

# 2021 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Thursday, December 16, 2021

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Nationwide Arena

## Wisconsin Badgers

## Coach Kelly Sheffield

## Anna Smrek

## Lauren Barnes

### Press Conference



Wisconsin 25-23, 15-25, 25-21, 23-25, 15-9

Louisville

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the Wisconsin Badgers.

COACH SHEFFIELD: I thought that was an epic volleyball match. The level of play by both teams and the heart by both teams was just special.

We're really fortunate to come out on the winning side of that. It wasn't something that we showed more heart than our opponent or more will than our opponent. Those guys showed that as well.

I thought Louisville, just what a -- we knew it was going to be like this going into this match. That was not a surprise. That is an unbelievable team that had an incredible, incredible season.

I thought some of the defense that was being played tonight, especially the latter part of the match when both teams -- their backs were against the wall -- I mean, they're just in it. Just how hard those two teams fought. Just a great match.

**Q. Lauren, are you exhausted?**

LAUREN BARNES: Honestly, right now I feel like I could run through a brick wall. But I'm sure it will hit me a little bit later. Adrenaline is still going. But I feel great right now.

**Q. Anna, a big breakout night again. You've had a couple of these. What was going on? What did you see and your ability to assert yourself, especially in**

those early sets?

ANNA SMREK: Well, as a team we discussed coming into this match with confidence. And we were on the same page and everyone worked together from the pass, the set, and knowing there was a lot of coverage behind us and going up.

Kelly said let's remember three words, "Let it rip." And I think everybody had that mentality and we fought.

**Q. Coach, what did you tell your team when the sets were tied so they would keep their composure?**

COACH SHEFFIELD: Both teams were being stressed an incredible amount. They were stressing us big time with their speed. How fast they get on a ball is, it's really, really quick. I mean, their arms are just boom.

And Dilfer will find those middles, find people in trans. And we were stressed defensively. We know that they were extremely stressed. Try defending that.

And so a lot of it was, there were some adjustments that were being made, but it was also a reminder of let's stay right here, stay where your feet are and let's move past the previous point. Let's find a way to get the next point. Let's just play good volleyball.

And it sounds simple, but it's not always simple when you're playing in front of 18,000 fans and you're playing against a team that really does a great job of stressing you out.

But I thought both teams played pretty clean. But I thought at the end of the match both teams were playing an even higher level, which tells you that both teams were just in a really good place, a really good place.

I don't know how many balls that you're sitting there going, oh, my God, that ball's going down. And on the other side of the net here it comes back. And I don't know how many times Barnesy had her cape on and she comes out of the phone booth and flying in there and keeping the ball off the



floor herself. It was just, the defensive tenacity by these two teams was incredible.

**Q. Lauren, you guys come back to win that third set and then it seemed like you were about to do it again in the fourth. They battled back. I want to know what did it ultimately get across this line, and where does it rank up for you among the matches you've played in your career?**

LAUREN BARNES: A little bit of what Coach said. Just really we just kept emphasizing, be where your feet are. And once the fifth set came it was 0-0. It was just a race to 15 at that point when we were tied 2-2.

But gosh in a rank of matches, that was all-time. That was two teams battling it out. That was a lot of fun.

**Q. Kelly, you think about your senior leaders who came back this year after last season's end. I know there's another game left. I'm trying not to get ahead of myself. But just what does this match mean to you as a coach and to them to be playing on Saturday?**

COACH SHEFFIELD: Barnes, what did I say there? What was that toward the end of the fourth about the seniors coming back?

LAUREN BARNES: This is why I came back, for moments like these.

COACH SHEFFIELD: That was one of the things that was said at a timeout during the end of the fourth, when it was right there, just, man, we're just so fortunate to be able to do this. I'm so jealous of these guys.

They hear me say it all the time: To be able to play in front of this environment, this crowd, that kind of team and the work, that is why they came back.

The victory is great. I mean, the win is incredible. But to be in the battle, that that's where you want to be. And they came back for that, that battle. And they showed up, both teams did, when it was time to go.

**Q. You obviously don't know who you're going to play Saturday, but the way your defense especially stepped up in the most clutch moments, how does that help you in terms of looking forward to another championship match for your program?**

COACH SHEFFIELD: You've got to play good defense when you get here. You've got some very talented teams that are making it to this. And I know our offense gets a lot of -- it gets talked about quite a bit. We don't win that

match tonight without us defending.

Syd there towards the end came up and put three balls in a row -- one-option balls. We got some big-time stuff blocked. We made some incredible digs. Made some great covers.

We didn't win that match on our offense there in the fifth set. We won the fifth set off of our defense. And against another team that's a special defensive team. That's where that match was just in the trenches there in the fifth set. It was on the defensive end.

**Q. It appeared to me that Tori Dilfer was setting her teammates a little further from the net than normal, possibly to counter act your size. Did you see that, or am I imagining something?**

COACH SHEFFIELD: I have no idea. It's possible. I mean, that is a strategy when you're going up against some bigger blockers. All that I know they were hitting some really fantastic shots. DeBeer, we were having a lot of trouble, she was really working the line early on in the match. Had a lot of success.

And Chaussee was really doing a great job with that thumb-down shot underneath our middles. They were giving us fits.

They started working in some off-speed shots the second half of the match. And just this constant changing, adjusting of how we're wanting to defend. Whether they were bringing it off the net or not, that's a great question. Probably something that maybe I would have done.

**Q. The challenge I believe Devyn's hair was in the net. Were you pretty confident that you were going to get that challenge when you did it?**

COACH SHEFFIELD: You're never confident when you're challenging anything. We had four challenges at that point. We hadn't used any of them.

He said the hip was in the net or something. That would be unusual. That's not something that she is throwing her hip into that. She was pretty adamant she didn't.

All right. Let's go. Let's see. Apparently it was the hair or something that -- I mean, that was a big point, right?

**Q. Kelly, your thought on Anna's contributions, especially I think it was the third set coming back? I think she had eight kills there. Just her performance tonight throughout as the youngest kid on your team full of old kids?**

COACH SHEFFIELD: We certainly didn't say this to her but that was something that the coaching staff was discussing right before the match, is we thought this was set up to be -- that Anna was going to have a really big night. How she's been going about things practice-wise.

But what I liked about her is that one of the things is that she had a really good balance of -- she wasn't forcing things. She was just playing within herself and taking good swings and making really good reads, not trying to do too much.

And to play in that environment like you said at her age, she just seemed -- she seemed like a grizzled veteran out there, how she kept her composure and just balled out.

**Q. Anna, the crowd is a lot of Wisconsin Badger fans here. You guys were getting them hyped on the sideline. What was that like for you guys to interact with the fans?**

ANNA SMREK: Back home at the fieldhouse it's electric, the crowd. I think so many people showing up to support us here kind of fed our energy, even from the bench; they're contributing with each other. And it honestly just lights everyone up. So it's really important to have that support. We appreciate it.

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