

# 2021 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Saturday, December 18, 2021

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Nationwide Arena

**Nebraska Cornhuskers**

**Coach John Cook**

**Lauren Stivrins**

**Nicklin Hames**

**Kayla Caffey**

Press Conference

Wisconsin 22-25, 31-29, 25-23, 23-25, 15-12

Nebraska

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the University of Nebraska. Coach, an opening statement, please.

COACH COOK: I think the fans got their money's worth. It was a great match with two great teams and not a lot of separation in points like it has been all year. It was a great match. And I told our team that this might be the most proud I've been of a Nebraska team, how they handled the season, the setbacks, the losses to get to this match and play like that and even get way down in the fifth and fight our way back.

Just tremendous amount of heart, grit and resiliency. And these guys have done it every day. So I'm a very, very proud coach. And these guys are going to own Nebraska with this effort, win or lose tonight, it's just the Husker nation is really, really proud right now.

**Q. Can you go through the good and bad of that fifth set bad?**

COACH COOK: I wish hindsight was 20/20, but we started in rotation one because I wanted to get our best servers going starting with Nicklin; it gives us our four best servers really in a row. We thought that could be the difference. And we just got stuck in that rotation.

Gotta give Wisconsin credit. They touched us. They blocked us. We were in system all the time and they just turned some plays. That was a big hole to get into to start



the fifth game. But we inched our way back and almost got a deuce game.

**Q. What happened at the end of the second set? You had a couple of four-set points. Couldn't convert any of them. What was that like and how did that affect the (indiscernible) you were going forward?**

COACH COOK: Well, it was a 31-29 game, and both teams had chances to win. And to beat teams like Wisconsin you've got to win more of those games than the other team.

You can see, look at this, three deuce games -- 31-29, 25-23, 23-25. That's what a national championship should be. And we had our chances. So did Wisconsin, they converted a couple more than we did.

You've got to give them credit. It's not like we lost those -- they had to earn them. We didn't give them away. It was great volleyball. They executed and found ways to win those points.

**Q. Lauren, what are you proud about of how you guys played tonight and especially to come back there in the fourth and fifth?**

LAUREN STIVRINS: I think that this team did a good job of fighting and staying in it. There were a lot of times where we could have so easily, I don't know, given up, but we didn't. I think that we served really well in the first set. And there was a lot of good volleyball throughout the whole night.

It was just, as Coach said, just the little things. And for a team that's so inexperienced -- there's us but everyone else is quite inexperienced, I thought they did really well for playing in such a big match. And I felt like they kept their composure the whole night. So that was cool to see.

**Q. Lauren, you wanted to get back to this national level with this program before you leave. What have the last few weeks been like, and how are you leaving this program now that you feel like?**



LAUREN STIVRINS: The last few weeks have been really exciting. It's been a lot of fun to compete with this team. And I think that's what, that's obviously what got us here, how much we love each other and how much we love playing.

It's been a joy to play with them. And I'm obviously not happy the way it ended, but I'm happy that we got to this point.

**Q. Lauren, it wasn't even a year ago that the spring season began for you guys in 2020. Can you put this last year of your life into words from that spring season to your recovery to tonight?**

LAUREN STIVRINS: Unpredictable. I think it's just been one thing after another. And I'm just blessed to have had the people around me that I did, because I don't think I could have got through everything I did without them. So I think "unpredictable" is my word.

**Q. Nicklin, what emotions are you going through now? I imagine a roller coaster of a night. What are you feeling right now?**

NICKLIN HAMES: Sorry, I just think I realized when she was talking that I'm never get to play with her again probably. So I'm a little sad.

But obviously I'm just really proud of this team and the fight that we had, the season. It wasn't always the best. But we found our way through it. And we didn't win tonight, but we battled. And we played together. We had each other's backs. And I think that was really special about tonight. But obviously I'm a wreck.

**Q. What did you see on that final play of the fourth set from Kayla's dig to Madi's pass to Ally's kill, what did you see unfold on that play and what was your reaction to it?**

NICKLIN HAMES: I mean, for Ally, as a freshman, to take that swing, I think that just shows you how much growth that they've had. That was a big-time swing. It wasn't even -- it was an out-of-system set and it was off, but she went for it. That just talks to our mindset this whole tournament and how Kayla dove for that dig. It wasn't an easy dig and it really shows how hard our team really played tonight.

**Q. John, your team almost has 100 digs on the night. Obviously their block was very good as well. Was this a game that showed kind of the defensive prowess of both sides?**

COACH COOK: No, I think definitely it was hard -- looking at we killed more balls than them as well, which really surprises me.

But their strength, they're a huge block. And we probably could have managed that a little bit better. But that's their strength. And our strength is digging the ball and keeping the ball alive.

And I felt like it was a heavyweight fight going back and forth, back and forth, they would make a big play, and then we'd make a big play. You saw two exceptional defensive teams, two exceptional serving teams. And those are the strengths of both of these teams.

**Q. Kayla, you had big hits early in the match, certainly. What was it like, what were you seeing out there early and what was it like going against that block?**

KAYLA CAFFEY: It was great. I don't know. I don't know. Sorry.

**Q. Nicklin or Lauren, can you put into words what kind of performance Kayla had tonight, career high in her kills?**

NICKLIN HAMES: Nice. Obviously she's a stud. We know she is. And she was a big part of why we won most of those games. She was putting the ball down for us. And it's huge energy when Kayla gets a kill. She gets really excited when we get excited because they're like bounce kills. But I'm really proud of you.

KAYLA CAFFEY: Proud of you guys, too.

LAUREN STIVRINS: It was really cool to see. It's nice to have weapons like that. And with Wisconsin having so many, and us, it's kind of like a toss up of who is going to be our weapon each game. So Kayla's been like one of our only consistent weapons throughout this entire season.

So just to see her go out there and take big swings as if she's hitting up against no block and just playing fearless volleyball, that instilled a lot of confidence in all of us around her. It was really cool to see, especially under, I don't know, big lights and the bright lights, whatever it is.

**Q. Nicklin, the end of that fifth set, you guys -- Madi gets a touch. There's like a big pause in the action to get it back to 14-12. What do you remember about that review and that time and what you guys are thinking going back out there with still a chance to win?**

NICKLIN HAMES: I think we knew there was a touch. We

just didn't know if the ref was going to see it. But we were talking, okay, we're going to keep going at it, keep believing. We're not going to quit right now no matter what the score is. I think it shows, we came back down 6-0, but I think we were just chilling.

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