

March 9, 2014



UConn: 83
Rutgers: 57

An interview with:

UConn

THE MODERATOR: Quick statement, Coach, and then we will have questions.

COACH AURIEMMA: I thought the way we started the game was about exactly like you want the games to start. I thought we came out aggressive, and, you know, we got out in transition, we move the ball great, and we got everybody involved. It wasn't just one player. But that entire first 20 minutes was probably the kind of basketball that -- as good of basketball as I could hope for, especially in the postseason.

Q. Geno, you obviously would like to see that all the time and there has been games this year when it's been a slower start. Did you see something in the locker room or the pregame shoot-around that they were pumped up for this?

COACH AURIEMMA: This team doesn't really give you a lot of signs of what they're going to be like. They're pretty much the same.

We were the same at the beginning of the game in the locker room as we were at halftime in the locker room. And we were the same yesterday in the locker room at the beginning of the game.

So they're really -- they're pretty much right here, level, they don't get too high, they don't get too low. I wish we could start out like this every game, but sometimes the other team has something to do with it. Today, I don't think there is anything Rutgers could do about it.

Q. Geno, Moriah, a couple of early three's. Can you talk about the difference that makes?

COACH AURIEMMA: When you make shots early on, it looks like you're off to a great start. And generally speaking when teams start the game against us, they've got a game plan that they're going to guard certain people a certain way, and I don't think they go into the game saying we gotta making sure Moriah Jefferson doesn't make any three's. I think most times they're okay with her shooting those, and when those are going in and we are finding Kaleena in transition, and those three's then tend to pile up, and I've said a lot this season if Moriah Jefferson is a really, really consistent 3-point shooter, then we become -- as good as we are now, we become that much better when she is shooting the ball like that.

Q. Geno, can you talk about Kaleena and everything she has been through, because she was part of that "hot stuff" that you talked about today, as well, going 3 for 4 early. Is she back to where you expected her to be?

COACH AURIEMMA: No, from where she was as a freshman and where she was last year to where she is today, from what I can see, from watching her every day, I would say on a scale of 1-10, it's like 5. It just hasn't been right since November, and you add up all the stuff and it's -- there isn't that consistency that there used to be, and little by little I hope it comes back. Hopefully between tomorrow and whatever in the amount of games we have in the tournament. No, we haven't seen anything like it this year at all since November.

Q. Breanna, the score is 30-9 and they were running down the floor with a likely layup and you chased her down and blocked the shot. Tell us what your thought process was there. Does anybody on this team ever feel like it's okay to take a possession off in a situation like that?

BREANNA STEWART: I honestly didn't think I was going to get it. I thought I was too far away but she slowed up a little bit and I was able to get there and make the block and I think that, you know, most of the time we're hustling back because usually once someone turns it over and we lose the ball we want to make up for it.

Q. Geno, I know Rutgers doesn't normally take a lot of three's, but they didn't even attempt one today. What is the last time you've seen that?

COACH AURIEMMA: Wow, I don't know. I don't know. That's a good question. I don't remember a game off the top of my head where someone did not attempt even one three. I guess if you know you're not going to make 'em, why shoot 'em?

Q. Bria, can you talk about how important it was for your team to get off to that hot start, 13-0 before three minutes expired and what it says about your team when you do that?

BRIA HARTLEY: I think it was really important. We talked about yesterday that we want to have a better start than we did yesterday. When we're goin' like that and we're playing well we know we can go on really big runs at a time and when we're playing like that it's fun, we all had a great time out there and we all enjoyed it so I think we want to keep playing like that the rest of the way.

Q. Kaleena, can you talk about your play and how you feel after the mono and do you think you're getting your shot and your game back?

KALEENA MOSQUEDA-LEWIS: I haven't been on a consistent path all season, whether I'm hurt or sick or I'm hurt again. So, you know, I took pride in the consistency that I had last year and I just haven't really found the rhythm yet, so just trying to keep it up and do everything I can for my teammates while I'm out there whether it's rebounding or playing defense.

Q. Geno, your thoughts on playing in the inaugural finals of the American Tournament?

COACH AURIEMMA: We talk about this periodically. You don't really get caught up in the name of things, because that, as we saw, can

change. If it's a preseason tournament at home, if it's a Thanksgiving tournament on the road, if it's a conference tournament. We have traditionally done pretty well in tournaments.

I think it's appropriate, I think, that we're in the finals. I was hoping we would be. I wanted us to be. You know, we had to prove over the first five months that we're the best team in the league. We should be playing tomorrow night. There are two really good teams playing tonight and whoever we play, it will be a first as you said. It will be the first one and hopefully it's the first of many.

Q. What if you play Louisville again?

COACH AURIEMMA: If we play Louisville again? It's never easy to play someone two times in the span of a week. There is a lot of things that they do that we struggle with and there is a lot of stuff that we do that they struggle with. Tomorrow night, the significance of tomorrow night as far as the NCAA Tournament is concerned is probably huge for Louisville because everybody is talking about them being a No. 2 seed at home. I know because there are so many more good teams deserving of a No. 1 seed than they are, so the significance tomorrow night is huge. Not only to win a conference championship but if they win tomorrow night then they probably are definitely a No. 1 seed, so it should be a great atmosphere.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks.

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RUTGERS

THE MODERATOR: Rutgers is joining us, Coach Stringer, Rachel Hollivay, Kahleah Copper and Betnijah Laney.

Q. Coach, why no three-point shots today? What was the strategy going into tonight?

COACH STRINGER: If you can't hit 3-point shots, why would you take them? Does that occur? Sometimes we do, but sometimes we don't, and 99% of the time we don't. When I get some 3-point shooters next year, we will do that.

Q. Coach, can you talk about UConn's defensive intensity?

COACH STRINGER: UConn does so many great things and they are not always given the credit they deserve. They're given nowhere near the kind of credit they deserve on the defensive side of it, and I say that because defense is not just the way you play, whether it's in the zone or man-to-man but in completion. They're block out, doing all the fundamental things they need to do and it's easy, especially when a team is scoring at the clip that they are offensively to be slow and sloppy and lazy on the defensive side of it.

And I think that Geno does a masterful job of encouraging his players to be as intense on the offensive side as they are on the defensive side or vice versa, but that's what clearly makes a great team.

It's not as obvious until you see the kinds of things the way we were forced to score. We weren't trying to do that, they were forcing us into that situation more than we would like.

Q. Vivian, can you talk about the first ten minutes there? Seemed like UConn came out and they were hitting everything.

COACH STRINGER: Not only were they hitting everything, if you look at any of the stats, at least that we've been looking at, you get into the boxing ring and they get -- they look to knock you out the first ten minutes, and I think that probably is the secret, is to be in the eye of the storm and still maintain some composure, be calm and not abandon the ship, so to speak. We clearly did that. We got anxious. They shot the heck out of the ball, doesn't matter, from one side to the next, and that's not something you practice. They came in shooting and they got that much better. That's not an accident. They spread the floor so well.

Having said that, we have to recognize that they always beat you half to death as much as they can in the first four minutes and I'm saying that if you look at the tracking system, it's true. In this case they were able to sustain for eight minutes and then they just shadow box the rest of the time and something happens at the half and they come at it again. We knew that was -- that would be a surge. I thought our team did a great job of settling down and playing them much more composed basketball game, one that we would be proud of. We weren't too happy that they forced us to get excited and try to "save ourselves" and when that happens no one person can beat UConn because it is not one person that's beating us anyway. It's the entire UConn team that makes everything happen. That's the secret to us and to any team that's going to be successful against UConn.

Q. Vivian, what will the next eight days be like for you as you wait until Selection Sunday? Last year you guys kind of knew you were out and years before you knew you were in. It's been a while since you've been on the bubble.

COACH STRINGER: Yeah, I don't know.

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Rutgers Quotes

I think tomorrow and the next day will -- tomorrow and the next day we will just try to rest up, get in the ice bath and hope that we are in, which I believe that we should be, but it doesn't really matter what I think a whole heck of a lot, it depends on what the committee thinks but it is an uncomfortable situation because we don't know. We really don't know.

We will wait quietly at our televisions and if they say you guys are -- because you know that UConn is UConn by itself and everybody else is there, and I don't like to have to say that but it is what it is and it's the true. So it's incumbent upon all of us to be a whole heck of a lot better. I think they set the standard in each position with what they do and it's as simple as that, and we're okay, we can aspire to that but we're going to have to wait.

In years before we have always known that we were in. We were out last year, which wasn't a shock. This year we don't know. I think that based upon the way I thought that Betnijah, Kahleah and Rachel and others practiced this summer, I thought that they really remembered that. They personally -- more credit goes to them than to any of us, at least me specifically, or to the coaching staff because had it not been that they decided they didn't like where they were, they came back ready, they worked hard and we're grateful to be able to coach them and to put this together for them. I know that they want better and they're going to work, continually.

I know that they don't believe that it's over, so maybe tomorrow -- not tomorrow but maybe the next day they will get some shooting in but they will come ready. As a young group, we're proud of them and they will be back. If we have an opportunity to show our talents this year, that will be great and if not we will be that much more determined through the summer and this group will come back with that much more resolve and I have no question in my mind, based upon what I've seen, not what I've heard about but what I've seen, I'm proud of the way they have come back this year.

Q. Kahleah, can you talk about how difficult it is to attack the basket and get to the free-throw line with how much size they have in the middle?

KAHLEAH COPPER: It was really hard, but our coaches prepared us for that. I knew once I had to attack my guard had to slide up and we

had to kick it out. They're really long, and as long as we kept getting deeper into the paint they were close IN on us, and that was expected. Coach prepared us for all that but yeah it was difficult.

Q. Vivian, based on what you said about showcasing your talent, if it didn't happen (NCAA Tournament), would you consider a NIT bid if it came?

COACH STRINGER: Is my athletic director here? You know how I feel about that. You know that. You of all people know that. But I think that we will do what is best for the team. Probably what's best for the team is that we will take advantage of the experience, the opportunity, one, to practice, to play, to compete, and it's a team that while I could be disappointed that we are not in the NCAA Tournament, I would because -- I would do that because I know that this would benefit the team, the fact that we can go to Europe this summer, that's what I'm trying to do.

I think this team is capable of lots of good things, so to answer your question, Mel, yes, but don't tell anybody else that, because we planning to go to the NCAA. Let me leave it like that.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players?

Q. Rachel, you set the program single-season block record today. Can you talk about what you take out of this season, given the loss?

RACHEL HOLLIVAY: Just keep working hard and try to do the best I can, help my teammates.

Q. Betnijah, I know you guys practice real hard. Where you practice for something like that, being down 25-5 or whatever it was? Does that shock you when you are out there and how do you not let that get the best of you? Obviously you guys played better the rest of the game.

BETNIJAH LANEY: I don't think it's something you practice for; it just happened. We talked about we knew what their game plan was, to take us out in the first custom minutes and we tried to focus on that and make sure they didn't but it happened.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies.

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