

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 2, 2023
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA
Target Center

Michigan Wolverines

Kim Barnes Arico

Elise Stuck

Emily Kiser

Postgame Press Conference

Michigan - 63, Penn State - 61

KIM BARNES ARICO: I thought Penn State really battled. Every time we would go up, they fought to come back. I think it was an unbelievable test for us. I just think it speaks to the competitive nature of our league and how strong we are from top to bottom.

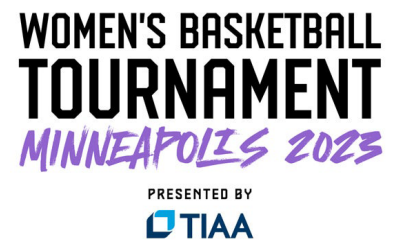
But when we needed to get that stop at the end, I was really proud of the way that our kids dug down and were able to come away with a victory. It's March, survive and advance. Excited to be playing tomorrow.

Q. Elise, you obviously made some big plays and were in the game in key moments down the stretch. Can you talk a little bit about the mindset and reflect on your performance? Emily, can you also talk about Elise's importance in today's game?

ELISE STUCK: I think we always talk about as a team next-man-up mentality and just being able to contribute what you can when you do get minutes. That's kind of been my story being here the last three years.

I think for me today and for most games, what gets me going is like getting a rebound, hustle plays. Those kinds of things are what really start my momentum and make me feel confident throughout the game. So I think I was able to really build off of those today. Hit a couple shots, and just be able to get a couple stops on the end.

EMILY KISER: I think when you're going to have someone come off the bench like that and give you such huge minutes, the deeper your team can be, especially in tournament time, is huge.



Elise gave great minutes. She's always known for her hustle plays, but her offense was up there today too. To come in and have the confidence to shoot those shots, I was in that position once in my career, and it's really difficult. So credit to her for having that mindset.

Q. Obviously the game came down to that last second shot. What was going on in the timeout before that last defensive possession knowing it would be that crucial?

EMILY KISER: I think it was just one more, right? March is do or die. Give it all you've got for one more possession. With the personnel we had out there, we were thinking switch, switch everything, go aggressive. We had a foul to give. Don't let them have a three. You always see games come down to the last second. At least a three doesn't beat you.

Yeah, just relied on our defense. Even in the fourth quarter after we kind of got hot there and then went on a little bit of a drought, but I think we really relied on our defense and got quite a few stops in the fourth for sure.

ELISE STUCK: I think just sticking to our principles at the end of the day, knowing what we're good at, will work, and what we practice every single day is just like what we have to harp on at the end of the day.

Q. Every basket is two points, of course, but your team had two key buzzer beaters - the halftime and then to start the fourth quarter. How much extra oomph does that give you for those baskets?

EMILY KISER: For sure. I feel like, when you're on the other end of it, it deflates your team. You work for that possession, that stop, and then the last-second shot. So just carrying the momentum into the next quarter was huge today. Luckily we were on the right side of it for today. But, yeah, that was huge.

Q. How important was it to have Laila Phelia back today, and what did you see from her?

EMILY KISER: I think Laila, whether or not -- whatever



she can bring on the court, it gave our team some confidence. She's such a good player, whatever she could bring today.

I think you saw a little bit. She's getting back into it a little bit. She had some huge plays. She changes the whole dynamic of our team with her ability to get downhill but also shoot the inside shot. The defense just has to pay so much attention to her. So it was great to have her back.

Q. Playing Ohio State again tomorrow, third time all season. The lost the first two matchups. What's the mindset? What are you focusing on? What are you hoping is going to be different this time you play them?

ELISE STUCK: I think just having to come -- like it's March, right? We're going to have to come with everything we have. It's tournament play. I just think being able to be the aggressor. We talk a lot about being able to come out strong, which we did in our first contest with them, and I think that's just going to be a good start for us.

Then just being able to kind of have it roll over to the next three quarters and just be able to be the aggressor, be the tougher team at the end of the day.

EMILY KISER: Yeah, I'm pumped right now. To have them for a third time -- I mean, to let a team beat you twice, to get that chance to play them a third time and a rival at that in a Big Ten Tournament setting, it's going to be a battle tomorrow, but hopefully we just want it more tomorrow. So really excited.

Q. Obviously specifically in the first quarter, the Penn State defense forced a lot of uncomfortable situations, specifically with the full-court press, with the constant trapping, whether it was bringing the ball up or forcing you guys into uncomfortable sets on the offensive end in the half-court. What were some of the big in-game adjustments you guys made that helped you guys come out on top and kind of break that defense apart?

EMILY KISER: I think just bringing up our back line. I think sometimes we have -- our back line usually runs deep, and making sure they stay up just with that three-guard front that they had, was kind of an adjustment we made, and really looking ahead instead of just me and Leigha in the backcourt.

Then just taking care of it. At the end of the day, making sure it wasn't a live ball turnover. Those turnovers for layups were killing us there for a while, so that was one.

Q. Slightly different question about Ohio State

tomorrow: First two times you played them, you turned the ball over 27 times and struggled mightily against the press. With the struggles you had against Penn State's press today, how are you going to hope to rectify that before the game tomorrow?

KIM BARNES ARICO: You know I love you and you are a student reporter, but you don't have to remind me when we lost or how many turnovers we have. I know those things. Now everybody else in the room knows them. I'm teasing.

That's obviously been a point of emphasis all season long, and especially when we haven't been a hundred percent, I think we get exposed in that area. That's something that I think today was great prep for tomorrow. If anything, we learned how to handle that type of pressure or we experience that type of pressure.

So it will be a similar type game going into tomorrow, and hopefully with that it will help us. I think we made a couple of adjustments in the game. The kids were talking about we tried to switch the inbounder, so Leigha was the decision-maker on the reversal instead of Emily always being the decision-maker.

I think it also helps when you have Laila as your second line because she aggressively attacks, and we saw a little bit of that today. I think she'll be more confident in that area tomorrow.

But we'll see. Got to play the game, right? We'll see.

Q. Similar question that I asked --

KIM BARNES ARICO: Oh, geez. Are you going to go right there and tell me things I already know? (Laughter).

Q. Elise was obviously huge off the bench today. Made some really big plays and was in the game down the stretch in clutch moments. What did you see from her, and can you speak to her performance?

KIM BARNES ARICO: We've kind of been talking about it all year long, and especially when we've had Laila out and Leigha out, like who's going to be able to step up and really take those minutes? But really earn them, not because somebody isn't there.

So I think from a coaching perspective, I try different people and really see who's ready. And on different nights, it's been somebody different, because they're young and they're inexperienced in terms of minutes played.

So tonight I went to a couple different people early, and then I went to Elise, and Elise always -- I mean, we talk

about it all the time. She's one of our toughest players, plays exceptionally hard, can make shots. So when we went to her, her number was called, she went out there, the first possession she got a rebound off the ground like this high, and I felt great about that.

I said in the locker room, the kids were all excited because she made all these shots, which obviously we needed them. I was excited as well. But I was excited with her toughness and her energy and the other intangible things that she brings to our team because I think that that is a separator.

Each kid on our team has their things that separate them from the next, and tonight she went out and was a great Elise Stuck, and we needed every single minute of it. I'm just super proud as a coach for her to have the courage. Like Emily said, the courage to take the shots is big. Sometimes when kids are in those moments, they hesitate to take them, and she doesn't.

That was great. We needed them all tonight. She was amazing.

Q. It was a nine-point lead, then got down to two. What did you see from Penn State that got the game close again, and what were you telling your team during those last two timeouts, one before the inbounds to Leigha and then on the last defensive possession?

KIM BARNES ARICO: I think we got away from kind of what we were doing that got us the nine-point lead. I think we just were trying to make a play so badly, and that's kind of how we started the game. Then I thought we settled down and started to share the ball more and started to find the open person, where we were just trying to make that play so badly that we didn't make the play and then they were able to chip away.

But like we talk about all season long, to be in that kind of situation and be able to figure it out and come away with a win was awesome. We were able to do that earlier this season, but we've had a couple of stumbling blocks late. So for us to finish it today was just awesome.

I'll go back and watch the film and watch the film with the kids just so they can see those end-of-the-game situations and try to be better tomorrow.

Q. Can you just talk a little bit about Leilani Kapinus' impact on both ends of the floor. It seemed like one of the players dictated and really making life difficult on defense?

KIM BARNES ARICO: She's improved a tremendous amount, and she's continued to improve. She's a terrific hard-nosed player, just affects the game so much on the defensive end. Even when we got caught in the backcourt on those traps, we were afraid to change direction because she was in that location. She has great length and anticipation.

She needed to -- I thought we did a great job on Marisa, and she needed to score with them being shorthanded. She needed to score for them tonight. I thought she did a great job of scoring for them when they needed to too.

She's a great player. She's off to a great start in our league, and I'm sure she's going to have a great career.

Q. I'm going to repeat my question. Can you talk about having Laila Phelia back, what you saw from her tonight, and how important she's going to be for the rest of the postseason?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Laila's a game changer for sure. She just has a speed, a gear, an athleticism that makes our team different. When she's on the court, she can affect the game on the defensive end. We were talking about Leilani Kapinus, she affects the game on the defensive end. Laila has that ability to affect the game on the defensive end. But she can get downhill probably as good as anybody in the country. Then her ability to knock down the three as the shot clock was running out is incredible as well.

So what she was able to do after, I don't know, I think it was like 37 days of -- how many? 32. 32 days of being out, tonight was pretty special.

She was voted by the league as Second Team All-Conference when she missed 32 days. So I think that shows the tremendous amount of respect that everyone in our league has for her. She's a worker. She's worked so hard to get back off this injury. Our athletic trainer, who's done an amazing job, says to me, I wish I had a patient like -- I wish everybody was like her. She's so diligent. She's been in there morning, noon, and night trying to get herself back to 100 percent.

So she's a game changer for sure.

Q. Tonight we saw Maddie and Ari guiding Marisa, and last time Laila was on her. What have you seen from Maddie and Ari stepping up defensively since Laila's been out? And now that you have all three of them available, what does that give you moving forward?

KIM BARNES ARICO: I think, when you lose a player,

sometimes you think you just lose their offense or you're not -- it changes every single person's role on the team. Maddie had to go from guarding the other team's second best player to guarding the other team's best player for 39 minutes. That's an exhausting job, but she did a heck of a job.

I think, when everyone's healthy, that's what made us one of the best teams in the country because not only could we score, but we could defend everyone at multiple spots.

So I wouldn't say Laila is 100 percent yet. I mean, maybe she is, but she's a work in progress for sure, but it's definitely a game changer for us when she's out on the court on the defensive and offensive ends.

Q. You held Penn State's bench to zero points. Can you talk about how you managed to do that and the impact you felt it had on the game?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, Penn State was short a couple of players. I know how that feels. We were last week as well. So that makes your rotation a little bit shorter, and you're not getting that impact off the bench, and that's kind of what we talked about, about how Maddie's role has changed. Everybody on their team's role changed today with two players down.

So I think that was definitely an impact for us. And then having Elise being able to come off the bench and provide such a spark for us definitely was a game changer for sure.

Q. At one point during one of the intermissions there was a video on the board. It was asking three of the players how well they know you, and one of the things they said you say is, "Are you physically serious?" Just made me think kind of how well teams know each other and the chemistry teams are able to build. Especially you're talking about tournament play, playing potentially back-to-back-to-back games and then the national tournament. Can you talk about this team and the chemistry and cohesiveness they've been able to build as a unit?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, I think that's important in every program and especially one that's trying to win a championship program. You have to have that culture. I think a big thing for us coming into this season from everybody out in the world was how is Michigan going to survive without Naz Hillmon and what's going to happen to Michigan without Naz Hillmon? I think our players that were returning, that kind of gave them a little bit of an edge and a little bit of a chip on their shoulder, something to prove.

Like I said, until recently, because of adversity and injuries, we've had a little bit of a bump in the road, but when we're together, we are an incredible team. I just think part of that is your chemistry, and they do it for Michigan. We always say, you're winning for Michigan because it's about something that's bigger than yourself.

Our team really prides itself on that, and our chemistry is great. I think that's important for any team moving forward, and we had that tonight to make that play down the stretch.

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