



2017 NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

First Round · [9] California 55, [8] LSU 52

Ferrell Center · Waco, Texas

Saturday, March 18, 2017

POSTGAME QUOTES – LSU

Nikki Fargas, LSU Head Coach

Opening Statement

NIKKI FARGAS: These two young ladies sitting up here, I can't express enough how important they are to the success of the LSU program. Obviously we're going to have Raigyne Moncrief next year, but Alexis Hyder is one of the toughest, undersized, versatile post players in the game, and I'm proud to be her coach, along with the exceptional player in Rina Hill, our other senior, who is one of the hardest working players I've ever coached and been around. Jasmine Rhodes, who's our other senior, who will be missed, with her versatility to play the 4. We're an undersized team but a team with a big heart, and I can't say enough about giving Cal the credit. They did what they needed to do. I thought Thomas had an unbelievable night from the three-point line, and we missed some of our defensive coverages, but the fight that we had in us to really get them turned over 20 plus times, our ability to make stops against a team that was taller than us, I commend our team for having the heart and the fight.

It's been a journey for us. A lot of ups and downs, but this group has been pretty special. For us to turn the program around where we were last year and to see them a year later, that's improvement, and we're going to build off of that.

Q. Coach, which home game and which road game that you saw that you all won or lost that you saw coming down the stretch the team was growing and they were headed in the right direction?

NIKKI FARGAS: In our last game against Mississippi State in the SEC tournament, I thought our team battled a very good basketball team, obviously someone who's a No. 2 seed, potentially could have been a No. 1 seed, and I thought we played extremely hard for about 36 minutes. The first time that we played Mississippi State in January, they beat us pretty good, and to see the improvement that we made in that short period of time, I felt really good about our chances

going into NCAA Tournament play.

Q. Coach, you kind of talked about those turnovers, and I know that was the game plan going into this, to kind of negate their size advantage. Is tonight what you had in mind there?

NIKKI FARGAS: From a turnover standpoint, it definitely played to our favor to turn them over 20 plus times. We didn't always convert like we had been in the past off of those turnovers. I thought our offensive board play allowed us to get some second and third looks, but again, late game, down the stretch, we've got to make plays, and we can't -- things that we're going to get nailed out. Every place that we missed, an and-one opportunity, we've got to go try to score the ball, and I think this group is very well aware that they've got to make their own breaks, and I think those are life lessons for them, that you're going to have to make them in life, as well, when you leave here. It's a 40-minute game, and the beginning of the game, I know you mentioned that, I thought we missed our defensive coverage. Again, I'm going to highlight Thomas for Cal. I thought she was huge in the play action.

We had a lot of good looks. Moncrief -- if you would have told me Moncrief and Jackson were going to go 0 for 13 in the first half, they hadn't done that all season, and so that's just part of it, and the fight that they had, though, in the second half, I'm really proud of this group.

Q. What particular adjustments did you make at halftime going into the second half?

NIKKI FARGAS: We tried to extend our defense a little bit more, tried to disrupt them in the backcourt, thought our pressure took some time off the clock and delayed and disrupted them. I thought from a half-court defensive standpoint, we really tried to apply more ball pressure and tried to disrupt the ball handler so the ball couldn't see inside. We knew their size was going to be an issue, so it's something that we've had to battle all year. But moving forward, we've got size coming in, so hopefully we can still play that sustained, aggressive style of play but have the size to combat the inside play of some of the teams that we faced that were bigger than we were.

Q. In that same vein, talking about next year, what is the next step for this team?

NIKKI FARGAS: You know, it's tough right now because you've got three seniors that mean the world to me personally. I can't say enough about those three, having had to just endure last year having six players and those three being the three returning. You just want to keep playing basketball for them.

But next year, the future of the LSU program is very good. We've got a great class coming in. We return some experience. We also signed a young lady with size, Raven Farley. We missed Faustine Aifuwa, our 6'5" kid. I think she really would have made a difference had she not been out this season with a knee injury. We'll get her back. So along with some really good guards, we are going to still be athletic and quick on the perimeter, but we're going to be bigger.

Raigyne Moncrief, Guard

Q. Raigyne, you and Chloe both kind of started off a little slow, and then you stepped up. Kind of talk about that difference in the second half.

RAIGYNE MONCRIEF: We got a lot of talk from the coaches and motivation from our

teammates, and they were just saying that we've been doing this all year, and just play our game and relax, and I think we just came up there, we started the game kind of really off, and we just started knocking down shots and making plays, especially Chloe Jackson.

Alexis Hyder, Forward/Center

Q. Alexis, could you just describe what you saw on that last play?

ALEXIS HYDER: Which last play?

Q. The lay-up that got blocked.

ALEXIS HYDER: I saw the lane, and I wanted to make contact, which I thought I did. It just didn't go our way. I wanted to get her in the air, and I thought it was a good drive. There's things I thought I could have done differently, but I was just trying to take the best shot for the team.

Q. Alexis, how were you so effective against Kristine Anigwe?

ALEXIS HYDER: I understand that I'm undersized, and I take advantage of that. I understand that many 6'5" people do not want to guard around the perimeter. They don't want to guard pick-and-pops, they don't want to guard off the dribble, so taking advantage of that opened up the court, and that's why Ayana Mitchell was great down the stretch and that's why Chloe and Rai were easily getting to the lane, because we opened up the floor.

Q. Was it something Cal was doing to start the game that threw you guys off, or was it something for yourselves that threw you off?

ALEXIS HYDER: I mean, like Coach said, they were a good team and came out playing hard, but I think we could have came out better offensively, and our shots weren't falling. They were just hot. Our shots weren't falling, their shots were falling, and things didn't go our way. I don't think that it was anything specific. We were getting the looks we've been getting all year, and it just didn't go our way. The same screens we've been setting all year, we got them, the same flares, we got all the screens and everything we wanted to get the looks, we just couldn't knock them down early.



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POSTGAME QUOTES – Cal

Lindsay Gottlieb, Cal Head Coach

Opening Statement

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: At the risk of sounding cliché, I felt like that was a survive-and-advance moment for 40 minutes, and we are thrilled to have the opportunity to play on Monday. It wasn't the prettiest, but I credit LSU for that. That's what they do. They turn you over. We turned it over 20 times. That's what they force teams into on average. It's why they were in this tournament. It's why they won 20 games this year, so credit them.

And while I don't think we were a masterpiece on offense, I could not be more proud of our players' grittiness and toughness to pull it out when it wasn't the easiest.

These two young women sitting here, our sophomores, played a ton of minutes their freshman year and were sitting home at this time, and all they've wanted is to get this team into postseason and to advance, and for Kristine to have the second half that she had after not having things be easy in the first half shows her growth and shows why she's an All-American, and Asha just simply came out and played 40 minutes, turned the ball over once and knocked down six threes. Really proud of our team, excited to be playing on Monday, a lot of credit to LSU, and I had contractions. That's how close the game was. Fun night all around.

Q. Coach, when is the baby due, and will you have some stories to tell later? You've had some dramatic finishes.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Seriously. The baby is due May 9th. That's what like science says, but I'm like, whoo, more things like this, he could come any day.

Lots of stories to tell. I mean, this has been such a special season because of the link between my family stuff and my basketball family. I mean, Teasy (ph) walked by and touches my belly. I

think any time you go through pregnancy for the first time, it's imagine it's like miraculous and really wonderful, but to do it with a team, I feel so grateful for that.

Patrick is in the stands over there. He always says when we're on the road, like, he calls the baby "Point Guard." He says, How are you and Point Guard doing? What did the girls say to Point Guard today? Just the whole thing is around this. So it's just extra super special.

Q. You heard what Kristine said about her second half. Talk about that; she had some big moments in that second half for you guys with the free throws and the block.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah. I mean, I can't really put it into words how proud of her I am. Most people would look and say, 15-7 and five blocks in the NCAA Tournament. That's a good game. We all know for Kristine, it wasn't her best game all around. But we're with these young people in the locker room every single day. I know what they struggle with. I know what their fears are. I know what their strengths are, and to be able to look at her at halftime and say, we're going into the locker room with the lead and just shake it off and give us what you can give us. Give me everything in the second half, and to see her do it was remarkable. On that last play with eight seconds left, I looked at McKayla Cowling and said, the ball goes into Kristine's hands because I knew she would get open and I knew she would make the free throws, and I wouldn't have been able to say that if she was not mentally locked in because it wasn't the easiest game for her.

She had an incredible freshman and sophomore year, but the growth this year, being able to handle pressures and adversity and all kinds of defenses, it's been really something, and I'm looking forward to continuing that. But those are the moments coaches love, when you just see kids rise to a different level. Maybe fans and media don't know what they're going through, but I just think she had a really big-time second half, and that was -- we needed every minute of it.

Q. Talk a little bit about Asha's game, her first tournament game, and all season long and what she provided for you.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Unbelievable. I said to the team in the locker room there, as a coach you figure out how to say what you need to say to each player. I'm the most unfiltered with Asha Thomas. I can look at her and say, make a darned shot, or stop turning it over. There's no filter because she can just -- she's steady. She can handle anything.

She shot the heck out of the ball in practice yesterday, and I was just kind of going to the assistants, like Teasy, she's not missing, and so when the first one went down today, I felt really good about that.

But just similar, we threw her into the fire last year and she faced a lot of pressure and she made a lot of shots early in the season and not as many late, and to see her growth and come through in a big-time game, knock down shots, it's not like she was wide open, it's not like these weren't under duress. I mean, we got her off some flare screens. She had a quick release on a lot of them. You don't always see the reverse. Kristine to AT for three, it's usually AT to Kristine. But really, really big time. You can't win in the postseason without good guard play, and today she stepped up and knocked down shots and also didn't turn the ball over. It was pretty impressive.

Q. The conference has changed. You all have done a lot of growth in the last three to five years, but over the last two, there's no bottom feeders in the conference anymore. Every game is competitive. What changed?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Well, first of all, I mean, pretty unreal that the PAC-12 is 7-0 in this first round. I'm really proud of all of our teams, and you said it exactly right. What has changed is that I think schools across the conference have made a commitment to women's basketball. I think coaches have gone out and gotten the best players on the West Coast, more so to stay home, and there's a lot of good players. I think people have gone and recruited great players from other regions, as well, and people have hired great coaches, and the players have embraced representing the west and making the PAC-12 great. I think there's been smart scheduling, but smart scheduling can't do it alone. You then have to then win those games. But I said it all week with all the questions we got, there's no bad team in the conference. There's opportunities for good wins all the time. We had a bunch of losses, but nine of them were to the RPI top 35 and better. I mean, that's a luxury to be able to play those teams all the time and face every kind of defense.

I'm really happy to be part of the PAC-12. You know, who knows if a team will go to the Final Four this year or two, they could, but if not, the depth and strength, our teams 5 through 12 in our league, had 12 wins against the RPI top 25 this year, and that's not even talking about the four really, really super elite teams in the league.

It's been a great to be part of it. There's a lot more losses in my world than there were a couple years ago, but when we came here four years ago as a 7 seed, we were second in the PAC-12 at 13-5 and nobody else in the league got in besides us and Stanford, and now we finished seventh in the league, so it's a really good league, and we certainly wanted to be better, and we hope to get back to the very top, but we also know we can be seventh in the league, come in and win tournament games, and I think that speaks to the strength of the PAC-12 top to bottom.

Q. Talk a little bit about playing Baylor next.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Oh, yeah, that. How many points did they have up tonight? I went back to the locker room. 119? Was it a record? Yeah. So I didn't need to watch that game to know that they're really good. They're really good. I'm sitting up there looking at Odyssey and Griner, and we played when I was an assistant at Cal we played Baylor with Sophia Young, who was -- not even talking about now, but she was one of their first great All-Americans on the National Championship team, and this year's team in a lot of ways might be the most complete. They're huge, and they've got really good guard play to go with the size. They're a No. 1 seed for a reason. They're a National Championship contender for a reason, but there will not be a team more excited to play on Monday night than us.

I've said it the whole time, you can be excited to be here and still have a focus and try and want to win the game, so we'll give them a game plan. We'll watch a lot of film between now and then, the coaches, we'll get the players locked in, and we see it as a great opportunity, but they're a heck of a team. They have 31 wins now, I think, which is no fluke. They play an incredibly tough schedule, and we'll have to give it our best shot on Monday night, but I don't doubt the women in our locker room love a challenge, and that's what it's going to be.

Asha Thomas, Guard

Q. Asha, can you describe how you got open on that three that you hit in the corner there late, and just how good did that feel going in?

ASHA THOMAS: They were denying the ball -- Kristine had the ball. They were pressuring her. They were denying Kayla, and they left me open, and I caught the ball, knocked it down. I knew I could knock it down like I have before. That was it.

Q. Asha, just talk about, that's almost a perfect game, when the point guard only has one turnover and scores as much as you did. Were you in the athletic zone today?

ASHA THOMAS: Let's just say I was nervous. This was my first time being in the NCAA Tournament. I was nervous. You probably couldn't tell because I hide my emotions. But I just embraced the moment. You know, you never know when you'll get this chance again, take advantage of it. But like you said, the turnovers, I hate turning the ball over. Point guard, you don't want to turn over the ball, and when I just let my nervousness out, just played my game.

Q. Asha, you talked about embracing the moment; is that kind of what was also going through your head there at the end where there was that scramble for the ball and you guys got the jump ball?

ASHA THOMAS: Definitely. I know we had like a time-out left, but I just wanted to get the ball, really just to get the ball, make sure we secured it, and that's what happened.

Kristine Anigwe, Center/Forward

Q. Kristine, what did they do that made it so tough for you in the first half, and how did you pull it together to have that second half, but particularly playing with four fouls at the end, how did you manage to hit those free throws, make that big block? How did that happen?

KRISTINE ANIGWE: Well, they had a really good game plan, and I give them a lot of credit because they're super physical. I just tried to get used to it, so you're just coming from playing like in a different conference; you have different refs, different players. Never seen them play before; we never went against them. Again, I was really nervous. I was like shaking before the game. I just tried to do whatever I could to win, and I didn't want to go home, and our whole team didn't want to go home. We just played with that mentality.

Q. Kristine, you had the block at the end, but it seemed like every time LSU tried to do something you came up big. You made all seven of your free throws, which ultimately ended up being huge. Talk about that and playing in the moment.

KRISTINE ANIGWE: Well, the first half, again, was a struggle for me, and I wanted to win. I wanted to come here and win, and that's what we did. So the second half I just tried to focus on other things, rebounding, blocking shots, playing defense, being there for my team, bringing energy. So I just came with this whole different mentality. I just wanted to win so bad, so I just tried to do everything I could. I knew it was going to be tough scoring so I tried to play really like in defense and talk to my teammates. Asha was hitting all her shots, like again, you said she had about like a perfect game, and she works on that shot. We all trust her to make that, so she came up really big for us this game.

Q. You were talking about being nervous at the beginning of the game, but at the end you've had a lot of close games this year, and many didn't go your way. How did that feel at the end and to come out with a win like that?

KRISTINE ANIGWE: Well, again, we're used to -- like you said, we're used to being in close games. I think we've done a good job closing out, like once the season -- we're comfortable with each other and we know how to overcome adversity, like close games, two-point games, three-point games, calling time-outs, when to foul, who to foul, trying to get us in the perfect situation to win. So again, we're used to making those big shots at the end, big shots, big free throws, big defensive stops, so yeah.