

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 1 Semifinal - Indiana vs South Carolina

Friday, March 29, 2024

Albany, New York, USA

Times Union Center

**South Carolina Gamecocks**

**Dawn Staley**

**Raven Johnson**

**Bree Hall**

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

South Carolina 79, Indiana 75

**DAWN STALEY:** We are excited to be moving on to the Elite 8. Just want to say that Indiana is a really tough basketball team that wanted to move on, and they gave an incredible effort in the third and fourth quarter to get themselves back in the game and put us back on our heels.

I wish the seniors well, and I know that Teri will get her team back in this position again in the future.

**Q. Raven, talk about the three-pointer that put them to bed. How good did it feel coming out of your hand?**

**RAVEN JOHNSON:** I was open, and all I could think was, let it go. I don't want to lose. Just going from last year. Nobody can sag off me this year, and I take that very personal. And I get in the gym every day and put up reps and I think that's where it comes from, the confidence.

**Q. (No microphone).**

**RAVEN JOHNSON:** The play call was to get the ball in the basket (Laughter).

**Q. Raven, I want to take you back to a statement, out of the Final Four loss last year, Aliyah said, this is Raven's team now. How much did you feel that responsibility this year and especially tonight?**

**RAVEN JOHNSON:** I honestly don't look at it as that. We



play for one another, and as you could tell, Coach says, it's like daycare. It's really like daycare off the court. We have a bond that's so strong and we want to see everyone succeed. And that's the joy about this team. We just want to see everyone wants succeed, and we just have fun. That's what it's all about, having fun.

**Q. Bree, late third quarter, early fourth quarter, seemed like the offense stalled a little bit. Were you seeing anything? Did Indiana change anything? What was happening on offense during that point in the game?**

**BREE HALL:** Offensively I think we were just a little stuck, not getting the flow of things. But we're going to take note of that and change some things around.

**Q. I wanted to ask both the players, it seemed like in just the eye test, when certain games get crucial like this in the end, you can see players getting sweaty palms and getting nervous. You guys didn't look like you broke a sweat. Is it because of just everything you've been through this season, particularly what you went through in the tournament, being undefeated, all eyes on you, the expectations? Are you just used to this and that's the reason why? Please explain.**

**BREE HALL:** Honestly, I think it's really just our determination and our motivation. We don't want to lose. We want all the same goal, and we just love each other so much and are so confident in each other. I think it's just kind of having that determination out there on the court, not really getting too shaken by the moment.

**RAVEN JOHNSON:** Yeah, we have the Dawn Staley. When you have a coach like that, how can you sweat? If she don't sweat, you don't sweat. I mean, hey.

**BREE HALL:** I agree.

**Q. Raven, this is the best that you guys have shot from three-point range this season. How much more dangerous does it make you guys that teams can't take off, can't not shut you down outside, not shut you down inside because you can hurt them both ways?**



RAVEN JOHNSON: You can't just shut one player down on our team. We have threats from all over the court. We have threats on the bench, also. It's hard to guard our team because we just bring different weapons, and I think when it comes to scouting us, like you said, we can shoot from the outside, we can dominate in the paint, we have drivers, everything. How can you guard us? That's how I look at it.

DAWN STALEY: We gave up a 17- or 20-point lead (laughter).

BREE HALL: I think we were just tired.

**Q. Bree, just curious how beneficial you think it will be to have had this close game, like you had here, as you guys are preparing for the rest of the tournament?**

BREE HALL: Well, you know, we'd rather not have a close game like this, of course, but I think it'll be beneficial just because when the pressure is on, we have to be able to execute, and we'll look back at this game and see that we were able to execute and defend, as well. That was one of the key things for that game.

They were really good three-point shooters, and when it comes down to it, we've got to get a stop.

**Q. Question about the way you built this team out of last year. This is a team that shoots about 40 percent from three. How much was this done with the way this came down the stretch in mind, making sure you're able to look for those shots from beyond?**

DAWN STALEY: Well, I mean, anytime that you are trying to put together a championship team, you figure out what your weaknesses are, you figure out what people scheme, that play against you in. You just try to plug in players that can help us -- again, help us actually combat that.

Does Paopao help us? Absolutely. Absolutely. She helps us. In more ways than just being a great three-point shooter. She's a great floor spacer, can't double-team our bigs as much, her work ethic off the court and her ability to bring other players into the gym with her to get shots up. I think once we lost Coach Chmiel last year. We went in and got Winston Gandy, who I think he's an awesome player development coach that's worked with our guards tirelessly. Every single day he makes sure they get their shots up. So it's all of that.

It's having Coach Boyer, who has more coaching experience than all of us probably put together. It's having Coach Law, who again, has more coaching experience

than I do. And it's bringing along some youngsters like Khadijah Sessions and Mary Wooley. They both have like incredible gifts in understanding the game and seeing things and giving much needed suggestions on the bench. So it's all of those things.

I'm happy for our team. Obviously we'd like to get a lead and hold serve throughout. That didn't happen, and we know it's not going to happen with teams like Indiana, teams like Oregon State now, that no lead is safe.

It's good to get this game in. But I would much rather have it smooth sailing.

**Q. Were you surprised when you guys were doing two-man game Cardoso that they stayed in man so long?**

DAWN STALEY: No, they actually played zone in the second, came out in the third quarter, playing a little bit of zone. We were shooting the ball at a pretty good clip. You take your chances with having to double Kamilla or just squeeze her a little bit down in the paint or give us some wide-open threes. So I wasn't surprised.

I thought they did a good job of keeping us off balance. I thought in the third and fourth quarters we took some ill-advised shots, and that's been the tendency of our young basketball team is when we're able to build a lead, they pretty much think any shot is a good shot. I thought today we took some bad shots that led to some easy buckets for them. We just have to control those situations a little bit better.

**Q. What, if anything, did you learn about your team tonight?**

DAWN STALEY: I mean, I've only learned what I've already known, and that's I've got a resilient basketball team that they don't like losing. They are able to make plays on both sides of the basketball through great play, through shoddy play, through having a lead, having built a lead and then getting it down to one and having it be a one-possession game, that they were able to play their way out of it.

We are the habits that we've created, good and bad.

**Q. What did you see when they were making that run from you guys' side of it? Raven said that the play was get the ball in the basket, but what actually were you hoping on that open three she hit?**

DAWN STALEY: I wanted to get the ball to Kamilla, and Kamilla, they collapsed on Kamilla, left Raven wide open,

and I wanted her to shoot it. I was mouthing "shoot it" because she was so wide open and she shot it in rhythm, and when it's like that, good, bad or indifferent, it's a really good shot to take, and I'm happy that Raven stepped up.

But before that shot, I saw Raven's eyes when it was coming down the stretch and our lead was diminishing. I knew she wasn't going to let us lose. I knew she was going to do something. She had two big baskets, the three and then the mid-range shot in the lane, and then she made one of two free throws. A lot of that was her making big plays, instinctive plays that really good point guards do when they need to do it.

**Q. What did you see when you guys were struggling?**

DAWN STALEY: I mean, I know why, and as much as you want to call a time-out to stop the bleeding, I also knew that we were going to need the time-outs because it was going to be that kind of game. So I just tried to control it, slow it down a little bit, and play call from the bench.

They saw some other things out there. Like we called a play to get Kamilla the ball, and Breezy, they overplayed Breezy, so she popped back in the corner. Any other time it's a good read. Any other time it's a good read. She took the corner three that probably ended up -- it actually ended up with us having an imbalanced transition defensively-wise. If it's in the flow of it, great, but we needed Kamilla to touch the basketball.

Maybe once she touched it and they collapsed on her, let Breezy get her feet set and take a better, more predicted shot.

So what I'm seeing is a young team just trying to fight to actually get a basket versus getting a stop, and it has to reverse itself.

**Q. Can you maybe describe just the point or the process when you believe that Raven taking that shot was good for the team and just over the course of the season the work that she put in after last season?**

DAWN STALEY: I mean, I see the work that Raven puts in every single day. Every single day she gets shots up, before or after practice. They have a quota to meet each and every day. I see that before. I see that after. So I don't think about last year. I don't think about any of that when it comes to Raven.

Now, it might be embedded in Raven's head, and if it is, it's helping her to overcome it. Some players need that in their lives. They need that type of friction in their lives to make them work a little bit harder, to meet the moment when

they need to meet the moment. But certainly I know it's a feather in her cap knowing that she was able to knock down that shot.

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