

March 9, 2015



UConn 84
USF 70

An interview with:

USF

THE MODERATOR: Joining us now from USF is head coach Jose Fernandez, along with senior guard, Tamara Taylor, junior guard, Courtney Williams and junior guard Shaletia Stringfield. Coach, a few comments to get us started?

COACH FERNANDEZ: The one thing we talked about the first two times we played them was no turnovers and points off of turnovers. We fixed that, tonight we didn't turn the ball over. The issue was rebounding. We're fourth in the country in defensive rebounds per game and that was uncharacteristic for us.

I thought UConn did a great job on the glass. That was the difference. I was extremely proud of our kids' effort. There were two 4-minute segments in that first half that really hurt us, the 12 to 8 media was not good, you know, and they were able to extend, and you're down 23 at the half. We kept chipping away and fighting.

I've said it all along, you know, this team hasn't gotten the national attention from the media all year, hasn't. But in the last seven days I think these basketball players have proven that they can compete and play with anybody in the country. UConn is very, very good. They make the most out of every possession. They make the most out of every trip. I thought our kids really battled and played hard.

Q. Courtney, USF played UConn tougher than anybody this year. This loss was their smallest of the season, their smallest conference loss on the season. What is it about your team that enabled it to do this?

COURTNEY WILLIAMS: I think we just play hard. I think we don't give up when we're down. Like coach said to the media they really hurt us. But we went into the locker room at half time and got ourselves together and said "Look we have to get ourselves back in this game," so I think we went out and tried our best to do that.

Q. How do you think this is going to translate into the tournament, having played them? It's not likely that you're going to play anybody certainly so unique and has that kind of skill set. Do you think this has served your team well?

COURTNEY WILLIAMS: Oh, yeah, UConn is -- they don't make mistakes, and when they do you have to capitalize on it. I'm not downplaying other teams but they're No. 1 in the country for a reason. As long as we don't run up against them -- I mean, we going to be ready, you know? As long as we get into a different bracket, I think we should be fine coming back to home for the Final Four.

Q. Tamara, can you address the lack of respect that this team gets? Do you think the fact that you're in the conference with UConn affects that at all? Because a team with -- I think all but a couple of your losses have come against RPI Top-10 opponents, if I'm not mistaken.

TAMARA TAYLOR: Like she said, UConn is a very good team. We go out there and play and do what we supposed to do, anybody is beatable. I think we fought hard, we didn't give up and we just stuck to the game plan.

We made shots, and, I mean, anybody is beatable.

Q. Overall nationally, can you talk about what you think you showed the nation?

TAMARA TAYLOR: I made big shots when I need to do to help my team win and that's what I got recruited for. My teammates did a good

job of finding me. And I stop, one, two, three, pull-up -- they got bigs, I can't get to the rim, because they are going block it, so I pull-up.

Q. Courtney, you came in yesterday to the press conference, knees taped up and looked like you were limping a little bit when you walked in. Feeling all right?

COURTNEY WILLIAMS: I'm fine. I tweaked my ankle a little bit but we got time before the tournament, I'll be fine.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies. Questions for Coach.

Q. Jose, what is your scout for these teams that are going to have to play UConn in the next three weeks?

COACH FERNANDEZ: Why should I help them? (Laughter.)

Q. At times this season it seemed like it was the Courtney Williams show, and this time you got a lot of people stepping up. How important is that in the overall picture and getting five or six players contributing offensively?

COACH FERNANDEZ: You're absolutely correct. If you took on our first 10 games and you touch on our non-conference schedule, do I need to one through those? Villanova, Chattanooga was in the Top-25, what are they now, 17 in the AP Poll? Is that correct? Yeah, we beat Oklahoma on a neutral floor, too, by 18. Our losses were to Kentucky by two and Maryland on the road, with Marcos Canedo and Weber injured. We relied on Courtney Williams a lot early. I think through the course of a year, you evolve and develop your guys and we gotta have more point production outside of Courtney and Alisia.

Some of the things that UConn does when we play Courtney, you know, we don't see that. But if we can get production from Laura Ferreira and Tamara and have solid point guard play like we have for us to be successful and take the next step we have to have better balanced, you're correct.

Q. Jose, we've seen enough teams come in to play UConn that are intimidated by the uniform, don't have a game plan and don't seem to be really prepared. Obviously you have never had that problem and your kids play with tremendous energy and drive. What is it

that you instill in them that's different that makes them know that they can compete in any game against anybody?

COACH FERNANDEZ: It starts in the locker room. You've got to win in the locker room before you win on the court. I think it's a credit to their character and the culture that we have in the program. I think sometimes a team takes a personality of the head coach and the staff and I think I've always been a fighter my whole life. We have a lot of fighters in that locker room that play with energy and intensity and with a lot of desire. It's great to come in and coach kids with passion. Those are the type of kids that we recruit.

Q. Stewart scored in double figures last 19 post-season games, Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis last 18. Can you address defending teams that have two players like that, seems like when they need to score they score.

COACH FERNANDEZ: Two very good players that are going to play in the WNBA. They have five guys that shoot over 50%, so it's tough, especially how you defend the post or double the post because then they make good decisions.

What UConn does so well I think is they move the basketball and pass really well. So your defense makes adjustments and slides and your reactions to passes have to be very, very good. I think, you know, it's postseason time and Stewart is playing really, really well. But I've always said, I think Stewart is the best player in the country. I think most valuable for them is Moriah Jefferson. She is the engine. I'm happy for our conference. I hope we get three teams in, and we'll see you guys in the NCAA Tournament.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports