

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 4 Final - TCU vs South Carolina

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Sacramento, California, USA

Golden 1 Center

South Carolina Gamecocks
Coach Dawn Staley

Joyce Edwards

Agot Makeer

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference



just try our best to do that and just be ourselves and be comfortable in being ourselves.

DAWN STALEY: I'll say this, I mean, you all are seeing us play sports. I think women are some of the most powerful beings on Earth. And I will take a page out of my mother's book in that she used to say, a woman has the strength of 10 men. And I believe her.

The challenges that we're faced with, I think we do them with a great deal of poise and composure because we know that if we handled things any differently, you know, we probably wouldn't be able to accomplish what we need to accomplish because of just opposing forces.

Q. Joyce, during that fourth quarter is when you guys really were able to blow the game open. What changed there in the fourth? And you guys have been so dominant this tournament this season. How is fighting an uphill battle in a game different from just trying to hold someone off in a game when you build early leads?

JOYCE EDWARDS: The mentality sole proprietorship different. When you're doing an uphill battle, like you said, you're always fighting. Everything -- you're in a state where every possession matters, every little thing matters.

Once you build a lead early in the game, you can see some people relax a little bit. Your mindset kind of changes.

But we just came out the fourth quarter and we knew that before we got to the five-minute mark we wanted to be up by 20. Ta'Niya literally said that in the huddle: Before we got to the five-minute mark in the fourth quarter we will be up by 20.

And that's what we did. I feel like our defense got more intense. And defense turned into offense, and we were able to get some transition buckets. And it just went up from there.

Q. Is it important to have that kind of game heading into this next stage of the Final Four?

South Carolina - 78, TCU - 52

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Dawn Staley, Joyce Edwards and Agot Makeer.

DAWN STALEY: Want to congratulate TCU on a great season. It was a really hard-fought game, one that took us a little bit to just kind of open it up, and we did that by the play of two people sitting here.

But I thought, overall, it was a great team win from both sides of the basketball.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. As women's basketball continues to grow in popularity, how is the sport contributing to the empowerment of women, and particularly Black women?

DAWN STALEY: That's a deep question.

Q. How has the sport contributed to women's empowerment?

JOYCE EDWARDS: We're all out here. We're playing. We're just showing the world what we can do. We're confident in ourselves. And then even off the court you see us, you see our style.

You see what we do, like, academically. You see how we're smart. We're not just athletes. And all of that just contributes to you know females in general. And we kind of, we represent the general female gender. And so we



JOYCE EDWARDS: Coach always said the Elite Eight is going to be one of the hardest games in the tournament. But it just shows us our resilience, our determination, our togetherness, and I feel all that is going to help build moment into the Final Four.

Q. Dawn, obviously this is old hat for you get to the Final Four, but is it still special? There's so many first-timers; it's their first Final Four experience, as opposed to you going to six straight?

DAWN STALEY: Anytime you're able to play in the third weekend in the NCAA Tournament is always special. I don't know, I think it's our sixth in a row. But it really doesn't feel like that because the work that it requires for you to get to this place, it's a lot. It's a lot.

I think we were just talking to our coaches in the locker room, and we're, like, people really criticize coaches for how they coach, how they coach on a game day. A game day is the easiest, the easiest time of our day.

It is what you have to do to prepare players who are going through whatever they go through because they go through things. They go through not doing so well in a classroom. They go through breaking up with their significant others. They go through just mental exhaustion just for having to deal with their young lives.

So that's the hard part. Don't criticize us on game day. That's the easiest part.

People that don't see what actually happens to get a team and a program up for the challenges of a season and get to the Final Four, like, we lose a game and I can't coach. We lose one game and I can't coach.

Well, I don't really take it to heart like that, but for someone to actually generate that statement, put it out on social media and think they've accomplished something, it's hard. It's gratifying because there are five new players on our team that haven't experienced that.

There's one player on our team that experienced a Final Four every year of her college career, and that's Raven Johnson.

And the think pieces on her for five years are quite incredible. But at the end of the day, Raven's a winner -- a winner. And now people are seeing the type of player that she is, that she was capable of being.

We just lost the core of our team. There was a core that was a part of the last, probably, five years. It was a core

group. They've all gone to the WNBA, which leaves Raven left to be able to just play how she's playing this year -- scoring when we need it, facilitating when it's needed.

But she did some things on the way in this journey of the NCAA Tournament and let -- Joyce, I saw this exchange; you remember this? You started talking about the rims during your shoot-around. How the rims weren't -- Raven came up to you, she said we only want positive thoughts, something to that extent.

She didn't know I was listening, but I saw the entire exchange. And it's that. She didn't really care it was Joyce. It was just something about the rims being tight or whatever.

But it's just that, that you really can't discount and you can't really just know the full extent of a person and her leadership because they shot 2-for-10 or any given night.

So I'm just really proud of our players for being able to overcome all the things that come with the rigors of a season.

Q. Agot, this NCAA Tournament for you has been outstanding. You've had double figures in all four games. I'm just wondering, like, what has changed for you, what have you found to be so successful in these four games? And then, Dawn, just the growth you've seen in her. I know she missed some time this year with injury. But to have these moments and tonight you put her on Olivia Miles and she did an outstanding job. What have you seen from her growth wise especially late in the year?

AGOT MAKEER: I feel like my mindset changed. Starting in the SEC Tournament I just started approaching games differently. And I feel like it wasn't just one-dimensional thinking. I just wanted to go and do whatever I can to get the team to win.

So just in this tournament, I've just thought whatever I can do to get this team a win is what I need to do.

DAWN STALEY: And her growth, I think when you get to know young players, you get to see their habits on a daily basis. And for our program, you've got to show and prove to us, like, you've got to actually do the things that we need you to do in practice. Because we know that if you do, it's a no-brainer, it's going to happen in the game.

And I think with Goti, she was in and out with injuries. And then we had some other injuries, and she got pushed up to knowing that she was going to play.

I do think she's a different player when she knows she's going to play. So I think it's that.

And we also just challenged her. We just really challenged her to go out there and be who she is. I mean, she's had a tremendous postseason. And her future is bright.

Q. Agot, you were a big part of that run towards the end of the third quarter, those first six minutes of the fourth quarter. But I'm not going to start there. But as a freshman, from your perspective, because Coach Staley is talking about this set, you being part of the next set, you and Joyce. What is it like being coached by Coach Staley? And Coach Staley, what is it like coaching this freshman?

AGOT MAKEER: I mean, I feel like it's super cool. A lot of people in the outside world always ask me that question because she's, like, a celebrity to them. But she's in our life every single day and I feel like she plays every figure, like coach, mother, everything in our life. So I think her impact is not just on the court. But it's off the court, and I think that's like the best part.

DAWN STALEY: And coaching a player like Goti, you just really get to know them. You know, actually, what buttons to push. You know where they need to improve in order for them to help themselves and help us.

But these take time. I mean, and health was a big reason why she wasn't able to just kind of connect and stack days. She was in. She was out. She was in. She was out. I think she's been the healthiest -- this is the healthiest stretch she's been.

She's probably still hurting a little bit but she's fighting through. She's fighting through for herself and she's fighting through for us to advance in this tournament. And she's become a vital piece to our success.

Q. Coach, just speak to what it means to build a program like this throughout the years and stay rooted with great players from the state of South Carolina. Joyce, speak to what it means to continue that tradition of being a great player from the state of South Carolina?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, it's really important to us that we keep our very best stars at home. I think if we can compete with pretty much everybody else in the country that can provide what a high-level program can provide.

If it's a local star that just wants to leave and experience something outside of their local grounds, that's great. But at the same time, I think you could get everything you want

and you need from South Carolina. And your family gets a chance to see you play. And that's very, very important to South Carolinians.

Q. Coach, the last time you were out here in California was in Stockton, in '17. That led to a championship. So is it kind of difficult to be all the way on the other side of the country to play the Elite Eight or the Sweet 16? And for Joyce, what motivated you to have this type of game? Because you didn't have this great game last game, but this game you exploded it, and it really helped the team win?

JOYCE EDWARDS: I didn't feel like my last game was necessarily bad. Obviously my point production was reduced. But I mean when you've got two, three people coming at you you ain't supposed to be shooting the ball, especially with a team as great as this.

It was single coverage. There really wasn't multiple people coming at me. Whenever you get single coverage, Coach tells you to go score it, and so that's what you do.

DAWN STALEY: Let me just say this, we didn't control the controllables, right? So when you don't do that, you understand why you have to play a little bit further from your home state, right? So I understand that.

We lost to Texas in the SEC Tournament. We knew we were going to get bumped. So you just take the hit. You take the hit and you just keep on going.

And you start thinking about the last time we were here in California it worked out for us. Worked out for us here in Sacramento, and everybody's been great. I mean, everybody in this arena has been great. Our hotel's been great.

Walking around the streets have been great. I think people are really enjoying having the NCAA Women's Tournament here. I mean, the crowd was great. I saw a little bit of Virginia. Saw a little bit of the other teams that were still here.

And we're so far from home, and for the people to come watch us play and cheer us on, I think, it's a great place. I have no complaints about being here.

Q. Coach, when you were growing up and you were a player and Team USA and all that stuff, can you imagine now so many years later that you are such a star? You and Kim, the women's coaches have this game is such great hands. And the biggest cheers are for you guys. It's also entertainment and you guys are just wonderful. And I was wondering, how is that



evolving in your mind? Is it hard to believe?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, I feel like I owe basketball. Like, basketball has been incredible to me, to my family. And I always feel like I have to repay. I don't get a chance to really take a big chunk out of the debt because we're going to the Final Four. It's another thing that basketball has provided that keeps stacking on the debt.

I'm just happy for our game. I'm happy for our players that they get to experience all the things that come with it.

And I know it's a great thing for players. I think coaches salaries are great for our game. And I think even people who put articles about how much we spend on our budget, that's even great, too. But you can see that there is investment in women's sports and women's basketball.

And a lot of times there's not a great return on your investment, but I think for women's basketball, for women's basketball programs, when you pour in, it may not hit as very similar to what it would hit if you're a football or if you're men's basketball, not until our units get up to par.

And once they get up to par, I think we'll be respected even more. There won't be articles written on how much we're spending against the budget.

Q. Agot, you shared an embrace with Coach Dawn after you dropped your career high. What was it like to share that moment with her? Was there anything said during the embrace? And a quick follow-up to that, Coach Dawn said she challenged you this postseason. In what ways did she challenge you?

AGOT MAKEER: To elevate. I feel like all the assistant coaches and everybody has been putting an emphasis on that for me to rise and just be in that spotlight and stuff. So I think in just that moment -- I'm in a flow right now.

But also the little hug and stuff is we're here and we're ready to go. I think we're excited to go to Phoenix.

DAWN STALEY: I mean, nothing. I'm just proud. Just proud. I could see how talented she is. Like super talented. And when the talent isn't always reaching their potential, but -- but you see it and there's growth.

Like, we never stopped thinking about the contributions that Agot can give to us. We never -- it's always, like, she's super talented. When is it going to click? And then we just kind of stayed with it, probably even when she didn't want to stay with it.

Because young people, when they're not playing, they

think they're never going to play. They probably have excuses as to why they're not playing. Except the real reason is you've got to start stacking practice days. You've got to start doing things you need to do so when it's time for you to perform in a game, it's familiar to you.

So I mean, she's playing lights out. She's making great basketball plays on both sides of the ball.

Q. Dawn, had you gotten an answer from the NCAA about Madina's status for next year?

DAWN STALEY: We haven't. We actually called our compliance today because as soon as our season's over she's got 48 hours. We're hoping we get an answer.

Q. Coach, tonight is not the first night that a player has told you that you're more than a coach. You're kind of like a mom figure. So what does it mean to you to hear that? I know you've heard it a lot. And when was it in your career that you realized you were going to have to be more than just a coach to all of these players?

DAWN STALEY: Well, kind of what I look at -- I mean, I've played basketball for a long time, been a point guard for a long time. And you don't lose those qualities of being a leader. Because sometimes just being a point guard, you've got to handle and got to manage certain things for coaches.

For me, it's just managing. I mean, I've got an easy job. I really do have an easy job because I think our players have conditioned me and our coaching staff and we've conditioned them to be able to handle real truth. Like real truth.

And when you're able to handle real truth, it doesn't really hurt. It's just a part of your process. So we have those kind of back-and-forth conversations with each other so we can have greater -- like more depth to our relationship.

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