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Illinois - 71

An Interview With:

**COACH CONNIE YORI
NATALIE ROMEO
HAILIE SAMPLE**

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Nebraska head coach Connie Yori and student-athletes Natalie Romeo and Hailie Sample.

Coach, an opening statement.

COACH YORI: Well, those first 30 minutes, I'm not sure we could have played a lot better offensively. That first half. I mean we did a great job sharing the ball. We made shots.

You look at our starting lineup, and we shot a high percentage. I just thought our unselfishness -- but I also thought our intensity was just outstanding. We got on the floor for loose balls. Illinois is a team that really scraps.

And we had to match and exceed that intensity. And I think we did. We're a team that scraps, too. I thought we got a lot of loose balls in that first half and that led to extra possessions for us. Led to some fouls for them, too.

Obviously foul trouble hurt them. But I thought we were aggressive. And we were the aggressors most of the game up until the last ten minutes when they slapped on their -- 10 or 12 minutes - their full court press and we didn't handle that particularly well.

But the way I'm looking at it right now, we're playing with house money. We got a good win here. And now we got another matchup with Iowa, which is the 11th time we've played them in our seniors' career, which is pretty unusual.

But that's not going to be easy. But I just thought, I just want to enjoy this moment with this group of kids, because I thought that was -- I thought they executed very, very well.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Natalie, did you realize at one point in the game that you had the same amount of points as the Illini did?

NATALIE ROMEO: No.

Q. And you're out there shooting you had 26, was it close the first half when you had those three points you had five in the first half, I believe?

NATALIE ROMEO: I was just shooting. I was open, my teammates got me the ball, I found the open look and it felt right.

Q. Hailie, when the game was over how well did you feel like you had played as a team in that game?

HAILIE SAMPLE: I thought we played really well as a team. We were all clicking tonight on the offensive end and the defensive end. We talked really well and we actually executed the game plan pretty much perfectly. So I think we played really, really well.

Q. Hailie, you and Emily and Allie all in double figures. How much did getting Illinois' post players in foul trouble help that?

HAILIE SAMPLE: That was pretty huge. It was good to get, their two post players out because they're pretty good scorers inside and outside, and also I mean they're shot blockers. If we got them out of the game, it was a little bit easier to go inside for us.

Q. And Natalie, since you've been in the starting lineup I guess the last eight games now, you've had some games like this and games you struggled from 3-point range. When did you maybe feel like this could be one of those big games?

NATALIE ROMEO: I don't really think

about it like that. If I'm open, I'll take the shot.

Q. Hailie, you guys shot 64 percent in the first half, 61 for the game. What allowed you guys to be so effective offensively?

HAILIE SAMPLE: I mean, we worked our zone offenses all year long and we've played against a lot of teams who have played zone defenses. So I think that we're fairly comfortable in it and I mean we're pretty used to it. So I think that it just is a little bit easier for us.

Q. Hailie, what do you think about another chance to play Iowa and what were those two previous losses, how did you handle those this year?

HAILIE SAMPLE: I mean, I'm really excited to play Iowa. It's always a fun matchup. They work really hard. We work really hard. And we're two teams that have played each other a lot over the years. And two senior classes who know each other pretty much inside and out. So I'm really excited.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. The way Natalie played, how important was it for her to maybe be on from 3-point range and tonight and hit all those?

COACH YORI: We said before the game, somebody's going to have to hit some perimeter shots. Whether it's T or whether it's Natalie. Those are the two most logical candidates for us. And we said going into the game, gotta make some perimeter shots. I think that's what you gotta do against Illinois, the way they play.

You gotta take care of the ball but you also have to make some perimeter shots. And we've been inconsistent shooting the ball from the perimeter. Obviously when you shoot it like that, you look like you know what you're doing as a coach.

So tonight it looked like I knew what I was doing as a coach. But making shots is a big part of the game. And they play their couple different zone defenses and you gotta be able to hit perimeter shots against them. Natalie opened it up and I thought, I also thought their foul trouble, you mentioned getting the ball inside their foul trouble enabled us to get the ball inside. And they had to play more zone and we kept hitting shots. The combination of their foul trouble kept them in the zone I think longer than they might have wanted to be.

Q. The first two games against Illini were a lot closer. What were you thinking when you saw the game kind of get out of hand at one point?

COACH YORI: Well, I didn't really expect this. I mean, I would have thought we could barely get over 50 the first two times we played them. And for us to get in the mid to upper 80s means that we did a lot of things on offense well.

And we weren't -- they're a team that tries to keep you off balance because of their changing defenses and the way they mix things. And the interesting thing is we played this game without Rachel and the first two games we played without Rachel we could barely get it to 50.

So I wouldn't have expected necessarily for us to score like we did today. But we had it going.

Q. Connie, I think way back you thought Chandler might be the freshman that would have the bigger impact. Has Natalie exceeded at times what you thought she could do?

COACH YORI: I think Natalie has really grown in her confidence. We knew Nat from the get-go, she was always playing hard. We felt like she attacked practice in a positive way. And we figured that she would get better as the season went on. And that's exactly what's happened.

I go back to when we played -- now she missed a good -- she missed a good portion of our season because of an injury. But one of her first games back was when we played Illinois at Illinois. And she couldn't have played a lot worse in that particular game.

And now here she is basically a month and a half, two months later, and that's what happens sometimes with freshman. Is that they get better as the season goes on because they gain confidence and they learn the pace of the game and they're just -- a lot of times freshmen are not used to playing at this level with the quickness and the speed of the game.

And she's really adjusted well to it.

Q. Those last 10 to 12 minutes when Illinois went into that press and made a little bit of a run, those are all kind of Ivory Crawford led, does that fire -- almost 30 what you expected from her?

COACH YORI: From Ivory Crawford? I

think Ivory is a really great player. I've always liked her game. I think she's super competitive. She's a scorer. She's tough. I think she's been a great player for them throughout her career. And she's a hard matchup because of her ability to, especially if she's hitting shots. But she's just such an aggressive player.

She's a kid that you hate to play against. But she's had a great career.

Q. Natalie had all those 3-pointers but seems like on the bench and from you, when she drove and then got the foul, it was kind of the bigger reaction from you and the bench. Why were you so excited when she drove the ball?

COACH YORI: I think Natalie's got more to her game than just a 3-point shooter. And I think we've seen only a little bit of that. I've watched -- we've seen her in practice do it. I saw her in high school do it. She can get to the basket and she's quick enough to get by people. And we, when you're playing against the zone, you're not necessarily going to get to the basket a lot. But when they start pressing -- it doesn't bother me when teams press, when she's on the floor. She can handle it and she can be a good decision-maker. I think she's going to be -- I think we've really just seen a small part of her game. And I think obviously she's a good shooter, but I think we'll see more from her as she grows.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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