

2021 DI Women's Volleyball Championship - 1st & 2nd Round

Friday, December 3, 2021
West Lafayette, Indiana, USA
Holloway Gymnasium

Purdue Boilermakers
Coach Dave Shondell
Grace Cleveland
Caitlyn Newton
Jena Otec
Press Conference

Purdue 25-27, 19-25, 25-15, 25-6, 15-5

Dayton

COACH SHONDELL: Just a tremendous match tonight. And I want to lead off by congratulating Dayton on a great match and a great season. I have tremendous respect for their coaching staff. One of the best coaching staffs in the country.

And so when we get beat the first two sets, it was because their team played very, very well. And they did a lot of really good things. The easy thing to do is to say, well, we didn't play well. Well, we didn't play well because Dayton is a really good team. They came out very well prepared.

I can't define what happened after the second set. These guys would have a better idea, but certainly a light bulb went on. We came out and played with a totally different look on our face, with great intensity, almost an electrical current going through the entire team to play at the level that we played at, to come back from the dead, to be able to advance to the next round.

And I really just kind of sat back and watched the last three. I wasn't that engaged, because when the team starts to play like that, you're better off staying out of it and just kind of letting them do what they were doing. It was again a magical moment.

But we're fortunate that we're moving on. And there's lessons to be learned in every match you play. And I think



there's certainly matches or lessons to be learned from the one tonight that we can take forward.

But very proud of the team. They could have folded when they were down 2-0 but they did not. They did the absolute opposite, which is a real sign of a champion. Played with just incredible heart tonight.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by student-athletes Caitlyn Newton, Jena Otec and Grace Cleveland.

Q. Caitlyn, watching you play for five years, you showed more emotion tonight than I've ever seen. Do you kind of get that sense of this is it; we've got to bring it and leave it all out there because for a lot of players on this team, if you lose today, it's the end of your college volleyball careers anyway?

CAITLYN NEWTON: Definitely. After the second set, we just kind of brought it in and talked for a few minutes, and I think that really helped us to calm us down. And volleyball is like a momentum sport. And just if you can get energy and just bring everything that you can, it will like swing your way and that's what happened. And I didn't want to lose and I didn't want it to be our last game today. So I got excited.

Q. Jena, like Caitlyn, you decided to come back this year. Through two sets you shanked as many serves I've ever seen. Struggled a little bit and then turned it on. Same question: Was it a sense I'm not ready for this to be over yet and I've got to step up here?

JENA OTEC: Definitely. And going into the match, we knew that Dayton was probably one of the tougher serving teams that we've seen. And passing too is pretty difficult whenever you are facing a tough serving team like them.

And I think we made some adjustments and kind of got a feel for where they were trying to serve us and how they were trying to serve us. But, again, it's an emotional thing. It's a mental thing. And I think we kind of reset our minds a little bit after that second set -- me, Skimmy (phonetic), Maddie Schermerhorn and Mo -- have talked about we played a little bit tense. We were passing a little tense which caused us to bring the ball off the net. But I think

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

everybody released that tension and allowed us to play really smooth volleyball.

Q. Coach and Caitlyn, 17 attack errors on the night total and only one of them came in those final three sets. Can you talk about how much, how efficient your team has been these past two nights but more specifically tonight with those errors?

COACH SHONDELL: Well, the last three sets looked pretty good. The first two, not quite as encouraging. But, again, you have to give a lot of that credit to Dayton, as I said earlier.

But this team, when they're locked in, they're as fun to watch as any team in the country. Just ask the people out there. They're just volleyball fans. They love this team. I get letters and e-mails and texts every day about people that don't even know; they just love to watch this team because of how they play.

And it's a mature team. With maturity and experience should come less errors. But I hadn't noticed that until you pointed out that there was only one hitting error in the last three sets. It was unbelievable.

CAITLYN NEWTON: It was my error. And it was really dumb.

[Laughter]

I think that after the second set, we just kind of relaxed and played how we've been playing in practice all season. And I'm glad that it finally showed in the game how well we can play together and it was really exciting to play and I'm excited for the next game.

Q. Grace, you combine on a lot of blocks tonight with Raven, I believe Taylor towards the end. How effective is that, right, and combining with the two young players?

GRACE CLEVELAND: Oh, yeah, a lot of the blocks definitely came from them. I think I struggled in the beginning really figuring out how to line up. But they just worked their butts off and really worked to close each block. And that's what you need from a middle. And they both were doing that and closing well.

Q. Jena, you talked about passing, getting a little better as the match goes on, but you as an experienced player had the mindset to let a couple of those balls go, and you made a lot of athletic digs, so did Caitlyn, too, props to you. What goes into your mind right before it clips the out-of-bounds mark?

JENA OTEC: We were struggling in the beginning with our passing. And I was trying to make up for it with my defense and it just kind of came to us. They were serving the ball really tough. And we have thought to ourselves, like, honestly, like, no way they can continue to serve this tough at us without making those errors, because they weren't making a ton of service errors in the beginning.

I think we just kind of dialed in and remained focused and became more mentally tough. And I think that that's what helped us in the last three sets.

Q. Coach, been in this media room many times, basketball, football. What's it say to you to see the fan support for your team moving forward, just Purdue in general, and how the fans turn out? Doesn't matter what the sport is, just the enthusiasm from the fans to support your team?

COACH SHONDELL: Just pride. I mean, it makes us feel really good. Our program and all the programs you're referring to, you work really hard. You want Purdue Nation to love watching you play. And we've sold out every single match at home this year. I think people were hungry to go do something -- as you know, it's been a tough year. But they're out but we need them to continue to be out. We've got big matches ahead for this team.

And so I don't know where we're going to be yet. We don't know if we're going to be at Pitt or if we're going to be here. We know we're going to be one of those two places next weekend. And Boiler Nation, we're asking your help, because it makes a big difference.

When these guys got rolling and that place was roaring, Dayton felt that. They certainly felt that. So it was fun. Fun moment, but thank you.

Q. You mentioned you said you didn't have really words to describe what happened in those first two sets but --

COACH SHONDELL: I've got some words. I just don't want to use them.

Q. I just mean from a game-plan perspective, was there anything that Dayton did that was different than you were expecting that maybe put you on your ears a little bit?

COACH SHONDELL: No, that was what was different. Aside from serving the ball really tough, which you can't really tell a lot when you watch a team play how tough they're serving and what a difference it might be against

you, if they're serving tougher or not.

But they actually were doing the exact same things we knew they were going to do. They ran a couple of plays right out of the gate and we didn't respond to them very well.

And so that was an indication that this isn't going very well, which is unusual for this team because they're very coachable. You go through the plan and they get it. But we were still a little bit late on some plays right out of the gate. And I thought that's not a good start. And it just took us a while. Luckily it's a five-set match.

Q. Grace, you played a team tonight that hadn't lost in, I think, ten weeks. So did you feel like we've got to put some pressure on them and put them in situations they haven't felt? They didn't lose in their conference season. I think it was middle of September they lost to Michigan. Did you feel if we can get a lead on them build something, we'll put them in positions they haven't felt in two and a half months?

GRACE CLEVELAND: Even just from watching them yesterday we could tell they are, like Caitlyn said, they lean on momentum a lot and they're a very energetic and passionate team. They play with a lot of passion. So once they got those leads in sets 1 and 2, they definitely ran with it.

So going into set 3 we knew that we had to start off strong because if we didn't they had that energy and the momentum to keep going.

Kudos to them. Like even watching them yesterday I could tell they played with a lot of passion. And so it was definitely important that we came out started each set strong.

Q. You've talked about the experience of this team all year long. Does a less experienced team fold in that situation? How much does that really help that they did not, they weren't -- they were mature enough to handle being down 2-0?

COACH SHONDELL: Depends on how tough they are. I look at two of the people that were the ring leaders out there. And one was a sophomore and one was a freshman. I thought Trammell was a difference maker. When she and Raven started blocking, getting their hands on every ball -- they got hands as big as a steak -- but it took everybody.

But obviously the veteran players, the biggest thing -- they've already pointed out -- when your back's up against

the wall and you have big dreams and all of a sudden they're going to end if you don't wake up, you wake up. And I thought they did a nice job of that.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.