

# Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament: Penn State vs Villanova

Monday, April 1, 2024  
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA  
Hinckle Fieldhouse

## Penn State Nittany Lions Carolyn Kieger Leilani Kapinus Makenna Marisa

### Semifinal Press Conference

Villanova 58, Penn State 53

CAROLYN KIEGER: Obviously, first of all, I want to congratulate Denise and Villanova. They played a really hard game against our offense and really shut us down. Congrats to them.

Then I want to focus on our seniors, that one right there (Makenna Marisa). Mmmm, special (pausing).

She stayed loyal. She stuck with the process. Her and I got her at the same time, both with the same mission to rebuild this program, and I can't say enough about her character and who she is as a person.

And we just talked about it in the locker room. Everything Penn State does moving forward is because of the tone that she sets, the leadership she has for this one right here, and bleeding Blue and White. It's in her family. It's in her blood and I just wish so badly we could have left her with a championship.

But what Makenna Marisa and these seniors have meant to the program is huge. We are not where we want to be yet but we are way farther along than we were when we took this program over. And I think it's rare these days to have somebody with that amount of loyalty, and I just want to thank her for that.

And it's going to be a sad day coaching without her. Really proud of the rest of our seniors for leaving the jersey in a better place.

But this program is coming. We are going to have a chip



on our shoulder next year, and we have got something to prove and we have got places to go.

**Q. Obviously you had a double-double. While offense struggled to get a rhythm. What was the key to your performance tonight?**

LEILANI KAPINUS: I mean, my teammates found me. I was trying to run the floor. Obviously not as efficient as I wanted to be, 5 for 12. But I mean, my teammates found me. They got me the ball. We tried to play together as much as we could, and find the hot hand. So that's just who we are as a team. We are very selfless.

**Q. Congrats on a great career. You were not recruited by Coach but you stayed here all five years. What has she meant to you? She just spoke so highly of yourself.**

MAKENNA MARISA: Yeah. Coach Kiegs has completely changed me as a person, a player, everything, for the better. And you know, I'm someone -- I'm a completely different person because of her in so many good ways, and I'm so beyond thankful to have been coached by Coach Kiegs.

You know, I'm someone I'm proud to be because of her and she's a strong, competent, competitive woman in this sport, and it's inspiring and it's inspired me to be the same, and the whole team. I can't say enough thank-yous to her for what she's done for me. It's going to be a sad day for me not playing under her.

**Q. You all had a really strong defensive effort tonight. Can you talk about what went into that and kind of the keys that you had and how you all were able to really disrupt what Villanova did?**

MAKENNA MARISA: Yeah. I mean, we have been working on our defense and that's -- we try to play, that's Penn State Basketball, and Leilani over here, I believe, is one of, if not the best defender in the country, and she leads our defense. You know, Tay Valladay went down, and she also led our defense. Tough and gritty, that's how we try to play defense.

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I'm really proud of our defensive lineup's effort tonight. They got us back into things. They got us back into the game. You know, unfortunately we couldn't pull it out but I'm proud of them.

THE MODERATOR: I wanted to ask you real quick, because obviously the end of season -- take the wins and losses and everything, but the emotion that you go through every year with a group of young women, and you become a family. Talk about what that is like for a coach to, again, create a family within 15, 16 people you never knew until maybe four years ago. What's that like for you as a process?

CAROLYN KIEGER: Well, I think all of us, first and foremost, who have ever played competitive sports, especially team sports at that, that's why we play. We play for the person to the left and right of us and we play for the life-lasting relationships. You'll have your teammates at your weddings. You'll have your teammates at big-time life-changing events.

As hard as it is to go through losses together, as amazing as it is to go through wins together, you do become a family. And that's what sport gives us. Not only does it teach us to become competitive in every walk of life, but it gives us an immediate family.

And I know, I can call any one of my teammates, even if I haven't talked to them in ten years, and they will pick up, and that's what these ladies are going to have, as well.

I think, you know, sport can teach us so many lessons, but first and foremost, it teaches you how to be selfless. It teaches you how to be competitive, and now relentless. It teaches you how to fail, too. I mean, to fail with a group, it's hard. And at some point in your career, you're always going to fail, and you want to fail forward.

So as a family, you go through those ups and downs. Everyone in life has went through ups and downs with their family. And now these young women are going to be strong, they are going to be confident and they are going to be ready for every walk of life in their professional career, whether it's a basketball player, whether it's a doctor, whether it's a lawyer, whatever it might be.

I know I'm thankful for sport. I know I'm thankful for my teammates. I'm thankful for these young women that I hopefully get to inspire every day, because I know they inspire me. But at the end of the day our jobs as coaches are to make them better human beings. Teach them what it's like. Maybe not always tell them what they want to hear, but what they need to hear, and they have to do that

for each other. I think that's what makes a family truly a family, when you're authentic and real with each other, and that's authenticity right there.

**Q. Looking forward, you and the players talked about this being a springboard into the future. How do you make that happen? How do you take what happened these last couple weeks and spin that forward?**

CAROLYN KIEGER: Yeah, well, I think -- I've been a part of a lot of NIT Championship games or Final Four games, and now with the WBIT, I did it -- was lucky enough to do it at Miami, Marquette and now here, and every single time, it propelled us into the future. It taught us how to win in March. It taught us how to lose. It taught us how to be tough.

And now we are playing in April, and when you have a group that's trying to learn how to win, that's really important.

Absolutely a springboard. Absolutely where we want to propel forward. You learn lessons. We learned we need to be tougher. Obviously we had a great defensive performance but our offense didn't show up. You've got to show up on both ends to be tough in April if you want to win.

Can't say enough about our nitty-gritty defensive performance tonight, and against Mississippi State, but we've got to learn how to put two halves, four quarters together, and push this program into that NCAA Tournament.

**Q. This year, you finished with 22 wins, a WBIT semifinalist, you've improved all five years when it comes to win total. How would you summarize this year, and bouncing off that, obviously the losing streak, but is there one key moment that maybe defines this year for you? I know some coaches have that one moment, maybe springboards you to next year. But how would you summarize it and maybe is there that one moment that really puts this year all together?**

CAROLYN KIEGER: Yeah, I don't know if there's necessarily one moment. Obviously if you know me, you know I'm never going to be satisfied. You know, we have big goals for this program. I have big goals for this program. We want to win and we want to win at the highest level.

So you look back, you look back at the USC game, one-point game to a No. 1-seed. You look back to -- we took Ohio to state to overtime. Obviously Final Four here.

We are right on the verge. We are an almost-team right now, and we have to figure out how to not be an almost-team. We have to figure out how to be tough enough to push forward.

I think a game that I would say would be a pivotal game for us is that a Mississippi State game. That wasn't an almost-game. We showed up and we finished. So we have to teach, I have to teach this program, I have to teach the staff and I have to teach my players how to be finishers, and that's what we will start from this day moving forward.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, appreciate you taking the time.

CAROLYN KIEGER: Yeah, I just want to say thank you to the WBIT. Everybody on the staff, I thought you guys did a phenomenal job with tournament. I really want to thank you and appreciate you. Because it's going to be a big springboard for this program, and for us, you made it feel really big-time. So I want to thank you all. It was an awesome inaugural event. Thank you.

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