

# Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 5, 2023

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Iowa Hawkeyes

Lisa Bluder

Caitlin Clark

Kate Martin

Monika Czinano

Postgame Press Conference

Iowa - 105, Ohio State - 72

LISA BLUDER: I'm just so proud of this team. I knew all year long, we've stuck together, we've tried to get better every day in practice. We've kept the focus.

We have some stars, but honestly everybody -- like yesterday five people in double figures on this team, and that's when we're at our very best. Second quarter might be the best quarter of basketball that I've seen or been a part of in a long time.

To win back-to-back championships, so hard to do in this league. This is an amazing league. Great coaches, great players. Just feel really, really thankful that we have this opportunity today to win this again.

**Q. For all three of you, what did happen there in the first half? I mean, you were scoring possession after possession after possession. What was so easy about it?**

KATE MARTIN: Easy? I don't know. They're a really good team. I think we were getting a lot of stops, and our defense was really moving, and we were communicating hard. Then when we got stops, we got to push in transition a lot.

We were moving hard, cutting hard on our offensive end. Getting the ball inside to Monika. They were trying to put one of their guards fronting her, and so that gave us a great opportunity to get it inside.

Easy, I don't know. It didn't feel that easy, but it was really



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fun. It was fun to be a part of.

**Q. Caitlin, everyone in the arena kind of knew when you got your tenth rebound for that triple-double. What did that mean to you?**

CAITLIN CLARK: I mean, I knew I needed one more. Coach Bluder told me right before that, and it was a really long rebound, so I had to turn the jets on to get it. It was kind of fun.

We went down, maybe somebody made a shot, I don't know. It was kind a fun moment with the arena. I started laughing a little bit. Our fans have been incredible. Our three games here, I don't know if we do it without them. It's really a home court advantage. There's chanting "let's go Hawks" with 45 minutes left in warmups. That's probably pretty intimidating if I'm the other time. A lot of credit goes to them. They're incredible. It's been like that all season long. So we're just really thankful.

**Q. Monika, you lost some games early in the season. How did that help you? Did you guys feel like you had a target on your back all season? To finish at the top of the Big Ten...**

MONIKA CZINANO: We're really lucky, this league just really prepares you for what's next in March. I think each of our losses taught us a big lesson that we needed to use to get to where we are today and to peak at the right time.

I think, as unfortunate as some of them were, we needed them. We needed the lessons. I just think we're hitting our stride in one of the best times we could possibly hit it on. So it's a really fun time.

Yeah, we play in one of the hardest leagues arguably in the country. It really is incredibly difficult to get here. So I'm proud -- every single person on this team deserves it. I'm very proud of everybody.

**Q. For all three of you, what are the emotions like when you have the final buzzer and you win it? It's a little different when you probably have seen it coming a little more. Is it any different when you win it**

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## **back-to-back years?**

CAITLIN CLARK: I mean, they're different in their own way kind of, but it's just still just as special. Every year is really different, and we weren't regular season champs this year. So we came here with something on our minds that we really wanted to get. This was one of our goals.

Yeah, it was kind of different because we were just sitting there for four minutes. It was the longest four minutes of the game, and they were still continuing to call fouls and the clock kept stopping.

We also got every single person in the championship game, which I thought was pretty special too. It's always special in its own way, and then to feel the confetti come down too. I'm just really proud of this group.

**Q. Question for any of the players: I know you guys talked throughout the season that you guys love playing in big games against really tough opponents. Close games, you love those type of games. But what was it like today, you go into halftime with nearly a 40-point lead. What's it like to spend most of the second half with a really comfortable lead and just kind of have fun with the moment?**

KATE MARTIN: I think that did allow us to have a lot of fun in the second half. We're always having fun when we're playing, but with a comfortable lead like that, we knew we would get everybody in the game, like Caitlin said, and that's super special.

I mean, we were just basking in that moment. I'm just really proud of everyone.

**Q. Caitlin, and honestly all three of you guys, seeing all of those little girls cheering your name and chanting for your name afterwards, I can't even tell you how many times I heard them screaming. What is that like?**

CAITLIN CLARK: I think it's really special. It's never something that I take for granted. I think the role models we have on this team, not just myself, not just these two, but the whole team. I think Coach Bluder always talks about developing women and being strong female leaders, and I think that's what we have in our locker room.

I can't think of a group of people that I would want young girls to look up to more. So I think it's very special. I think our team is always doing the right things, not only on the court, but also off the court.

When I was a little girl, I was in their exact same shoes. I

remember I came to my first WNBA game here and watched Maya Moore. She was my favorite player ever.

It's crazy how fast time goes, but taking 10 seconds can really make somebody's year. So we always go out of our way to do that.

**Q. The only triple-double in championship game history. We had to wait for a little while, I think five minutes left in the game. Can you just reflect on that accomplishment, just the singular accomplishment. And talk in general just about the efficiency this offense is working at at this point.**

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, it is special, but I think a lot of credit goes to my teammates. I was able to kind of get them the ball in areas that was really easy for them to score. But to get an assist, my teammates have to make the bucket. So all the credit goes to them there.

I thought Monika worked really hard inside tonight. It's not always easy when you're getting fronted constantly and they're super physical. She makes some really tough catches on the block.

I thought Kate played tremendous. She made some tough baskets for us. Makenna, she's been tough as nails. And Gabbie has been incredible all weekend long. And I think Sydney Affolter came in and played really, really hard tonight. I think that can't go unnoticed. That spark she brought off the bench was tremendous.

It is a special accomplishment, but I truly mean it doesn't happen without every single person in the locker room. So I'm thankful for them.

**Q. Monika, how many friends and family did you have here the last three days, and what was the experience like to have that so close to home?**

MONIKA CZINANO: I couldn't even tell you how many I had, quite honestly. I ran out of tickets before the season even started.

It was just so special to kind of have this experience here, have all my family, even like teachers that grew up coaching me. Just the most random people in my life showed up today to support me, and that's so special. It just shows how big my community is and surrounding me.

It was so great to have them here truly. It's a memory I'll never forget.

**Q. For Kate, 5-of-6 from the field today. How did your shot feel as it started to go down?**



KATE MARTIN: It felt great. It really did. I think I had some good passes from my teammates, and I was glad that I could knock them down.

**Q. Caitlin, when you got the tenth rebound, it seems like the whole crowd knew that you got the triple-double. Did you know that?**

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I definitely knew that I needed one more. It was kind of funny that they all just started screaming. Definitely a cool moment for sure. I think our crowd, like I said, has been incredible all year long, so I've got to give a lot of credit to them.

**Q. As you guys were sort of running over them offensively, they only made nine baskets in the first half. What was your defense doing that prevented them from really trying to challenge you?**

CAITLIN CLARK: I think we changed it up a lot. Our player-to-player defense was pretty good to start the game. I think we played really well at the beginning of the game minus maybe the start of a couple turnovers but handled the press.

They're a good team. Probably in a different game, they probably make a few more shots, and I think you saw that in the third quarter. They started to catch a little fire there. But I thought our defense was really good. We were contesting shots, playing physical in the paint, but most importantly, we got rebounds.

There were a couple times they got a few O boards, but to complete a stop, you have to get the rebound, and that's when we are at our best in the transition offense. That's where we thrived. Mon and Kate leaked out a couple times. Makenna did. Gabbie was open. So I think we switched it up a little bit, but more than anything, it was just the mentality of wanting to get stops.

**Q. Monika, Caitlin talked about you needing to finish those baskets for her to get the assist, but she also needs to read the defense to know where to put it. How have you seen that part of her game kind of grow the last few years?**

MONIKA CZINANO: She just does a phenomenal job, and it's been a pleasure to see her game grow throughout the years. She's such a good moderator, controller on the court. It's crazy. She gives me like different looks, and I know what she means. At this point in my career, I know exactly what she's asking me to do. That just comes with being on a team together for three years.

Truly her passing skills are so phenomenal, especially coming into the post. She truly makes my life so easy, so I love to see that development.

**Q. Kind of a good followup to that question: Caitlin, for you, I had asked Coach about this specifically, but the way you communicate with each player on your team seems like it's a little bit differently. With Monika, you get some looks from her, and you sometimes move your hands or whatever. Do you communicate differently with every single player on the team? Does everyone sort of have their own style from you?**

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I think that's super important, understanding how to talk to your teammates and what's best for them. Me and Kate are two super fiery competitors, so we might snap in each other's faces, and we know it's to fire each other up. Other people might be a little more soft. So I think that just comes from understanding your teammates and things like that.

Me and Monika don't even need to talk to each other to know what's happening. We just got telepathy like that.

**Q. Caitlin, I know the top of the to-do list was probably not NCAA Tournament positioning coming down here, but I know you're also aware of the landscape of college basketball and where things are falling this time of year. Do you feel like this cemented a 1 seed for you guys? Just in general, how important is this week for the NCAA Tournament, just kind of bringing everything back and centering everything for that?**

CAITLIN CLARK: I think this does earn us a 1 seed, but at the same time, I don't know how much difference there is in a 1 seed, the fourth 1 seed and the top 2 seed. You're technically in the same region. We beat two 1 seeds in the past two weeks. I don't know how that wouldn't earn you a 1 seed, but I'm not the one that makes those decisions.

All we could do was control the game right in front of us, and that's what Coach Bluder talked about every single day. When we first got here, our focus was Purdue. The next day was Maryland. It wasn't about where we were on the seeding line. It's something you are aware of.

But I thought we came out and beat three really good basketball teams, and all three are projected to make the NCAA Tournament. That's not easy in itself, and I think it also speaks to the depth of the Big Ten Conference. This is not an easy tournament to win. There's not any cupcakes given.

I'm really proud of this group. We came out and fought every single night, took it game by game, and that's all you

can ask.

**Q. You guys were in the Big Ten Tournament championship a couple years ago, gave up 104 points to Maryland. I think the narrative at that time was kind of that you guys were a good team but not an elite team. How does it feel to have it kind of come full circle at this point where you guys are the elite team now, you put up 105 points today, and have kind of changed that over the last couple of years?**

MONIKA CZINANO: I think there's just a lot of growth there. At that time, we were one of the youngest teams in the Big Ten. I think quite literally we were the youngest team in the Big Ten. So us getting to the championship that year was pretty incredible for its own worth, and I think we learned a lot of lessons from doing that.

But it feels great to be an elite team. It feels great to kind of hone in on each of our skills. Yeah, it feels great to win all these games. Yeah, it's been cool to see that growth.

**Q. Caitlin, I asked you the other day about your memory for specific plays, but you just said that you didn't remember that loss two years ago. I'm curious, do you bury losses, or is that kind of --**

CAITLIN CLARK: Losses like that, yeah. But also I remember my freshman year we were playing four games in four days, and I think that speaks to the importance of a double bye. I don't think anyone's ever won this tournament without a double bye, so that's something you really want to work for in the regular season.

Yeah, Maryland was a tremendous team that year as well. Like Mon said, I think that gave us an advantage, and it is kind of coming full circle now. The last two years we've been here and we've won it. To have that experience, I think sometimes you can take it for granted.

Like this isn't normal to be in the championship three years in a row. So I think it speaks to the veterans we have on this team, and I couldn't be more proud of them.

**Q. Usually you just don't beat teams by 33 points that are as good as Ohio State. What was the key to that kind of early start to get such a massive lead?**

LISA BLUDER: Our start wasn't that great. We had a bunch of turnovers to begin this game, and then we kind of settled down. Thankfully, our defense was holding through those turnovers, so they never really got a big lead or anything like that on us.

Honestly, the second quarter was spectacular, in my

opinion, on both sides of the ball. I thought we handled the press very well. I mean, we have 25 assists on 16 turnovers. Those are really good numbers against a team that presses like Ohio State does. That's how they won the game yesterday was on the press and turning people over.

Our team was very focused, watching film on that last night and practicing today and getting ready for that. We've been hard to press all year, but it feels good to come out here and get some good shots.

Monika goes 11-for-12. That's spectacular. Caitlin, 17 assists on 2 turnovers. I don't know how you can say she's not the Player of the Year in the country. I just don't know how you can say that.

**Q. Caitlin mentioned how special it was to get everybody in the game today. What did it mean to you to have everyone in the conference championship game of all games?**

LISA BLUDER: A lot of times that can't happen, or it doesn't happen, right? Usually they're nail-biters or it's down to the last few seconds. So it felt good to have a lead like this and be able to coast into the end and be able to have everybody out there.

**Q. Kind of along the same lines I asked the girls earlier, you guys are preseason No. 4, so a lot of people expected you to be really good. How did you navigate some of the early struggles? Today you looked like a Final Four team.**

LISA BLUDER: We did have some losses that we didn't think we should have at the beginning of the year. But I think we grew through every one of those. Look at the Maryland game, if we wouldn't have done so poorly at Maryland, we might not be in this championship game. That gave us really the focus to be ready to play Maryland in this Big Ten Tournament.

We also feel like there's growth through every failure that you have, and I think our team really believes it. We never got down. We never got down on each other ourselves. They just kept coming to practice ready to go.

So it's the maturity of the team that really was able to handle some of those things and to learn from them and to put it into place.

**Q. Lisa, you're the longest-tenured coach in this league. Is there another season that you've been in that feels -- the top third of the league, at least, feels this good, feels like they all could make Final Four runs?**



LISA BLUDER: Absolutely not. This is the strongest this league has ever been. You look at the top six teams, the top four teams in this conference, it's amazing. Any one of them could make it to the Final Four, maybe more than one. I think it's that good of a conference.

**Q. You've had Caitlin now for three years. You've seen a lot. Do you ever get to the point where you feel like you're not going to see anything more? Is she still capable of surprising you?**

LISA BLUDER: She is. Did you see the behind-the-back pass to Monika or over-her-shoulder pass? That was crazy. Yeah, I get to see incredible stuff every day in practice. It's fun for me to go to practice because I never know what I'm going to get to see that day.

So, yeah, she continues to surprise us. But when she got that last rebound and she raced down the court with the biggest grin on her face, like that's joy. To be able to play like that is so much fun, and I admire her for that. She's so competitive, but she loves the game so much.

**Q. Lisa, you guys were able to build that lead to nearly 40 points in the first half. As you guys are playing well and building that lead, was the message just that Ohio State came back from a large deficit yesterday. We've got to keep the pedal down because we don't want that to happen to us.**

LISA BLUDER: Absolutely. It's what we talked about at halftime, second half is when they made their big run yesterday, so we didn't want to give them any hope on that. We gave up a few too many baskets in that third quarter, but luckily we were able to keep scoring in the fourth quarter.

But, yes, we talked about continuing. Every play was a new possession, a new game.

**Q. Can you compare the Monika who walked in the door five years ago to the one tonight? And how happy were you that she could get this tournament experience so close to home?**

LISA BLUDER: I mean, right? That's like one of those storybook things. Kid comes from Minneapolis area, comes home, wins a championship. Wasn't highly recruited out of high school. You know, wasn't. And she just came in and looked.

She learned from Megan Gustafson, who was a National Player of the Year at a post position when she was a freshman and Megan was a senior, and she just took off. It

was hers.

So happy for her growth in so many ways, not only her game, but just her mentality, her leadership. Really happy for her.

**Q. So the saying kind of goes like free throws win games. How did that apply to today?**

LISA BLUDER: Well, let me look. I don't even know. Oh, we shot pretty well from the free-throw line, didn't we? Yeah, 83 percent is pretty good. Ohio State shot 64.

You know, there's just so many things that contributed to this win. I really think it was the mentality more than anything. It was our players were -- they were ready to play. They were chomping at the bit. I think they wanted to play last night.

Everything is contributing, but I love the assists because I think that's the way that we are at our best is when we're passing the ball. So that one is a real key to me.

**Q. Lisa, I asked the players about -- I know you guys won the Big Ten Tournament last year, but I asked about that loss to Maryland a couple years ago, you guys allowed 104 points. What's it like to see that game kind of come full circle to where now you guys are the ones putting up 105 points and winning by that big margin and you guys are now the elite team?**

LISA BLUDER: Kyle, I completely erased that from my memory, so thanks for bringing that up again. Again, I think you've got to learn through every situation, and we obviously learned through that situation.

For us to be in the championship game that year was pretty special, and then we made it to the Sweet 16 after that. So that was a young team, like Monika said, and Maryland was and is a great basketball team. So, yeah, it's no fun to be on that side of it.

**Q. Two questions: First one, do you believe you've done enough for a 1 seed? What's the case for that? Second thing, Big Ten has made quite an investment compared to other conferences in women's basketball. How much do you think that has helped?**

LISA BLUDER: We've made an investment?

**Q. An investment in women's basketball, whether it's with Megan's position, and other steps to promote the sport.**

LISA BLUDER: I think the Big Ten, I mean, we need to get

somebody in the Final Four, and I think the Big Ten knows that. All of us coaches know that. We feel like we've been really close, but it's been a long time since Michigan State was in there.

Megan's done a great job, a great job for our league. Kevin is obviously on his way out, but we're really happy that we have Megan in that position. I think she's really good for our league.

Your first question was -- the 1 seed, okay. At the end of the day, we don't have a lot of control over that. We'll take what we have, and we'll make the best of what we have. Do I think we deserve it? We do. We just survived one of the hardest conference tournaments in the country. We beat two teams that were predicted to be a 1 seed in the last seven days, the last eight days. I don't know what else you can do to get this.

So in my opinion, we deserve it, but people smarter than I have to make that decision, and whatever we get, we'll make the most of it.

**Q. I just want to get back to that statement. You said that the second quarter may have been one of the greatest ten minutes that you've been a part of. When something like that is unfolding in front of you and this amazing play, as a coach, do you just kind of become a spectator and just like appreciate it? How does that affect you?**

LISA BLUDER: You're just so thankful. Our whole staff, being able to be here in Minneapolis, to have the fans, to break the record, to have this fan support here, to assemble this group of women, and to see it all coming true in front of your eyes, it really feels good. It really does.

I really feel that the best description is we're grateful. We really are.

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