

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Final: Baylor vs UConn

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Alamodome - River Walk

UConn Huskies

Paige Bueckers

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference



PAIGE BUECKERS: She's a terrific player on both sides of the ball. She does great things for them offensively and her defense speaks for itself. She's been a contender for national defense player of the year a lot of her years playing in college.

I think when she went out, obviously you hate to see somebody get injured, but I think we just try to take advantage of it, defensively, and attack their guards, attack the paint, try to drive and kick and just get our feet into the paint and create shots for each other.

And then offensively she's the point guard for them. She does everything for them. She makes everything easy for them on the offensive end. So I think that was a huge change in momentum. But I think it was a huge focus for us just to play our game on both sides of the ball.

Q. What does it mean to your team, particularly as a young team, to face a test like this, to face kind of a crisis moment like this when you're down 10 and come through it? What type of growth do you think took place in that short period tonight?

PAIGE BUECKERS: Yeah, I think it spoke for our mentality the whole season of just facing adversity and taking it with our chin and just fighting back. They hit us, they went on their runs. Basketball is a game of runs. We just tried to stay confident. And we just didn't want to go home and we wanted to keep competing and make it to the Final Four. And I think we just really stuck together. I think that's the biggest thing for our team is just coming together when times are tough and sticking together and never losing that confidence.

Q. Do you think Geno is happy -- do you think you shot enough tonight to make Geno happy? And you had some nights where you really filled it up, but doing this on this type of stage, what was this night like for you and did you envision it growing up as a kid?

PAIGE BUECKERS: I think Coach is never satisfied with anything I do. Even after the game, he was yelling at me about not waiting for a screen on one of the last plays. We have two more games to go. Hopefully, on Friday we'll

UConn - 69, Baylor - 67

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Paige Bueckers.

Q. You guys were down by 10 with a few minutes left in the third quarter. The offense had stalled out a little bit and then you guys go on that 19-0 run. What from your vantage point kind of changed in you guys offensively at that stage?

PAIGE BUECKERS: I think just keeping our movement. We got kind of stagnant and just watched everybody do their own thing with the ball. Once we got that ball movement better and we started pushing in transition, getting easier buckets against their tough defense in half court, I think that opened up the game for us.

Q. At the beginning of this tournament Coach Dailey asked if you had another gear you could shift your game into. And that came out when the game was really physical. This was a pretty physical game and it looked like you had an extra gear there. Could you describe what that means to you to kind of shift up to play into that physicality?

PAIGE BUECKERS: Yeah, I think it's just coming in, I knew the game was going to be physical, especially against Baylor, they're a really physical, tough, strong team. Just trying to get that mindset before the game and making sure I was ready for that mentally and physically, that was huge for me and the whole team. But I was just trying to do and our whole team was just trying to perform enough in order for us to win.

Q. Could you discuss the matchup with DiDi and how the game shifted when she went out? How big of an impact was that?

have that Final Four matchup and we want to win compete for the national championship.

I don't think any of us are satisfied. Obviously we're going to celebrate the win tonight and be excited and happy proud of each other for what we did tonight. But we still have the killer mentality going into the Final Four.

But as a little kid, I would be outside at the park shooting hoops, envisioning these moments but you never really know if you're going to get those chances and opportunities. And that's where God kicks in. I know I wouldn't be here without him and just the confidence and experiences and opportunities he's given me. I've just tried to shine and sort of make him famous and use my light that he's given me to shine on him. So these opportunities, you dream of them as a kid, but you can get there with strong work ethic and faith and just trust in God.

Q. To follow up on you sticking together with your teammates, what were those conversations like in the huddles when you guys were down 10 or what were you guys kind of talking about or who was pumping you all up?

PAIGE BUECKERS: We all do a really good job of having little things to say to encourage each other. But in the huddles it was just making sure we locked in on the defensive end and sort of clogging the paint and making them shoot outside jumpers, and making sure we were helping each other on defense, not leaving each other out to dry.

And on offense we just wanted to reiterate the fact we had to have ball movement in order to be successful on the offensive end and just attack, attack, attack. And I mean just obviously those are little game-plan schemes that we talked about, but just making sure we kept that confidence in each other. We always told each other, it's okay, we've got this, this game's not over. We've got a whole other quarter, whole other half. And we always just stuck together and never lost confidence.

Q. I've asked you, I said not only during the Big East Tournament but also here at the NCAA Tournament about the balanced scoring, said that the team has -- you had 10 of your 28 points during that 19-0 run, but I think Christyn Williams' 21 points, I think she scored the last five points you had. Can you just talk about (indiscernible) just having that and Evina with 11 points, I don't want to leave her out.

PAIGE BUECKERS: Everyone does huge things for this team. You can't take one person away and think you're going to win because we have multiple people that can sort

of get a bucket at any time. I think that's really huge for us going into the Final Four is just making sure we have that balanced scoring and everybody's playing with confidence, everybody is playing their best basketball.

I think that just comes with our selflessness as a team and as a unit. And that's just UConn basketball, making sure we have plenty of people that get involved and can be a threat on offense and defense. So that's just what we've been doing all season. Like I said before, we're just not a one-person show.

Q. That was wildly entertaining to watch. I'm sure it was wildly difficult to participate in. Could you just describe how tough the situation was, how tough Baylor was, and what the rewarding emotions were like when it was over?

PAIGE BUECKERS: Yeah, I mean, like I said before, it was a game of runs. We got off to a really hot start. They came back, made their runs. But it was really up and down, sort of high-anxiety game.

But I don't know, we just kind of stuck together. Obviously there's a lot of high-stress moments, but we just tried to stay together and played our basketball no matter if we're up 20 or down 20 or tied with 20 seconds left. We just tried to stick to our game plan and never let it change.

In the end getting a tough win like that against one of the best teams in the country, it's so rewarding to hear that final buzzer go off and you win and you make it to the Final Four. It's really unexplainable the feeling that you get from it. It's like a dream come true.

Q. If my math was right you were seven years old when UConn made it to the Final Four in this streak of 12. How often in this intervening 12 years you dreamed of you specifically being at UConn doing it. You talked about doing it on the playground. And whether it's sunk in yet that that chain of players, that you're now connected to in terms of that accomplishment?

PAIGE BUECKERS: Yeah, it's crazy to be a part of this history. We were talking about it in the locker room. I think Coach said it was 13 straight years that they've been to the Final Four. And I was about six when that streak started. And just to be a part of that history, that's really why I came here, just because of the unspoken success that they've had over the years and just all the winning that they've done.

I watched it on TV as a young kid. I've always been a team player and always put winning first. So I saw that as a



young kid and I was like, man, I want to be a part of that. I worked for it and I prayed for it. And I don't know, it's just surreal. I grew up watching Stefanie Dolson. She was my favorite player growing up from UConn, hoisting that trophy. And it's crazy to be part of that history right now.

Q. A year ago this time last year you had your game canceled. Now here you're in the Final Four. Can you describe what that's like, start from that point to where you are now?

PAIGE BUECKERS: That was a really hard time for me, the start of the shutdown of the whole country. That's when I really started connecting with my faith and with God, knowing he always has a plan for me through the ups and the downs, just always keeping that faith and that trust that everything's going to work out and everything happens for a reason.

And it's crazy just, like, a year ago today my dreams were sort of shattered as a senior, wanting to go out on top, undefeated my junior and senior year. Just wanted to win that state championship.

But if you could tell me a year ago today that I would be in this position, I would be super excited and happy and ecstatic just for it. But, yeah, it's really surreal, just the sort of turnaround that happened.

Q. Aaliyah seemed to always be there in critical defensive moments. What does it say about you and her as freshmen being in the middle of moments like that when you need the defense?

PAIGE BUECKERS: I think me and Aaliyah, we just try to do everything that our team needs of us. We try not to think about how we're freshmen and how this is our first year. Because really only Christyn and Liv have UConn tournament experience. So we know this team is very young and really inexperienced when it comes to tournament time. So, we just try to come in and step in and do everything that our team needs us to win and just try not to have a freshman mentality about it.

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