

# Big 12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Sunday, March 12, 2023

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Municipal Auditorium

Iowa State Cyclones

Coach Bill Fennelly

Ashley Joens

Lexi Donarski

Postgame Press Conference

Iowa State 61, Texas 51

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Iowa State. Coach?

BILL FENNELLY: It's really hard to put into words, obviously, but so proud of our team, so proud of our fans.

These are moments that they're going to remember. Not just winning, but you're going to remember what this environment was like for their whole life. We beat a great team. It was a great three days for us.

**Q. Bill, how would you explain the type of tournament that Ashley had?**

BILL FENNELLY: I'm not that smart! I really think it's one of those things where the one thing we talked with Ashley about as she was finishing was the great players show up at the biggest moments.

Not that she -- she doesn't need any validation by any means, but when you lead a tournament to a championship you're in rarified air there. I think that was something she was focused on when we came down here.

She was incredible. Incredible for three days.

**Q. Was there a stretch during this tournament that you felt like, okay, we are really headed in a good direction? This is a tournament we can win?**

BILL FENNELLY: You know, I don't know about a tournament we could win, but I felt like the last four minutes, last 3:59 of the Baylor game we did everything right. I think our kids understood what it took to be



successful here.

You had to beat three NCAA tournament teams, really good teams. I knew we could compete because every team we've played we've beaten. They've beaten us, too.

But we had a walk-through for 45 minutes this morning, and they were eerily focused. I knew they would come out ready to play. It was just could you make enough shots and could you make a rebound?

**Q. Coach, how do you describe the way your team has come together late in the season? Can you compare it to a team that you had in the past?**

BILL FENNELLY: I really can't think of one right now, but I think the biggest thing is we have, obviously, one of the best -- we have a First-Team All-American player; that helps.

But our group is connected. I've said that a lot. They really do have a lot of faith and trust in each other. I think everyone's role, they show up and they -- like today everyone gave us something.

I guess the last thing I would say is from a leadership standpoint, everyone talks about it, it's hard to get. Emily Ryan and Lexi Donarski, I wouldn't trade -- we have the best backcourt in the country when it comes to playing, competing, leading, taking responsibility.

I think all of that stuff kind of came together.

**Q. Do you think your team played their way into a top 4 seed today?**

BILL FENNELLY: Good question. I don't know. I mean, that's for someone else to decide. I would think that that was probably discussed. A, we have a really good team that's playing really well, and we have amazing fans that will show up.

But, whatever, we're going to watch the show here. We're going to have dinner because we couldn't get home, so we're going to watch it here. It never gets old. Besides

Christmas it's the greatest day of the year for me, Selection Sunday.

And to see Iowa State come up on the board representing this league, it's an amazing thing. Really proud of our team.

**Q. Bill, before the confetti swirled and the trophy and cutting down the nets, I happened to look over at you and wondered, what's going through your mind? You kind of ran your fingers through your hair like you were taking stock of the moment. I wonder what it was like for you last time in this building, first championship in 22 years.**

BILL FENNELLY: I think all that stuff you start thinking about. You know, former players, who did it, the memories I have of my parents and Deb's parents in Kansas City, the last time in this building.

Someone told me it will be the last Division I game ever played here. You just think about all the people that have allowed us to do what we do and the blessing that we have.

I work at the best place in the country for the best bosses in the country. It's just -- it's a moment. To be honest with you, there was a part of me thinking maybe it would be a good time to quit and retire! Might not trump that one.

But just everything. But mainly my family and what Deb's been -- it's hard to be a coach's wife, especially this coach's. But amazing to see the smiles on our kids' faces. It's what you do, why you do this.

**Q. Coach, we asked Vic what makes Ashley so hard to defend and he talked about the rest of your team. Talk about the supporting cast that makes you guys so tough to defend as a team.**

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, I think that's what makes great players great is how they interact and play off of one another.

Ashe, as hard of a cover as there is in the country, she can take the three, she can take it to the basket, and when people double team, we have a lot of other players that can shoot and get to the rim.

We are a very skilled team, and when you have five skilled players on the court it makes us hard to guard, because you have to focus so much on what Ashe is doing. Other people get open.

Tonight it just seemed like someone would hit a three,

someone would make a layup, someone would get to the free throw line. And when you get a good rotation, that's what happens.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for our student athletes?

**Q. Talk about finishing your Big XII career, Outstanding Player?**

ASHLEY JOENS: It means a lot. Obviously I got the opportunity to come back, and to be able to do it with this team and these coaches is as good as it gets. They work as hard as they can and are able to come out every day and compete.

I don't know how much sleep the coaches have gotten all weekend, but they put in a lot of effort to help prepare us and get us to where we are today.

**Q. Ashe, there was 50 seconds left when you were at the free throw line and the fans started chanting "MVP." What was that moment like for you?**

ASHLEY JOENS: I knew I had to make the free throws, of course, but I could hear them and it was special just to know that we had kind of pulled away.

Obviously there was still time left on the clock and we had to finish out the game, but to know that we were sitting in a pretty good spot at that point felt pretty good.

**Q. Lexi, what's changed for this team over the last, you know, five, six, seven games or whatever? Seems like there has been a second wind to you guys or you've kind of refound your mojo, I guess.**

LEXI DONARSKI: Yeah, I don't know if anything has necessarily changed, but we are playing well and we're playing together and we're willing to fight and do whatever we need to do to win games.

And if you look at the last three games we played, all of them were very different and we had to do things defensively against each of those teams, and we just bought into the game plan the coaches gave us and we were able to come up with the wins we wanted.

**Q. Ashley, did you hear what your sister did at halftime?**

ASHLEY JOENS: I did hear, and I think she should give me 50% of the money because I'm the only reason she's here!

**Q. Fair enough. For both of you, Lexi, you touched on**

**it, but from each game, Denae rebounds her own miss. Nya hits a big three off your pass I think. Can you talk about everyone having their moment amid this one big moment for everyone?**

LEXI DONARSKI: Yeah, I mean, I feel like different people did different things well in each game like what you were saying. That's what we needed out there. Everyone was willing to do what they needed to do to get the win.

**Q. Ashley and Lexi, your team coming together now in this moment, how excited does that make you to try to make a deep run in the NCAAs?**

ASHLEY JOENS: It's really exciting, and we've got a lot of momentum going and obviously we need a little bit of rest, but we're going to get back at it and figure out where we're going and who we are playing and get ready for that.

**Q. Coach, heading into this season, if I have my facts right, you guys hadn't beaten Baylor and Texas in the same season since 2020. How special was it to beat them during regular season and then both teams during the Big XII Championship?**

BILL FENNELLY: I think it's a great thing for our kids. Obviously Texas and Baylor are two of the most preeminent women's teams in the country, so if you do that you better be playing well. To do that twice this year, to beat Baylor twice this year and Texas twice this year, I think says a lot about our team.

You know you have to play well, and we've struggled with them mightily over the last few years. That's a credit to their programs and their coaches, but I think it does show that our team was willing, like Lex said -- you know, we talk a lot about fighting, fighting to the finish.

Our kids have done that; certainly did it this week for three days.

**Q. For either of you guys, it seemed like at the beginning of the game Texas defense was tightly on you. What changed so you could spread them out a little bit and up the scoring a little bit?**

ASHLEY JOENS: I think knocking down shots and spreading them out a little bit, being able to attack, and then kick and knock down some threes was huge in getting open looks.

**Q. Ashley, seemed like you were taking a lot of shots there under the basket. Can you speak on that physicality that Texas brings?**

ASHLEY JOENS: Yeah, Texas is really physical, really aggressive defensively, so you have to, when they get in foul trouble, attack the basket.

Obviously they don't want to foul and come out of the game so they're not going to play quite as tight, but they're very physical and you have to keep battling.

**Q. Ashley, since you've made a few trips to Kansas City now in your career at Iowa State, with this being the last game in this building, how will you look back at that experience?**

ASHLEY JOENS: Yeah, obviously looking back through all the years and everything that we've been through, obviously to look back and be able to remember this moment will be something really special. Especially in this building with this team and the coaches.

**Q. And Coach, as a follow-up on that, you talked about this year. Whether you're with the team or not next year, how do you feel about this tournament standing on its own in the other building?**

BILL FENNELLY: I'm going to get myself in trouble again. I like it exactly the way we're doing it now. We should play here; both tournaments should be at the same time. I've been saying that forever. I think this is a phenomenal facility. Our kids love playing here. The fans show up.

I don't know that -- and Kansas City does such an amazing job. Besides the NCAA Tournament, this is the best weekend in college basketball in my opinion, and to separate them, we'll see what happens.

A building is a building. It's about the people inside the building to me. I think you could ask these guys, this was a hell of a day for them. I think that's a celebration that will be missed by a lot of people.

**Q. Lexi, you talked about three different opponents that you guys have faced. Can you talk about how that's going to help with the NCAA Tournament? Because you have been able to defeat three teams that were very different.**

LEXI DONARSKI: Yeah, I mean, all three teams we played have very, very different styles, both offensively and defensively, but that prepares us for the tournament, because now no matter what type of team we face, whether they're super physical, whether they run a ton, whatever it may be, we have some success against that and we know we can have success against them.

**Q. Ashley, you were about to turn one and Lexi, you**

**were not born yet, the last time Iowa State won a Big XII Tournament. What does it mean to you guys? You've seen pictures of those teams. You know about Angie Welle and Megan Taylor and all those great players. What does it mean to be part of that now as a champion at Iowa State?**

LEXI DONARSKI: It feels great. It's something we have been talking about for a long time, at least as long as I've been here, for the last three years. It's something we wanted to do and this year. We really wanted to get the regular season, but things didn't go exactly the way that we wanted them to. So we came into this and we're like, here we go. We gotta win three games. We can do this.

Yeah, it feels really, really good.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

ASHLEY JOENS: I've talked to her a couple times and she was a great player, great person, and to have my name associated with her name means a lot.

**Q. Ashley, wondering out of all the things you have accomplished in your career, where does winning this title set amongst all those things?**

ASHLEY JOENS: I would say right at the top, for sure. We've got more work to do now.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, ladies. Congratulations.

Remaining questions for Coach?

**Q. When you think of losing Stephanie and then you guys went on that stretch where you lost three in a row, really tough probably plane trip back from West Virginia. At that point you have two days to prepare for Texas, and you win that game. Is this sort of the season a story about resilience for you guys?**

BILL FENNELLY: I don't think there is any doubt. You lose three in a row and you got Texas and Baylor next. It's not looking -- it's not looking real good.

And I will tell you, we practiced -- we flew back late on Saturday, practiced on Sunday, played Texas on Monday. The Sunday we practiced, we practiced 30 minutes, and it was the best practice we had all season. I told them, I told our staff, I'm like, I don't know if we're going to beat Texas, but we're going to show up.

Then it just seemed like the season -- it didn't go easy, but I think it did turn. Obviously, that win was a big win for our team; it got us over the -- hadn't beaten Texas in a while.

But that Sunday afternoon, I was surprised, you know, because we were kinda down, no question.

But, again, when you have the kind of kids that we have, I shouldn't be surprised, I guess, but that was a big day for us, in a lot of ways.

**Q. When you talk to different pro coaches they tell you what somebody can or can't do and you hear a lot about Ashley might not be able to do this or that. How big do you think this weekend was? Can you make the case of why she is a first-round draft pick?**

BILL FENNELLY: I think this weekend probably -- I would be shocked if it didn't solidify it in some people's minds -- obviously we talk to all the teams. There are teams that didn't think she was a first-round pick, and there are teams that love her.

I don't know how you could watch that kid compete and score -- basketball is about scoring, and in five years, showed up every day. I think she missed two practices because she had a slightly tweaked ankle, and she was pissed that I didn't practice her for two days.

That's the kind of kid or young professional that you want in your franchise, in your community. You can see, like, little kids love her. She'll be a great representative of that league, and whoever takes it is going to be very, very happy that they took her.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, congratulations on your championship title. We wish you well representing the Big XII in the NCAA Tournament.

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