

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA
Target Center

Penn State Nittany Lions Carolyn Kieger Ashley Owusu Postgame Press Conference

Penn State - 80, Wisconsin - 56

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with the press conference for Penn State with an opening statement from Coach Kieger.

CAROLYN KIEGER: First of all, I just want to say how proud I am of our team. The last two games, we've played a really good defensive game. We've played personnel almost flawlessly. We did a great job on Serah Williams tonight, who's a phenomenal post player. So much respect for her game and her improvement over the last year. Can't say enough about her.

But our team, they weathered that matchup. They did a great job sending two, three people obviously to the boards tonight. That's something we've been talking about all year, wanting to own the defensive rebounding, and I think our team did a really good job of that tonight.

Obviously sharing the basketball, 20 assists. That's what we say, we're a much better team when we space the floor, play with pace, and share the basketball.

Really excited for this next round matchup. Obviously Iowa is doing phenomenal things for the conference, Caitlin Clark and what it means for the sport of basketball. Phenomenal opportunity for us, Big Ten tournament sold out with a great opportunity in front of us.

Q. Ashley, you came out in the first quarter very aggressively, and Wisconsin struggled to guard you, but then you took on more of a facilitator, kind of connector role the rest of the game. What did you see from UW's defense in the first quarter that caused you to exploit it and score so many points?

ASHLEY OWUSU: For me, just personally coming out, like



you said, coming out hot, coming out ready to play. Obviously we didn't have the outcome we wanted last game, so I wanted to make sure it came out a lot differently than last game.

Q. They said on TV that this is Penn State's first quarterfinal appearance since 2014. We talked about earlier how you do have experience playing in March Madness and making runs in conference tournaments. How does that feel from a personal standpoint to get your team to this point?

ASHLEY OWUSU: It feels great. Being a part of history is always awesome. Just being able to come out and do it with a team that I love and coaches that support me is awesome.

Q. Ashley, you guys outscored them really handily in terms of bench production. Getting that kind of output from Kylie, where she was nearly perfect, how big was that for the rest of you ladies to see and to really kind of help bolster things?

ASHLEY OWUSU: It's very huge. This is postseason, and if we want to get to where we want to get to, we're going to have to play a lot of games.

So being able to rely heavily on our bench players, our game changers, it's great.

Q. Coach mentioned that you guys got Iowa coming up. You're only about a month removed from playing them last time. Just what do you see in that matchup, and what do you do against Caitlin? Obviously for the fact we know she can do scoring, but 15 assists last time against you. How do you approach it this time?

ASHLEY OWUSU: Coming in ready to execute the game plan. I'm not exactly sure what the game plan is just yet, but I'm sure we'll get it after this. Coming in ready to play, ready to execute the game plan, and laser focused.

Q. Over your first five years now, you've had more wins in each of your first five years, and now this is the furthest you've made it. From a coach's standpoint,



you've had a lot of players come in and out. Some of them stuck with you through it all. Makenna's been here all five years. How does it feel for you to know that you're one of the last eight standing?

CAROLYN KIEGER: First of all, obviously really proud of our players. They've put a lot of blood, sweat, and tears into getting this program back on the map. It hasn't been easy, and we've done it the right way. We've built the foundation brick by brick.

When we came here, we wanted to put the jersey back in a better place and put it back where Penn State belongs, which is back playing deep into March. Can't say enough about our team like Makenna Marisa, she bleeds blue and white. She stuck through it all, through the good, through the bad, through the ugly.

Now I'm just so excited for her and her teammates to feel what it's like to play through March. They deserve it. They put a lot of hard work in. Really I'm just more elated for them and excited for them to feel what it feels like to be proud of themselves.

Q. Coach, you mentioned that Serah Williams did some damage against you all the first time. What specifically were you trying to do differently tonight as opposed to the first time? And what did you like from Ali Brigham, who was defending her one-on-one for some of the game?

CAROLYN KIEGER: We wanted to throw different people at her. Obviously we wanted to make it hard for her to get open looks. I think even tonight four of her points came from outside shots, which was great for us to bottle them up inside.

We sent two. We sent three, just really working on our double-teams and our gap defense to make it hard on her. She's such a phenomenal player.

I thought Ali did a great job wearing her out. Even though she only scored eight points, she was ducking in at the right time. She was making it hard for her on the offensive end and doing a great job bodying her up on the defensive end.

We knew going into the game we'd have to be physical with her and try to tire her out. Once again, kudos to our team for following the game plan.

Q. We all know last time you guys met Caitlin had a great game. I think the main force is really Hannah Stuelke, 47 points, 9 rebounds. What's it going to take to stop her?

CAROLYN KIEGER: Obviously she's a rim-running clinic. She puts it on every game. She plays so fast. She plays with a lot of heart. She crashes the offensive glass. We've got to get back in transition against her. We've got to keep her off the boards. We have to have better ball screen defense than we did first time around. She got a lot of open stuff off ball screens.

Obviously Caitlin is Caitlin. We have to do different schemes. I don't think you can go into Iowa and have one scheme to play. You have to have plan A, plan B, plan C, sometimes plan D all the way down to try to stop her. Stuelke and obviously their entire team do a great job with their synergy and how well they play together.

Q. Coach, you mentioned Ali, the job she did, the amount of help defenders that you guys had, Leilani Kapinus being an all-defensive team selection. How big was she today and being able to come back from that ankle injury too?

CAROLYN KIEGER: Leilani is -- she's a beast. She just really is. In my mind, she's the best defense player in the country. She's the best defender. She can guard 1 through 5. She can rebound. She can D you up 94 feet. She can stay on her feet in the half-court. I'm excited for the country to realize how good of a defender she is, and she's just going to keep getting better and better.

Can't say enough about what she's done not only tonight but throughout the whole year. Where she's really growing is her IQ on the defensive end -- short closeouts, playing personnel. You've seen her the last five or six games, really weathering that and making sure she's playing smart and not just hard.

Q. Going into tomorrow there's a lot of talk about Caitlin Clark's scoring, but how does her passing facilitating kind of throw a wrench in the game plan for you guys?

CAROLYN KIEGER: It's funny because obviously she's the best scorer in college basketball history. The crazy thing is people don't talk about her passing enough. She's got phenomenal vision. She sees plays before they happen. She's thinking two steps ahead. Obviously you need to have high hands.

I thought we did a good job obviously last game with her high hands. She had 12 turnovers. We're going to have to repeat that and really kind of get -- changing, throwing different bodies at her, longer defenders. Switching it up with how we're guarding ball screens.

Can't say enough about her dual threat with her scoring and her assists. I think, like I said, she doesn't get enough credit for how good of a passer she is, elite.

Q. Just curious, you guys had a lot of players out on the court today, no one really playing 30 minutes at all today. How important is the depth that you've built with this program in a tournament setting?

CAROLYN KIEGER: I'm glad you asked that question because I think that's our secret weapon all year. We've been talking about our depth and our versatility. When you're playing in March, that gives you such an advantage, right? We knew tonight that we have 12 starters on our team. I truly believe that. We call them the game changers.

Starting lineup goes out there. The game changers come in. Every single one of them could be a starter on our team. And our team buys into that. Our team buys into next woman up. It's just phenomenal.

No one played over 26 minutes tonight. So hopefully we have fresh legs tomorrow. That's what we're going to do. That's what we said is going to be our best thing about this team all year, and we're really going to buy into that here in March.

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