

2022 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Wednesday, December 14, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center Arena

Pitt Panthers

Coach Dan Fisher

Courtney Buzzerio

Serena Gray

Press Conference



to the bright lights on the big stage?

SERENA GRAY: Last year, at the Final Four, I definitely tried to stay focused on the task at hand, which is playing in the semifinals and then the finals -- we obviously didn't make it to the next round last year. But I think that's something I'm taking this year also to tune out what I need to tune out to make sure I have enough time to scout, have enough time to sleep, have enough time to do my assignments, everything like that.

Q. Serena, can you talk about -- I know your focus is on the match -- but just in your two years at Pitt, being at the Final Four in each of those two years, what comes to your mind when you think about that?

SERENA GRAY: I think it's a little bit of a surreal experience. Like, you never think your time is going to end and then all of a sudden you're 22, almost 23, and then your time's ending. And then your freshman year looks like it was the beginning of high school. And you're looking to go out with a bang. That's kind of how I'm looking at it.

Q. Courtney, I wanted to ask you about a match you guys played in the Elite Eight and how that, to be able to win the way you did, how that propels you into this Final Four?

COURTNEY BUZZERIO: I mean, we talked about, at the beginning of the tournament, how if and when we made it to the Final Four that we were definitely going to be battle tested and prepare us for this weekend. And I can 100 percent say that I think we are.

We've played in three different, four different games of different styles of games. And I think last Saturday definitely prepared us with blocking out the noise of the crowd and the environment that Wisconsin brought. And obviously their size and just their caliber of playing that -- to beat a team like that, stick it through and keep being us and playing the way we know we can, that we're definitely ready for what Louisville is going to bring and what this match means.

Q. Serena, Amaya Tillman for them, I assume you

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by head coach Dan Fisher and student-athletes Courtney Buzzerio and Serena Gray.

COACH FISHER: Just want to start out by thanking everyone in the NCAA and all their hard work putting this event on, all the special things they've done for the athletes and the city of Omaha for being a good host so far.

For us, it's a dream to be here. And we're excited to play and represent the ACC.

Q. What are your thoughts about playing the match tomorrow, thinking back to the first two times that you guys have played them and how this one's completely different, a different setting?

COURTNEY BUZZERIO: I think the biggest thing is who is going to start strong. I think we started really strong the first time we played them and they obviously started strong the second time we played them.

It's obviously a team we're very comfortable with and have seen a lot of film on. So just what team can block out the noise of this whole weekend and this whole -- the convention and everything, that we can play our game consistently for three sets.

SERENA GRAY: I'm really excited to play Louisville. We've seen them twice this year, and I think the third time is going to be a tiebreaker. So it's like the real winner. So I'm just excited to come to that result tomorrow.

Q. Serena, what do you take from last year's trip to the Final Four that you carry over to this year maybe to help you with the experience and just kind of get used

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have a respect and enjoy competing against somebody like that. Have you ever said anything to each other through the net and do you know her? And do you have any thoughts about her as a player?

SERENA GRAY: I talk through the net with a lot of people, but we haven't had any exchanges. But I really respect how hard she works in transition and how she max jumps on every ball and just her vigor and excitement and the way she celebrates. I don't know her at all, but big fan.

Q. Courtney, what has this year been like from leaving Iowa and coming here, joining a team that made the Final Four and getting back? I imagine the was motivation behind your transfer to Pitt was to have an opportunity like this. To see it come to fruition, how special is that?

COURTNEY BUZZERIO: I mean, the possibility of making the Final Four was obviously, like, our goal this whole year has been to win a national championship.

So this opportunity to play for it has been -- it's a dream. I don't think it's anything I would have expected myself to do coming into college. And so the ability and the opportunity that I have, that we have as a team this weekend is really special. And it's not something I ever imagined myself being in, but really grateful to be here.

Q. Did you take a little extra satisfaction that it had to come against Wisconsin, a team that's tormented you for the last four years?

COURTNEY BUZZERIO: It's definitely a little sweeter, for sure.

Q. It might be because their coach is an ex-Nebraska assistant. It might be a pro-Husker crowd tomorrow night. Given the circumstances that you have beaten Wisconsin in a hostile environment, how much would that help you under these circumstances?

SERENA GRAY: I think we're so ready to handle that environment. We do certain things in practice to prepare us to have crowds rooting against us and things to make sure that our energy overwhelms the court instead of the outside noise.

So I think if that's going to be the case tomorrow, which it will be because it's a sold-out environment, I think we're ready for it.

Q. To counter that, Serena, I'll start with you, why should the fans be rooting for you? What motivation should they have to cheer you on and be on your side?

SERENA GRAY: We're very much so an underdog and smaller team. We're not expected to win. And I think everyone loves rooting for the underdog who just stays in it, who doesn't jump as hard, who doesn't hit as hard or get as many aces but over time can wear down the opponents, I think there's a certain kind of respect for that kind of team.

COURTNEY BUZZERIO: I don't think we're the flashiest team on and off the court. So we'll keep working hard and grinding down to win.

Q. Serena, does that mean you're rooting for San Diego against Texas for those reasons?

SERENA GRAY: I love Gabby Blossom. I'm a thousand percent rooting for San Diego.

Q. Same question about Amaya Tillman, your thoughts about her and what she brings. She flies under the radar in some ways for them but she's really solid and keeps getting better and better and a big part of what you have to think about.

COACH FISHER: First thing that comes to mind -- she's a good blocker, no question -- but this has been their system is just to run these really fast slides, mid-slides. And she's able to implement their system really well. She puts a lot of pressure on her left-side blockers.

Q. In your particular coaching staff, you and your assistants, what specifically is the division of labor, meaning who does what and how do you lead into maybe the whole season, and then specifically for match prep?

COACH FISHER: Well, everyone on my staff is allowed to coach everyone. I'll say that. I think my voice is probably the loudest in the gym. But Coach Kellen is our offensive coordinator. And Coach Lindsey is our defensive coordinator. Kamalani, my director of ops, kind of the statistician. And our volunteer, Michael Fisher, who was a player at Saint Francis a year ago, he's pretty heavy in serve and pass.

Q. Is it more of a blessing or a curse to play a team that you're so familiar with at this stage in the tournament?

COACH FISHER: I just don't have a strong opinion on it because they have the same situation we do. So you've got to beat good teams to keep advancing. And we've done that. And you can't control the draw. So once you see it, you just don't spend much time thinking about it after that.

Q. Can you summarize or describe the characteristics that your team displays for it to handle hostile circumstances?

COACH FISHER: Well, I think every environment's unique, but the thing is just how quickly you reset because there's going to be moments you don't handle it well and you don't like the way things are going.

And it helps to be on a team where you've done it in the past, you've come from behind. It helps to be on a team where you trust in each other. And I think our last couple of matches you've seen those kind of scenarios play out. And it's been a tough group.

Q. What's it been like, this being your second time in the Final Four? Anything different, or do you know what to expect? What is it like to be back in the Final Four?

COACH FISHER: It's pretty nice to be here. And it means a lot with this group especially because the team we had last year, yeah, we added in Serena and Leketor, but it was largely the same core we'd been working with the last couple of years.

This year, doing it with the four seniors that we lost last year means a ton.

I do think we worked really hard. I made a million calls last year to other coaches that had been through it before to get advice. But I do think there's a couple of things that we can do better this year, in our prep.

Q. Even though you obviously have been playing, practicing, prepping, have you dealt with the portal? Like have you personally had to field emails and phone calls from kids in the portal talking to you over the course of the last week, ten days, including even today?

COACH FISHER: Just got off the phone. But, really, we've just decided that, for me as the head coach, I've talked to two or three. It's part of the deal now.

Q. Coach, as you've built Pitt's program, you've obviously elevated the ACC. Having two ACC teams here back-to-back years, Dani was talking about what's that meant, that you guys have pushed each other. What do you feel like it's meant to volleyball as a whole to have the conference be elevated this way?

COACH FISHER: I think I'll first talk about us and Louisville. I think our rivalry, we've made each other better.

And I also think Kentucky winning a couple of years ago, I think the landscape has changed. There's a lot of good volleyball in the country. And I think parity is a good thing.

Q. You talked about how the transfer portal is part of the deal. You look at your team with Courtney and every team here I think has important transfers that played a vital role in it. Is that an evolution of the sport, or is that here to stay, and how have transfers kind of impacted the college volleyball landscape?

COACH FISHER: It's definitely here to stay. I think it will slow down a little bit with each year as we kind of graduate through the COVID fifth years.

I think there's a lot of athletes that find themselves, hey, I already have a bachelor's. Do I get a job? Do I go pro? And it looks like a pretty good option to get a master's degree and have a new experience. I think that's part of it. But I definitely think it's here to stay.

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