

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Minnesota Gophers

Lindsay Whalen

Isabelle Gradwell

Mara Braun

Postgame Press Conference

Penn State - 72, Minnesota - 67

LINDSAY WHALEN: So we talked at times in the first just how many possessions and how long postseason games are, and I'm so proud of the group for hanging in and believing that. It comes down to a late-game situation after the start.

Give Penn State credit, but I'm proud of how we battled. We've done that all year. I cannot thank our seniors enough for what they've done and for how they played this year. We'll carry that moving forward with this group we have. It's a special group.

Obviously we learned a ton, and this is a group that's only going to continue to get better.

Q. Isabelle and Mara, you guys visibly frustrated here. Are you frustrated the season ended the way it ended, or are you guys sad the way it ended? Just describe the emotions you're feeling after this game.

MARA BRAUN: I think a little bit of both. We fought. We gave everything we had. We came back from a huge deficit early on.

But I think the way we fought back, the way we came back, that just describes this team. It comes from leaders like Izzy. We'll miss her a ton next year and Mi'Cole. That energy is going to keep us going next year, and it's going to have a big impact. We'll play with a chip on our shoulder a lot next year.

ISABELLE GRADWELL: Yeah, I agree. Obviously sad. That was my last collegiate game with this group. When we had tied it up, I really thought we had it. So it was a



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frustrating way to end, but I'm really proud of how the team fought even whenever we were down in the first half.

I'm just really proud of them, and I know they're going to do great things in the future.

Q. Coach, I know we had quite a lot this year, but the turnovers, especially to start this game, the hole that was dug. As you move forward, anyone who watches this team knows they play hard all the time. But what is going to have to happen between next year and this year to take the leap in that department?

LINDSAY WHALEN: I think that's something that we'll continue to work on through individual workouts, team workouts, fundamentally just continuing to improve and continuing to get better as a group in that aspect.

I think tonight was an intensity. There's an intensity, and I'm really, really thankful that our group got to experience that, and now obviously there's things that we work on and improve upon going into the postseason and summer and whatnot.

Q. Mara, your first year is now done. Finished it strong. Can you just talk about like what are the top two or three things that you learned about this season that you'll be able to carry forward next year?

MARA BRAUN: I think -- I mean, this is a common theme, but especially as a freshman, just the physicality. The difference between high school, it's a huge jump. So that's something I'm really going to be focusing on in the off-season, and then just bettering my game.

Coach was kind of talking about this before, but every workout now in the off-season, just remember this feeling, remember the hurt, and come back hungry next year.

Q. Mara, this question is for you: You guys have laid a good foundation for what's to come. For recruits that are questioning whether to come to Minnesota, what do you hope they learned about your team and this program the last couple of weeks?



MARA BRAUN: That we're a bunch of fighters, no matter what. No matter how young we are, how inexperienced, we're going to give a fight no matter what. It doesn't matter if we're playing against fifth, sixth-years.

It's tough, but we're going to give everything we've got and we are going to go down with a fight every night.

Q. Lindsay, one thing at the end you came back and didn't turn over the ball. I think you were stuck at 22 for a while. What else did you do well there to get you back in the game? You got some good open looks.

LINDSAY WHALEN: I thought defensively there's a few really good possessions we were able to come over. I thought our midline as the game progressed got better. So just helping -- they do a really good job kind of in the middle third of going ball screens. I thought our coverage got better. I thought that obviously we picked up and pressed a little more. I think that that was effective.

Then we had some possessions where we moved it. We played inside out, and we were able to play a little bit around Rose. Got some draw-and-kicks, some kickouts. I know Amaya got downhill a few times. Both ends of the floor, we covered for each other. Offensively, we played inside out, draw-and-kicks. Defensively, we were there to help when we needed to be there.

Q. Mara, if I could ask, you spend that much energy coming back, and then you tie it with 45 seconds left. Are you still -- is the adrenaline running? Are you worn out? You expended a lot of energy coming back. I'm wondering how you guys felt at that point. Like Izzy said, "I thought we had it."

MARA BRAUN: At that point, you're working so hard to get back. So it's like you've got to find that second wind. When it comes down to it, you're going to do everything you can to win. We fought to the end, when people are laying out everywhere. So I think you really just find that second gear.

Q. Coach, speaking of the Xs and Os, what did that press do to you guys all game long? Penn State talked about them wanting to take away Rose Micheaux on the inside. She had 31 points the last time they played. What did that do to your game plan, and how did you plan to adjust after that?

LINDSAY WHALEN: I thought that when we kept our spacing and we played against the press with some pace, I thought we were able to break it. The times when we did turn over a little bit back on our heels, and we didn't provide outlets for each other. When we did, especially

after the start, I thought it got better as the game went.

Obviously they're aggressive, a little more three-quarter fronting on Rose. So, yeah, she gets a lot of attention from everybody, from every team.

There was times when -- that we found her late. There's a couple times when we missed her. And so it's just -- obviously that's something that, again, moving forward, that we'll continue to work on.

Q. This is for Mara and Izzy: Obviously despite the 21-3 slow start, you guys proved you were fighters and did a great job coming back, especially in that second half. Was there ever a moment where you guys believed that you fully were able to snatch away all the momentum from that Penn State full-court press?

MARA BRAUN: I think Izzy talked about it early on. After she hit that three, we all thought, all right, it's go time. And Rose made a really nice finish. I thought we had it at the end. Rose got that tip. I tried to lay out just a little bit short, but I think this team knows the whole time that it's never over till it's over. It's kind of been a thing going on all season. We fought back from bigger deficits.

So I think just the whole idea of it's not over till the last buzzer sounds.

Q. This is for Isabelle: You spent a majority of your collegiate campaign at Cleveland State and spent your last year here at Minnesota. Just put it all into perspective how much this season has impacted you and the relationships that you've built over the course of this year.

ISABELLE GRADWELL: I mean, this is -- sorry. Despite our record, this was like one of my favorite years as a collegiate player. Just from my teammates, the coaches, just believing in me as a player, as a person, and really caring about me.

Coming in, I had reached out to the coaches, wanting to get closer to home, and Coach said, I don't know. I don't know if you're going to play a lot. We'd love to have your experience. She gave me a shot, and that was all I asked for. Man, I'm grateful I got this opportunity.

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