

Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament: Penn State vs Villanova

Sunday, March 31, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

Villanova Wildcats

Denise Dillon

Lucy Olsen

Bella Runyan

Semifinal Press Conference

DENISE DILLON: Well, happy Easter, everyone. This is really special to be here to have an opportunity to continue to play. We were home for three games. Thought it was incredible environment, recognizing our staff for that, but this is tremendous, as well.

So we appreciate all the support here, the attention, and ready to play some basketball tomorrow. So we're fired up about it.

Q. Postseason play is always great, obviously, but the inaugural WBIT, is that something you all talk about in terms of a new event and trying to put your stamp on it or is it just the postseason is the postseason. Lucy, would you start?

LUCY OLSEN: Yeah, I think we've talked about as a team, to be the first championship, champions, of this WBIT would be really cool. You can only be the first once. So I think that would be awesome.

But yeah, any postseason's great.

BELLA RUNYAN: And I've said it before, not every team has the opportunity to play in a postseason tournament. So we're taking it all in, and it would be awesome to be that first winner of the WBIT.

Q. You've played at Hinkle Fieldhouse the last couple years. Some thoughts about this building and when you realized that the semifinals and Championship Game were here, was that something that excited you?

LUCY OLSEN: I like playing here. It's an awesome gym.



It's super nice. We were just in there taking pictures, and we were like, wow, this is a beautiful gym. It's super fun.

BELLA RUNYAN: When I saw that it was at Hinkle, I was like, Oh, we get a little advantage. Like this is my fifth time here and I love playing here, too, and the history of Hinkle. So it's awesome to be back.

Q. What has this extra time together meant to all of you, and how do you see this experience in helping you propel towards something even bigger in the future?

BELLA RUNYAN: Yeah, I think this postseason has really made our team like gel together in ways that we didn't know that we could. We were struggling a little bit towards the end of the season. I think we all wanted to finish the season a little differently.

But we really embraced this invitation to play in the WBIT, and the way we're playing, it's so fun and we feel so connected. Everything is just flowing. Everyone is feeling good.

So I've been cherishing these moments with my teammates in the postseason and having so much fun. Hopefully next year, we can find that groove a little bit sooner.

LUCY OLSEN: I would say we haven't gotten sick of each other yet, so that's a good sign (laughing).

Like Bella said, we are embracing the moments that we have to play together. You never know when it's going to be your last time. So we are really just enjoying the last few moments, having fun with it. Yeah, we are all celebrating Easter together, that's exciting.

Q. You've been to the NCAA Tournament the last couple of years. Curious how you got beyond maybe the disappointment of not getting to the NCAA Tournament, and for Coach, what kind of benefits have you seen from playing three extra games so far and a fourth tomorrow?



LUCY OLSEN: I think what we said earlier, is that we wished we were in March Madness again. The past two years have been awesome experiences. But we didn't make it. So we're not just going to quit any ways.

We're a team of winners. We don't want to lose. We don't like losing. So any game that you're going to put front of us we are going to try to win.

Yeah, we made it this far, so we might as well keep going.

BELLA RUNYAN: Yeah, I think the first practice back after our loss to Marquette in the BIG EAST Tournament, Coach Dillon said, now we have a chance to play for a championship, why not. Why would we waste that? Like Lucy said, you put a game front of us, we are going to give it our all. We made it this far. We made it to Hinkle. Just two more games and we are champions.

DENISE DILLON: They summed it up. This group has grown so much this season. We talked at the beginning of the year about every time you step on the floor, you need to prove who you are and what you're about, this group.

And Lucy saying, yes, we're winners. We may not have come out with the victory, but I think the effort that group has put forth every day at practice and put themselves in the position: One, to be in that conversation on the bubble of the NCAA Tournament; the 1-seed in the WBIT here, and to really embrace that after a tough finish in the BIG EAST Tournament. You could say a disappointing finish perhaps.

But for them to show up, that first practice, was, all right, what are we going to get here, and I tell you, from that point on, they were there. As fresh as we looked in October with the mentality of going through drills.

Adding some wrinkles to things and just shifting a little bit of the mentality to proving ourselves got the job done against really great competition in VCU, Virginia and Saint Joe's, going up against a city rival this time of year is not easy. You're most familiar with each other. To still be going with that edge and commitment to proving ourselves, you know good, things can happen.

Q. You all hold opponents to less than 60 points throughout the season. Penn State scores a lot. What are the keys to the game tomorrow to with contrasting styles?

DENISE DILLON: Yes, Penn State certainly does score the ball. Their rotation is deep. They can go.

It's decreasing the possessions. They want to have as

many offensive possessions as possible. They want to score quickly in transition. Even in their transitioning off a make, they are getting a ball in quick and looking for threes. They are looking to get to the rim. You stay with that defensive mentality of slowing them down, force them to run the clock.

I think we have the best in Bella Runyan as the best guard defender and Christina Dalce being named BIG EAST Defensive Player of the Year, someone around the paint. It has to be that one-and-done mentality on the defensive end.

We can't get caught up -- often we talk about tendencies of the individual, of your opponent. With this group with, Penn State, it is the whole; it's the threes -- as I say, getting to the rim, finishing with the rebound.

Then for us, being patient on offense. As aggressive as we are on the defensive end, we can't play into the possession game of taking a quick shot, and then allowing them to get more. We've got to work our offense. Being poised on the offensive end to get looks that we want and make Penn State work on that end, as well.

Q. It's become more common the last couple years with transferring becoming more of a thing, but with Maddie spending a couple years at Penn State, is that something that you all talked with her about at all? Have you all gone to her for play calls? Anything there that makes this specially unique circumstance?

DENISE DILLON: It's interesting, I tell you, I felt like I've had Maddie Burke since the beginning of her career. Even when you just said that, I was like, oh, that's right, she was at Penn State. Yeah, she plays Villanova basketball, and she knows what we are doing and she's all about it.

I said it when she stepped on campus, it was as if she had been there. I had to remind myself those first couple months, Oh, this is new to you.

Yeah, Maddie Burke, through and through, has been a Wildcat. Just for her, might be those first couple minutes making that shift, just the emotions of it, but she's been playing basketball a long time. So she knows just to do her thing and do what we do best.

Q. A different Maddy who graduated last year. What's the conversations you had with Lucy over the summer? Talk about that; she had a large role last year, also.

DENISE DILLON: Sure.

Q. But just of what you need from her and how she kind of has stepped into that role.

DENISE DILLON: Well, what Lucy has done this year is extremely impressive, and it's because of her work ethic and commitment. You hear her story, just seeing the process, the progression of her game from freshman to sophomore and now into her junior year. She recognized Maddy Siegrist's commitment to being a great player.

She's solid. She wanted to emulate it. She had said, you know, she saw how hard Maddy worked. She wanted to work with her and work harder than her. So when you have that, you know you're going to experience greatness. You're going to see it.

And Lucy just developing different areas of her game, and it wasn't a conversations that we had, like, Oh, Maddy is finishing, now it's your turn. She was doing all the things that she needed to as a freshman and sophomore last year growing in her game. Just recognize like some other players, coming along for us, and taking a little longer. So Lucy was like, all right, let's go.

As I say to so many, and you're seeing more efficient scoring out of Lucy of late because other players are feeling confident in their ability. And I just get so excited for what is to come as we finish this weekend, and then her final season, just with the pieces coming into play.

I think you're just getting a taste of what Lucy Olsen has to offer, and it's not just on the offensive end. I think defensively what she does is impressive.

So it's been great. It certainly has made my job a little bit easier to know that you have that dynamic scorer, and even different. Maddy Siegrist just scored in so many areas of around the basket, at the three, adding the mid-range; and Lucy with the ball in her hands a lot, creating for herself or somebody else.

Yeah, when you see it and you see other players make their teammates better, it's really special.

Q. Would you talk about the BIG EAST Conference and how it's helped you prepare for this particular championship event, is there a rejuvenation when you get to the postseason knowing you're not going to see the same teams over the course of 20 games and play different styles? Who might be similar in style to Penn State in the BIG EAST?

DENISE DILLON: Yeah, well, you certainly do that. You want to, for yourself in the scout, as coaches, and then for your players, to have an understanding because it's a short

turnaround, each game.

You mentioned, though, about going against your BIG EAST foes day-in and day-out, going against a big five foe in Saint Joe's. So we had a little taste of it, feeling like we were going against a similar opponent.

For us, looking at Penn State, it's like a Creighton, the ability to score the ball in so many different ways: The three, around the basket, their movement, sharing the basketball, everyone a threat, everyone an option. You know, just that efficiency; how can we contain that a little bit.

Didn't go our way so much against Creighton, but we've seen it. So hopefully we're better now than we were end of -- or mid-February.

Q. One question that was asked earlier in the Penn State press conference, talked a little about the impact of an increased national television exposure on the women's game and what have you seen over the course of the last few years as more games are being played on over-the-air networks, and more games are on primetime. What's your thought about the growth of the game through the television exposure?

DENISE DILLON: It's remarkable just in a short period of time. It's the conversations. It's not just after a game. It's in the off-season. You're hearing so many more people talk about women's basketball and the recognition they have of the individual players, the teams in general.

We see it in our fan base. The crowds that we had the last couple years at Villanova is tremendous. You have that support. Why? Because the media attention we are getting being on television, and then they want to see you in person. It's been fantastic.

We want to see it continue to grow and get it out there. We talked, it's a great product with some really great individual players and team concepts.

So keep it going. We appreciate you all.

THE MODERATOR: We wish you the best of luck, and we'll see you tomorrow.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports