be key for us because they're the number-one team in their conference in getting o-boards. So, the two things we have to focus on are taking care of the ball and defensive rebounding."

Kari Korver, UCLA Guard:

on how this team feels compared to last year

"I think we've grown since last year; we've made big strides this year but I think we're a closer team this year and I think a hardworking team, and we're having a lot of fun."

on what team learned from Pac-12 Tournament

"I think, specifically from the Pac-12 Tournament, we played really hard against Oregon State and it comes down to just a couple possessions so just taking every possession really seriously and being super urgent in practice and games, since it's going to come down to one possession."

on playing at home to start the NCAA Tournament

"I think we're really excited about that; we've had two years where we've played really well at home so it's fun to be here, it's fun to be in front of your family and your home crowd, and it's just fun to be at home."

on if the team was worried about losing hosting privileges on Selection Sunday

"I don't think we were too worried about that, no. I think we thought we had a really good chance at hosting."

on Boise State

"They're also really good three-point shooters, so we have to take away the three and take away middle drives and just play our principle defense that we know."

on most pivotal moment during the season

"I don't know if it was a pivotal moment, but I think it was a really fun moment when we beat Stanford, at Stanford. It's probably one of my favorite memories from this year. I also think when we lost at Oregon State and Jordin (Canada) got hurt in the second quarter; we were forced to play without her for the whole second half and I think we learned that we could do a lot of things even without Jordin, and now that she's back I think we're a lot more confident group since then."