

2018 NCAA® DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Friday, March 16, 2018

PREGAME QUOTES

UCLA HEAD COACH CORI CLOSE

on how she feels the Pac-12 prepared her team for the NCAA Tournament

"Good question. I think that we're just so fortunate. I think that there's a level of confidence that all of us coaches and I think the players too, I'll let them speak for themselves, come into NCAA Tournament play because of the level of the conference from top to bottom and the variance of the styles of play. I think that we play so many different styles at such a high level, I don't think that anything is a shock to us. So, I think our preparation has been really good this week and we've compared American to some of the things that we've seen with some of the all five out guard systems. Washington, Washington State play a little bit that way and that really has helped prepare us with the … situations. So, anything our preparation in the preseason playing Creighton early and just that their style of play, not speaking to anything in the rounds here, just playing all those varied styles but against an NCAA level opponent is really, really good for us."

on establishing a legacy

"Well, you as a coach, when you have an opportunity to take over a program with such a storied legacy and past as UCLA, you're really just hoping for a group of young people that will believe for really big things even before they have any substance to show for it or get behind it. I've told them this already but I'll be forever grateful to these three young ladies that believed in something and were willing to dream big but were also willing to work really big to create their own legacy. I remember like it was yesterday talking to them about that we want to create something here, a foundation in the program, that long after you leave, you will be the ones who will have set the standard and the tone for the trajectory of this program and they have done exactly that. I'm expecting really big things in the tournament, and expecting us to play our best basketball, we are seeking excellence and a deep run, but there is nothing that could happen in this tournament that could diminish what they have already built and that we will continue to build upon as a result of their hard work and courageous belief."

on playing final games in Pauley Pavilion

"Just to build on that real quick, it's been so meaningful to see our community support grow for these young women and I think that it makes playing in Pauley this special because of that. We've grown our support in terms of attendance, moving into the top 25 in the country this year, and I am just really grateful to the UCLA community as well as our broader community in Southern California for getting behind this program and these women and I think it makes it that much more special to be able to have the culmination to play at home this last weekend. So just really grateful for that and want to continue to build the enthusiasm, not only for UCLA

women's basketball, but for the game and broadening that and deepening that influence and really thankful for their support."

on closing games better
"Well if I knew that exactly I would have prevented it in the first place, but I think that the reality is baskets are harder to come by this time of year. Teams scout really well, we held Oregon to a drought that way, we held them below their average by a long shot in that last game but speaking over the course of time I think you have to be able to get more high percentage shots in the flow of your offense and create mismatches that way by team work that's going to be a real simple thing. You know statistically in the NCAA tournament everybody's point totals go down by about 10-12 points per game so I think that you have to be able to rely on your defense to create some easier opportunities so when you do hit those droughts or times when the baskets are harder to come by you can get some more stops. For us, it's getting out into transition, and the other for us is trying to move the ball and screen really well so we can get the ball in the paint. We don't want to rely just on jump shots, that's not our identity that's not our strength this year so we need to create ball movement we need to create angles for the defense to have to make choices so that we can get the ball to the paint, both off the bounce and off the pass so that we can get Monique touches as well as getting our guards touches to the paint off of the bounce and I think that will create easier opportunities. Something that we've talked about all year is when you get the ball to the war zone which is the eight-foot area around the basket, this time a year you have to make that shot or get to the free-throw line because those are really hard touches to come by and you've got to be able to deliver with those types of high-percentage situations so there's a lot of things to it but I think it's a mental toughness about playing the way you need to play, relying on your defense and rebounding when some of those droughts happen. If you watched the men's tournament yesterday it happened in several games, and the ones that were able to sustain those were the ones that were able to rely on getting stops on the other end and then trying to get the ball to the war zone and be able to deliver in the war zone."

o*n the importance of passion plays to close out games*
"I think it's everything. I think you've seen and heard all three of them refer to when we're playing at our best that's how we are. I think the fun thing about college basketball is that there's a lot of ways for teams to be successful, there's a lot of styles, there's a lot of things. But our style, were not going to come out and outshoot you from the three-point line this year, you know there's some things in our style. What we can do is use our length on defense every day to get every hustle play to get out of area rebounds to win the possession game to really build on those passion plays which are the non-statistical categories which we think really make us go. So, I think that they are immensely important, we have never lost a game where we have had 70-plus passion plays. It also feeds into our confidence, we know were playing at our best when we're playing with great aggression, with speed, using our length, relying on our defense and creating easier opportunities because of our selflessness to do those non-statistical things."

UCLA SENIOR FORWARD MONIQUE BILLINGS
on what she expects to see from American
"We know they are able to shoot at all positions, one through. They have shooters, and they're a motion team. We're just going to plan on switching one through five and playing all positions."

UCLA SENIOR GUARD JORDIN CANADA
on team's defensive identity
"I think we just have to continue doing what we're doing, cleaning some stuff up obviously on the defensive end. But I think just us playing to our identity, and that's being aggressive; that's bringing that energy that we need and just continuing to do that."

on how team's used rest period since Pac-12 Tournament
"We had the weekend off to do a couple things in between, but I think for a majority of the part has been practicing and getting ready for the tournament. Making sure we've been taking care of our bodies with rehab and treatment. It's been pretty cool to take some time off and get away from the game, and focus on what we need to focus on going into this tournament."

on being their last weekend at Pauley Pavilion
“This is crazy how time flies. I can remember our freshman year being here, and knowing we had so many more years to go. And now this is the last weekend we’ll ever be able to play in Pauley. Again, it’s just so surreal, but it’s been one hell of a ride with my teammates.”

on how team plans to attack American
“Well for me it’s playing to my principles, making sure I’m pressuring and being aggressive, making it hard for her to score and get the ball; and that’s going to be my job.”

UCLA SENIOR GUARD KELLI HAYES
on how important it is to show improvement from past seasons
“So the past three years that we’ve been on this team, we’ve always fallen short and not be where we wanted to be. My freshman year we won the NIT. Granted, did we want to be there? No, but we made the best out of that experience and that launched us to our sophomore and junior year’s successes. Granted we may have fallen short of winning the Pac-12 or going further in the NCAA Tournament, but that doesn’t take away what we’ve done throughout those three years. The way we’ve grown and matured on the court and off the court has been shown the past three years. Then this year, not getting what we may have wanted with winning the Pac-12 Tournament. Moving forward we want to surpass the Sweet 16 this year, but if that were to happen again, it doesn’t take away what we’ve done the past four years we’ve been here. I think with this group of women, you know that you worked hard and you want to get more out of it. I think that’s something we as seniors have really taken on and knowing that we want to do a lot more as a collective group. I think that’s something that will be shown in our growth and maturity on the court.

on this being team’s final weekend at Pauley Pavilion
“It’s been a great and tremendous four years with these girls, and the girls I’ve played with past and present. I’m just looking to hopefully get a win on Saturday and looking to play again on Monday.”

o*n if she feels she needs to personally step up*
“Well I think that’s something I’ve tried to do this entire year, trying to be that helping teammate whether it’s if communicating off the ball and on the ball. I think my ability to communicate and help my teammates helps them pressure the ball or helps Mo outside to block shots. It’s really helped me to direct in that sense because knowing that I have my teammate’s back regardless of what may be going on with my player. Usually I’m guarding shooters, so I have to be able to close out fast enough so they don’t get the shot off. Also being able to do two things at the same time; that’s playing my man but also helping my teammates out, and helping anybody else that’s on the floor. That’s going to be a big focus for this game moving forward.”