

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 6, 2022

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Iowa Hawkeyes

Coach Lisa Bluder

Monika Czinano

Caitlin Clark

Postgame Press Conference



BIG

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL
TOURNAMENT
INDIANAPOLIS 2022

PRESENTED BY **TIAA**

Iowa - 74, Indiana - 67

COACH BLUDER: I'm just incredibly grateful. When you get to do what you love to do, where you want to do it, with the people you want to be around, it's just the most amazing feeling.

And I'm just so thankful for these women. I'm thankful for the support that we get all the time from our university, from our administration. Indiana is a great team. To beat them three times in a couple of weeks is really hard to do. They're a really good basketball team.

This whole league is amazing. We should have a record number from this league invited to the NCAA Tournament. There's no doubt that we should. So excited to see what happens next Sunday. But right now I'm just going to enjoy this and wait a week.

Q. Monika, you established position in the paint. You never relinquished it all day. How important was that for Iowa to win? And Caitlin, is Nicole Cardano-Hillary your toughest defensive opponent you've played from week-to-week? And Teri Moren said I could ask you that.

MONIKA CZINANO: Yeah, I think it's huge that our team does a great job feeding whoever is successful at that moment. Right from the beginning I got some good looks. And the team did a great job feeding it and feeding it, but, yeah, getting position early is super important. And coach Jan Jensen is the best post coach in the world.

CAITLIN CLARK: Certainly she's a great defender. Obviously I picked up four offensive fouls. I'm not sure those were offensive fouls, but that's how they were called

tonight and sometimes that's just how it goes.

But, yeah, obviously a great defender. I didn't bring the ball up much because she picks up basically the whole length of the court. We don't really need me to bring the ball up but she can guard you the entire game just like that. I don't think she ever gets tired.

She's a great defender, that's why she's on the All- Big Ten All-Defensive Team. But I think there's a lot of great defenders in the Big Ten. It's hard when you keep going up against them for three times in three weeks. You know everything everybody's going to do.

And I think overall just not getting frustrated with some of those calls and staying level headed throughout the fourth quarter was kind of the key to help us get over the hump there and win.

Q. What are the emotions like after winning your second Big Ten title?

CAITLIN CLARK: It's obviously amazing. I think this team has done a tremendous job of really enjoying last Sunday but at the same time putting that behind us. And coming into this Sunday I wanted to do it all over again with confetti this time. We didn't have confetti at home. We had 15,000 fans but we didn't have any confetti.

We got the best of both worlds. And this is an incredible feeling for us to be the first Iowa women's basketball team to be regular-season champs and Big Ten champs. You can say we're hitting our stride at the right time. It's perfectly fun. And obviously Monika was tremendous tonight. And Kate stepped up huge these last couple of games. That's what we're about and Iowa basketball is all about. And that's just fun basketball.

MONIKA CZINANO: I think I just kind of processed the last one, and I got another one to process, but I think this team, we've been working for it. We've been envisioning it the whole season. This was one of our goals we've been focused on it.

And I think we all went into this game knowing what we

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

were capable of knowing what we could do. And this team deserves everything. We worked so hard. I'm just happy for everybody involved. Our coaching staff is phenomenal. It's just a great win for Hawkeye country.

Q. Monika, you said after the Indiana game involved that everybody kind of knows everybody's play calls. Between you two now, I'm sure you have that scout down by heart. Was there any element of today that that familiarity benefited you guys? And could you just tell in the flow of the game especially kind of early when there was a lot of back and forth, these two teams that have played three times in 16 weeks?

MONIKA CZINANO: I think we all knew personnel going into it. Didn't have to touch on it much. There were a couple new play calls put in both sides. For the most part we all knew everything. It came down to who was going to do execute better. They're a great team. They execute everything well and props to them.

Q. What has worked [inaudible]?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think obviously you do know our play calls it's how it's going to be for anybody. But you can still run and execute your plays. And I think at the end of the day that's what we still do no matter what.

But I think this was a gritty win and obviously I think every game we've played them has kind of been different in a way. Obviously we got up huge at their place. We were down at our place and here it was just back and forth. They're all kind of different.

But obviously a very gritty win for us especially in the fourth quarter. Once we got that lead kind of stretched out to six or seven they couldn't really quite get over the hump. And I thought we came up with some big defensive stops. And we haven't really used our zone defense a ton but it's been tremendous over the last two games. So, kudos to us for doing that as well.

Q. Kate yesterday said that she was going to manifest a victory today. How much manifesting actually went on last night or the day before the game?

MONIKA CZINANO: I mean before the season we all wrote down our goals on a piece of paper and a lot of them have them taped to our locker. We see it every day.

I think that's huge. Kate is a huge manifester. It's awesome. We talk about what we want to do and it's worked so far. So we'll keep doing it.

Q. Back in January you lost to Northwestern back

home. Kind of a disappointing loss, fell to 7-4 and fell out of the AP poll. What changed from there to now with you guys to be able to go on the run -- I believe it's a seven game win streak now -- and win two Big Ten titles?

MONIKA CZINANO: I think this team we needed some consistency at the beginning of the season. We battled a lot of adversity right on, getting COVID, having a lot of games moved. We just needed that.

And I think right now we're hitting our peak at the right time. We've gotten that consistency back. This whole team is fully bought in. But I just really think this is when all teams in the whole country want to be hitting their peak. And we're doing that kind of all finding our role -- pulling into our own. I'm really proud of us and I think we're just getting started.

CAITLIN CLARK: I agree with Monika. Obviously kind of went through a lot of adversity to start the season. Obviously COVID, injuries and losing some games we maybe should have won. And I think that Northwestern game, especially at home, I think we went on the road to Nebraska right after that, and our season could have gone two ways.

Could have went in there and hung our heads. But I think the biggest thing was we continued to battle no matter what. We got a huge road win there. And in the Big Ten you've got to go 1-0 every night because it's so tough. We knew even down the stretch in regular season play that things just needed to fall in place and we could be regular season champs and obviously coming here it's a clean slate.

So, like Monika said, I think we're really hitting our stride the right time getting everybody healthy and really finding out who this team really is and playing Iowa basketball to its finest.

Q. Big Ten and regular season and Big Ten Tournament champs. How driven does this make you for the next tournament and the opportunity to cut down more nets?

MONIKA CZINANO: I think that that's exactly what we want. Our goal every year. And I think we're going to be working for that goal. We know what it feels like now. We know exactly what it takes to get there. I think this team is going to be really dedicated in the offseason to get that again.

But I think we're all looking at March right now to see how we could be most successful there and focusing on, this is



the last page of the Big Ten story book, and now we look beyond that. So the whole team is really excited. We love the Big Ten but we're excited to see new teams for sure, but it's been a blast.

Q. Caitlin?

CAITLIN CLARK: Obviously, I'm super excited for March, like Monika said. And I know Coach Bluder said on the podium we want to cut down more nets. It's as simple as that. And that's what we said last weekend.

Until the season is completely over we'll enjoy this but moving forward and wanting to win more, I think that's how this team is all about. We're always hungry for more and those have been our goals since the season started. We'll enjoy this for now and then we'll look forward to selection Sunday and enjoy that as well.

Q. I asked you guys at media day, big smile, great smile I want to get one more big smile, but what's it like to be Big Ten champs?

MONIKA CZINANO: It feels phenomenal. I can't even describe it. It's just all the hard work you've put in for so long, even longer than just one season. Ever since I got here and beyond that you've been training for days like this. It's just awesome and it's such a relief. Like I said, this team really deserves it.

I'm so happy for everybody involved, whether they are injured, whether they played more bench positions -- they know their role and everybody's bought in and that's what led to this. And I'm proud of everybody involved.

CAITLIN CLARK: It feels unreal, honestly. Just to be the first team to ever do this in Iowa's basketball history. This team's competed every single day. A lot of teams say they have these goals every single season. But this team has really worked and earned it more than anything. And that's what you have to do.

Everybody could say they want it, but at the end of the day who is going to work the hardest to get it. And like we said, we faced a lot of adversity but we didn't hang our heads. We just came back and fought every single day and now this feels pretty good.

Q. The highest and most looks (indiscernible) like the guard play [inaudible]. How were you guys able to stop that?

CAITLIN CLARK: Obviously they do have really good guards. I think their starting five is really tremendous and what they bring off the bench is really good as well.

We knew 3-point defense was going to be huge for us. They went 4-for-19. That was one of the biggest keys to the game for us. I thought overall we took care of the ball, only 11 turnovers across the board for us.

Obviously we didn't shoot the 3 ball very well either. I think being able to weather that just is a testament to this team. And obviously having Monika inside really helps when we're not shooting the ball like we're capable of. But you know you're going to have those games.

But, yeah, overall great guards Indiana has. And I think stopping the 3-point run was the big thing for us and that's exactly what we did.

Q. I remember when you cut down the nets the last time. Compare it to now. And then [inaudible] was Kate Martin, the way you (indiscernible) Kate Martin. Talk about how important she was in this game for you?

COACH BLUDER: Every time you cut down the nets it's fun, it's special because it's a different group of people. And so the circumstances are always different. Your season progresses and you have different highs and different lows. You have different battles that you have to fight and work through.

And, so, that one was special because we hadn't done it for a while. This one is special because it's a different group of people and we return everybody for next year. So that's pretty exciting.

Kate Martin, I've been saying it all year long, she's the glue. She's the person that keeps this person together. She's our captain. She's the person that cares for everybody, looks out for everybody.

She's the one that works extremely hard. I am so happy for her because I thought she played so well in this tournament just doing a number of different things for us, not only scoring. She took the ball the whole (indiscernible). She just looked differently.

She went through an ACL tear freshman year. Battling back from that, it's nice to see Kate playing her best basketball right now. Thanks for noticing.

Q. We talked about the last few days getting off to a good start, Caitlin had some turnovers, the whole team had some turnovers early in the game. How would you assess the team's start today in the first quarter?

COACH BLUDER: They got off to the first lead in this

game and we battled back to the two-point lead going, at the quarter break. But we valued the ball today. I think we had 21 assists on 11 turnovers.

The last time we played them, we had so many turnovers, we gave them 30 points off of turnovers. And this was uncharacteristic. I don't know why we were throwing some crazy passes. So lesson learned. We took it forward today and we didn't do those same type of things today. So really glad that we valued the ball today.

Q. [Inaudible] what worked consistently for you guys, playing Indiana? (Indiscernible) three different things your perspective. What do you think worked over and over again?

COACH BLUDER: I agree with Caitlin. They were all completely different games. And obviously Mackenzie Holmes got healthier and healthier as things went on. When Grace Berger got in foul trouble today I think that helped us a little bit as well.

But Monika Czinano, I think she showed why she's one of the best posts in America. She's going against another one. Mackenzie Holmes is so good and we have so much respect for her.

And I just think Monica is so special inside and very, very talented as far as her footwork, her hands, her ability to score underneath the basket. Even you saw that tonight, coming around reverses. She's a special kid, and I'm really glad she's in a Hawkeye jersey.

Q. Monika is only 13-for-18 today. How important is it for her to be so efficient on offense the last three days?

COACH BLUDER: We didn't shoot the 3 well today. Caitlin talked about our goal was 3-point defense. And we did that. We did a good job. We did a good job on 3-point defense today. And we've done a good job, actually, this whole tournament on our 3-point defense.

Q. Monika Czinano and her efficiency, 13-for-18 the last three games.

COACH BLUDER: We didn't shoot well from 3 so we had to go inside, whether that was getting the ball on the inside on the drive or getting it into Monika.

Again, she's just an amazing player. She goes so hard all the time, and I love her growth from her freshman year to now and how much she's matured, not only as a player but a person.

I'm thankful I've got one of the best scorers, field goal percentage shooters, in the country wearing a Hawkeye jersey, for sure. 72 percent today. Give her the ball.

Q. [Inaudible] outside the host discussion, some tough results back and forth. But you guys kind of did what you did last year and kind of hit that late surge to really carry it into March. How much confidence was there with this unit that that late surge was going to be there again and you guys could get it to where the best product is on the floor in March?

COACH BLUDER: We were frustrated at times during the year. There's no doubt. When you're having injuries and starters out. And COVID. Games moving. Makeup games. Playing four games in eight days. We had all kinds of obstacles. And a lesser team could have just said, oh, just not our year, we've got next year. We've got everybody coming back. This group never did that.

They always believed. Even when we lost to Maryland at home, and Maryland played great that game, we looked and we said, four games, we've got four games in eight days. Think what we can do in these four games in these eight days.

And they bought in, and they were completely focused. We talked with our team that focus and faith was going to help us get through this game. And that's exactly what we have. We had faith in each other. We had faith in our teammates. We had faith in our system and what we try to do. And certainly, like you say, we're women of faith, and we believed that we were on this journey together for a purpose. So it's just very -- and our focus was unbelievable. I thought our focus was really good today.

Q. Let's talk about the Iowa fans. Big Ten wrestling is going on in Omaha. Much closer. You have all these fans. What's it like for you, the tradition of Iowa, to have all these fans here supporting you and your team?

COACH BLUDER: Hawkeye fans have always been amazing. IU is 45 minutes away, whatever. We're, what, five-plus hours away. And I think we were louder than they were, for a lot of the times, even though there was more of them.

That didn't intimidate us, though, because we went into Indiana and we played in front of a pretty big crowd, 8,000 or something like that, at Indiana, on their senior day. So we already kind of experienced it.

I'm glad we experienced it because it really is something you can fall back on when you've been through something

like that, you can fall back and say this is nothing compared to what we did at their place.

But the Hawk fans are amazing. And again, we broke the NCAA record for attendance for the first and second rounds three years ago when we hosted. Over 23,000 people came to Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

And I think we're going to beat this time, break another record. Hawkeye fans are special. We had a sellout for our last game against Michigan. That hasn't happened in a long time. I know they'll be behind us all the way.

Q. You've been playing your best basketball right now. But now you guys have a little bit, almost a two-week break before you get to play in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. How do you ensure that you keep this momentum going even though you do have the big break before you play again?

COACH BLUDER: That's always a little bit of a battle. It's like a double-edged sword. You love having this break because you're exhausted right now. Our team needs a break, desperately.

We're starting spring break, and then our kids miss spring break. So you kind of want to give them a couple days to go home and enjoy that, act like normal students.

But then Sunday is the Selection Show and you start all over again. And you're right, you have to worry about being rusty because you don't play for two weeks.

Hope we get the Friday game, for sure, because that's one less day that we're sitting around. We just have to really put ourselves in like scrimmage mode, ringing officials, put that scoreboard on. And we have to get ourselves into that mentality because two weeks off is a long time. But right now it feels like we need it.

Q. Looks like March and April [inaudible] stepped up big time. Could you talk about her style of play today because defensively she controlled the tempo of the game, gave you points as well.

COACH BLUDER: I think she drew a foul on Berger as well. We tried to iso when Berger was guarding her and let her take it to the hole and draw some fouls because we know how valuable Berger is to the Indiana team.

And so when we had an opportunity to iso Kate and get her to the basket, and try to get her to score or draw another foul, either of those outcomes was going to be good.

Kate is just heady. I'm telling you, she's calm. But she'll

also hold her teammates accountable. She'll build her teammates up. Everybody needs a Kate Martin on their team. And sometimes it goes unnoticed. And I'm really glad that during this tournament people noticed her play and what she does for our team.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

