

# Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament: Washington State vs Illinois

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

## Washington State Cougars Kamie Ethridge Astera Tuhina Eleonora Villa

Semifinal Press Conference

Illinois - 81, Washington State - 58

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Yeah, just a real simple message. We got beat by a better team. I thought they were spectacular. I've watched a lot of film on them. Clearly their guard play and their play-making ability and shot making ability is pretty elite. We struggled at the beginning kind of getting a handle on them and then, you know, they just got a little bit too big of a lead. I thought we tried to make a good push at the end of the third, but we just couldn't counter their ability to put the ball in the basket from a lot of different spots on the floor. So I give them a ton of credit. Shauna has done a great job, really, really highly skilled and disciplined and good team and they outplayed us tonight, and want to say congratulations to them.

**Q. For both players, just this season as a whole and this tournament run in particular, how much has this meant to the team and what are things you'll take from this, the last few weeks of a WBIT run?**

ASTERA TUHINA: It's a great opportunity for us to be here. It great experience to play in March, as we've talked before. I mean, we've made it this far. We have practiced a lot to be here. It's unfortunate that we played a really good team and they outscored us today. But as I said, it's a great experience, and it's a lesson for the future. We would love to get here and do better, or make it to the tournament and do way better.

So it's just a lesson and got to work for it.

ELEONORA VILLA: For me the same. I think that it is, of



course, a great experience and opportunity for us to improve, and also to learn something new. I think that we face a lot of aggressive and strong team, and I think that, of course, this experience make us improve and also want to do better the next time.

**Q. What was it about that first quarter that Illinois was really doing well that seemed to give you all some trouble just in the very first part of the game?**

ASTERA TUHINA: As we said, they are a great team. We didn't really guard them well. They outscored us in every quarter. To beat teams like this, we have to either guard them better or score more but we can't be short on offense and also not guard them. So I think that's what got us.

**Q. Are these the kinds of things that will help as the sign says behind you, elevate the women's game, these sorts of tournaments?**

ASTERA TUHINA: Yeah, obviously this tournament has helped us, especially since it's the first one. It's a great opportunity for those teams that doesn't make it to the tournament to keep playing and actually get better on those how many games we've had. It's a great chance for every team to just keep playing and actually get better and obviously elevate the women's game.

**Q. What would you tell other teams the best part of this experience has been for you guys personally?**

ELEONORA VILLA: I think that the best part is to have the opportunity to face, like a high-level team, and that is something that makes you learn something and I think that, for example, we faced three different kind of team, very different players. So this is also an opportunity to try to figure out a new way to play, and I think that this is the best opportunity for a player because when you face different kind of player, you get better and better.

THE MODERATOR: We talked yesterday about the amount of time that you've been involved at the highest level of women's college basketball, and the one thing that I'm taking away is how unique it is to be able to play such great opposition in a neutral setting that feels important,



and I'd just be curious to get your thoughts after being here in the first WBIT, did this meet the expectations that you had of this.

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Unfortunately I don't know if that was neutral. I thought Illinois showed up really well. Great environment. Great environment. And better to have that than an empty arena.

But clearly, it's a convenient thing for them and I think it's going to give them a great advantage going into the Finals as well.

But we had three home games, as well. And yes, you earn them and it so happens to be here. I can't say enough about this experience, playing in this arena, in Illinois, playing just drastically different styles which is what you do when you get into postseason, you have to be built the right way to advance, and we are just not quite built the right way to beat a team like Illinois right now and it's a credit to them. That's why you can turn on the TV right now. I'm sure there's a game going on that you see unique skillsets and athletes and sizes and bodies, and just the talent level. That's why they are still playing right now.

**Q. Just wanted to get your thoughts on the success, given the adversity that you guys overcame this year.**

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Yeah, I mean, every team has to live through some injuries, but again, I think when you really get to the deeper teams, the teams that are in the Top-10, the teams that are in the top 20, probably Top-10 more so than anyone, they can avoid a key loss and overcome it. Connecticut had to go through two or three or four at this point and they are still in the tournament, and that just tells something about the talent level that they have.

We are not built in the way that we can lose our best player probably and not skip a beat. It took a minute to get back in the game a little bit, and you know, we're still -- and this game was an example of just not having enough shot-making ability or play-making ability on the court. I thought we got some pretty good looks, but we couldn't match that kind of scoring output. That has somewhat to do with our adversity and not having a Walker who can create shots for herself and others. I'm proud of how our team responded. Those two that were just in, and really our young players, they competed really hard. We still have to get better in a lot of positions. I'm proud of the senior leadership that we've had on this team, and you know, we have a lot to build on, but we have a lot of room to get better.

**Q. Having seen Illinois up close for 40 minutes now, what makes their transition so difficult to defend,**

**because I know you guys wanted to play more in the halfcourt, slow down a little bit and play less possessions, but they seemed to dictate the entire tempo all day.**

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Well, they have got three really dynamic guards that can push and you know, they are really good in the open court and it's really hard to guard them one-on-one. So we missed a lot and they got some good runouts and that kind of -- that makes their transition game all the more better.

But I thought they broke us down even in halfcourt offense as well. Their bigs are good. They can get rebounds. Their bigs can stretch you out, and shoot, as well. Really, their starting group is just so well built. It's hard. You've got to pick your poison. Unfortunately we didn't want their two or three best players to beat us quite like they did tonight but you can see it all evened out. They had an even scoring from pretty much their entire starting group.

**Q. Just asking about your players as a whole. I mean, first off, the young players like LA and AT, what growth did you see from them and how important was a tournament like this where you're playing in April? And circling back to the veterans, some of them didn't play much of this season, Yo, Charlisse and Bella, those two, obviously a lot of postseasons played for you in their careers.**

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Yeah, I'm excited about the future. She can't hardly answer some of these questions because she doesn't know too much of the history of it, and this is her only experience.

But you know, AT has -- and a little bit older player, juniors, sophomores, they have been through some NCAA experiences, and now in this tournament, which was just so well run and treated us unbelievably well. Made us I feel like we were in a really high-level tournament and clearly we are. This has been a wonderful experience for those guys, the players coming back. It needs to be a great experience for our seniors. I think losing Yo and not playing quite as well as we wanted to play, that's really hard to take for the seniors because they don't get to try it again, and they don't get to put that uniform on again.

I'm unbelievably proud of the senior group that had another 20-win season and they probably walk out of our program, most-winning senior group, and that's something to be said in a program that's really not had a lot of success over the course of the years.

You know, what would have been, what could have been, you know, Yo is on the bench all year and doesn't play.



She was a starter for three years for us. Obviously Charlisse. Thought we going to be a little deeper and thought we were going to have a little bit more punch in scoring potential and it didn't work out for us this year, and I think, again, that's why you've got to take advantage of any opportunity you have when you have it because they don't come by -- they don't come easy to us. So we've got to continue to recruit at a high level. But our senior class has been unbelievable in how they lead us and how they recruit and how they bring people in, and I think our program is in a really good spot to grow, and again, I don't think we've hit our ceiling. I think we can get a lot better.

THE MODERATOR: Want to thank you very much and wish you the best of luck in the future.

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: You guys did it great. Appreciate everybody. This is wonderful.

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