

2024 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Friday, December 20, 2024

Louisville, Kentucky, USA

KFC Yum! Center

Penn State Nittany Lions

Coach Katie

Schumacher-Cawley

Jess Mruzik

Gillian Grimes

Caroline Jurevicius

Semifinals Press Conference



Penn State - 3, Nebraska - 2

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: I'm proud of this team. I think I've said that every day, but I'm proud of their fight and the way that they stick together. They find a way to win.

I'm really happy and proud. I'm happy for our alum. I'm happy for Penn State. Looking forward to Sunday.

Q. After being down 2-0 against a team that you guys beat earlier in the season, what was said to this group after you guys went back to the locker room?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: I think it was just settle in. I thought we were making one too many errors and we didn't look too confident. But we came out after that and focused on our serve. Our serve pass game got better, and we found ways to score. Defensively I thought we were picking up more balls. We were just scrapping for every point we can get.

Q. Jess, congratulations on this match. You guys were able to fight off a couple match points there in the fourth. Can you just talk about being able to do that and then just swinging as freely as you seemed to be able to do, even with the pressure of the fifth set.

JESS MRUZIK: I think my backcourt helps me -- I'm able to swing freely because of them. I have them look at me constantly throughout the match just telling me to let it rip and telling me where they are on coverage so I know that,

when I'm going up to swing, they're right there behind me.

Q. This is for the coach and for the players. I think you've been in four other five-set matches, including the Elite Eight match. What does this match, though, say -- is it kind of indicative of how this season has been and obviously some of the challenges you guys have had to overcome this year?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: I think these guys train really hard. I think our strength coach, our athletic trainer do their very best to keep these guys in shape. We put them in situations in practice all the time with scoring, down, winning, all of that, and just being able to be steady in the chaos.

They did a great job of that. I think the effort that they're putting in on and off the court that's separated them to win those fifth sets.

GILLIAN GRIMES: We practice a lot harder (laughter), and that kind of translates into the games. I think Jordan or someone said before the fifth set, like we're made for this, and we love playing five-setters because we're really good at them.

It was just kind of like a calming whatever she said to like help us.

Q. Coach, this will be a historical final, the first time a woman head coach will win. It's either you or Dani. I wonder if you could talk about the significance of that and also the fact you and Dani both won titles as players. So this is sort of a full-circle moment, it seems like.

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: I think I'm just really excited to represent Penn State. I think we've heard that quite a bit, the first time a woman, this and that. I'm excited for this team. I'm excited to represent the university, to represent Coach Rose and the former players of Penn State.

I think Dani is an exceptional coach. They have an excellent team. I'm excited we both get to compete at this



level and that we've brought our teams here.

Q. Coach, you've talked about how everybody's playing for more than just volleyball this season. This question is for all of you actually. What is going through your mind in this moment as you kind of have come to realize that sentence?

JESS MRUZIK: I'll talk because Katie doesn't like talking about herself.

At the beginning of the season, we picked out one of our core values was going to be bigger than us. It just really felt fitting for everything we wanted to accomplish this year. It's bigger than this team. It's about representing the legacy and representing all of the alums and people who have come in this program.

We're obviously wanting to do this for her because she's been so amazing throughout this season. So I think just that gritty five-set win like helped put another brick into that piece that we're trying to build this season.

Q. Guys, you won an early season match here in this state at Kentucky 3-2, came back from two down. Is there something around here maybe that you can start the season that way and kind of start closing it out that way?

CAROLINE JUREVICIUS: I think that we have to act like we've been here before, and I think, yeah, being in Kentucky before and winning some gritty matches, that definitely helps.

Honestly, it's just a matter of being comfortable with each other in the matches we played in Kentucky, not necessarily the location, but we've been in these moments before and we trusted that, and we came out on top.

Q. Coach, Andi Jackson for them had 19 kills, but 16 of those, I think, were in the first three sets. What, if anything, did you guys look to do in those last two sets to just keep her away or be able to block her successfully?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: It felt like she had a hundred kills, I'll tell you that. She's a great player. I thought we made a few adjustments, dug a few balls, and slowed some down.

I thought the attackers worked really hard in transition to find a way to score after we'd get a touch on it. I thought Izzy was setting the right players.

No, Andi Jackson is an exceptional player. I'm just glad we

snuck out of that one.

Q. Caroline, this is for you. I think you had two of your biggest matches against Nebraska this season. Can you talk about what it is about playing against them as a transfer? Walk me through why that's the case.

CAROLINE JUREVICIUS: I think personally I'm young and this is my first real season playing. So there's a lot of mental preparation that has to go into these things. Whether it be real or all in my head, yeah, I have to do a little bit of mental work beforehand.

Maybe it's that extra bit of meditation, that extra little bit of just breathing and just being where my feet are. I guess that pays off, yeah.

Q. For both Jess and Caroline, you guys gave up a 10-1 run in that fourth set and still came back and won it. That's not real common. Then the two match points. Can you just speak to your mentality at the end of that fourth set, in the middle of that fourth set when things were going against you, and how you stayed up?

JESS MRUZIK: Yeah, I think it's just the trust that we have between each other. I was struggling a bit in serve receive. And I looked at my teammates and told I got them, and they looked right back at me and said, No, we got you.

I think it's that trust between each other and just knowing that we're never out of it. I mean, we're not playing these matches to not lose -- like, we're playing to win. We're not talking about losing ever. So we're never counting ourselves out no matter how big of a deficit we're fighting.

CAROLINE JUREVICIUS: I think in those moments it's a reminder to myself and a reminder to my teammates that we dog it out at Penn State, whether it be our gym in preseason is 90 degrees or we're walking through the snow and getting back at 3:00 a.m., we dog it out.

I looked at every single one of my teammates and gave them a little shove and said, We are doing this. We're dogging it out. Whether they got sick of me or not, I thought it worked.

Q. I was wondering if maybe any of the players, was there anything -- obviously the grit tonight, but was there anything you guys learned about yourselves strategically that you thought you did well tonight that you could take into the championship match?

GILLIAN GRIMES: I think we can beat seriously any team when we put our mind to it, and I think it's just we have one game in the Yum Center under -- what's the word?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: Belt.

GILLIAN GRIMES: Under our belt. I just think that, if we go into every game with the same mindset that we did the last three sets, that we can really put the cherry on the top of the season.

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