

2022 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Friday, December 16, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center Arena

Louisville Cardinals

Coach Dani Busboom Kelly

Anna DeBeer

Aiko Jones

Press Conference



knowledge we'll be playing tomorrow and we're scouting in practice.

But I don't think the weight of the situation or the experience has truly sunk in yet, and I think that's because there's more work to be done.

Q. Dani, you saw the video of the Freeman students wishing you good luck. What was your reaction to that? Also, we talk a lot about the support in Nebraska, but specifically from Freeman, your hometown, your home community that travels to your matches and kind of supports you, what has that meant to you?

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: The video was really cool. First of all, I'm really impressed with their choreography. It was spot on. So, really impressed. Technology has gotten a lot better since I was a student at Freeman.

But it means a ton. My hometown is about an hour and a half away, and I got pictures of my friends wearing DBK T-shirts. These are classmates that I don't speak to all the time. And they're still out here and so excited and spending the time and the money to come up here and watch us, it really means a lot.

Q. You're not going to have an impromptu 20-year reunion this weekend?

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: No, I don't think so. Geez, am I really 20 years out?

Q. Dani, you guys broke through this year to get to the title game. You're up against a team that's used to being here. What are your impressions of Jerritt Elliott and the job he's done at Texas?

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: I know Jerritt a little bit personally, and I think he's a great guy. I think he does things the right way and treats his players and staff really well.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to our NCAA Championship press conference with Louisville. We're joined by head coach Dani Busboom Kelly and student-athletes Anna DeBeer and Aiko Jones.

Coach, if you would please begin with an opening statement on the championship match tomorrow night, and then we'll go to questions.

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: Pretty excited to be here. Made history for our program. It's a big deal, and we're still soaking it all in. Going one moment at a time.

I know we're all a little bit tired right now. That game, unfortunately, lasted way too long.

Again, just happy to be here and excited to live another day.

Q. Anna and Aiko, it's been, like, 15, 16 hours or so since that match ended. Has it hit you yet that y'all are playing for a National Championship? And what are your emotions? And what have the reactions been like from your friends and family?

ANNA DEBEER: I was just saying last night it felt so surreal. I don't think it hit me until maybe even this morning I was still thinking about it, and I was like I need to let this sink in. Like we are literally playing in the National Championship.

So, no, still right now I'm in awe.

AIKO JONES: I totally agree. I don't think it will truly hit me until maybe two, three weeks from now. But I have the knowledge that we won last night and I have the

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Obviously he's built a dynasty, and every year they're expected to be in the Final Four. And I know when they're not in the Final Four, people are asking, what's wrong with Texas this year?

So it's a pretty hard spot to be in, and it's a lot of pressure year in and year out, and they handle it really, really well.

Just really impressive, just the consistency of the program.

Q. Anna and Aiko, I wonder if you could talk about the future of volleyball as you see it as young players right now. I know there's a pro league in development, Athletes Unlimited had a league this past couple years. There's obviously overseas leagues. But as players in the United States, how do you see the future, if you two want to continue playing professionally?

ANNA DEBEER: I just think volleyball as a sport is continuing to grow each day. Just to see the record-breaking viewership this season and how more and more people are starting to become interested and falling in love with it.

I think people don't realize how awesome of a game it is until they watch one game and realize how exciting it is. So I think it's huge for the sport, and it's only going to be up from here.

So I'm really excited to see where this takes us. I mean, we're kind of creating the history right now, and I'm excited to see for those behind us to continue to grow this sport and to show people around the U.S. and around the country how cool volleyball is.

AIKO JONES: Yeah, I 100 percent agree. And I think the more volleyball grows around the United States and the more our viewership increases is the more sports penetrates countries in areas where it's not so popular.

I've seen that with Jamaica, and I've seen many Jamaicans in the U.S. reach out and want to host camps and develop the sport there. I think that's a big part of the popularity too is to be able to reach young ones who look up to us and don't have the opportunity to play. I think that's huge in making change and making the sport even bigger than it's already grown to be.

Q. This is really for Aiko and then Coach too. What do you guys kind of see with the matchup? They've got really strong outside hitters. Obviously a great defensive performance last night at the net. What do you guys kind of have to do to stop that attack tomorrow?

AIKO JONES: I think, like with a lot of our games, it will come down to the scout and trusting it wholeheartedly, and our scouts tend to be close to perfection. So we have a lot of trust in them already.

We just have to be the aggressors at the net. We have to own the net, like we like to say, and get to the ball first. And good things will happen when we touch balls at the net. Defense wins championships, that's what they say.

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: I just think we need to not be wowed by plays that they make. We know that they're going to make some plays that are really unbelievable, but each play is only worth one point. So if we can keep that in mind and stay consistent with what we do and disciplined, it will definitely put us in a much better spot.

Q. Coach, I know we've been kind of pesky with the female coach thing, but also on the perspective of being somebody who's won a national championship as a player, that doesn't happen in many college sports that somebody has a chance to be a player who won a national championship and a head coach. I know you're just focused on the match, but just to be in the position to do that, I guess what does that mean to you personally and to the program?

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: To the program, I think just being here is a huge deal, and it means a lot, just the work put in and the people that have believed in this program and have fought for us to be here means a lot to them and to us.

But to be a female that's won as a player and as a coach potentially, I got asked that question when I was an assistant when we won it. And, man, as a player, I felt like, I did this. We did this as a team.

As a coach, I was just so happy for the team because I knew that feeling and I knew that they're the ones that are sacrificing so much to be great in their sport and that are trusting people that aren't their family day in and day out.

We're here. It's our job. But these guys are the ones sacrificing a lot of life to be great at their sport and giving so much to us.

I don't know if that answers your question. That was a tangent. I know winning as a player and a coach would be pretty surreal, and I haven't really thought about that yet.

Q. For both players, we have video of you all singing before you went out on the floor last night. You all are awfully loose. Where does that looseness come from within your squad?

AIKO JONES: I definitely think it comes from how comfortable we are around each other. And Dani talked about being with people who aren't our family, but our program, not just our team, our support staff, everything, we truly are just like this big, goofy family. And it makes showing up to early morning lifts so much more fun.

The song we were singing, we sing every game day in the locker room, and sometimes when we go out on the court at home they play it for us and we go out and sing it in front of the fans and make big fools of ourselves.

We just like to have a good time, and if that means looking goofy, then that's what it is. We just like to have a good time.

Q. I was wondering if you could comment on knowing how this event is big for the city of Omaha and the fact that Louisville's going to have the Final Four in a couple years, and with what you have been able to build with the success of the program and with what you had at last week's regional, how would you describe the buildup to hosting in Louisville?

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: There's a huge buildup. It's been circled on our calendar for a long time once it got announced. It's like, man, will we even have a chance to get there?

Then sure enough, we made the Final Four last year and this year. So now we know what it takes, and we know that we have a chance to get there.

I've been telling our players that might have an opportunity in 2024, like, there's nothing like in our hometown. Anna DeBeer is one of them. In your hometown, in front of all your fans, and that's even a step up from Omaha, what it is to Nebraska, because that's a U of L arena. So it would be incredible. It is a huge buildup.

It's very cool to be here now, and any time you get to the Final Four, but to do it in your home city, it's a whole nother opportunity that is insanely rare.

Q. Anna, I believe last night you guys had, with the 10 service aces, just the most in the last decade in a national semifinal match. How big has the serve been for you personally? And obviously it was big last night. But for you personally and this team going against a team like Texas.

ANNA DEBEER: Dani always says, the answer to everything is serving tougher. So if we can't stop them in certain ways, serve tougher. If we can't do this, serve

tougher.

It's always just getting them out of system. It helps open up a lot of things for us as a team.

I think we knew we had to be pretty aggressive, and Pitt is a great passing team and great team all around. So if we could get them a little shaken up. I think Elena and I did a pretty good job of just trying to point score because that was my goal was to just to go on some runs and see what we could do with that. Not expecting that many aces. That's huge for the team.

Yeah, I just think it just came down to trusting it. Trusting it, we do it every day, and that helped us a lot last night.

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