

2021 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Saturday, December 18, 2021

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Nationwide Arena

Wisconsin Badgers

Coach Kelly Sheffield

Sydney Hilley

Lauren Barnes

Dana Rettke

Press Conference

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

Nebraska

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the national champion Wisconsin Badgers. Coach, an opening statement.

COACH SHEFFIELD: Epic weekend. Just an epic weekend. I'm so happy for these guys and the other seniors. Stage isn't big enough to bring all those guys back. But they came back for a goal and a dream and had some adversity along the way and were rewarded.

It was a heck of a match, just an absolute grind. And that's how it should be, right, I guess, to do this.

Just an unbelievable performance by Nebraska. Unbelievable performance by our kids as well. It was just every player putting their entire heart and soul into a match. It was great.

Q. This is a day you've dreamed of. How does reality compare to that dream?

DANA RETTKE: I honestly don't think it's set in yet. I mean, I kind of imagined, like, dropping to the floor and crying and I kind of just stood there in shock.

And maybe that's a testament to just because we have played that moment over and over again in our minds -- I think every single one of us. So, I think for now we're just going to really enjoy this. Soak it all in. Wow, last time wearing a Wisconsin jersey. Just really going to enjoy it. It



will sink in in a couple of days.

Q. Lauren, 14-11 in the fifth set, and then there was a timeout. And then obviously that challenge after you guys thought you had won. What were the emotions like there and then finally the final point falling, what was that whole event like?

LAUREN BARNES: Well, during the challenge we kind of just kept making eye contact with each other, looking at each other in the eye, saying, all right, if this doesn't go our way we're still playing volleyball. We haven't done anything yet. The game isn't over.

We really just kept our level of play the same. We stayed composed and it didn't go our way. And you can show how in it we still were, because our blockers didn't let the ball cross the net. Half the time it came over we took care of the free ball, Dana put it down. We took care of the pass right away. We think we won it. We might not take care of the pass. We don't take care of the pass but thought we did a really good job staying in it.

Q. Dana, what is it like playing in front of 19,000 people and millions around the world who see you win the championship? What did that feel like?

DANA RETTKE: It feels amazing, honestly. I haven't really put too much thought into the people around us. I was really just focused on our team because if you get in those moments and you look around you're, like, wow, this is big.

We prepared for this. We played in an environment every single night that prepares us for this. The Big Ten Conference prepares us for this.

It's really awesome to think -- a little story about when we were walking down the red carpet coming into the match, I really got choked up just because of how many people are behind us and supporting us. It was truly incredible to see.

And we know we have all our loved ones but to really see it on the biggest stage, in the biggest moments, for us, all

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those moments we worked for all these years, it was pretty emotional. But I think it was crazy, yes, sir -- it just feels awesome.

Q. Sydney, you talked yesterday about how you envisioned this moment so many times, the dog pile, the confetti. It was kind of weird because there was no dog pile, the confetti was delayed. Was the whole thing kind of just -- what did you feel in that moment?

SYDNEY HILLEY: I think what Dana said. It was still kind of shock. We kind of got to celebrate that moment twice because we thought we won. It was like wait, wait, no you didn't. We kind of got to do two celebrations.

So I think most of it was just shock. You look around, everyone's crying. You could see how much love there is with every single person on this team. And the fans were incredible. And it's an amazing moment I'll never forget just seeing how happy my teammates were. And that's the best feeling.

Q. Kelly, took a while for Dana to get going, I think it was three kills through two sets, but obviously the block was huge tonight. What did it mean to you to see the defense step up to the challenge knowing how good Nebraska's defense is, like you said yesterday?

COACH SHEFFIELD: Their defense is really good. I think everybody saw that. The effort by both teams, this was just unbelievable defense. We got 24 blocks. That is just crazy against a team like that. The thing is everybody kind of did their part.

It was, here, how can I contribute? And, so, Devyn and Dana had a tough time scoring, but yet huge on the block. And Julie had a tough time scoring. So many of those balls were targeted right at her. And she kind of settled down a little bit and got into a groove and so much of that.

This wasn't a pretty stat. This was -- I mean there's so much to take from this. It was just really, really good volleyball.

Barnesy defensively was just, holy cow, just the entire weekend and how many balls you're thinking, well, this is going to go down, and out of the phone booth with her cape she comes and fights to keep the ball off the floor. I thought Syd was moving the ball around and continuing to give them different looks.

And then Jade got us going in the fifth. We got a big lead. Her short serve really gave them some issues. It wasn't something we did an awful lot of that goes back there in the beginning of the fifth set and just puts ball after ball

after ball. And there was a lot of really good things that were happening.

Q. Lauren, in the first set and a half or so, you guys had some problem in serve/receive and Sydney was setting a lot of balls off the net. What changed from there? Seemed like the offense really got going in the third, fourth, fifth set?

LAUREN BARNES: I think we just stuck to our training and what we know. Having that reminder, all three of us in the rotation always remind each other, stick to our training, let's hold this pass, let's fight this step.

But they had some great servers. And once we said good on you, all right, now let's see you try to do it again. Just keep reminding each other of that really helped us stick with it and just reminding each other we're here with you and kind of we passed the system. There's no individual passing there. Passing as a system is when we are at our best. So, just continuing to remind each other of that and sticking together.

Q. Dana, that second set you guys were down 13-7, battled back and then I believe you faced four set points there. If you lose that set you're down 0-2. Could you just talk about that battle and winning that 31-29?

DANA RETTKE: That was definitely an epic battle. Really good volleyball, so back and forth -- kill, kill, block. And then I think we don't fight through that -- if not every single person on our team believes that we can. And we know we perform well in those moments. We know when the game's on the line people really step up to the plate, doesn't matter what position or how old you are. That's something that's every special about our team. And that doesn't happen unless every single person believes we can win that set. And we pulled it out with some clean volleyball.

Q. Dana, remember back before this season when you were making them all live in limbo and you couldn't decide if you were coming back and Sydney couldn't decide if she was going to get her lease renewed. Was it worth it?

DANA RETTKE: Oh, my gosh, 100 percent worth it. Just like this feeling and this team, been some ups and downs and I know every team experiences that. But this group was so special.

And I think it's one thing to really think about being a national champion and training to be in the national championship. That's one thing, but being in a national

championship is another.

We really did that. So that was awesome and I'm just so thankful that this group of seniors came back and we got the job done.

LAUREN BARNES: We did do that.

DANA RETTKE: We did that.

Q. Kelly, they're all celebrating, you went and sat on the bench, looked like you were exhausted, elated. Could you take us through that moment? Was it shock? What was it?

COACH SHEFFIELD: I wanted to take it in. This is about them, this is about the team. And seeing the joy in their faces and the love for each other, with a little bit of exhaustion as well.

Q. Coach, could you put in perspective what this means on your first season with Lauren making the championship match, and then a couple of years ago losing, getting this close. You said we've been so close, painfully close, the other day. Now that pain is over. Could you put it in perspective for both you and this whole program, even going back to the Steebler (phonetic) days?

COACH SHEFFIELD: This team stands on the shoulders of the alums that have come before them. The example, the hard work. We stand on the shoulders of the coaches that have been here prior to us. We're uplifted by an incredible fan base that is so passionate and supportive. This is the ultimate team effort.

Q. Anna didn't quite hit .700 plus tonight, but she's 14 kills, 28 swings, most outstanding player in the tournament. Just her performance as a freshman on this stage?

COACH SHEFFIELD: She didn't flinch. And she wasn't the only one that didn't flinch. For a kid that just turned 18, she was obviously pretty comfortable in the environment, which is really impressive. I thought all our young kids were.

I thought we were a little bit jittery, trying a little too hard out of the gates. But we settled down. I thought we were really good at in-game situations. There at the end, the sets that we lost, we came back to get really, really close and just too far back.

But I loved how we were in end game. I thought we were really clean in that area. We were confident. We were

working together. It was an unbelievable team effort.

With Anna, that's one of the things with middles, you've got to have the ball control as well and Dana will be the first one to say that.

And we handled the ball really, really well when Anna was especially was in the front row. We had a little bit of an advantage with her, with her height. But it was a special tournament for her. She didn't flinch.

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