

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Kent State vs Notre Dame

Saturday, March 23, 2024

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Purcell Pavilion

**Notre Dame Fighting Irish
Head Coach Niele Ivey**

Anna DeWolfe

Sonia Citron

Media Conference

Notre Dame 81, Kent State 67

THE MODERATOR: We're going to get started with an opening statement from Coach Ivey and then to question and answer for the student-athletes.

NIELE IVEY: Well, really excited about this win. First, I would like to thank South Bend with this sold-out corrode. Energy was amazing. We had the most student tickets and student section of our program's history, so that was really excited for that and just excited to see the buzz that's here in South Bend because of women's basketball and obviously our program.

It was a little ugly I felt like defensively. We found a way with foul trouble with this team. I thought these two did a phenomenal job of just leading us, starting with A.D. It's her first NCAA game, so I was really, really excited for her.

Coming into this game that was something we talked about in the recruiting process of you wanting to go postseason, and it meant a lot to me today and the fact that you were the last person to get called in the starting line-up. I thought that was just icing on the cake. Really happy the way that A.D. started this.

The game, I thought she shot the ball really well. I thought we had a lot of great support and a lot of great things happen within our entire team, but I thought Sonja was so solid for us. She had a quiet almost 30 piece. Always so solid. Does so much for us.

We're just looking forward to Monday's matchup. Again, survive and advance, and really proud of this group.



THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. For Anna, you got off to a hot start, like Coach said. How did you compose yourself with this being your first NCAA Tournament game and kind of give your team what it needed in that moment in the first quarter?

ANNA DeWOLFE: I was actually talking to one of my classmates the other day about enjoying every moment and knowing that I get another chance to step on this court and wear this jersey. It just means a lot. Enjoying every second and try to remind myself why I'm here and why I'm doing what I'm doing, and truly enjoying every second I get to step on the court with my friends.

Q. Sonia, Coach called a time-out midway through the fourth, and then you went on a 10-2 run after that. Just kind of how did you all compose yourself because Kent State was making its run, but then you kind of made the run that closed the game out.

SONIA CITRON: I think, again, just staying poised. Basketball is a game of runs, and we knew that it was our mistakes. We were doing it to ourselves. We just had to clean it up and just lock in and just, again, stay poised.

They went on their run, so just locking on defense and just keep pushing it.

Q. Sonia, it seemed like a lot of your passes were coming straight from Hannah, especially on the break. Can you just talk about the chemistry that you two have developed over the course of this season, especially with this being her first season?

SONIA CITRON: Yeah, Hannah is a great point guard. She's going to find you if you are open. I think just credit to her. She was finding me in transition, and I was running trying to get ahead of Kent State so, I think she just did a good job finding me.

I mean, it's coming to the end of the season, so I think we've just been playing together for so long, so we've kind

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of just built that chemistry just playing together.

Q. Anna, like Coach said, this was your first NCAA Tournament game. How was it that you were able to get off to such a nice shooting start in that first quarter with all the jitters that come with the tournament, and obviously it must have been kind of mind-boggling that you were able to get so much success early on?

ANNA DeWOLFE: I think just locking into our scout and knowing what we have to do as a team and just go in and play our game.

Q. Sonia, just following up on the passing question, the spin pass that Hannah got to you, maybe you don't even remember it because it's so routine. I just wondered if that's routine for her in practice?

SONIA CITRON: Was that the bounce pass?

ANNA DeWOLFE: Yeah.

Q. On the bounce.

SONIA CITRON: I couldn't even see the pass because the Kent State girl was in the line of it, so I just saw the bounce pass coming to me. I honestly didn't even see her pass it, but knew she was going to find me through that little, I don't know what you call it, but yeah, I didn't really see it. Credit to Hannah, she's a great passer.

Q. It seemed like the offense got a little bit bogged down in the third quarter, and Coach likes to talk about what you can learn from games both wins and losses. Maybe what do you guys take as a learning experience from this game?

SONIA CITRON: I think regarding the third quarter -- was that your question? The third quarter and our offense?

I think we were just getting stagnant. I think we were settling for outside shots. Just keeping the ball moving and driving, kicking, and just keep moving. I think we were getting a little stagnant.

Q. Anna, how important was it for you to play in an NCAA Tournament in your career?

ANNA DeWOLFE: That was the biggest reason why I transferred. When I got on my first call with Coach Ivey, she said to me, like, This is what you want, this is where you need to come. She said to me that, If you come here, we're going to win a championship. The ACC Tournament was definitely super special, but being here in March Madness is even more special.

Q. What was it like waking up this morning knowing you were going to play in an NCAA Tournament game for the first time in your career?

ANNA DeWOLFE: It was really exciting. It's that simple. It was really exciting.

Q. Can you elaborate on what enabled you to have that kind of spark you had and sparked that 18-0 run?

SONIA CITRON: I think my teammates were just finding me, and I was just getting good positions to shoot, and I was knocking them down. Then I think I was getting a lot of my points off of just transitioning, so it's pretty easy just open layups, yeah.

Q. For either one of you guys. The assist number was pretty high in this game. How important is it for you to have multiple players to touch every possession and share the ball around and get the feel of the game early on?

ANNA DeWOLFE: I think that's what makes our team so special. We have such -- not depth, but like depth in who can score and whose night it's going to be. I think that's why it makes it so hard to guard us because it's anyone's given day.

Q. Then going to off the depth, you had the foul trouble later on today. How do you guys work through that through the moment when you know that there's not many people that you can have come off the bench and you have to hold yourself accountable on defense?

ANNA DeWOLFE: Yeah. Coach talks a lot about adjusting to the refs. I think we struggled a little bit with that today, myself included. I think just adjusting to what the refs are calling, it's really important for us, especially down the stretch.

Q. Just curious, Coach mentioned the environment. The stadium was filling up 30, 45 minutes before the game and had great buzz to the arena all night. I would be curious to hear the student-athletes' perspective on what it was like tonight out there.

SONIA CITRON: Yeah, it was amazing. Playing basketball in that kind of environment just seeing how much support we have from our students, just all of South Bend, it's an incredible feeling. I think it really just inspires us.

Playing basketball on that court after you hit a three or



good defensive stop, whatever it is, just hearing the crowd, it really plays into the game, so it meant everything.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you to our student-athletes. Questions for Coach Ivey.

Q. I asked Sonia about that time-out. I'm curious why you thought you needed to take that in that moment and what was said and then what you thought of the response by the team as well?

NIELE IVEY: I thought they were gaining momentum from our defensive lapses, and I thought we turned the ball over multiple possessions. So I wanted to regroup with the group, with the team, and talk about what we needed to do defensively.

Like she mentioned, I thought we settled for a lot of outside jumpers, so we didn't get a chance to get either downhill or paint touches. That's what I talked about. We needed to regroup and really focus on our defensive lapse that is we were having at that moment.

Q. Speaking of defense, with the foul trouble, it seems like you guys have done a good job of staying out of it even with the low numbers. Do you feel like that's as bad as it gets with three players finishing with four? Obviously fouling out is possible, but if that's as bad as it gets and it does get better, then do you think that you're in a pretty good spot knowing what you need to do the rest of this tournament?

NIELE IVEY: Absolutely. Unfortunately, we had a game versus Pitt where I had Maddy out with a concussion, fouled out Nat, so we ended with almost having to play one of our walk-ons that turned into a scholarship player.

We've been in this environment or had this experience before, so I'm hoping that that was the worst of it. But like A.D. said, you have to adjust, and I didn't think that we adjusted in a timely manner. I thought we fouled and had some defensive lapses that put us in a bad situation with foul trouble. Hopefully that was a lesson for us, and then we could do better on Monday.

Q. You won a National Championship as a player and another one as an assistant coach. You know what this tournament is like. Hannah and Anna had not played in the tournament before this, so did you tell them anything specific about playing in this tournament before today?

NIELE IVEY: Yes. I told the entire team just in general of March Madness and what that means and also just saw that conversation with A.D. and another conversation with

Hannah. When you have never been in this moment, you don't understand the magnitude of it.

I knew that they were both going to be really excited. Again, having A.D. have this moment, but also being the last person in the starting line-up, I thought that was just really special for her. It is a constant conversation.

I talked to them about watching games so they can see what it feels like with other teams. There's a lot of upsets that happened yesterday on the men and women's side, so we talked about that and what that means as far as coming out here with the sense of urgency to play great basketball for 40 minutes no matter what the seeding or no matter having home court advantage. So we've talked about it all week.

Q. When you were addressing the crowd after the last regular season game, you more or less indirectly gave a plea to have the tournament committee have games here for the tournament. Once you realized that you were, in fact, going to host the tournament, what was going through your mind?

NIELE IVEY: I was so excited. The last regular season game, sold out arena. It was so packed. The energy was amazing. The buzz in South Bend is just incredible. I was really grateful, and I was praying that we had the opportunity to bring great women's basketball back here and to play here. So that was a really big blessing.

Credit to the team. We had to play five ranked teams right after that -- I mean, in that whole stretch, and three games back-to-back in the ACC Tournament. We worked to put ourselves in this position, so I'm really grateful.

Q. Your man defense in the first half was really good. I can understand why you started out in that, but what's the calculator on when you have to get out of that to go to the zone? What pushed you the other direction?

NIELE IVEY: Well, foul trouble, number one. And I thought they were doing a great job of getting downhill. You could tell off a make-or-miss, they were headed to the rim. I felt like we needed to have a little bit more containment within our zone and just try to slow them down. Sometimes that is what forces me to do it.

Q. The Kent State coach yesterday said that the analogy is Hannah looks like a kid at recess on a sugar high. It looked like in the third quarter maybe that was true. What turned up the volume, the gear for her? It looked like she found another gear in the third quarter.

NIELE IVEY: Yes. I think probably the energy of the game. Probably a little bit of jitters initially. Some of her shots weren't falling and then she finally got a couple of steals, got a couple of easy, wide-open baskets in full court off of her defensive energy, and I thought that really ignited her. Got to the free-throw line. So she is saw some shots go down. I think that's when she got her second wind.

Q. Just curious, obviously you guys took a big lead when you held them scoreless for seven minutes in the first quarter. Got out to a big run in the second quarter, but they kept hanging around. I'm just curious, you obviously watched a lot of film on them. You don't get to play them much. What did you make of Kent State because they just would not go away all game long?

NIELE IVEY: They're a really tough team. I've watched them a lot. He does a great fantastic job. They have a lot of three-level scorers. They play with tenacity and are very disciplined. They play really good defense and force you to take a lot of contested twos.

I thought they played really well. They've come off of the MAC Championship. They're playing at a high level. Like I said, he does a really great job there. I was very impressed by them.

Q. Just curious what you made of Sonia's play today. It just seemed like all the time she's that player that can give you the big bucket when you need it. It's not like y'all needed a bunch of big buckets today, but she got a bunch of them anyway. Just how good was she tonight?

NIELE IVEY: She was fantastic tonight, and she's exactly -- she's what we needed as far as just settling our offense down. Again, we took a couple of outside jumpers and didn't get a lot of the O boards that I wanted, and we were kind of one shot and done. I thought when the ball went through her hands, something great happened.

She shot with confidence. She took the right shots. She played with great pace. She's one of those players defensively or offensively that I know I can count on. She's one of our glue players that does so many things well, and she really helped us get going today.

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