

NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Saturday, December 19, 2015

Jerritt Elliott
Yaasmean Bedart-
Ghani

Amy Neal
Molly McCage

Texas Longhorns

Nebraska - 3, Texas - 0 (25-23, 25-23, 25-21)

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Texas to the interview room. We'll start with an opening statement from Jerritt Elliott.

COACH ELLIOTT: Yeah, I first would like to thank the NCAA. They ran an unbelievable event here today, along with the event staff. The Nebraska fans were fantastic. When we arrived today there was, they were three deep and cheering for us and saying good luck.

And it's great to see where the sport is going, to have this kind of fan base, and showing the rest of the NCAA and everybody else about how the sport is growing is tremendous.

My hat goes off to Nebraska. I thought they played phenomenal. I bet John would say this is probably as good as they played consistently all season long. They never cracked. Their sideout percentage was remarkable all the way through about halfway until game three a little bit. But they were relentless in the pressure of siding out and we weren't able to get any runs going.

But more importantly, I'm just more proud of this team. My seniors have created a culture that has never been created before in terms of the chemistry and the trust and unity. We had some injuries early on and they just stuck together and they battled and they got themselves to play in this title match. I tell them all the time, I won't be upset if you give me everything you have and they gave me everything they had tonight. And it's just sad and it hurts for me to see the tears in



their eyes and the relationships that we have come to an end in terms of the season and not getting what they ultimately desired.

But reflecting on the match, immediately right now, I just felt Nebraska played well. I thought we played well for spurts and we lost the first two games by two points. And we were on the other side of the coin the other night. So, I just love my team and love my university and these players that are sitting up here.

Q. In the third set, you dialed your lineup so that you would, as it turned out among other things, have your freshmen matchup with their freshmen. What were you thinking? What do you think the results were with that decision?

COACH ELLIOTT: Well, what I was thinking was Foecke was on fire. She was hitting .562, so we were trying to slow her down. She ended up hitting .385 on the match. We were able to contain her a little bit more. But she was the difference maker in the match. We didn't have an answer. So we were just trying to get that matchup on her to slow her down a little bit and give ourselves an opportunity to get some more transition points, because that's where we were struggling.

Q. For the seniors, can you put into words the emotions of this loss?

MOLLY MCCAGE: Not in a short sentence. But I can tell you right now I wish I was not a senior. I wish that I had more time with this team. I think that not only the volleyball part, like, besides that, just the relationships I have with these players is incredible. And the bond we had with our coaches was different than any other year that I've been here. The amount I'm going to miss them is insane. The thing I'm going to miss the most is just how much fun I had with them.

And I wish we could have won a national championship. I think that we fought hard like Jerritt said, and I really regret nothing with this group. I think that they're incredible and the best team I've ever been a part of.

AMY NEAL: Same.

Q. You guys were down 2-0, backs against the wall, what was your message to your team as you

headed to the locker room?

COACH ELLIOTT: We said we were going to put the dial up a bit more. We wanted to get more middle right side involved with our offense in transition, our out of system getting Yaazie a couple more swings over there, because we were having a hard time scoring out of system. It's one of the areas that we kind of struggled with, some of the personnel. We didn't have a lot of back row options in three of the rotations to get us out of some of those situations.

But I felt like, I told them I said, hey, we're battling this, I think they're playing out of their mind and we just got to stay with the mission and stay focused about what we're doing and see if we can serve a little bit better and do some things to get them out of system. But it was a 2-0 games. We weren't far behind in being up 2-0.

Q. Molly, this is the second time you've played Nebraska. What was the biggest difference between the first match and this match?

MOLLY MCCAGE: Of this year? They were just in system constantly, so -- and they were not high error. I felt like the last time we played them we were able to just sneak in and make long runs for ourselves.

But this time we played them, their sideout game was incredible. So, we tried to manage our game, but they were just, they were on fire and they were really good.

Q. Do you feel like you needed to serve just maybe a little bit tougher to get them out of system as a good passing team, but also a very physical team? And did you feel like you could have done a few more things maybe from the service line?

COACH ELLIOTT: We tried everything of the -- the only thing we didn't do was serve short. Statistically that we had, the way that they pass nails and stayed in system with short serves, we didn't feel like that was an option. We moved over from, I don't know how many understand this, but over to zone five to zone one, to try to pull them off, got their percentages down a little bit.

The reality is their sideout percentage was good, we were getting opportunities to score, we just couldn't score out of system. That was the biggest thing early only. Our lefts had a hard time with the side block and they were playing great defense and we were making more errors. If you would have asked me before, I would say that we were managing our game a little bit better, at least from our side than we have -- than we did tonight. And I would say Nebraska usually makes a few more hitting errors and gives you points at times.

And tonight they were under 12 percent hitting errors,

their kill percentage was great, and they played phenomenal. Sometimes you run into a team that plays that well and feeding off that crowd for themselves was great. But we didn't -- it was a discussion we were having as a staff. I don't know what else we could have done.

Q. If you would have -- if somebody would have told you back when you had the big injuries, you lost the three time Big-12 Player of the Year, somebody would have said, you'd get here. I know you wanted to win it, would you have said, hey, that's a great finish for this group?

COACH ELLIOTT: Well, yeah, I mean, here's what I can tell but this group. They have got some magic between them, about what they were able to do. And as coaches, you start looking on paper of what you have and saying, wow, this is going to be a difficult run, I don't know if we can put the pieces together to win the Big-12, because we got to be consistent for so many matches. And then have a chance to make a run in the tournament. Obviously, you wonder.

And this team more so than any team that I've ever coached, took me for a ride. They instilled confidence in me, made me believe in them. I really didn't have to do too much with this group in terms of managing them. They did it on their own. They made me believers. And I felt like tonight we could win this match.

So at the beginning of the year, I would have said, on paper, no, we wouldn't be in this position. Not even close. And the road that we had to get here was not easy. Probably it was the toughest of all the teams, with playing Purdue and then UCLA and then Florida and then Minnesota. This team was good in the crunch. And I was just hoping we would get one of those games to give ourself an opportunity to have Nebraska question themselves a little bit, because they were just so on fire.

Q. Yaazie, you had your two best matches of the season in the Final Four. Any explanation for how you just came alive and dominated out there these two games?

YAASMEEN BEDART-GHANI: Well, my team has really helped me build over the season. Just like taking one game at a time and that's been the biggest thing, just instilling confidence in me. This was the place to do it. I just, I was given the chance to step up.

Q. Foecke was the MOP and she's a freshman. You had to have had some sort of a plan for her. What did you plan and what do you think she did to be able to be so successful?

COACH ELLIOTT: Each team has their systems and

their routines, or their routes that they run, and we have the tendencies in terms of what we want to be able to stop.

Look, when they're -- they're in the finals for a reason. They have got good balance, they have got a lot of players that can hurt you, and we -- when we talk about being in system, if you're in 75 percent of the time, which they were a majority of match, it's going to be hard to stop. So, because of the speed of the set and all that. And so we have some size issues with our team. That's one of the concerns that we had. Amy's not real tall. Chloe we is not real big. It makes those seams become a lot bigger than they were compared to if we were a little bit longer and lengthier. So the difference is, can we get a little bit longer and lengthier, which we plan on doing here. But, I didn't think she would be hitting the numbers that she hit tonight, that's for sure.

But I'm sure people didn't think Yaazie was going to put up the numbers she did the last two nights either. So it's what the NCAA tournament is about, what's making it special, and different players get on fire on different nights and congratulations to her.

Q. I have to give the follow to Amy, because he said they got to get bigger and lengthier, but you've had a career where people look at your height and say, no way she can be an elite team, be an outside at your height, and I mean this in a nice way. Do you want to take issue with him about whether you can do that or tell us what you think a 5'9" potential outside hitter looking at playing collegiate volleyball should be thinking?

AMY NEAL: I'm definitely not going to be mad at what he said. He gave me the opportunity to hit and he taught me a lot about what I need to do to succeed being undersized. It's obvious that I'm undersized, I'm not going to deny that, because it's hard to block these 6'3" middles.

But, just, I think that hitters that are undersized need to be smart and Jerri always talks about making the block your friend and using your volleyball IQ to outsmart the other team if you see open shots whenever you're hitting. You have to look at the block, you just can't blast away into these middles or you're going to get looped.

So the biggest thing I've learned is you just that you have to be confident. You can't be scared because your undersized. Just go out and prove these big hitters wrong, that's my favorite thing that I liked to do, just prove the blockers wrong.

COACH ELLIOTT: By no means was that a dis on Amy.

I think she knows how we go about business. She knows that I would go to war with her, especially right now after the four years, and we have got a unique relationship. It's just a matter of fact. It's where we are.

But, again, she's a special player and where she's come from, from the start of her career to here is the greatest transformation I've ever had as a coach. And I know that when I look her in the eye, that we have a forever relationship. That we'll be away from volleyball, I'm sure we'll be having dinners and she'll be spending time at her gym and doing that. And that's really what the coaching is about is you got to take the relationships to it and making an impact on these young women. And I know that she walks away a much better person than she was when she came in.

Q. Did Nebraska do anything special to neutralize Chiaka?

COACH ELLIOTT: No. I think Chiaka neutralized Chiaka. She started questioning herself and speeds changed and she got tight and didn't have a great match for her. When you lose that position, where it's so, you've been -- where she's been so good all tournament, it's a challenge.

Q. For the seniors, Amy and Molly. Now that it, you know, it's finished, you still have these, most wins in program history, the four final fours. Can you just put that in perspective and you do have a national championship that you guys won. Just put in perspective what these four years have been like.

MOLLY MCCAGE: Yeah, for sure. I think that it's a testament to all the hard work that we have put in with our team, but also we have had great teammates and coaches with us this whole time.

Just being able to play with these girls has been absolutely amazing. There's so many times where people doubted us and we just believed and fought as a team. And I absolutely love that about this team. And I'm so happy that I ended with this team here.

Q. Amy, what did Nebraska do defensively tonight that really stifled you guys and kept you guys on your heels?

AMY NEAL: I honestly think just playing defense. I think that they would get a good dig or a good touch on the block and they would come back just slinging away. And I just think they weren't timid at all and just came out and weren't, they weren't afraid. Their defense and touches and passing was incredible and that's what made them succeed, I think.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you all