

Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament: Villanova vs Illinois

Wednesday, April 3, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

Villanova Wildcats

Denise Dillon

Bella Runyan

Lucy Olsen

Finals Press Conference



Illinois 71, Villanova 57

DENISE DILLON: I want to congratulate Illinois on winning the first WBIT. Obviously something both teams wanted, thought for it, and yeah, it was a tough night for us on the floor but extremely proud of our group for the effort they put forth throughout the season, especially the run here in the WBIT.

Q. Lucy, talk about this run you guys had all the way to the championship game, this inaugural WBIT tournament. Talk about how you think your team did and what this is going to allow you guys to do next year?

LUCY OLSEN: Yeah, it didn't end how we wanted but I think it was a fun run. We played well together as a team. We just kept getting better. I wish we could have ended on a win. Hopefully next year we'll have a little more anger and want to come out even stronger. Yeah, it was a good run.

Q. Bella, so anger is good for you guys?

BELLA RUNYAN: Yeah, I guess. I guess everyone has like their own motivation but like Lucy said, the last few weeks in this tournament have been so fun. We felt so connected. This might have been like the most fun I've had in my four years. Like was this run, just like seeing the growth that started throughout this tournament.

Q. For the players, what without someone if they asked you about this experience of the first WBIT, and how do you feel about this event as it moves forward?

BELLA RUNYAN: Yeah, especially when we got to Indianapolis, and we were greeted by like so much staff and everyone was so excited and happy for us to be here, the NCAA did an amazing job putting this together and treated us so well. Obviously teams that were playing in this were disappointed for not making the March Madness, but they are rewarded with an amazing event that was put on that we played through.

Q. For both the players, I know it's really quick after the season has kind of come to a close but is there one or two of your favorite memories of this eight, nine months together that stand out to you?

LUCY OLSEN: I don't know, I would say the last few weeks, like practices have been really fun. Like we are just enjoying playing basketball, I think that's just the main thing. I notice like everyone wants to play. We have fun but it's competitive, every day.

BELLA RUNYAN: My favorite part of this auto year, like I said, has been playing this tournament, the practice, like the vibes have just been like so good competing, and we took Lucy's motto, basketball is fun and we said that every day. Like guys, another day to play basketball, let's have fun. Because we were winning games and we were advancing that. Wasn't guaranteed. We woke up, went to practice and let's have fun. Let's take on the day.

THE MODERATOR: When you come away from this in the last two or three weeks what will be the biggest takeaways from your memories of being with the team, not talking basketball, but just being with the team for three more weeks and being able to compete for something.

LUCY OLSEN: Yeah, just the growth and we didn't get sick of each other. I said it the other day but we're really such a special group and we all love each other so much. We play for each other and we have fun times. We are singing karaoke and doing all the nonsense outside of basketball but it's such a special group and we really did enjoy and embrace every moment that we had together.

BELLA RUNYAN: Villanova, everyone that goes there,



knows that it's such a special place. The community is smaller and especially Villanova women's basketball has just always been known as being like such a sister hood, as cheese I as that sounds. Lucy is my roommate. We see each other every single day and we don't get sick of each other. We always want to be around each other in basketball and have so much fun outside of basketball.

Q. '82 through '85 was great Villanova teams. The 2002, 2003 team made it to the Elite 8 in the NCAA. Talk about this team because no one has ever got to the championship game of a postseason tournament in Villanova history. How important is that to you with this group?

DENISE DILLON: Well, it's extremely important to continue to make postseason play, especially after a little run we had last year, the year before, with March Madness and the Sweet 16 last year and this group had high expectations of themselves. You look at it, you had some pieces that you thought you were bringing in, an injury affected us early, and made those adjustments and then affected us late.

But as I said, when you have high expectations and high standards, based off of the history of women's basketball and of course the unprecedented run of our men's program, you see what Villanova basketball is capable of, and that's why the standard is high and the expectation is high, so these players are here with us. You heard them. They are going to play for the program and play with each other and do whatever they can to advance in postseason play and we are going to continue to work to get a championship.

Q. For Lucy, the jump she made from last year to this year, what do you think could be her ceiling next year, or what are your expectations for her to continue to grow?

DENISE DILLON: Yeah, I think as a just mentioned, even with pieces, adding some pieces to it, so Lucy just doesn't feel like she's trying to do everything all the time. The effort is off the charts and you see it on both ends of the floor. She's relentless and she's going to keep going and keep getting better.

Learning the pace of the game, I think that was her greatest growth this year but just finding different ways to impact the game with the assists, with the rebounding, scoring we're going to continue to rely on and finding different ways. One of the areas she's doing a nice job, mid-range to the basket and just extending that range more consistently at the three. She's going to work on it. She's going to want to continue to get better, so that's exciting for

all of us.

THE MODERATOR: If you were at a banquet right now talking about this team, what are some of the key takeaways that you have about this team as a group of individuals and collectively together?

DENISE DILLON: Well, as I just said to them in the locker room, you know, extremely grateful to coach this group, the last three weeks as you heard from Lucy and bell a, stating how much they enjoy each other and there's nothing greater as a coach to walk into practice and know that you are going to get everything from them and that they are enjoying the game of basketball. It's not a job; it's not a chore.

I would just say their sheer genuineness, authenticity of who they are and what they are about and just being really good people on and off the court. They are fun to be around.

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