

2021 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Thursday, December 16, 2021

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Nationwide Arena

Louisville Cardinals

Coach Dani Busboom

Anna Stevenson

Anna DeBeer

Tori Dilfer

Press Conference

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

Louisville

COACH BUSBOOM: I'm really proud of this team and the way we battled tonight. And this is really a tough moment. This is just a team that you could be with forever. And there's no burnout. There's nobody tired of each other. It's just one of those really special groups that you just can't -- you just never want it to end.

So it's hard to know that it's come to an end. And we owe a lot to the seniors. And we had an amazing senior class. And they're really the ones who got us here.

But hats off to Wisconsin. They played really well in Game 5. And they really leaned on us. And I thought they broke us a little bit. So hopefully we can learn from that. And just really proud of this team and where they took this program. It's sad to see these guys go.

Q. Coach Sheffield was complimenting you heavily in the game in general, two teams playing at a very high level. Did this feel almost like a championship match, just the way it went.

COACH BUSBOOM: I think every game in the Final Four is going to feel like a championship match. But some of the rallies were pretty incredible and people making big plays when it mattered. And you had All-Americans going up against All-Americans. So definitely felt as high level as it gets.

Q. Anna, what did the fifth set -- what kind of changed



in the fifth set after you guys kind of come back and all the adrenaline is with you after that fourth set?

ANNA DEBEER: I think ending that fourth set on such a high-momentum service ace, I think it was just really hard for our team to just calm back down and get focused. I think we did a good job of starting it off. And came down just to us making a few uncharacteristic errors that gave them some momentum and they carried that.

I think it just taught us a little bit about ourselves and how we need to go after it against a really good team.

Q. Tori, I may be imagining something, but it appeared that you were trying to set your teammates a little further from the net to give them better angles. Is that accurate or not?

TORI DILFER: Honestly, no. I didn't try to change anything. I trust them. I wasn't scared of that block. I don't think they were. So, no.

Q. For Anna Stevenson, could you reflect on the season as a whole, 32 wins and it ends on a -- kind of abruptly. What's the emotion?

ANNA STEVENSON: It's the best season I've been a part of by far. But this group has just been the best. And it's just kind of sad to think that I'm done playing college volleyball, but having played at Louisville makes it that much harder to leave because it's the best of anything I've ever been a part of -- team-wise, program, best staff ever. I've just really loved every minute of being with this team. And I think I'm just sad it's over.

I would have liked to win a national championship, but just the thought that it's over, it's just kind of crazy.

Q. Tori and Anna Stevenson, what does it mean to be part of what you're creating what you have at Louisville and the impact you've had on the sport, not just this season, but the seasons going forward with this program?

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ANNA STEVENSON: I just feel incredibly honored to have been part of it. I remember after my freshman season, Rhamat Alhassan was my favorite player at Florida -- I don't know what year it was, but I was on my couch watching her play in the Final Four.

And just to think that maybe I'm that for somebody is just crazy to me. I never would have thought that I would be a part of any of this, ever.

TORI DILFER: I'm just incredibly grateful, grateful for the opportunity to join this program. Dani, Dan and Todd, I can't thank them enough. Coming to Louisville was the best decision I've ever made. And that was only possible because of them and them taking a chance on me.

So, I'm just incredibly grateful. And, like Anna said, honored to be part of the history that Louisville volleyball has made in the last couple of seasons.

But I'm knows excited to see people like Anna DeBeer and everybody else carry it on. We said it in the locker room: The greatest gift they can give us seniors is taking this and taking it to the next level next year and the year after. That will be the greatest feeling ever is seeing this program do things that we didn't do.

Q. Anna and Tori, COVID was such a crap year for everything. And a lot of people would have just moved on, and you didn't have to come back. But doing it, how much do you think that kind of impacts your lives and all that happened this year?

ANNA STEVENSON: I mean, just another year to be part of Louisville was just a blessing. I transferred here and I thought I'd only get two years with this team. And I am so happy it didn't end after two years and that I got a third.

TORI DILFER: Yeah, I can't say much more other than this last year has changed me as a person, as a player. These people have changed me, I hope, all for the better. I hope I'm coming out as a much better person than I came in.

Just having that extra year was an incredible blessing. Obviously COVID, no one expected it, nobody wanted it, nobody wants it. But I'm just grateful that that opportunity was extended to us.

I can't imagine leaving here without this last year. I mean, last year, when our season ended, it was the easiest decision to come back because that loss sucked. This one sucks a lot more, but that one sucked. And I was ready to be part of something awesome. And I knew this team had it in them just because of the people that they are.

Never could I have imagined what this year would have brought, but I was just excited to be part of this team for another year. These people are 100 percent the reason why I still absolutely am in love with the game of volleyball. And I love competing. It's because of them.

Q. Coach, I was wondering if you could talk about how everything you've learned about yourself as a coach over these last four or five years building the program, you know how hard it is to get here and then sustain it. What are some of the things you've learned and taken away from the season? Even though it ended now this has been a pretty spectacular year.

COACH BUSBOOM: Good question. I always hoped to coach a team that really understood what it took to be in this position and the hard work. But more importantly, it's just been really amazing to see this team not only work hard but do it the right way and have fun and inspire a community and the university to love this program.

I guess this team has taught me to stay true to myself and that we don't have to have -- like the role acceptance, like I was talking with my assistants a couple of days ago, just we are all very comfortable in our roles and that's really special. And that blends into the team. And I think that's something that's really tough and why we've been so successful.

Yeah, this team has taught me that you really can have it all. You can be great and you can win a lot. You can have fun. You can love each other and you can build a program. And that's been pretty incredible to do that all in one year.

Q. Dani, I think you've lost five first sets this year but you've never lost the second one or two in a row. What is it about the resilience of this team that enabled you to come back twice tonight and actually lead briefly in the fifth set?

COACH BUSBOOM: They know what they want. They don't want to lose. And I think the things that make us great are all intangibles. So it's easy to look back on those and say these are things we can control; it's nothing we can't control.

And so just really, like I've been saying, just looking back at what makes us great and being able to talk about that and go to that when there's a lot of pressure.

Q. Just talk about this game and what maybe you felt like you wish you had done better in this game or differently in this game than maybe we saw the rest of the season?

COACH BUSBOOM: Man, I don't know if there's a lot that I would have done differently from, like, a game-plan or a tactical standpoint. I thought we did a really good job.

We held Dana Rettke to one of her lowest hitting percentages of the year, which is no easy task. We made a freshman step up. Sometimes you roll the dice and you think, hopefully this freshman doesn't have as amazing a game as they do.

So I don't know if I would change anything. I wanted our team to be a little tougher down the stretch in game five and a little more aggressive. That's what we've been so great at all year. And so we started tipping a little bit and making some uncharacteristic errors. And that wasn't us. But when it comes to this match, I don't think there's much I would change.

Q. How would you guys in the next two or three years look back on your career as far as you guys going undefeated until this point, how would you guys look at this?

ANNA STEVENSON: I'm not sure that a season will ever top it again. I guess I would just look back with gratitude that they let me be a part of it as a transfer. Best decision I ever made.

TORI DILFER: I think kind of the same thing. I don't know how I'll feel down the stretch. But I know I'll be grateful for the rest of my life for this opportunity. I can't really tell you much other than that. I'm just incredibly grateful. I'm really excited to see where this program goes.

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