

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal: Iowa vs UConn

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San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome - River Walk

UConn Huskies

Geno Auriemma

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference



GENO AURIEMMA: Well, a lot of words come out of my mouth. 'Uncoachable' probably comes out 10 times a day with every one of my players.

I think the thing that Christyn struggled with early on was putting too much emphasis on her offense, that if the ball didn't go in the basket, she didn't really know how to contribute to us winning. That put way too much pressure on her. It was like every shot, every possession for her, was life and death.

There's been a huge change probably since maybe the first or second St. John's game at St. John's, if I can pinpoint a time, when defensively Christyn started to understand how I can impact this team in so many other ways.

Today she looked like the Christyn Williams that we saw when we were recruiting her, a kid that can make shots from everywhere, can make shots at the basket, can make shots from the three-point line, can attack you in transition. She was guarding one of the toughest players in America to guard.

I thought this is the best game that Christyn Williams has probably played in her career. No question about that.

Q. Was it nice to have a crowd here, actually have people cheering for you, which I don't think you had much in the season? You mentioned how this is a good game for basketball, pretty well-played, well-officiated. Was that a good showcase for women's hoops on national television, having a high-scoring, high-entertaining game so to speak?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, I wasn't thinking that when Iowa was getting layup after layup, open three after open three. I don't think the thought came into my mind, This is great for people watching at home (laughter).

Given all the hype surrounding the game, the game was really, really well-played. There were a lot of great plays made. People made open shots. Big shots were made at big moments. We would get up a bunch, they would make a big run to cut it.

Connecticut 92, Iowa 72

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Auriemma. We'll take questions.

Q. You said the other day this game, it was unfair to kind of put it all on Caitlin and Paige. Kind of turned out that way. How can you assess the job Christyn Williams did?

GENO AURIEMMA: Well, I think the fact that there was so much hype put on those two kids, part of it was unfair, but it comes with the territory. I get that. But like I told the team before the game, I said in all these matchups of players that get all the hype, it usually comes down to somebody else and something else. I think our defense, as bad as it was at times, was really, really good when it had to be.

Christyn Williams and Evina Westbrook and Olivia, our three juniors, were amazing. They just played the way you would want your upperclassmen to play. It was not going to be easy on either Caitlin or Paige to play their normal game. Obviously neither of them did, even though both of them played really, really well.

I think it was a well-played game by both teams, well-officiated game. We just had a little more than Iowa did. I could see why they are as good as they are. They're a difficult team to play against, that's for sure.

Q. I want to ask you about Christyn. I know there have been some ups and downs with her. There was a point where you mentioned to her you thought she wasn't coachable. I'm wondering what that moment was like, how she got from there up to where she is today, rising to the moment like she did.

It was just a really -- there weren't a lot of turnovers. There weren't a lot of fouls. So, yeah, I think this game showed women's basketball in a really, really good light. I'm glad there were some fans here to really appreciate it in person because sometimes what you see at home on TV is one thing, and what you see in person is something completely different.

But somebody told me this was the first network televised game since 1995, when we played actually in the championship game against Tennessee. It's taken a long time, huh? They were well-rewarded. I hope we get a lot more games on national television, on the big networks, not just your sports networks.

ABC I think really lucked out today.

Q. Is this the kind of game that kind of I don't want to sound too corny, but reminds you of why you love to coach? To see the growth of somebody like Christyn Williams who had so much hype and accolades, then had to find the hard parts of the game and come through it, to do it today? Is it maybe the fundamental reason why you like coaching?

GENO AURIEMMA: I think we all like to coach for the same reasons that teachers like to teach. Because we are teachers at heart. We love when our students, when they get something and the light goes on, they feel like there's a sense of accomplishment of, Wow, this was really hard for me, it took me a while to get this, but I feel so good about myself that I finally got it.

You as a coach, you just feel so good for them. As much as you want to (grunts) when they don't get it right during the process of learning, when it does happen, it's such a rewarding feeling. That certainly is why I coach. I don't know why anyone else does. But I'm sure I speak for a lot of coaches and a lot of teachers.

I've always said this, coaches get way too much credit for winning and way too much blame for losing. Coaches try to do their best to give their players the tools that they need to be successful. You just love it when players use those tools and are successful.

Christyn was amazing. I mean, she just had this look in her eye the first half when she was just -- it looked like she could score from anywhere, any time she wanted. She takes great pride in her defense now and her rebounding, her ability to make a play for someone else, to see things. Just a whole litany of things that I've been hoping that Christyn would eventually acquire. She certainly found the perfect time to do that.

Q. The last few days in preparing for this game, what specifically did you stress with Christyn about the most important aspects of actually keeping Clark in check? Sometimes things are more easier said than done. Were the challenges Clark presented in the game what you expected? Did Christyn have to adapt and adjust at all along the way? How did it play out versus the preparation?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, when you're playing in a game like this against someone like this, you play the way you normally play all year, right? So for the most part this year we've done a really good job of knowing when to switch, when not to, who to switch on, how to help, how not to. We've grown into that.

So we knew that Christyn, This is your assignment. But we also knew that there was going to be a lot of switches for the good or the bad where it was going to be someone else guarding her. During our prep, we made it a team thing that everybody has to know this is what we're going to do, this is how we're going to guard her.

There were a couple times where we guarded her great and she still knocked in a couple threes. So the whole thing was about this is how our team is going to guard Iowa, in particular Caitlin Clark. Not, Hey, Christyn, she's on you, that's it. Obviously Christyn had the main responsibility. I thought she did a phenomenal job.

The kid still came out of there with 21 points, but she needed 21 shots to get it. I think that's a pretty good defensive night.

Q. Wondering if you could comment on Aaliyah Edwards, averaging 18 points a game now, give me your thoughts on how you think she's contributing.

GENO AURIEMMA: Well, we wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for her. If it wasn't for Aaliyah Edwards, we wouldn't be here today. That kid has really added so much to our team. Her strength, her physicality, her toughness, her finishing around the basket.

I can't say enough about Aaliyah, the fact that she's been able to come off the bench most of the season, then early on when we started her, she was a little bit not quite ready it seemed like. Now she looks so comfortable in that spot.

More than anything I think what she does is she takes a lot of pressure off of Liv. It allows Liv to be what Liv likes to be. Liv, catch the ball at the high post, be someone who facilitates our offense, and it allows Aaliyah to muscle her way around. Because you put your best defensive big man on Liv, now Aaliyah is going to have her way a lot of times.

The way she runs the floor, to have a freshman like that, I can't even imagine what she's going to look like in a couple years.

Q. Paige hit a shot, she came over and slapped you on the backside. She said it was an inside joke between you and the team. Is there anything you can add to that? Regardless, you see the freshmen, they seem to be playing pretty loose. Speak to how unique that is.

GENO AURIEMMA: If I remember correctly, I think it was when Anna Makurat hit a shot.

Q. Might have been.

GENO AURIEMMA: I think Anna hit a shot late, late, late in the game, from the corner, in front of our bench. Anna hit a shot. Paige ran by me and smacked me. That was an inside joke, yeah.

Do you know what the inside joke was? That's more shots than Anna has made in a month. I kept telling her, At some point you got to make one, you got to make a couple, you got to help us a little bit.

What's funny, both Ben, our interim coach, and Jamelle both said, Listen, put her in there, give her a chance because she's going to make two threes in the next game.

You know what? She did. I think Paige was letting me know. She never passes up an opportunity to let me know when I'm wrong. Trust me when I tell you that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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