

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 6, 2022

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Indiana Hoosiers

Coach Teri Moren

Nicole Cardaño-Hillary

Grace Berger

Postgame Press Conference

Iowa - 74, Indiana - 67

THE MODERATOR: We'll open with comments from Coach Moren.

COACH MOREN: Just a real quick thank you to our fans, Hoosier Nation, who showed up here in Indianapolis to support our team. It meant a lot. And we're really grateful.

I do think we've positioned ourselves to host in the NCAA Tournament. So we'll look forward to having Hoosier Nation back in Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall here. And really appreciate all the support.

Certainly we're disappointed that we didn't get the outcome that we had hoped for. Didn't shoot the ball particularly well today. We knew we were going to some man-to-man, we would see zone. But whether it was a little bit fatigue, tired legs, I'm not sure. I think we got some really good looks. They just didn't go down for us, and sometimes that just happens in the game.

But I can tell you this, my staff, we're all very, very proud of what we've been able to do here the last four days in Indianapolis.

As I said to our kids, we had such a tough ending to the regular season of Big Ten [play] because of the schedule that we were handed. And we had every reason to come to Indy and fold and not be who we are and who we know we are. But we looked at it as a new season. I'm really proud of how they put things behind them in the rear-view mirror and how well they played.

You want to peak right now in March. I felt we were starting to do that today. We didn't. Came up a little short.



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But nonetheless, really proud.

As I reminded our kids, we are still one of the best women's basketball teams in the country. And that's what I'm most proud of.

Q. The offense worked. You guys were hitting shots, and Grace you were pulling up in the lane. It was spectacular and you were hitting every shot that Indiana needed. Talk about the game and a little bit of the inability to keep Czinano from getting the ball?

GRACE BERGER: We were confident that we would get good looks and that we would get the looks that we wanted if we ran our motion because we've gotten pretty good looks on the motion the past four days. We were confident offensively coming into the game.

As far as Czinano goes, she's one of the best post players in the country for a reason, and she's surrounded by really good players. She's so good at getting positioning and making shots that she's hard to stop.

NICOLE CARDAÑO-HILLARY: She said it all. We were confident going in. And Grace was getting the shots that she gets and some were going in, some weren't. Sometimes that's just how the game goes.

Q. Nicole, I'm sure you know that Iowa scout by heart now playing them three times in 16 days. Where today could you maybe feel that familiarity, the flow of the game, whether it was something you tried to run that they had or vice versa? Where in the game did you actually feel that playing them for a third time really made a difference?

NICOLE CARDAÑO-HILLARY: I've said it before, coaches prepare us extremely well for our opponents. I think playing them three times is not going to -- we're just always extremely prepared. I'm not really sure.

Q. Nicole, you've been described by the Rutgers and Maryland's players as a gnat on defense. Does that best describe your game?

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NICOLE CARDAÑO-HILLARY: I mean, I guess. Like I said a million times, it's up for the opponent to think that. I just try to do my best, and as I've said before, who I have behind me lets me do my job. I know they've got my back, so I'm able to do that.

Q. It seemed like the energy was really good but did playing four games in four days lead to fatigue or play any factor at any point in the game in your mind for either of you?

GRACE BERGER: I don't think so. I think we're in better shape than any team in the country. So I don't think that's the reason.

NICOLE CARDAÑO-HILLARY: Agreed.

Q. Obviously you lost but you held them much lower in points than the first two matchups. What did you do defensively that kept them more in check?

NICOLE CARDAÑO-HILLARY: We guarded very hard and they scored less points. I think that's kind of our thing. We're a very good defensive team and we just held them to those points.

COACH MOREN: This one right here [pointing to CARDAÑO-HILLARY] did a tremendous job on Caitlin Clark today. She held her at bay. I think she made her uncomfortable for most of the 40 minutes. But we had no answer for Czinano.

Q. Nicole, obviously in the last game of the regular season you had a tough night, but you really bounced back this whole weekend with several strong performances. I guess how did you, through the last week, how did you get yourself ready and put together those good performances?

NICOLE CARDAÑO-HILLARY: I don't think I would ever go out there without trying to do my best. I think the fact that this is so important for our team, it kind of gets the emotion going.

Like I said, my teammates are so incredibly supportive in every aspect on and off the court. So it's hard not to be good, especially coming into a big tournament like this.

Q. Lisa Bluder reminded me that there's 9,000 people when you played in Bloomington, another massive crowd here. What's it like to get the support of the hometown Indiana folks not only in Bloomington but here in Indianapolis?

GRACE BERGER: It means a lot. I think it's really special

for us to see how excited people are for Indiana women's basketball because it hasn't necessarily always been like that. So it truly means a lot for us. We hope that they're here for us when we host the tourney.

Q. This is the first time in 20 years that you've made it to a Big Ten Championship Game and you've all overcome a lot of adversity even with Aleksa Gulbe being sick. What's that say about Indiana basketball, that you're still able to thrive in an atmosphere where adversity strikes?

NICOLE CARDAÑO-HILLARY: I think that's what makes us such a great team. We don't let adversity bring us down and we're just going to continue. We've got a lot of basketball left and that's what we're going to do whether there's adversity or not.

GRACE BERGER: Just like she said, it shows how good of a team we are and we're led by a great coach obviously. And we have a lot of great, veteran leadership on our team. No matter what is thrown at us I think we showed we can do that.

Q. Is there anything you could have done differently with Monika? She's one of the best post defenders -- do you look back and say, 'Okay, I needed to post' or is there any kind of defense that would have stopped the entrance pass into her?

COACH MOREN: We see a lot of teams that struggle guarding her. The thing is she puts so much pressure on you because she uses -- half the time she doesn't even dribble -- she can catch it and she shoots it so fast.

So blitzing, doubling, we've considered and we tried at times, but she shoots the ball so fast. If you're late to your double, she's going to make you pay.

And then, full-fronting, we've looked at that. But then I think they're well-versed in being able to skip the ball and screen you in. And they got us on that in the first half, and knocked down the three.

But I think Nicole said it best. She has great footwork. She gets you deep. She blows you up in terms of just trying to get a deep seal and trying to -- just her physicality. She's really improved and she's a load on the inside.

Unfortunately, I just think for Mack, Mack's still not 100 percent. Mack's always been able to do a good job on her. But the matchups, the last three times or two times -- three times today -- that we've played them, Mack is still not moving as well, not as strong from below in terms of her leg strength, just to keep her out of the halo, try to keep her

out of the box, as we call it, away from the rim.

She hit a couple of tough ones, too. Just turn-around, high off the glass. So she's really improved. She's a big part of why they'll be successful. When you have Caitlin Clark and a post player like that, that's a special combination.

Q. Caitlin Clark was off her game a little bit today. You have to give Nicole credit for that. Probably, of course, Kate Martin did a lot of that distance there.

COACH MOREN: She did. Then Berger got in foul trouble and I thought she had to be more passive than normal because she obviously knew we needed her on the floor from an offensive perspective.

But Nicole's been so terrific and she's been really good with that matchup, that particular matchup. I don't know that Caitlin Clark would ever admit it, but I don't think that she enjoys Nicole guarding her.

Q. You've played 12 games over the last four weeks. You are averaging three games a week. It's been a long stretch here toward the end of the regular season and the Big Ten Tournament. You've earned a day off. Will you take one between now and selection day and what will you do with your time?

COACH MOREN: Certainly we'll take maybe one, maybe two days off because these kids deserve it. And then we'll get back to practice. We'll get -- we still are working, trying to get Mack back into shape, into great shape. And so we really thought that being here for these four days was really good for Mackenzie. And then we'll go back and be in practice, inside of practice where we can get up and down the floor again against our practice guys. Play whether it's four- or five-minute games of real live action.

And I just think that will really benefit Mack, because you can see out there today, we can only play her for about two minutes, two minutes, 30 seconds. Sometimes we let her go too long and that's never good.

But she's certainly working herself back in shape, trying to build her endurance. And so we'll get back to doing what we do, and that's just trying to get better.

Q. You end your regular season not on the best note. Then you come to Indianapolis and you have a couple of great performances. What do you think that's going to do for your guys' motivation just going forward?

COACH MOREN: I think we're excited. I'm really, really just sort of marveled at our kids and the resilience that they've shown throughout, because the stretch was hard.

You're playing five games in ten days. You're traveling. You do four one-day preps. You've all heard me say that. That's hard. That's hard on these young kids and especially I think it's hard on women. Not just physically, but mentally.

And so I can't tell you how proud I am of the toughness that they've shown, the resilience that they've shown. But I'm not surprised that we came to Indy with a new fresh perspective, a new feel, like this is a new season for us.

Because after the Big Ten season, after the Maryland game, we shelved all of that and we were just looking forward to this tournament and getting back on track.

I felt like we had some really, really great moments here in Indianapolis this weekend. And I don't want our kids to walk out of here -- obviously they're disappointed, but we're never going to be discouraged. Because as I mentioned, I know this: they're one of the best teams in the country.

Q. Thoughts on your shot selection in the fourth quarter, the shots that you got, the looks that you got and the execution?

COACH MOREN: I would have to really watch. I will say this, I felt like there were a couple moments in the first half where we were kind of settling. We were taking quick shots.

And then I thought there were other shots that we just missed that were good shots for us. I looked down, Grace Berger, anything at the rim, close to the rim for Grace Berger is a good shot. Some of those just didn't go down tonight for her.

And then Ali, Ali, AP struggled a little bit. She's been so great from beyond the arc here in this building. And those didn't go down as well.

I'll have to go back. I don't want to say one way or the other whether I was happy or not happy. I do feel like inside the game I did look at my staff saying we're getting some really good shots, they're just not going down for us.

But certainly there's always games, always shots that happen in a 40-minute period that you're like, why did we do that, why did we take that shot? We could have gotten a better shot.

But it's just our kids doing what they do, trying to be aggressive. And we're going to live with whatever those shots are. We really are. Like I said, today, we didn't shoot it great, but we just didn't do enough defensively with Czinano, we kept the other kids, which is what you want to

do, sort of in check.

Q. This is basically the same group you had that made the run for the Elite Eight last season, and going to the Final Four. Both in the buildup to this weekend from the stretch we talked about and in the run you made this weekend itself, did you learn anything about this group that you didn't already know, or did it reinforce anything?

COACH MOREN: Didn't learn anything new. They are who they are. They're tough. They're together. Their chemistry is off the charts. They love each other. They want each other to have success. Nothing that they have done, whether it was from the beginning, beating Rutgers, beating Maryland, beating Ohio State.

Yesterday was a tough day for us without Leks. All the adversity that we've kind of gone through this season, these guys have just, again "resilience" is the only word I can use to describe them because they just keep showing up.

They don't blink. It's like, all right, next man up. That was Chloe yesterday for us. And again they're veteran. They're experienced, but they're just great kids. And as I always say they're the best part.

Q. Sometimes those emotional conversations can carry the most weight. Watching the confetti fall and watching you gather your team on the floor, I'm wondering if you could take us through the huddle?

COACH MOREN: I think for us, you have a disappointed group of young ladies in there that are, whether they're tearful, whether they're -- a lot of them were tearful, I'll say that. You just reassure them that we're obviously proud. And to keep their head high.

It was a great four days for us. We reminded them of that. And then the biggest thing is we have more basketball. There's 300 teams plus, maybe 300 plus teams, that today could have been it for them. It's not the end for us.

So those are the things you just remind them; that we're going to shut this door and we're going to move on to the NCAA Tournament and look forward to hosting in Bloomington.

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