

UConn marches toward Final Four

Pete DiPrimio
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

DAYTON, Ohio — Kristy Curry faced the future with microphones in her face and camera lights in her eyes.

"I'm thrilled to death about next year," the Purdue coach said. "I'm as excited as I've ever been with the players we have back and the ones we have coming in."

The Boilermakers' 73-64 Elite Eight loss to top-seeded Connecticut on Tuesday night cost them a shot at this weekend's Final Four in Atlanta, but not, it seems, at future ones.

So there was Curry, standing in a carpeted University of Dayton Arena hallway.

"There's a lot to look forward to," she said. "And a lot to be proud of."

Start with Tuesday's late surge that cut a 22-point deficit to six and left Purdue (29-6) wondering about what might have been.

"You wish you could do things differently," guard Erika Valek said. "You have so many regrets. But all you can do is remember so you'll work harder in the off-season."

Valek and fellow juniors Shereka Wright and Beth Jones vowed to keep the memory fresh.

"We want to get back to this point, and even further," Wright said, "but it's going to take the off-season to get where we want to be."

That would be where Connecticut is, two victories away from a second consecutive national championship and third in the last four years.

And without a senior on the roster, the Huskies (35-1) could extend their dominance into the foreseeable future.

Surprise and parity are for the men's game. The women follow form and favorites rule, which is why all four regional finals featured top seeds against second seeds.

On Monday, top-seeded Ten-

nessee and Duke advanced to the Final Four. On Tuesday, Connecticut made it three of four, with only Texas' upset of Louisiana State preventing a No. 1 sweep.

That meant little to Purdue, which had visions of its third Final Four trip in the last five years dashed.

"You could see the hurt in their eyes," Curry said. "It just wasn't meant to be."

The matchups favored Connecticut from the start. Jones drew All-America Diana Taurasi, which was about as fair as getting Tiger Woods in match play. The bigger, stronger, faster Taurasi played like the regional's most outstanding player she was, driving and dictating and dominating en route to 21 points and six rebounds.

"She's just a very good, very smart player," Jones said.

For 32 minutes the Huskies turned Purdue into Pacific, punishing with defense, thriving with offense.

"We can make it look easy," coach Geno Auriemma said. "And then sometimes it gets away from us."

Connecticut opened with 30.8 percent shooting, which was terrific compared to Purdue's 7.6 percent.

The Boilermakers blew layups and jumpers. They missed against fierce pressure and no pressure at all.

They played intimidated, exactly what they had insisted wouldn't happen.

"We did things we never do," Wright said. "We didn't step up. We didn't accept it. We waited too long to attack."

The result was a 41-2 halftime deficit. Purdue trailed 62-40 with eight minutes left before a 20-4 run brought it within six.

But no closer.

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Football

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wide open."

The new guys

Doba and Karl Dorrell are the two newest coaches to join the Pac-10 fraternity. Doba replaces Mike Price, who left to become the head coach at Alabama, at Washington State. Dorrell takes over for Bob Toledo, who was fired after leading UCLA to an 8-5 overall record.

Both have experience in the conference. Doba spent the last 14 years by Price's side and had been the team's defensive coordinator since 1994.

Dorrell played for UCLA from 1982-85, and was a graduate assistant for the Bruins in 1988. Before his hiring, Dorrell had been the wide receivers coach with the NFL's Denver Broncos. He also spent the 1999 season as offensive coordinator with the Washington Huskies.

Both Dorrell and Doba inherit

teams that have the potential to finish in the top half of the Pac-10. That march begins in the spring. Washington State started its practices Tuesday, while the Bruins begin today.

"We brought in some new coaches with some new ideas," Doba said. "They won't be a whole lot different."

Remember him?

As Oregon gets ready to start spring practice Saturday, a look back at the team's past unveils a player of the week.

No, not in NFL Europe. Tony Graziani, who played for the Ducks from 1994-96, was named the Arena Football League's Offensive Player of the Week on Tuesday.

The No. 7-ranked passer in Oregon's history, Graziani threw for 319 yards and six touchdowns in Los Angeles' 64-63 win over Orlando on Sunday.

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