

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

Saturday, March 27, 2021

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome - River Walk

**Iowa Hawkeyes**

**Lisa Bluder**

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference



Connecticut 92, Iowa 72

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by head coach Lisa Bluder. We'll go straight to questions.

**Q. I know you've got a locker room full of hurting kids right now. I think what Caitlin has done over the not just week but season has been special. I'm confident she's created a lot of basketball fans around the country. I just wondered how big you think it will be for women's basketball going forward for little girls to see her playing not at UConn, not at Tennessee, but she picked a different school because she wanted to do something special?**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, you about covered all of it right there. She's had a fabulous season. I'm so proud of what she has done over the year. I'm so happy for her because she loves the game. She plays the game the way it should be played. There are so many kids that have a tremendous role model at the University of Iowa in Caitlin Clark, and I think quite honestly, in the rest of our team.

We're a young team. We'll be back here. That's what I told our team. Do not hang your heads. We are extremely young, and we will be back.

Again, going back to your Caitlin question, I think she's somebody that a lot of kids can look up to in our state, but around the country. I agree with you.

**Q. Offensive rebounds again was a problem, as it has been a few times this year. How much did this team, within 10 points with five minutes to go, how much did you prove that you belong?**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I mean, the final score is not indicative of how close this game was. We won the third

quarter. It's 12 points, five something to go in this game. We have four turnovers in the last five minutes. They did a great job of using the clock, then scoring at the end of the clock. That's unfortunate because we kind of melted down that last four or five minutes, really didn't show everybody how close of a game that really was.

You're right, the offensive rebounds really hurt us. We did not box out. That's been a theme for us all year. We've got to get better at it. It gives us a lot of good film to show and work on it during the off-season.

**Q. I know there's probably some frustration this moment to have your season come to an end. When you look at the big picture of this year, to go from outside the projected tournament picture in November, to dominating Kentucky in the Sweet 16, trading buckets with UConn in the Sweet 16 here, do you feel like there's no ceiling for this team now, that this run is going to help them in the long-term?**

LISA BLUDER: Oh, I can't tell you how far this team has come from the beginning of the year. It was a hard year as far as the pandemic and testing all the time, having those extra responsibilities, not being able to be together at team functions like we usually are.

I am so proud of our young team for navigating all of that. It's amazing. Playing in Carver without fans. That's part of the job of being a Hawkeye is the Hawkeye Nation, having the amazing fans we have. We didn't get that this year.

But I believe wholeheartedly that we have just touched the surface and this team can go farther in the NCAA tournament than we did this year. I believe that completely.

**Q. What do you think it meant as much as this game was obviously marketed and positioned as Paige versus Caitlin. You had other players really taking the stage, as well.**

LISA BLUDER: It's been that way all year as we've had different people stand up. Monika, she only got 11 baskets today. Give credit to UConn for keeping the ball out of her



hands. She was 7-for-11. We needed to get the ball into her more than we did. She's been tremendous for us all year, a consistent force all year.

Then you have McKenna Warnock who came out today and had a fabulous game. She's had games like that. Gabbie Marshall, she was 4-for-5 from three-point range. Kate Martin has done it at times. Tomi Taiwo has done it at times. We have other people to this puzzle. That's what's so fun, is we have the anchors in Caitlin and Monika, but we've got a lot of good pieces around that puzzle, too.

**Q. You mentioned that third quarter. How much of the first quarter, second quarter, when Caitlin, it seemed like UConn may have been focusing on her, she was getting shots but not able to connect, how much of that was UConn's defense?**

LISA BLUDER: I think halftime allowed us to kind of take a little bit of a breath, regroup a little bit. We know we didn't play Iowa basketball that first half on either end really. We weren't happy with our play. I thought in the third quarter we came out refreshed, kind of a better mental focus. I thought we played well for the next 15 minutes of the game after halftime until the five-minute, end-of-game situation.

Yeah, UConn was putting denial against Caitlin. We all knew that was going to happen. Believe me, people have done that during the year, as well.

**Q. How important is a game like this from a learning perspective? You mentioned you're young. Kind of a measurement of where you are now, where you want to be. Like you said, you're young, will be back. What should the expectations be going into next season?**

LISA BLUDER: The expectations should be extremely high. I mean, nobody else expected much of our team this year, but we did. We're the most important people in that locker room that believed in each other, knew that we could have a special year. Moving forward, that's just going to get better and better.

Our goal is we want to be in a Final Four. We want to take Iowa back to a Final Four. That's where the direction that we're trying to go, that we will go.

**Q. So much was said about Paige and Caitlin, rightfully so. This was really pretty basketball in some stretches. I think there were 48 assists between the two teams. Aesthetically, that was really nice basketball. What does that say about the game, the way both these teams play?**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I mean, I just think coming into this, everybody focused on Paige versus Caitlin. It was never that. I get it. I understand why the media does that. If it was going to promote this game and promote women's basketball, so be it. But, boy, there was some pretty assists out there.

I mean, I love that basketball, share the ball. We had 18 I think tonight. I think we could have even had more. But there was some really nice plays, especially dumps to Monika after drives, that sort of thing. I thought for the most part there were some really good looks offensively for us, but on defense we had too many mental lapses on defense.

**Q. When you take a look at what this season was and what everyone kind of battled through off the floor, do you almost like the fact that you did have such a young team that had to go through all this extra stuff on the side? I know you've spoken repeatedly on how good this team will be or what this run on the court can do for this group. Off the court, to be a little more grizzled, what are your parting thoughts on how this played out?**

LISA BLUDER: I think it's going to make all these kids more resilient. You either stood up to the situation and did well, like I think our team did, or you complained about it and you were upset about it, and that occupied your thoughts.

We didn't let it occupy our minds that we couldn't do what we normally do. We focused on the positives. I think that's what you have to do in these type of situations.

I think our team navigated this so well. Of course, freshmen don't know anything differently. I think that a veteran team, they had advantages this year. I think veteran teams had advantages because they didn't maybe need that summer practice time as much. They didn't need those individual workouts as much. We could have really benefited from those things. We didn't have those.

But I think the way that our team handled this situation this year, I'm just disappointed I don't get to go to practice tomorrow. I'm really disappointed that they don't get to do that with this group of women. They have been amazing all year long.

**Q. How important is the national coverage that this tournament has gotten on TV, that everyone can see these great players, great teams, every game was televised?**

LISA BLUDER: This has been wonderful. I mean, all the

games being televised instead of that whip-around coverage has been terrific. These games today being played on ABC, this is good for our game. This is what we need to grow our game. This is what we've been missing. People need to see what we're able to do. Television plays a big, important part of that. Media plays such an important part of that.

I love having 16 teams at the same site. I believe we need to explore that moving forward. It felt like more of a tournament atmosphere. It didn't give anybody the advantage playing close to home. So I think there was a lot of good things that we learned from the pandemic that we have to take from this and think about how can we do this in the future to grow our game.

**Q. With UConn, with how they shot the ball today, is that just one of those games where you can do all you want, it's just hard to stop that kind of shooting, or did you feel there were times where the defense allowed it to happen? What can you say about the UConn shooting? Just when you thought you had a run, they seemed to hit a big bucket.**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, they did. That's what great teams do. I will say I do believe we had some defensive lapses. But I am not taking anything away from UConn because obviously they're a tremendous basketball team that can really score the ball.

But I know that the final score is not indicative of what this game was or how I think either coach probably felt during the game. I feel like UConn did a great job scoring, but I do think we gave them a little bit of help in that area too many times today.

They're good players, they're going to take advantage of any miscue or mental lapse that you have. And they did that to us.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Congratulations on a good season. Look forward to seeing you next year.

LISA BLUDER: I do, too.

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