

# 2023 NCAA Division III Women's Basketball Championship: Transylvania vs. Christopher Newport

Saturday, April 1, 2023

Dallas, Texas, USA

American Airlines Center

Transylvania Transy

Coach Juli Fulks

Kennedi Stacy

Madison Kellione

Dasia Thornton

Finals Postgame Media Conference



MADISON KELLIONE: I mean, it means the world to us to actually see a dream come to fruition and to see all our hard work pay off. It's something we've talked about all year, and it's never been out of our minds. It's always been brought up. Nearly every day in practice we're talking about our goal, and we did everything we could to reach it. And we're really proud of this team that we were able to pull it off.

DASIA THORNTON: Yeah, at the beginning of the year, we said that we wanted to win a National Championship, and we just kept that goal in mind the whole time, and there was really no doubt pretty much the whole time.

We're just glad that we pulled it off.

KENNEDI STACY: Yeah, so the whole year we've had two mottos, really, Join the Journey and Texas to Texas. I think it's crazy to be here right now.

**Q. Madison, I'm wondering if you were able to envision this dating back to your freshman year when you went through so much with the ACL, with all of the illnesses, and whether you flash back to that time as you've been celebrated here afternoon?**

MADISON KELLIONE: I actually told Kennedi in the locker room, Did you ever dream of this when we stepped foot on campus four years ago? But I mean, even when I committed to the program, I knew they were growing and it was a strong program. And at that point it wasn't a National Championship level program, but our senior class has really done well with putting the program on the map nationally.

I mean, especially I agree, like myself after everything I've battled and went through my freshman year and up until this point, it's the best way you could ever cap off a career, and I'm super thankful that I got to be a part of it.

**Q. You guys hadn't played a ton of close games this season in terms of final score-wise. And I think there was a minute 40 left, game was tied, you guys broke your time-out early and it was just you three as part of the huddle with Juli coming over. What were you**

Transylvania 57, Christopher Newport 52.

JULI FULKS: Well, I am super excited for this team. A few days ago when we were here, we talked about starting and ending the season in Texas and trying to do that in the perfect way. So it is absolutely awesome that they could do that.

One of the things that they all brought up here with them, they all brought up their dream cards. So last May when we sat down and talked about what our goals were for the upcoming year and a bunch of different things, they all have one of these, and it says National Championship on every one of them. Right or wrong, we pulled them out before the game, so we took the court and I think everybody was crying.

I'm just so proud of them, to watch a group do everything it takes all summer and the off-season to stay together as a group, work through all the adversity, and then come out on top and undefeated.

We never could be ranked No. 1 this year, and we kind of joked about it, and we decided we wanted to be No. 1 at the end. So really proud of them for doing that and everything it took along the way.

**Q. You guys made those cards sometime last year. What does it mean to actually be here and to actually pull it off as national champions?**

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**talking about and leaning on in this close game with all this on the line?**

DASIA THORNTON: I don't actually quite remember the exact words, but it was probably something along the lines of just take it one possession at a time. We still have time, as long as we get a stop, we'll be able to play off of that and use our offense and make sure that we rebound. Rebound, that's all I heard.

MADISON KELLIONE: We also talked about anytime we've ever been in a close game along our careers, we've always said we're not losing this game. And we stuck by that, and we used that to drive it. And we talked about they don't get any more rebounds the rest of this game. We knew that was going to propel us to finish the game and get the win.

KENNEDI STACY: While we've not been in close games this year, we've always prepared for that in practice. They make us play 5 on 5 and what-ifs. It's always the what-ifs. We always go through those scenarios and we know what were going to do when it happens.

**Q. Inside American Airlines Center, what are some of the challenges you guys face as players and shooters inside an arena this large?**

MADISON KELLIONE: I think it was kind of a culture shock to all of us. We've never really played in a big arena like that, so getting used to it. We spent our whole practice here two days ago just shooting and getting used to the backdrop where there isn't walls around and all that like our gym back home. It took a second to adjust, but we really relied on pushing it in the paint because lay-ups are a lot easier in a big gym.

**Q. Dasia, you talked about rebounds and then you pulled down that really critical one at the end of the game. You also hit the last lay-up. What was kind of going through your mind in that last minute, and what does it mean to bring back this title and the first appearance for the program?**

DASIA THORNTON: Yeah, I was probably thinking like hopefully I don't cramp, grabbing that rebound. I just didn't want to cramp up. But I got the rebound, got it out to Maddy or Kennedy, and we could make something happen with that.

I don't really think of any rebounds as special or not, I just go for the rebound because it's in my area. It's something I'm supposed to do. I'm supposed to dominate, so that's what I did.

**Q. You guys held Sondra Fan to 0 in the first half, 6 overall. Can you talk about the approach for planning to contain an explosive player like that?**

KENNEDI STACY: Yeah, so we've had a couple players this year where we've had to be lock-down defense on them, and I think it's really helped us. Those people were within our conference, so we've practiced a lot for those games and those people.

We know what to do whenever she was on the three-point line. We had to be close.

MADISON KELLIONE: I think also the games in the tournament leading up to this, we played a lot of really good players and a lot of All-Americans. So having that under our belt and knowing how we needed to guard them in order to win, it was good for us, and we pulled the same game plan tonight.

**Q. Dasia, with achieving this goal and winning the National Championship within a year's time, how does this affect your confidence running for president later on in life?**

DASIA THORNTON: It feels great, something that I can add on to my resume. I don't think really any other Presidents played sports that we know of at the collegiate level. It's just something that I can add to my resume, as well.

**Q. Can each one of you talk a little bit about what it's been like to play for Coach Fulks? She's one of the most serene coaches on the sideline. Does that carry through to practices, as well?**

DASIA THORNTON: Yeah, it's been great playing for her for four years. She knows our best interests. She tries to develop us into becoming the players that we are today.

It definitely took some time for me personally. Freshman and sophomore year, I didn't have as many minutes, but I knew that I could step up to the bar, step up to the plate, whatever it's called. So we did. And she trusts us. She's definitely worked with us not just on the court but off the court and made me become a better person overall.

MADISON KELLIONE: She is the most amazing coach I've ever played for. She's a great role model and she's there for us on the court, off the court. Just the effect she's had on each of our lives is something we're always going to remember, and I know we can call her any time when we're done here and she'll pick up the phone.

As far as her coaching goes, I think she's really skilled in

knowing what each player needs, and she changes her coaching style to that and she fits each of us. And she'll do it in practice, she does it in games. So even when she's calm on the sidelines, if she needs to in rip someone in time-out, she's not afraid to do it.

KENNEDI STACY: I want to say that I'm grateful that she has bought into me as a person and as a player. She's learned to trust me and I've learned to trust her, and I think that's a big thing with me.

She's a great coach, and it follows on and off the court.

**Q. The arena was very electric, so what did it mean to have those fans come out to Dallas to help support you today?**

KENNEDI STACY: It means the world. I mean, I never imagined that we would have this many people here in Texas with us right now. It's always a big deal in the Beck Center back home, but it was crazy to walk the red carpet today with hundreds of people here for us.

MADISON KELLIONE: Yeah, we had a really big support from back home and our volleyball team came down and supported us, and we're super grateful for that. A lot of other student-athletes made the trip, as well. And the show-out from our parents and our community and even people from our lives back home made the trip.

And it was super special for us to look up in the stands and see them there and support us, because they've been there every step of the journey. The championship is also a piece of theirs because they've been there with us all the along for the ride.

DASIA THORNTON: Yeah, we thought a lot of people traveled with us to Connecticut in the Final Four. But coming to Dallas and seeing all the people that came is just amazing. Like I never thought that we could be here and all of our fans traveled really well with us. We just appreciate them for being there every step of the way.

**Q. Obviously you've had sustained success at Transy and there's teams that have had deep tournament runs before. Why is this the team that made it all the way compared to the others?**

JULI FULKS: Yeah, you know, I think they are just slightly better defending it on the boards. So on all of our really good teams, this was a team that was really able to lock people down on the defensive end. You know, I think the zone that we play really plays to their strengths.

It lets Kennedi and Maddy at the top be really athletic, it

lets Dasia roam to rebound a little bit, and she does a great job holding down her side. Emilie and Laken do a great job defending inside, and Sydney, obviously is so fast, she can keep anybody in front. So that is what we've always relied on.

The first half, I think -- well, the first quarter it took us a little bit. We gave up a couple shots in transition. It's probably been six or seven games and maybe twice all year we've had a team push at the sideline. So we were a little late on a couple of those coverages.

But I think once we got that kind of settled down, held them to six in the second quarter and 11 in the third, and that's been the target all year. Try to keep everybody to 11 in a quarter. So I was really proud because Christopher Newport obviously scores a lot in a lot of different ways. So to have two quarters that we just fell back on this is who we are and we're going to get stops.

And they do a good job of understanding what we're going to give up each game. Obviously in the zone, you can't take everything away. And did a great job on 15. She's just an unbelievable athlete, but were able to keep finding her on the perimeter and making those things hard.

I think that's the big difference between them on the court in terms of their X's and O's. But as people, they're just competitors and they hate to lose and they don't lose very often, and I think that mentality has carried us any time that we've struggled.

**Q. It's been two weeks since the semifinal game. What have been some of the challenges and possibly some advantages of having that much time between the games?**

JULI FULKS: Yeah, we actually thought there was a lot of advantages. Christopher Newport plays this awesome style of pressing and picking you up a lot of different ways. So to have two weeks where we were able to really focus on that.

And I thought by the time we were in the game today -- if you had seen a few of the practices, you would have thought we were never going to get the ball down the floor. And they did an amazing job. We tried to make it as hard as we could make it. We played 5 on 12 over and over and over to make every hard. And we wanted them to feel like many times in the game it was easier than what it's been the last week.

So that was for us honestly the biggest advantage. It gave us really a lot of time to prepare for a team that does things differently and some time to rest and get our legs back

under us after the first five NCAA games.

**Q. You're so poised on the sidelines. Your team really seems to follow that lead. How important was that both when you guys were playing from behind as well as when you were playing with the lead in the final minutes?**

JULI FULKS: Yeah, you know, I think there's a lot of trust in this group. One of the great things about the upperclassmen is they really can coach it on the court, and they do a great job every day in practice of understanding what we're doing and why we're doing it.

You know, it's a group that's a pretty excitable group, and so I don't think we want to add into the excitable as a coaching staff. I think we're usually trying to calm them down. So on the sidelines it matters to us that every time they come over, they're just getting instructions.

It's pretty rare with this group. They just go so hard. You're never really coaching energy or emotion. You're just always coaching the Xs and Os, and that's one of the reasons they're really successful is they come ready to play. So then you're just trying to figure out how can we adjust things, and they're really good at taking that and going.

**Q. I was hoping, I know you've had the Joy to the Journey as the mantra this year. Can you talk about your journey, building a program on the West Coast at Lewis and Clark and then coming back to the Midwest, building this program back to a national title contender and now winning one with a perfect season. What's it been like?**

JULI FULKS: Yeah, mostly I'm just really grateful. Anytime you get to do this career, there's just so much time, energy and effort by so many people. And like Tim Whitesel, he's back there, he and I have coached together for 19 years, and I thought he was an unbelievable mentor back when I was making plenty of mistakes and has helped guide the entire way.

And our current coaching staff, they no doubt could do this without me. I am very confident in that. I think this is the pinnacle that everybody is trying to get to. But at the end of the day, 10 years from now, I want them to be able to look back and be really grateful for the entire experience.

And the Join the Journey mattered because we've played a lot of teams this entire way, and it could have gone differently with many of those games. And while this was the goal, we didn't want this to be the only thing that decided whether the last six months had been worth it and

good and a valuable part of our lives.

**Q. Back in Lexington they've got people at the Kentucky Theater watching this, the send-off you guys had, the red carpet today. What do you think it's meant to the community and Transylvania University and for what you and the women have accomplished here this week?**

JULI FULKS: Well, on the way walking here, somebody showed me one of the watch parties. Yeah, honestly, it's pretty overwhelming on some levels to see what this group has been able to do across the state. There were watch parties going on across the country with this group, and to have as many people that came today.

Our team does an awesome job of being there for all the other sports on campus, and to see that pay off with all the things that they do and to get the return love. We were very tight with the volleyball team, and they all came down. When I walked out and saw them holding the flag, I had to hold back tears again.

You know, it's a compliment to this group to have so much support. They've just been awesome anytime we put them out in the community, so to be able to do this for the first time, Transylvania. Dr. Holly Sheilley is, I'm sure, the best athletic director in the country, and getting to work for her on a daily basis and being able to make sure she has a National Championship on her resume, too, that matters a lot to all of us, and we are super grateful for all the support.

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