

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 8, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Michigan Wolverines

Kim Barnes Arico

Laila Phelia

Lauren Hansen

Postgame Press Conference

Michigan - 69, Indiana - 56

THE MODERATOR: Good evening, everyone. We will start the Michigan press conference with opening statement from Coach Barnes Arico. Go ahead.

KIM BARNES ARICO: Just really proud of our team, the way they battled back. We were down 17. We talked about some adjustments we would have to make in the second half.

We thought we started the game great defensively and then had a really bad second quarter. Just I think our confidence grew as the game went on.

I think Laila Phelia showed why she's one of the best players in the country, and I thought she did a tremendous job late when they started to really double her and try to load on her of finding Lauren. Lauren is one of the best shooters in the country, one of the best playmakers in the country. So they found each other.

But our team just battled and did a great job defensively against a really disciplined, tough Indiana team. It was a great basketball game, a great basketball game for our team and super excited to be advancing in the Big Ten tournament.

Q. It seemed like a switch kind of flipped in that third quarter. Can you guys talk about some of those halftime adjustments that you made to go from scoring 9 points in the first quarter to scoring 29 in the fourth.

LAUREN HANSEN: I just feel like in the locker room we came back in, and we all had things we wanted to talk about defensively, offensively, just getting movement, kind



of using our actions to the fullest. Like going through each thing, not just running through the motions.

And we knew that they were going to go on a run. They're a great team. But we would also go on our run. We just kept saying, this is our half, this is our half. We stuck to that and stuck to each other.

Q. Laila, for you, obviously another great performance tonight, but now that's 76 minutes played in about 24 hours. Now you've got to do it again tomorrow in 17 hours, if my math is correct. How do you just get your body physically prepared to try to put together another strong performance?

LAILA PHELIA: I feel like throughout the season Coach has done a great job of mentally preparing me for that and physically, of course, just getting all the recovery in that I need.

Overall I feel like just the mental preparation, onto the next.

Q. It seemed like in the second half you guys had a lot better ball movement. What were you seeing that helped facilitate that improved offense?

LAUREN HANSEN: Well, Laila and Jordan, they both draw a lot of attention, so they were able to just drive and move the ball, kick it out, and we could kind of space the floor a little bit. Chyra did a great job. Cam went to work.

When you're aggressive like that, they have to play you, and we just kept finding each other. That was the emphasis at halftime, just playing off each other and feeding off that. So I think that was the difference.

Q. Lauren, on that timeout in the fourth quarter, you hit the end of the shot clock three. The team already had momentum at that point, but how much did that feel like it was really when you guys got going downhill?

LAUREN HANSEN: To make a three with two seconds left on the shot clock, it was just a huge momentum. Jordan threw me the ball, and for her to have confidence in me like



that kind of just reignited me. Then we got a stop, came down, and we were like let's get some stops and let's finish this out.

So I think it was just a confidence boost for everybody.

Q. This is kind of a question just about scheme. It seemed like Chyra and Cam were kind of playing at the same time to get that double big rotation in. What did you kind of see from that, and how did you see that working through?

KIM BARNES ARICO: We track like all of our numbers, so it was funny, I ran down the end of the bench, and I asked our video coordinator like what was the tracking in the first half with those guys in together? Because I wanted them an opportunity to be in together. They're different. They complement each other really well.

We were fearful of some matchups, but I thought Chyra just did a phenomenal job guarding a guard, and she really knew where to be and was able to give a lot of help. Then it gave Cameron the opportunity to really take the post position where Chyra could be a great screener and facilitator.

So I thought they both played really well together, and we did have them out there for a period of time together where they did a great job.

Cameron is so great with her back to the basket and really made some big plays for us down the stretch in that run as well, whereas Chyra is a little more comfortable as a face-up.

Q. Lauren or Laila, obviously this game helps with NCAA Tournament. It clearly, if there's any doubt that you guys were getting in, you're getting in now. Could you just talk about just having that in hand now and knowing everything you do from now on sort of even continues to help with that.

LAUREN HANSEN: I think it's a confidence boost, but at the same time, we came here to win a Big Ten Championship. So that's the goal. That's just right now it's a bonus. We'll deal with all that after. We're just going to stay focused on the moment that we're in.

Q. Obviously a really quick turnaround for you guys. You guys play tomorrow. You guys are the top defensive team in the conference going against Iowa, the top offensive team in the conference, and obviously a dynamic player like Caitlin Clark. She had 49 last time that you guys played. What's the unique challenge in defending a player like that, and what

gives you guys confidence that as a team and as a defense you guys are prepared to beat them?

LAILA PHELIA: I feel like the biggest thing for us is just staying true to who we are as a team and continuing to do the little things and chip away. Caitlin Clark, she's a great player, so we all have to definitely tune in and help each other out on that.

Q. Laila, even when Mackenzie Holmes switched to guarding you in the fourth quarter when she subbed in, it seemed like you were able to keep your offensive momentum rolling. What enabled you to do that?

LAILA PHELIA: Just staying aggressive. Coach harped on it a lot before the game. So just continue to go repeat, telling myself, okay, Mackenzie Holmes switched up on me but drawing the foul.

Q. How did Mackenzie's status kind of being up in the air affect you guys' preparation? What were you anticipating coming into the game, and through the week, how did it impact you?

KIM BARNES ARICO: It was really unknown. We tried to read the Indy paper every single day to try to figure out if she was going to play or not. But we prepared for her. She's such a tremendous player. We prepared during the week to face her.

Then she came in the game, later in the game. We were prepared to have to defend her. So we prepared if they went small, five guards, which is how they started the game, and then we were ready if they went with their post players as well.

Q. Bouncing off that question about Iowa to begin with, now, as he said, it's such a quick turnaround, but everyone talks about Caitlin, but four other players scored in double figures, Hannah Stuelke had eight. How do you prepare your team, top defensive team in the conference, to guard a versatile Iowa team?

KIM BARNES ARICO: It's tough. They're a great team. They're one of the top teams in the country for a reason. They have the best player probably in the world right now on their team, who's playing with a tremendous amount of confidence.

But she's not the only player. They have a really good team. We got to go to their place and be a part of that special night for Caitlin and for Iowa, and that was extremely, extremely challenging for us.

We hung around for a good period of time, but they got us



down the stretch. I think this gives us another opportunity to maybe get them on a neutral court and see if we can be better on the defensive end tomorrow than we were at Iowa.

We know that we're going to have to play defense on multiple positions, and we've had to do that the last couple days with great shooters that Indiana had as well. But they're an amazing program. Indiana is an amazing program, two phenomenal coaches. We know that they'll be prepared.

You guys have touched on a lot, the load of our players going into day 3. We entered the tournament earlier this season, and we talked about it at shootaround earlier today, where we'd have to play three consecutive days to try to prepare us for the Big Ten tournament.

I know that their bodies may be fatigued, but they're playing on adrenaline right now, and they're trying to do something that we haven't done before. So they'll be fired up. Hopefully they won't look fatigued for you all tomorrow because we know that Iowa will play like this. So we've got to be ready to go.

Q. Coach, obviously Lauren had those three big threes down the stretch to kind of put them away. Can you just talk about the importance of those threes, the tough, contested shots that she can make.

KIM BARNES ARICO: We tried to switch actually at half to put Lauren in a different spot and Laila in a different spot because we felt like Laila would be able to get downhill. So instead of Lauren bringing it up, we put Laila in a position to try to attack and go downhill right away. Then we had Lauren as the person that was filling in her spot.

I probably told you guys, I rebound for Lauren every shootaround, and she's an exceptional, exceptional shooter. We just don't always get her in positions to shoot it because a lot of the times she's handling the ball. So we tried to make an adjustment and play to what we felt the strengths were today, and that was Laila having the ball in her hands and being the decision-maker and trying to attack, and Lauren filling those spots and trying to get her some open looks.

Q. You had three of the lower-seeded teams win the quarterfinals today. Does that just sort of reiterate the difficulty of this conference?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, that's something I feel like, when we were a 2 or a 3 or a 4 seed, like I try to emphasize a lot to the rest of the world because I don't know if everyone really appreciates how strong our

conference is from top to bottom. It's actually just getting better and better.

Next year when we add these other powerhouses, it's going to be even better and better. I just think that that speaks to obviously the parity of our league, but even from the NCAA selection committee, holy cow, look at this league. Look at the teams that have beaten other teams. Sometimes it depends when you play somebody or where you play somebody, but I think we've got some really darn good teams in our league. I think that was on display for everyone to see today.

Q. Laila Phelia's average, more than her previous career high in this tournament so far. How have you seen her really heat up and take charge in these key moments down the stretch?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Laila has been phenomenal, and I think she, like our team, is continuing to get better and better and better. I told her just walking over here how proud I am of her ability to read the screens, and they were icing her and trying to force her to go left. Cameron did a good job of switching the screen, and she did a good job of dragging it out. That's why Mackenzie Holmes was on her a few times.

I just think her growth and her understanding of the game is continuing to develop, and it's been on display. She's a tremendous player. She always talked about her freshman year when the team went to the Elite Eight, those seniors, like Naz Hillmon and Danielle Rauch, like they poured into her, and they carried her through that tournament.

Today I challenged her, like Laila, this is your time. This is your time to pour into those young ones and show them what it means to compete and to compete at this level. She pretty much did that today, yesterday, and it's proud moments as a coach to see your players really, it clicked the way it has for her the last couple days.

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