

NCAA Women's Regional Semifinals and Finals: Sioux Falls

Thursday, March 24, 2016

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Holly Warlick Bashaara Graves Andraya Carter

THE MODERATOR: Joining us from the University of Tennessee, head coach Holly Warlick in her fourth season. This is Tennessee's 34th Sweet 16 appearance in 35 years of this tournament.

We'll take questions for coach.

Q. What has been the biggest change since those two losses at LSU and 'Bama?

COACH WARLICK: I think we've come together and are playing well as a team. I think our leaders stepped up. We had a chance to play as a unit a little bit better, a good little starting five.

I just attribute it to we started off the year with a lot of injuries. We lost three great leaders in our seniors. It took us a while to lead, to follow, to get healthy. I really, really think probably our loss to Alabama got our attention.

You know, we've always been a really, really good practice team. But now I think if we could have gotten any more focused, we got more focused. We started playing together.

As you know, talent doesn't always get you where you need to go. But you obviously want it. We're very talented, but I think our talent now is playing well together. Now we understand each other. We understand where we should have a pass or what we should do. That's just playing together. It's taken us a while to learn to play with each other.

Q. Coach, the style Ohio State likes to play, I'm sure you've seen that this year. Are you comfortable with that style? How do you slow them down, if that's the goal?

COACH WARLICK: Yeah, I think they want the game fast. I think we want the game fast until I watch them.

Ours is to get to the ball, try to slow it up, just change



up what we want to do defensively.

We're going to stick to our game plan, too. We run, we press. Our defense is extremely important to us, rebounding. So we're going to focus on those things.

I think Kelsey Mitchell, she's phenomenal. I've watched a lot of people do different things to her. You got to be really, really playing well to score 45 points. I mean, there's a difference in shooters and scorers, and she's a scorer.

We're just going to have to do our best and try to guard her by committee, like I said, mix it up.

You focus on Mitchell, and you lose sight of the other players that they have. Extremely athletic, make you play fast. We're going to have to not turn over the ball. I think when you get them in the open court, they're dangerous. We have to be mindful of taking care of the basketball, as well.

Q. Holly, you struggled somewhat against zone defenses as opposed to man. What do you anticipate Ohio State doing? Arizona State kind of stuck with man a lot of time.

COACH WARLICK: You know, I hope Ohio State watched Arizona State and takes that lead. I hope they play us man (laughter).

I don't know. I don't know. I watched Ohio State. They've played man, they've played zone.

I don't know. I know if our zone, we've gotten better. Beginning of the year we were not very good. I think towards the end of the year we've gotten more comfortable with it. We're working on him playing both. We're planning on him playing both.

They press. They press and I think they do it very well. I think 99% they're going to press us. The rest, I'm not sure. I think they'll do a combination of both.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH WARLICK: It's a 2-2-1. But I think their zone press is very effective.

Q. What do you think of the depth of field here?

COACH WARLICK: We've had the opportunity to play

Syracuse and obviously South Carolina. I think it's extremely strong. I think it's a very athletic group that is here. Strong coaches. Different styles.

South Carolina is generally man-to-man, run. You look at their group, they're so solid.

We played Syracuse, had that opportunity. They're a matchup zone team. He's done a heck of a job, too, as well.

We've obviously watched Ohio State.

We have a lot of similarities. We may play a different style of defense, but I think in general all the teams are pretty strong rebounders, gosh, athletic, run the ball when we can.

It's a tough regional. I know South Carolina, they're familiar with Syracuse. It doesn't matter if you've won or lost, we talk a lot about a new season. Sometimes playing them before has helped you, and sometimes it can hinder you, as well.

Q. Ohio State has released that Cait Craft is not going to play. Does that change them at all, in your view?

COACH WARLICK: She's one of their best shooters from the outside, a great scorer. I mean, I don't think. I think they got here on solid team effort, regardless of what she did. That's not going to change our game plan.

I did not know that. I hate that for her. I hate that for her. She's worked all year, gets here, and doesn't get to play, so...

Q. Holly, are you guys probably as healthy as you've been this season?

COACH WARLICK: Yes, I think we are. I think we're finally healthy. We went through dealing with Diamond's injury, to Jaime Nared breaking her hand. We've had some really bad ankle sprains from a lot of people.

So, yeah, I think right now we're healthy and we've got a strong bench. That helps. It helps down the line if you want to press, do a lot of things. It has helped us the last month.

Q. You mentioned Kelsey Mitchell before. Have you seen many guards who go 100 miles per hour with the ball the way she does for 40 minutes?

COACH WARLICK: I have not.

Q. What do you do to try to stop that?

COACH WARLICK: If she gets close to the bench, I'm

going to maybe trip her, I'm not sure (smiling).

No, I watched her in high school. She's got a great gift. She knows the game. The ball is a part of her hand. She's a phenomenal player.

I haven't seen too many, male or female, come around like her. She gets a shot off when she wants. She is a great passer. Normally if you're a great shooter, you're not a great passer. She's a great passer. She distributes the basketball.

So, no, I think she's a special kid, she's a special basketball player. She deserves all the attention she's getting right now because she's at that level.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. Good luck tomorrow night.

COACH WARLICK: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the University of Tennessee student-athletes Andraya Carter and Bashaara Graves.

We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. What has been the difference from early in the season to where you're at right now? What has started to click for this team?

BASHAARA GRAVES: I think we're just playing with a lot of energy. We're very confident right now. I mean, I don't think a lot of people would have thought we would have made it to the Sweet 16 from the season we had earlier.

I mean, we just turned things around, starting with that Georgia game. We just came out with energy, was playing together. We just going to take that energy and bring it into the next game.

ANDRAYA CARTER: I think the same thing that Bashaara said. The pieces kind of started to fall together. I think it started with Georgia. We had glimpses all throughout the season of what we were capable of. But as far as playing with energy and togetherness, everybody knowing their roles, rotation, doing things the Lady Vols way, that started since the Georgia game.

There's a huge difference. Anybody that watched us a few months ago and watches us now, the differences really speak for themselves. It's a positive change in every way.

Q. Is it more than just the X's and O's part. How has chemistry changed over the course of the

season, if that was an issue?

ANDRAYA CARTER: It's funny because a lot of people were talking about chemistry. But our team has always gotten along extremely well. We've never had any off-the-court issues or anything like that.

I think it was getting on the court, playing, just kind of working some things out. A lot of former Lady Vols we talked to say they understand. It's the course of the season, the way things go sometimes. Some teams get started a little later than others.

I think it was a variety of different things. But I really think it just all came down to playing together, playing hard, focusing on the game plan, listening to what our coaches say, day in, day out, doing it in practice, doing it in games.

I think chemistry had a little bit to do with it, but we really had to pull it together from all ends.

Q. Bashaara, could you discuss the implied pressures that you face at Tennessee just because of the long tradition of the program, how much of a weight that is for you guys. Also, the fact you're here in the Sweet 16, does that make things right again?

BASHAARA GRAVES: I mean, when you decide to come to the University of Tennessee, you know the expectations. Our goal is always to get to a Final Four or win a national championship. You know that coming in. You know that when you're getting recruited, if this is where you want to go, this is our goal. That pressure is going to be on you. You have to be ready for it.

We've dealt with that. We've had a lot of negativity towards us because of this year. I think we've dealt with it, turned things around. Making it to the Sweet 16, it helps a lot because, like I said, people didn't think we would make it this far.

I think this is a first step. We've been doing great. I think we're representing the tradition a lot better now, though. I mean, I'm thankful for getting this far and being a part of this team.

Q. How do you plan on dealing with Kelsey Mitchell?

ANDRAYA CARTER: Well, we're probably going to start out in a zone defense because Kelsey Mitchell is their main threat. Obviously she has a ton of offensive power. They have a dribble-drive. They have threats from other angles as well. We're going to play zone and really extend out on her. She's obviously their best player. We really have to focus on shutting her down.

I think it's going to be a group effort. With any defense

we play, whoever is on her has to play the best defense they've ever played. I don't think we've faced a player with this amount of scoring power. She is the main part of their offense. She's scoring half of their team's points.

I think it's going to be a community effort. Whoever is on her is going to have to do what we worked on all summer, what the coaches harp on every game, what we do in practice against our practice players, we have to do that to the best of our ability on her. That's all we can do.

BASHAARA GRAVES: Same thing. She's going to take shots and she's going to make some of 'em. They're going to go in because she's that type of player.

We have to contain her. Whoever is guarding her, like Draya says, we have to play our best defense because she's going to try to go off them. She has to score for them to win.

Q. Could you discuss the challenge that you face going against such an up-tempo offense that Ohio State plays. Is there anyone you faced so far this season that resembles what they do from a tempo standpoint? How do you think you'll go about dealing with that?

BASHAARA GRAVES: I mean, a few teams. South Carolina kind of plays that same up-tempo, especially in transition. They want to run you in transition. They want to get transition points.

They also play great defense. They get a lot of their points off steals, too.

We have to take care of the ball when we play against Ohio State. I mean, they're going to try to get steals. Last game, West Virginia had 27 turnovers, and they scored off of those turnovers. I mean, that's going to be a big part of this game.

ANDRAYA CARTER: I think the same thing that Bashaara said. A huge key to actually stopping their offense is kind of our offense as well. If we're taking quick shots or turning the ball over, they're going to get those rebounds and go.

If we're working them on the offensive end, making them work on defense, they're going to be a little slower as they're going back in transition on offense.

I think it has to do with our offense, for sure. Not taking quick shots, taking care of the ball. Then on the defensive end, slowing the ball down in transition, stopping the ball.

A lot of times the ball goes from one end to the other end very quickly. Making their guards turn a few times, then just matching up, getting in whatever defense we're in, sprinting. We're really just going to have to play as hard as we can, stay in a stance and just go all out.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thank you very much. Good luck tomorrow night.