

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Creighton vs Illinois

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Moody Center

Illinois Fightin' Illini

Shauna Green

Adalia McKenzie

Genesis Bryant

Media Conference



2023. So just being able to be the change of the program and, hopefully, the start of a new beginning, it's a blessing, and I'm just very grateful to be a part of that, and hopefully, this program just continues to soar after we leave.

Q. How much did playing in the Big Ten prepare y'all for the NCAA Tournament, just kind of surviving that gauntlet, what you guys had to play during the regular season?

ADALIA MCKENZIE: Yeah, I would say the Big Ten conference is a very elite and hard conference. You're playing the best teams every night. Different caliber of teams, different height and skill, really good post players, really good guards. I feel like the Big Ten definitely prepared us for this moment.

We played Creighton, and we've seen teams like Creighton before. I just feel like we feel really prepared because we see the best of the best almost every single night.

Q. Coach, we'll begin with an opening statement from you.

SHAUNA GREEN: Super excited to be here. Obviously, this is what our goal was setting out for this season, come in with an experienced team back after winning the WBIT championship last year and making the NCAA Tournament in our first year at Illinois. We're just super excited to be here, but also this core group has been here before, so our goal is to come in here and to compete and to go 1-0.

Really proud of this team. We've been through, obviously, a lot this year. Had a lot of adversity thrown at us with injuries and illnesses, and they just continued to fight. They're so connected, so together. It's our core group that have been together for three years, since we got the job here.

To see them be able to get to this point again and to get back to the NCAA Tournament, I could not be more happy and more proud of the group that we have, and just a special, special group of young women, and I absolutely love this team and ready to play tomorrow.

Q. For either player, how much did last year's experience winning the WBIT kind of help you and prepare you for tournament play this year?

ADALIA MCKENZIE: I'll say the WBIT definitely was a great experience for us and just knowing what it takes mentally and physically, just having that relentless pursuit of just going 1-0 every game and not letting anything get in the way. It's the end of the year, so everybody is tired and just not letting anything, again, stop you from the goal of, again, winning the championship.

I feel like we were really connected that game, and the experience of the season kind of led up to that moment. It was a hard season, but we ended strong, and we just put everything together. I definitely believe that will prepare us for this tournament, a tournament that we dreamed of being in, and I'm really excited for it.

Q. Genesis, you transferred into this program a couple years back, and you've been here with the program now a few post-seasons. Talk about how that experience with the team, getting more involved with the program, has helped you.

GENESIS BRYANT: Yeah, when I was in my previous program, I went to a Sweet 16 and an Elite 8, so been there, seen what it's like, seen what it's like to just be in that atmosphere, what it takes as leadership, and just seeing that, I really value that experience that I got from there.

Then, just being here, like I said, going through times in the past three years when, before us, they didn't go in since



Q. You've now been here and done that in the tournament. How does that help you as a coach?

SHAUNA GREEN: Yeah, the more experience you have in the NCAA Tournament, I think, obviously, the better. You know what to expect. But the most important thing is that your players have experience with it. A coach can have been here and done a lot of things, but for them to have -- our core group to have played in this before I think is a big piece.

Obviously, as we're building this program, our goals and what we want to do is be able to get to the NCAA Tournament, have this be what we do every year, and then continue to win games and go further and further.

The most important thing is experience for our players, and I'm glad that we got that year with, again, our core group under our belt in year one.

Q. What makes Kendall such an effective defensive rebounder, because 6'2" doesn't necessarily scream great presence, but she's producing at an elite rate. What makes her so effective?

SHAUNA GREEN: First off, that 6'2" is a lie, so whoever did our -- she's 6'1" on a good day, and that's what she does even more unbelievable. She's so undersized, and going up in our league, everyone is 6'2", 6'3", 6'4", 6'5", 6'6". Just absolutely amazing how she does what she does at her size. I wish I could sit here and say we taught her all that. A lot of it in rebounding with KB, she has a knack for it. She has a feel for going after the ball, where it's going to come off.

The most important thing about it is, she has a great deal of pride and passion to rebound. That's what rebounding is; rebounding is heart.

I still tell her she could probably get two or three more a game if she just boxed-out a little bit more, but she just goes. I know even as a player, sometimes your best rebounders aren't your best box-out people, but it's your ones that just go get it.

Credit to her. Again, what she does at her size is absolutely unbelievable.

Q. Some fans around Texas probably remember Coach McEntire. What has she brought to your staff in the three years she's been with you?

SHAUNA GREEN: Yeah, and she was with me at Dayton before she came to Texas, so I forget how many years -- four years together at Dayton. Then she left me there and

came down here to be an assistant for Vic, and then when I got the job, was able to get her back. She's absolutely critical to our success. She's elite in a lot of different areas in terms of basketball, in terms of relationship building, mentoring.

So she has been a key piece to building this program and the turnaround that we've done. I couldn't do it without her, and really my entire staff. I say it all the time; the head coach usually gets the blame, gets the credit, but you cannot do it without the people around you, and all the success that we have is our players and our staff. That's who gets the credit for all of this.

But Calamity is an unbelievable coach, she's an unbelievable person, and I'm glad that she's on our side right now and not the other.

Q. You have two players that average over 28 minutes a game and three that average over 30 something. What does that consistency mean as you head into the postseason and this tournament?

SHAUNA GREEN: You know, I hope it's an advantage and not the other way -- this two weeks has been good for us. Obviously, we came into this season with really -- I was so excited because it was our deepest team. Obviously, we've been at Illinois for three years. This was going to be our deepest team we've ever had. And then injury after injury after injury after injury. So now we're down to, you know, we'll probably play about six tomorrow. I mean, at this time of the year, that can be good, and then it can also maybe be bad with your depth.

But it's one good thing, I think that the players know, you can play. I'm going to let them play through mistakes. I'm going to -- I think that's huge. I think when you can go out there and not worry about a lot of that stuff and play free, I think that's an advantage to us.

The other good thing is, they're used to doing it. We've done this now since January. They've logged 30-some -- most of our guys play 40 minutes a game. So again, in this setup, it's a little bit easier, too, than a Big Ten Tournament. If we win tomorrow, at least you get one day, instead of having to play day after day.

Q. Your players were asked about it, and you mentioned the WBIT. What's the value of being able to win a championship? It's a different tournament, but it's a title. What do you get from that?

SHAUNA GREEN: I think it's such a valuable experience. The thing was, again, I think you have to look at every program is different. When we came here and took the job

three years ago, they hadn't been to an NCAA Tournament since 2000. So, to make it in our first year was obviously huge, huge steppingstone for us.

To tell you the truth, I thought if I was going to -- it probably would have flipped. I thought maybe the WBIT first year and then, hopefully, an NCAA Tournament, but we kind of sped it up a little bit and got there quick.

Then last year, we had some ups and downs in our season with high expectations, and to make the WBIT, our team initially was not -- they not thrilled about it because you want to be in the NCAA Tournament. I gave them a couple days, and then we addressed them, and we're going to this tournament and winning it. If we're going to be in the WBIT, we're winning the damn thing.

They kept that mindset the whole time, and for them to be able to -- a tournament setting with a group that has -- we're just starting to get together, to be able to learn how to win in March is absolutely key.

We played in April. Anytime you can play in April, only a couple teams can do that. To be able to cut down nets and to win a championship, like you said, is -- I don't care what tournament it is. It's huge. It's hard to win championships.

Now they understand what it takes to win in March. They understand the grind of it. They understand the pressure of it, and they also understand what winning a championship feels like, and that is fun, and you want more.

Q. I think if I do the math correctly, it's about 16 days since you guys last played between this game and that game, and part of it is an early exit from the Big Ten Tournament. Do you like that long break between the conference tournament and the NCAA Tournament or would you like to see the conference tournament, maybe a week separating the two?

SHAUNA GREEN: I go back and forth with that. I think it's a good question. But I think in the end, I do like it early. Obviously, you had to remind me about the early exit, so I don't like that.

But you want to be playing a little bit later. Then it's nice to get that week to refresh, to get a little healthier, depending on where you're at. I do think it's good. I know some of the men's teams, I've heard -- talked with coaches, and they don't really like it because if you're playing in the championship or even in the semis, you're going -- you've only got a few days, a couple days' prep and not really time off.

For us in our situation this year with our health, it was huge. I mean, last week, the week after the Big Ten, we've only practiced two or three days in two weeks with our full five starters. That's kind of how we've been banged up still.

For us, it was just one of those years that two weeks, three weeks, give me as much time as we possibly can to try to heal up.

Q. If you could just scout Creighton for us real quick and what kind of a matchup it is for you.

SHAUNA GREEN: Man, Creighton, I've played them before. We've played them when we were at Dayton, and they're really good. They're really, really good. They're really, really hard to guard, as you guys know. This is a tough draw.

But in the NCAA Tournament, everyone is really good. They present some problems for everyone, trying to guard them and how they can shoot the three at such an elite level. They're very old, just like us. When you have an old team that has been in that system with how they play offensively, they have that thing down and their motion and how they play offensively.

I just think what Jim has done there has just been unbelievable. I think he's one of the best coaches in the country and one of the most consistent programs that there is. So, nothing but respect for Creighton. We have our hands full. We've got to be ready to guard, and we've got to be ready to move, and we can't be tired because they're going to wear you down, they're going to move nonstop.

It'll be a tough one, but we're excited and we're prepared.

Q. Makira obviously hasn't played the last couple months, but what's her value been with you guys and helping navigate the season?

SHAUNA GREEN: I just talked to her actually the other day after practice, and the energy that she brings every day. She had an appointment, something the other day, and she wasn't at practice. You can feel when she's not there. She's that vocal, the energy she brings. So, where she's at now in terms of just, like, her involvement, her engagement of just pouring into her teammates has been really critical for us.

I said it the other day, I'm like, man, don't get me wrong, I miss your 20 or whatever, and everything you give us on the floor, but I'm just very grateful for you for bringing that energy every day even when you're not playing, and we need you. I told her, we need you to bring that when we're



down in Texas. I need you to bring that in these practices. She's just been unbelievable.

You've got to understand, imagine how hard it is for her. This is going into your last year, and to not be able to play, and then for her to really just pour into the team, I think speaks a lot for her and the type of person she is.

Q. Just the experience this time around versus two years ago, what do you feel like this group can carry from that, that you feel will be beneficial this time around?

SHAUNA GREEN: Yeah, shoot, I think about where we were in that first year and how much further ahead we are now in every aspect. Again, when you have a core group that has been together for three years, that doesn't happen a lot anymore in college basketball. So, we've gained a lot of valuable experience throughout that NCAA Tournament, throughout the WBIT run last year, and I think this team, they understand what's at stake. They understand we're not just happy to be here. We want to win.

Obviously, that's going to be tough. We have a great opponent. But that experience, I think, will be very valuable for us, and having seniors out there where if you lose, you're done, and that urgency of it all is different. It's different than when you're a sophomore or a junior even.

I trust this senior group. I trust this team with everything I got. At the end of the day, it's about them. I really want to win for them. I want these guys to be able to experience this because they've just been so loyal and so resilient and just an unbelievable group for these three years.

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