

2023 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Sunday, December 17, 2023

Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

Nebraska Cornhuskers

Coach John Cook

Lexi Rodriguez

Harper Murray

Bekka Allick

Championship Press Conference



LEXI RODRIGUEZ: I would say the toughest thing was they were just able to mix up depths. They were hitting us deep and dropping some short, and they just had lots of movement on it, which made it tough for us passers. I think when they're going on a run, we're just trying to get one side out, just trying to get a ball high in the middle and run our offense from there. But with tough serves like that, it can be tough sometimes.

Q. The 10-point serving run that Texas had in the second set, as a coach is that helpless? Is that frustrating? What's that moment like for you?

COACH COOK: It's very helpless. You're hoping they'll miss one. But it just really takes away all of our rhythm and confidence when somebody can do that. I've seen it when we've done it to other teams. It's tough. There's not much you can do.

Give you a football analogy, since you like those, it's like fourth quarter and they're just running the ball; you know they're going to run it and you can't stop them. That's what it feels like. They just go down the field. And that's what Texas did.

Q. This is the last place you want to be, I know that, but starting with Harper, how long is it going to take to get this one out of your system?

HARPER MURRAY: I don't really think it's going to leave my system. So it will just carry on to next year and make us win next year.

LEXI RODRIGUEZ: I would agree with that. It was the second time I've lost a national championships. The first one is still with me. So this will stick with me throughout the next year.

BEKKA ALLICK: This isn't going away.

Q. Harper, you guys are such a young team. What did you, in particular, and what do you think the team learned from the whole weekend down here and from today's match?

Texas d. Nebraska 25-22, 25-14, 25-11

COACH COOK: Texas played great. They had a level of serving we haven't seen all year, and it really impacted us and our momentum and our confidence. And then everything just started going their way. And they got all the momentum and we could never get it back. So great job by them. Great job by their players.

I'm very proud of our team for getting here, and those seniors. And we've had a heck of a year. One of the greatest seasons we have ever had at Nebraska this year. So this match isn't going to define that and what we've accomplished this year, but hopefully it will motivate us for a great another run and get back here in 2024.

Q. It looked like Texas -- it wasn't a power game, it was more of a finesse game at the net. Would you say that's a correct statement?

COACH COOK: No. They mix it up a lot. So they hit, they throw, they roll shot. But there's a lot of out-of-system on their side as well. We just gave up too many points passing.

But their serving was not finesse; they were really serving tough and low air. It was impressive. Not sure I've ever seen -- well, I saw them do that to Wisconsin and do it to Stanford. So they're on a roll right now.

Q. Lexi, what was the toughest thing about their service game? When someone is on a roll like that, what do you try to do defensively?

HARPER MURRAY: That we need to take advantage of serving and passing more.

Q. Asjia O'Neal did a lot of that serving and obviously some other things in the match. Could you speak about her, all the problems she presents to you as an opponent?

COACH COOK: I thought we did a pretty good job defending her. They let her take some balls and throw them a little bit, which every ref calls it different. But what you saw there, that's an international player playing in her fifth year who played with the USA team this last year. At that level, you understand how hard you can serve and how hard you need to serve. And she's implemented that in college volleyball.

These guys haven't played with a U.S. national team in the biggest tournaments of the year and the summer, and that's a lot of extra practice for her. Again, we'll learn from that.

Again, I want to apologize, but Tampa did a heck of a job with this thing and these people deserve a lot of credit. I've seen Nebraska put on some big events, and Tampa has held its own, and the people here have been great. I want to be sure those people know they did a great job here.

And the NCAA did a great job, and it's one of the best Final Fours I've been to, with your question on what did we learn this week. It was a first-class event and they did an awesome job. And we're very appreciative.

Q. Lexi, as leader of this team what's your message to your teammates moving forward? Obviously this is not the way you wanted to see the season end but what's your message moving forward?

LEXI RODRIGUEZ: We talked about it a little bit. But we had a really good season up to tonight. And we have things we can be proud of. We had matches that we can take to our advantage next year. And we grew a lot as a team.

And I just think I don't really have to give a pep talk because I know everyone is going to be very motivated and compete even harder than we did this year to get it done next year.

Q. No seniors obviously, but each team is unique. What was special about this team, and what's it like knowing you're going to be able to bring this group back and build off of this season?

LEXI RODRIGUEZ: I think all year we talked about how

this team is special just because of how much drive and competitiveness we had. And I think that stays true. This team was very special, and we worked extremely hard for one another.

And until that last point, this entire season we were playing for the person next to us and playing for the 14 girls who put in so much work this year. And I think that's going to be something special about us next year because it's not just going to go away; it's going to stick with us.

Q. Looking at the offensive hitting percentage, in addition to some of the other things you've mentioned, there were some struggles offensively. Anything you can pinpoint that to as you look back at the match?

COACH COOK: Yeah, it's a seven-letter word called passing or seven-letter word called serving. So you can take your pick. I mean, volleyball is a hard game when you don't have any rhythm. And we had no rhythm passing.

Then you lose your confidence. Setters lose their confidence. Everybody is pressing, you try to hit the ball harder. We're out of system the whole time. It's a downward spiral from there. It's really hard to get it back once you lose it.

Q. Bekka, what's your feeling now? Is that a reflection of how you felt about the team this year or something different?

BEKKA ALLICK: No. This is a really great team. How I feel right now is that's the price you pay for caring. But, no, this is not a reflection of how I feel about this team. I would do it all over again with the same result with these girls.

Q. Harper, you never know how things are going to turn out. There's no guarantees. But I've said to people this year, if you don't get Nebraska this year, you better. Do you feel like that?

HARPER MURRAY: Yeah, I think we're going to win three national championships the next three years.

Q. The momentum in volleyball, obviously, in matches are so big, but even the momentum of a few weeks. Texas was one point away from being eliminated in the region semifinals and they end up winning it. What happened? What did they use to kind of propel themselves into this?

COACH COOK: I'll tell you exactly. I'll go back to 2017, we're playing Penn State in the semis. Penn State has match point and the setter and middle trip to win it and fall down. We come back and win the match you. And you



think you're invincible.

You think it's destiny, it's ours. And I think Texas experienced that. And I watched that match. They shouldn't have won it. Tennessee should have won that match. And when you go through something like that -- I remember in 2000, same thing, we were back then it was side-out scoring -- do I need to explain that for some of you guys what side-out scoring is?

But we were down 2-1. Back then it was 14-10 in the fourth. So they have match point. We're down 14-10 and we find a way to come back, win that, we come back, went on to win the whole thing.

Sometimes you go through those matches that give you that whatever extra thing is, like, hey, doesn't matter what happened, we're not losing.

And we've had some of those. But we've been playing really well. We played one of our best matches of the year in the semis, which is great for this group on this big a stage, but I think that was the difference maker for Texas.

Q. With the explosion of women's volleyball, if I'm a network, I'm doing the basketball's doing getting four teams together, eight teams together, going to Maui before the season starts. Do you think that may happen?

COACH COOK: No. The reason is basketball is a two-semester sport. So they have time to do that. We basically have four weeks and we're in conference. We don't have time to fly all over and do all that -- unless they want to change the schedule. But I don't think that's going to happen. I don't think you're going to see that, no.

Q. In what ways has Texas set the bar that you and other teams have to match now?

COACH COOK: I've got to think about that. But you look at tonight's match, I mean, they've got half their starting team are transfers. They're all fourth- and fifth-year players, except for Ella, the setter, who did a great job.

So that's how they've been building their team. That's how they built last year's team. I like what we're doing. I like recruiting kids and trying to make them be great.

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