

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship Final Four: Iowa vs South Carolina

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Dallas, Texas, USA

American Airlines Center

**Iowa Hawkeyes**

**Lisa Bluder**

**Caitlin Clark**

**Gabbie Marshall**

**Monika Czinano**

Semi-Finals Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the Division I national semifinal Game 2 press conference featuring the Iowa Hawkeyes. We'll hear an opening statement from Coach and follow with questions for the student-athletes.

Good afternoon. At this time, we'd like to have Coach open up with her opening statement.

LISA BLUDER: Well, we are extremely excited to represent Hawkeye nation here at the women's Final Four. We know we have an incredible challenge ahead of us, but at the same time, everybody loves an underdog. So hopefully a lot of people will be cheering for us.

I've been coming to the Final Four for a long, long time, but my seats are finally going to be pretty good tonight. So I'm excited about that.

Excited also about Caitlin obviously being named the AP Player of the Year today. One of my assistants, Coach Jan Jensen, will also be getting the Assistant Coach of the Year Award. So a lot of great things happening.

I'm just trying to convince my team 40 minutes of basketball and a lifetime of memories, and that's all we have to focus on.

**Q. Caitlin, I know you're a huge fan of basketball watching and obviously playing it. When you see the ticket prices for the women's tournament is more than the men's right now and there seems to be a much bigger buzz for this tournament, your guys' game, the**



**other game, what does it mean to you to know you're part of a movement that seems to be finally blossoming for women's basketball?**

CAITLIN CLARK: I think it's pretty incredible. I think it's starting to get the viewership, the attention, things like that that it deserves. And when people really turn on the TV or sit in the seat, they understand how good the product is and how much fun it is to watch.

I've loved the game since I was a young girl. I've always seen how good it is. And I really think we have so many good players in our game right now, whether it's WNBA or at the college level, and people are really starting to figure that out.

So I really think sky's the limit. I don't know if ticket prices are as indicative because ours is in an actual basketball arena, and they're playing in a football stadium. I don't know how much that affects it. But I think it shows the demand that people want to be here and be in the arena that seats 20,000 people.

More than anything, I'm just lucky and we're just lucky to get to play on a stage in front of so many people that love the game and want to watch our game.

**Q. Caitlin, following up on that, a lot to talk about, this game in particular, and there are people who are mad it's not a championship game, that it's a semifinal game. What does that say about the women's game and the fact that you do have people that are that passionate that they're arguing and mad about that? And for Gabbie and Monika, do you have a favorite memory of Caitlin like shooting or a specific game she did something very Caitlin-like?**

CAITLIN CLARK: I think it's really good for our game. I think, even though the conversation is about Player of the Year, conversations about Coach of the Year, conversations about who's playing on the floor, I think that's really good.

I think people need to realize how many tremendous players there are in our game, how many tremendous



coaches there are in our game. We're lucky enough, we play in the Big Ten. I believe that's the best conference in America. We've been lucky enough to play against the best players, Diamond Miller, Mackenzie Holmes. You can make a list of really talented players we've played.

We've played against National Coach of the Year. As some people have said. Obviously Coach Staley won the Naismith award yesterday. And I saw Coach Moren was named the AP Coach of the Year today. Congratulations to her as well. I thought Indiana had a tremendous year.

I think just finding confidence in that. We've gone up against some really tremendous teams. Obviously we know South Carolina is taller than anybody we've ever played. They haven't lost a game all season. We're just going to be us and believe that we can win, and that's all you can do.

We're going to give it everything we have, and we've enjoyed every second in Dallas, and we want to be playing two more basketball games.

MONIKA CZINANO: And I think, thinking about like a game where Caitlin is Caitlin, I feel like it's weird for us because we see her do it all the time at practice, so it's like a treat when you guys get to see it.

But I think Michigan at Michigan last year, just seeing her single-handedly bringing us back into that game when we were down. We didn't win it, but we got really close with a limited amount of people. I think that's when I was like, oh, great, everybody gets to see what I see every single day. So yeah.

GABBIE MARSHALL: I think my favorite is at home -- I think we were playing Iowa State. She had come down and hit three logo shots in a row. I remember looking over at Sue, like what is going on? This girl's crazy. I think it was Ohio State. I'm not really sure who we were playing, but that was crazy. But I was not surprised.

**Q. You talk about the difference in the sizes between the men's and the women's, where they'll be staged. Because this feels like a moment, because this is like Aliyah Boston, the defending champions and their team, versus you and your team, two projected No. 1 picks in the WNBA Draft, is this maybe the perfect stage to maybe show the NCAA that the women's Final Four can be, should be staged in the same kind of event space as the men's?**

CAITLIN CLARK: I'm lucky I'm not the one who has to make those decisions. Hopefully I'm the one that gets to play in the Final Four. Yeah, there's very high demand for

this basketball game, and even Virginia Tech versus LSU.

A lot of teams that are new to the Final Four, obviously us and Virginia Tech haven't been here in a while. I think more than anything we're just really grateful. We could be playing in a high school gym, and I would be just as happy to get to play in the Final Four.

I don't really care where it's played. I'm happy we get to play in the Mavs stadium. I think that's pretty cool. It might almost be cooler to play in a basketball arena than a football arena too. Maybe it would be easier to shoot. I don't know.

I don't think it really bothers me, but I think it definitely shows how the game is growing and how high of a demand there is for people to want to get in the door of this game. A lot of people are going to turn it on on TV too if they can't make it down to Dallas. I think we're just grateful more than anything.

**Q. You two carry the offensive load for this team, but over the last week, I'd say, Gabbie and Makenna have been playing some of the best basketball they've played all season. How does that open up the floor for you guys when they're hitting all their shots?**

MONIKA CZINANO: It's tremendous. People have to really pick their poison. They can really clog the paint. And then we have Gabbie and Makenna and Caitlin who are really doing their thing out there. Or they can choose to respect them for their game and leave me more open.

Just seeing the work they've put in all throughout their career. We've played 90-plus games together. Seeing them in the gym all the time, seeing their shots go down in a game, it makes me happier to see their shots go in than my own truly.

It's so great for our team. It really opens everything up for me individually, but we're just peaking at the right time.

**Q. Caitlin, you've gotten as much attention as anyone in the country this year, deservedly so. Have you been able to relish it? Do you enjoy it? Has it gotten old or overwhelming, or how have you kept it from not being too much?**

CAITLIN CLARK: I think I'm lucky enough to have a support system around me that kind of keeps me humble, keeps me grounded. I get picked on the most more than anybody on our team.

But I'm not really on social media that much, and I think that helps a lot too. I've just tried to enjoy every single



second. This is the most fun time I've had playing basketball this year, and that's why the product has been so good for myself and this team because I'm just going out there and having fun and enjoying what I do.

It's not to win an award. It's not for our team to hoist trophies. I think that has all come because we've played with the same love of the game we've had since we were young girls.

I'm going to enjoy every single second of it. I've tried to enjoy every single second of it. I think it's hard for it to set in right now because I'm so focused on continuing to play basketball and continuing to win basketball games. I think, after this season is over, I'll be able to reflect and really enjoy everything this team has been able to do together.

We've had two really good seniors that are going to be leaving us. So I'm just trying to enjoy every second I get with them because it's been three really special years of us getting to play together as well.

**Q. For Gabbie and Monika, what was the experience like yesterday to be able to support Caitlin at the Naismith? But also you have South Carolina and their team right there supporting their candidate?**

GABBIE MARSHALL: It was really special to get to be there and support her. There's no one more deserving of that award. The work she puts in day in and day out, it's unreal. I think the passion and competitiveness and joy she plays with is what makes people really want to watch her.

I think people are seeing that and just seeing what she's doing day in and day out and the performances she's putting on, and the impact she's had on this team. She kind of put us on the map. There's no one more deserving of that award. I'm just glad we were all allowed to be there.

Whoever else was there, we were just worried about Caitlin, so yeah.

MONIKA CZINANO: Retweet (laughter).

**Q. Caitlin, when did you first start shooting logo threes? For Gabbie and Monika, what's your first memory of seeing her do that, and what's it like to play with someone who can do that?**

CAITLIN CLARK: Honestly, I don't know if I did it in high school as much. Coach Bluder watched me a lot in high school. Maybe she can comment on that too. I usually played in a smaller court in high school, so I didn't have as much room to work.

I think it's kind of come with harder defenses, spacing them out more, getting stronger in the weight room. My shot mechanics don't change when I back up. That's a shot I go in practice all the time. When I'm in the gym working on my game and getting shots up, I'm shooting shots from back there. It's not like I get in the game and launching, and they somehow go in. Sometimes it might seem like that.

But those are shots I practice, and I shoot them in practice too. I think it all just stems from the confidence of the work I've put in. Honestly I would say it's more so come with being in college more than anything.

MONIKA CZINANO: I feel like in like summer scrimmages, you kind of play a little freer basketball with no one really watching you. Just you and your team having fun. I think I remember seeing the progression of slowly she would keep shooting them from further back, and they would keep going in.

I've seen her in the gym and I've walked in, oh, she's shooting at the logo. Oh, she must be having fun. No, she's on the gun shooting from there. It was really special to see that in practice and scrimmaging against her for the first time. I knew she was going to be a very special basketball player.

GABBIE MARSHALL: Yeah, she's been doing that since her first college game.

**Q. For you, Monika, obviously South Carolina is really physical in the paint. They crash the boards. Score a lot of points there. What can you say about them, and what have you been doing to prepare for this matchup?**

MONIKA CZINANO: They have great inside presence. I feel like they always have. Both of their bigs are so good. The fact that they bring that size and presence off the bench is kind of unreal.

I think that I'm really lucky to have played in the Big Ten, and even for our journey on this, playing Georgia, playing Colorado, who also have very big, strong, physical posts, it's kind of prepared me the best way it could for this game.

But I truly think at this point of my career, having played for five years, I've played against so many different style post players, so many different physicality levels, that I'm really excited for this opportunity. I think it's going to be really fun. I love going against really great centers. I think it makes me better, it makes everybody better.

More than anything, I'm just very excited to play the game.

**Q. Starting with you, Caitlin, this game has kind of been billed as you against Aliyah a little bit because of the Player of the Year debate. Can you just talk about the role that your teammates around you are going to have tomorrow to try to pull off the upset? And then for Monika and Gabbie, what do you guys kind of have to do to be able to make sure you are contributing at your highest level in the biggest game of the season to make sure you can help Caitlin as well? Because you guys always talk about a balance throughout is when you're at your best.**

CAITLIN CLARK: It's going to be Iowa versus South Carolina, and that's who's going to win the game. It's not going to be one player who's going to win the game. I'm lucky enough to have four really good teammates on the court with me at the same time. I love playing a team sport. I don't think I would like to play an individual sport.

If the game's not going your way, you're lucky enough to have teammates you can always rely on and lean back on. I think we're lucky enough where we've built a culture and a program where we always have each other's backs. I feel like Gabbie and Makenna and Kate are shooting the ball really well, and that can pose some problems.

They're going to be all up on us playing really good defense, and that's what they hang their hat on. They're really good at it.

So just relying on one another. There's going to be ups and downs in the game, and that's how basketball is played. We have five really good players on the floor at the same time, and we're going to have to use one another, and everybody's going to have to contribute.

GABBIE MARSHALL: Just going in there knowing it's going to be a battle, knowing it's going to be physical. Being able to value the ball and know we have to take outside shots and help Caitlin.

One thing that never wavers for me in the game is my defense. It's one thing I can always control, my effort and energy on defense, and I think that's going to be huge in this upcoming game.

MONIKA CZINANO: We've gotten this far by just being ourselves, stepping into our roles, and just doing what we know how to do. We don't have to change this for this game. We have the No. 1 offense, so just kind of ride with that and keep that going. We've gotten where we are by being who we are, so we just need to keep doing that.

**Q. For Monika and Gabbie, would you agree that Caitlin is the most picked-on player on your team? If so, why?**

MONIKA CZINANO: Yes.

GABBIE MARSHALL: It's just so easy too. She's just so loud and like when she comes at you, you want to go right back. But she's just goofy, silly, so it's just easy. She takes jokes very well.

MONIKA CZINANO: She has one of the biggest personalities on our team, so it's so easy to fire them right back at her. She gives them back too. Don't get that twisted.

**Q. I'm curious just as the game has grown, who you guys looked up to who were in the same seats that you guys are sitting in today and how they kind of helped you think about the game differently, how you want to be a part of the change moving forward.**

GABBIE MARSHALL: I was just actually looking at my Snapchat memories, and I was at the games where Arike hit the two buzzer beaters, and Kobe was in the gym and everything, and I was with my AAU team. I was thinking about, wow, I want to be them one day.

Now I'm here. It's so special. It still gives me the chills to think about how that was my dream. And now people are looking up to us, and they want to be us. I just think it's such a special moment. It's bigger than the game at that point.

So I think just soaking it all in and knowing that people are looking up to us, and we were once looking up to those girls. I think it's just awesome to think about.

CAITLIN CLARK: I loved Maya Moore, she was always my favorite player growing up when she was with UConn and the Lynx. Obviously that's the closest WNBA game to the state of Iowa, and that's who I rooted for. That was the first WNBA game I went to. They were playing the Seattle storm, and I got to see Sue Bird too, which is pretty cool.

MONIKA CZINANO: I don't think I can name a specific player. I watched a lot of Lynx. Being from Minnesota too, Lindsay Whalen was a god in Minnesota. I remember watching every single person and thinking how cool their lives were and how fun they were to watch. To be up here and be one of those people, it's really a full circle moment.

**Q. Actually, my question has a lot to do with what you were just talking about. I wondered how you envisioned appearing at the Final Four and then what**





**it's really been like for you.**

MONIKA CZINANO: It's been a dream come true truly. Being able to go to all these events that we've been able to. I mean, just being with my team for extra basketball too, getting the opportunity to hang out with them in Dallas, getting the opportunity to play another basketball game with them. It's really surreal. It feels like the season, even best case scenario, is ending really soon. It doesn't feel quite real.

Just the opportunity to be here with my team, that's all I could have asked for.

CAITLIN CLARK: I agree. This is everything you kind of dream of since you were a little kid. My mom texted me last night, and she's like I feel like I was kind of stuck in your dream that you wanted to do when you were seven years old. So it's pretty special, and I'm just trying to enjoy every single second of it.

We've been lucky enough to be together for three years, and to go out kind of in this way and accomplish what we wanted to accomplish is pretty special. We believe while we're here we can win two more basketball games, and that is certainly our goal.

Like Mon said, we just don't want to not have to come to practice the next day. I don't think a lot of people would say that, but we really enjoy being with each other, and that's carried us a long way.

GABBIE MARSHALL: I feel the same as both of them.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies.

**Q. Two-part question. I know you said you got a text from Vivian right after you guys advanced. Have you talked to her since then, and has it also sunk in that Iowa's here for the first time in 30 years and you obviously know the history of the program from your time there and before that, what it means to have Iowa back on this national stage?**

LISA BLUDER: It wasn't a text, it was a voice message, which tells you the age of both of us. Who leaves voice messages anymore? But I love voice messages because you can hear the enthusiasm in their voice versus reading it on a text, and she definitely had a lot of enthusiasm.

Her love for the Hawks is strong, and I'm thankful -- you were talking about mentors, and for the players, Vivian was certainly one of mine. So I'm very thankful to have her support, as the last person that took this team to a Final Four. That really means a lot.

To take our team back here, sometimes as a coach, when you're at some place for so long, it does get a little old. You're like, well, it's been since '93 since they've been in the Final Four. So, yes, it feels good to be back here again, absolutely. But it's always the people that you're around.

To me, this group of women are special. That's what makes the year special to me.

**Q. You just had a couple players say they're really glad they get to go to the Final Four because they get to continue to go to practice. To me, that's amazing. What does that say about the environment you've created here?**

LISA BLUDER: We love being around each other. We really do. We kind of joked about that. We came straight from Seattle. We didn't go home. We've been on the road together for two weeks now, and we've enjoyed every minute of it.

If you didn't like the people you were around, this would be a chore. It would not be much fun. But when you trust the people that you're around, when you have respect for them, when you know they're doing their job, it's such a comforting feeling, and you don't want it to end.

This has been a fun season for us, and so, yeah, we do not want it to end.

**Q. Coaches tend to be -- I'll put this nicely -- control freaks, whereas Caitlin seems like she needs a lot of freedom. I'm wondering when you realized that and what that has been like. Like the first time that she pulled up, whether it was in practice or a game, and took a logo shot. What was your response, and how has that process kind of worked itself out?**

LISA BLUDER: Her freshman year, I definitely had some times I was pulling my hair out. There's no doubt about it. Just she had to learn how to play with other players that were good players. In high school she had to do it all on her own. I remember going to her high school games, as she said, and kids yelling "overrated" to her from the stands. I just would love to see them today.

But honestly, she did test us her freshman year. So we had to learn -- it was give and take. It wasn't all controlling what she did because I think, when you try to stifle somebody like that, you're ruining a little bit of the type of player they are. What she does on her own is special. I think, if you were trying to tell her exactly what a good shot is, because what a good shot for her is totally different than



what a good shot for somebody else is. So she has a little separate set of rules, quite honestly, than other people because she can do things other people can't do.

We had to get her to understand how to play within a system a little bit without putting out the fire of being Caitlin Clark.

**Q. I have a question about scouting and game planning: What's your preference in terms of do you like watching the most recent games of a team? Do you like watching them against teams that you think are similar to you? Do you like watching common opponents? And then how do you get that information to your players in a way that they can use it on the court?**

LISA BLUDER: All of the above honestly. We watch recent games. We watch people that play a little bit more like us. And we have a common opponent in Maryland. We also have common opponents in Georgia, but Georgia plays so differently than us, that that wasn't really a game we were going to focus on.

We've been watching film with our players now for a couple days and trying to get them as good a feel. Right now I think it's like less practice and more mental, more film. You're not going to get better at boxing out right now. I'm not going to go out in the gym and teach them a skill like that.

What we need to do is be as familiar as we can with our opponent, and that's what makes it hard in the NCAA Tournament because you don't know your opponent as well. When you're going through the Big Ten, you've seen them year after year, same coach, same coaching styles, same players. You know those players so well. In the NCAA Tournament, you may only have a couple days to get ready for an opponent, which makes it a lot more difficult.

So a lot of film right now that we push to their iPads and they watch on their own and we watch together as well.

**Q. I believe after the Elite Eight you said that Caitlin plays better against better opponents. So I'm curious what you're expecting from her tomorrow.**

LISA BLUDER: I honestly just want to take the pressure off of Caitlin. She just came in here and received all these awards this week. She knows a lot of eyes are going to be upon her, and I want everybody else to step up and help carry that weight for her because that's a lot. That's a lot for a 20-year-old.

So I'm just going to try to take the focus off of her as much as I can and put it on the rest of my team because they want to kind of help shoulder that.

**Q. Wondering how the strength of the Big Ten this year compares to other years in the time that you've been at Iowa, and how the conference's overall strength helped prepare you and your team for the tournament?**

LISA BLUDER: There's no doubt this was the best year for Women's Big Ten basketball in a long, long time. We had three out of the eight in the Elite Eight. That's almost like 40 percent from the Big Ten Conference. We have felt all year long that playing in the Big Ten prepared us.

Now, again, we haven't played South Carolina yet, but has prepared us on this journey so far. And whatever team that we play, they tried something different.

Well, one of the great coaches we have in the Big Ten has probably tried it against us already. Some of the great athletes in the Big Ten have probably done that already to us.

I just think playing in such a strong conference as the Big Ten has helped prepare us for this NCAA journey because we've seen it all.

**Q. Kind of a two-part question I asked Caitlin. This game has been built up as a Caitlin Clark versus Aliyah Boston just because of the National Player of the Year discussions. Does that feel like a slight to both teams just because both teams do have good players around them? Then second part, what do the players around Caitlin on your team have to do tomorrow to make sure that you guys have a chance to win?**

LISA BLUDER: People compare Caitlin to Aliyah, and to me that's apples to oranges. It makes no sense. They are completely different players. They are completely different positions. They're both great at what they do, but what they do is different. So I don't think you can compare the two of them.

They both contribute so much to their team's success, but to me it's not Caitlin versus Aliyah. It's Iowa versus South Carolina, and we have to continue to remember that.

What we need to do to be successful is we have to make sure we box out. We have to make sure that other people are hitting threes and not just Caitlin.

**Q. The women's tournament has grown so much in the past few years, but what would you like to see the**



**NCAA continue to invest in for the Final Four specifically so that it grows even more?**

LISA BLUDER: The growth this year has been amazing. I'm sure that, if they would have had a crystal ball a long time ago, they would have not signed this contract that we're dealing with today in being undersold for our product.

They grouped us with a bunch of other sports, which at the time maybe seemed like a good idea, but with the growth that we've had over the last ten years, we have short-changed ourselves. So I'd like to see that change coming with the big TV contracts. I'd like to see also teams being paid for their success in the NCAA Tournament like we have on the men's side.

Athletic directors are going to invest where they get something back from it. I think at Iowa with our fan base, we've gotten something back from women's basketball. Certainly notoriety as well as fans in the stands being the second best populated fan base we have in the country.

But if AD's knew, hey, if my team makes it to the NCAA Tournament and I get a little money from that, it would help some of them invest, if they're not completely vested in women's basketball now.

**Q. Obviously when you're playing a team like South Carolina, who's as deep as they are and who can rely on their bench like they can, how does that change your preparation?**

LISA BLUDER: It really doesn't change our preparation, just because we're not suddenly going to be able to make our team deeper or do things differently. At this time of year, I think, if you start changing things, if you start -- you know, you have to tweak things, but if you start making wholesale changes, you're setting yourself up for failure because that's just abnormal behavior, and the team is going to recognize that in you and think, uh-oh, something's wrong. If she needs to change all this right now, something's wrong.

But you're right, the depth on their team is amazing. The height on their team is amazing. Obviously they've got tremendous coaches, including a former Iowa Hawkeye, I have to say, Jolette Law, wearing the black and gold. I had to tease her last night to make sure she had her black and gold shorts underneath that Gamecocks.

**Q. This is a followup to the connection about the growth of the tournament. We're also seeing women athletes be more present socially, like Dawn is doing AFLAC commercials with Coach K. We're seeing women's basketball players doing commercials for**

**Gatorade and other companies. What has it been like to watch that progression? And what kind of message should that send to, whether it's the NCAA, athletic directors, even young girls who are trying to decide if they want to play sports or want to stay in sports?**

LISA BLUDER: You have to be naive right now as an athletic director to not see the growth in women's basketball and the impact that it's having with businesses and with fan base and with corporate sponsorships and such. I'm going for a walk around the arena a couple days ago, and all of a sudden, Dawn's flashing down on me, looking above me with the AFLAC commercial.

It's so good. These players now with NIL, they understand branding. They understand that they have to create a brand for themselves and that they can be very -- have their own businesses and become have profitable from that. Why should that not happen? I think it's a great lesson for them. What college student couldn't learn a lot from that type of lesson of being able to market themselves?

So I think it's -- I don't know if that answers your question, but you'd have to be really living in a dark hole to not realize what's going on with women's basketball right now.

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