

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship Final Four: LSU vs Iowa

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Iowa Hawkeyes

Caitlin Clark

Finals Pregame Media Conference



really cool now because I got to play against Coach Whalen, and very complimentary of my game.

To be honest, I just loved watching basketball. I had a cousin that played at Downey Catholic, where I went to school, and she went on to play at Creighton. I was her biggest fan too.

To be honest, I wanted to be around the game as much as I could. I remember my dad took me when Des Moines hosted a regional site. I think it was Baylor versus Tennessee. I think it was the last game Pat Summitt ever coached. Brittney Griner was playing at the time, which was super cool. To be able to say I got to see the last game Pat Summitt ever coached is so, so cool in my home state, in my home city. I just wanted to be around the game as much as I could.

Obviously I had college basketball on, pro basketball on. Whenever we were on spring break, we made sure we were around the TV to watch it. And I would instantly print off my bracket to make a bracket. Honestly, I love this game so much. I have ever since I was a young kid. My favorite player was always Maya Moore. She was always my favorite player.

I was drawn to her, one, because of her scoring ability. Also she's a tremendous person. And she played for the Minnesota Lynx, which is the closest team to Des Moines, where I was from.

Q. Caitlin, where do you go mentally to compartmentalize to stay composed and poised in these big moments?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think the thing for me is I understand things aren't going to go my way. I think accepting that, and that's not always something I've had throughout my college career. When I haven't gotten fouls called, when I've had turnover, when I've had missed shots, it's kind of thrown me off my game a little bit.

I think the physicality is something I've just come to accept at this point in my career. People are holding me. I have scratches. I have bruises. But so does everybody else.

THE MODERATOR: Good morning and welcome to the Division I pre-National Championship press conference featuring the Iowa Hawkeyes. We are joined today by Caitlin Clark. We are going to start by fielding questions.

Q. We talked in Seattle. You said you felt the calmest you ever have in your whole life before Louisville. Did you replicate that last night? How do you do that again tomorrow?

CAITLIN CLARK: I honestly did. I felt very confident in our group and the game plan our coaches put together. I thought we came out and executed right away. I think the start of the game was really, really important for us. We showed we're here to win. We're here to play. We believe we can do it.

You know Kate Martin starts the game out with five consecutive rebounds, and I think that really set the tone there.

Yeah, I think I had that calmness about myself last night. I had a belief in my teammates. I thought we played really good basketball. I have to do the same thing on Sunday. I understand there's only 40 more minutes left in my season, which is kind of sad because it's been so much fun. But why not go cut down another net?

Q. There's a lot of little kids in this arena and watching on TV who are falling in love with basketball because of how you play the game, the joy you play with. I wondered when you were a little kid, who was that for you? Who did you watch that made you love the game of basketball?

CAITLIN CLARK: I grew up loving basketball. So I watched a ton of players. The Minnesota Lynx team was like my favorite team, Maya Moore, Coach Whalen. It's



You can't complain. At this point of the season, refs aren't going to call it, nor could they down the court.

I think it's just come with my mental toughness and working on that and accepting things aren't going to go your way. That's the game of basketball. All you've got to do is respond and that's what's going to be best for your team.

Q. Some of the LSU players are scouting the game obviously from last night and thought it was, quote, this is their words, disrespectful, the way that you guys played their guards, and they're not going to be able to guard us the same way the way they shoot the ball. I wonder if you have any reaction to the use of the word "disrespectful" in the way that you guys have guarded South Carolina on the perimeter, and what might have to change against LSU considering they're a better shooting team?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think LSU can shoot the ball a lot better. We're not going to guard LSU the same way we guarded South Carolina. Obviously with South Carolina, you've got to pick your poison. They play two tremendous posts.

If they were going to beat us, we were going to let it be by the three-point line. You have to pick and choose your battles. We can't guard everything. That's the game of basketball. You have a scout. You know player personnel. What are you going to give up? That's what we were going to give up. We had all the respect in the world for South Carolina, and especially their post play.

We're a smaller team. We had to go down there and double them. They still doubled us on rebounding. But we never got discouraged, and I think that speaks to this team is, I know Mon had a few just go right over her head. She tried her best to box out. Mon, it's okay. You've got to keep your head up. We've got this.

I think it's just confidence and resiliency. You've just got to pick and choose within a scout. And Coach Bluder is a very good coach about player personnel. We're going to have a different game plan for every single team.

Q. We talked a lot in the last week about growth in the game and how many eyeballs are watching this and such. I think you have tickets tomorrow going for more than Taylor Swift down the road.

CAITLIN CLARK: Hey, I'm going to Taylor Swift in June too. That's pretty awesome.

Q. Maybe she'll bring you on stage.

CAITLIN CLARK: Maybe so. That would be cool. Hopefully she likes women's basketball. She should stay for the game tomorrow. How about that?

Q. Agreed. Just with what you guys did last night and the other game was also a really good game and all that's come with the attention on this game. How would you like to sort of put a final bow on this for the season to maybe help this game grow even more tomorrow with what you do and what this game could bring with an ABC audience and everything that comes with it?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think winning a National Championship is how you put a final bow on it. I think that's the best way, but we're going to give it everything we have for 40 more minutes. We know that's all we have left of our season. That's all we have left with McKenna and Monika, who have given their heart and soul to this program. Mon came back for a fifth year to be in a position like this.

More than anything, they're my best friends, and I'm going to be so sad that I don't get to go back to practice with them. Even though my body hurts, I would give an arm and a leg for those girls.

I think it's just the belief we have in one another. We might not be the most welcome. We might not be a team full of five-star athletes, but we have a love for one another that's always going to be there for the good and the bad. We've had plenty of hard moments this season, but that's what makes you great in these moments.

So I think the way to put a bow on this is a National Championship, but also exemplifying what women's basketball can be and how fun it is. The joy and the passion that we play with, us and LSU, because I think they do a tremendous job as well, and they bring a lot of excitement and fun to the game.

So I think it's just a great matchup for women's basketball in general.

Q. Two parts to jumping off what was asked: One is we covered you obviously in the women's game for a long time. This has been sort of an order of magnitude more fame obviously as this run has happened. I'm wondering whether there's a moment or moments that that's hit home for you. Wow, this has really gotten huge.

CAITLIN CLARK: Honestly, I don't think it's really hit me yet. I don't think it will hit me for a couple more weeks. I'm trying to enjoy every single second of this.

I will say what I really loved is I saw so many videos of people back in Iowa City, just every single bar completely packed, screaming about women's basketball. That's so, so cool to see your impact on your university and your state.

People love this game. They love this team. And I truly don't think we would be here if it wasn't for our fans, the way they've traveled at home, at the Big Ten Tournament, out in Seattle, but now here. I think people understand these fans know what women's basketball is. They're not just here to scream because we're here. They're here because they understand the game and how great we play it. That's why they're here, because they can appreciate it.

I think that's the biggest thing, what I've appreciated most about this journey. It's going to take me some time, a few weeks to reflect on everything that's happened. More than anything, I'm grateful, and I want to end it with a championship.

Q. That's just the other part of it. We were talking to Lisa about being an Iowa product and doing this. How meaningful is it to be doing this as an Iowa product with an Iowa head coach? Have you thought about what it's going to be like to head home after this?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, that's the reason I came here is to be in this moment right now because I believed in Coach Bluder. I believed in what she could do. I think the thing that's lost is I get coached hard every single day. Coach Bluder doesn't think I've arrived. I don't think I've arrived.

I want to be coached because I think I can get that much better. But to be able to do this for a university and a state that has given so much to you and supported you so much, it means the world. I know, when we get back to Iowa City, hopefully we've cut down another championship net, and I'm sure it will be wild.

But I'm just going to enjoy every single second because you may never get back to this point, and it's really rare and really hard to be here.

Q. Caitlin, just for you, how do you kind of balance embracing what you guys accomplished last night but knowing there's still a bigger task at hand? Was it enjoy it in the locker room, and right when you leave the locker room, were you set, or how did you guys kind of handle that?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think it helped that we didn't get back home to the hotel until 12:30. So our only option was to go to sleep. We weren't up just thinking about what we had done and things like that.

I think like Coach Bluder said is enjoy this. What you did is special. But at the same time, why not win one more? That's what we're here to do is win another basketball game.

I have all the confidence in this group that we can do that. It's the National Championship, that not hard to wake up for. It's not hard to give your heart and soul for. That's exactly what this group is going to do, and that's what we've done all year.

We played three back-to-back-to-back games against three great teams in the Big Ten Tournament. This is our third weekend of basketball in the NCAA Tournament. We're ready for this. We've been through challenges. We're prepared.

Q. What would you tell another -- a five-star recruit who maybe wasn't from Iowa? What would you advise as far as considering Iowa? What are the benefits that recruit might find at Iowa?

CAITLIN CLARK: I could make you a really, really, really long list. I think the biggest thing is, when you are thinking about a school, I think for me, is I didn't want to go somewhere that only just cared about me playing basketball. I was going to go to a school that cared about me as a person.

I think that's lost in today's world. Coach Bluder, we could have lost in the first round of this tournament, and she was going to love me the exact same way and be there for me for the rest of my life. To me, that means way more than ever cutting down a championship net or hoisting a trophy, and I truly mean that.

This just comes along with the love we have for one another is being in positions like this. If you want to play in front of soldout crowds, if you want to play for a fan base that understands what's happening in women's basketball, you come to the University of Iowa.

But I also will say, it's not just the University of Iowa. It's Ohio State, it's Drake, it's UNI. Our whole state understands what the game is and what it can be. I think that speaks to the talent level at the high school level and at the AAU level. I played for All Iowa Attack, and a lot of my teammates are now playing for teams in our home state and thriving on those levels.

I think Coach Bluder's résumé speaks for herself. She's a tremendous coach, a tremendous person, and every single person in our locker room is valued. At the end of the day, I think that's way more important than ever cutting down a

net.

Q. Caitlin, if you go back to December 1st when you guys lost to NC State, you're 5-3 at that point. Tough competition. I think you said after that game you scored 45 but only had 10 assists. As a team, you guys weren't playing Iowa basketball. Can you talk about both how you and the team have improved from that game? The trajectory has just been upwards since then?

CAITLIN CLARK: First of all, I think giving our coaches credit for the schedule they created this year. We played some really tough games at the beginning of the season. NC State, UConn, Oregon State is not an easy team to play. We traveled to Kansas State; lose there. Just a long list of really tremendous teams.

That's all you can ask is to be put in those situations, and those are the games you want to play in. But like you said, that wasn't Iowa basketball. You can't have 10 assists. That's not going to cut it.

I think obviously Gabbie Marshall was kind of struggling with her shot at that point in the season, but we had all the belief in the world in her and knew she was going to get going. We just got back to the way we play -- everybody contributing, everybody working hard on defense.

Yeah, that was not a good game for us. 45 points but a loss is never too great. I think we all understood our potential, what we could be. It was just we all had to give more. We had to get back to what we're really good at, and that's sharing the basketball. High assists and high mid-field goals. I think that's you've seen throughout this tournament.

Q. Clearly I cover LSU, but my timeline last night was a lot about you and obviously your performance. A lot of comparisons to Pete Maravich with the ball handling and the shot making. Are you familiar with his game? What does that compliment mean to you in today's age?

CAITLIN CLARK: I am familiar with his game. I've seen a lot of his highlights. Obviously a tremendous compliment. I saw somebody called me like Ponytail Pete or something like that. I thought that was kind of funny.

I think just a tremendous compliment. Like you said, I take a lot of pride in being able to do a lot of different things for my team, whether it's scoring, but also I think the passing can get overlooked at times. Monika has really tremendous hands and makes me look really, really good, but also you have to pick your poison with this team.

Leaving McKenna, leaving Gabbie is a mistake, and Kate Martin just comes through when you need it. I think it's a tremendous compliment. I am very familiar with Pistol Pete. A lot of people have been saying that since I was even in high school. So kind of a cool compliment.

Q. First of all, because you said you printed off a bracket. How's your men's bracket doing? Did you correctly predict any of the Final Four teams?

CAITLIN CLARK: I actually didn't do a men's bracket this year. Yeah, I had the Iowa men in my heart all the way, but it's okay. They had a great season.

Yeah, I'm sure my bracket would have been a disaster on the men's side anyway. It's been fun to watch the men's tournament as well. I have basketball on whenever.

Q. The other thing I was going to ask is you said a second ago that you don't think you've arrived. Coach Bluder doesn't think you've arrived. If you win tomorrow, have you arrived?

CAITLIN CLARK: No. I'm lucky enough that I'm only 21 years old. I feel like I have so much left in the tank to give to this game. I think I can get so much better.

You know, I did have eight turnovers last night. That wasn't too great. So I just think there's so many more ways that I can improve, and I truly believe that. I understand I have quite a bit of skill, but there's always so many areas to refine and get better.

Stats never lie. They never do. Film never lies, and I watch a lot of it. We analyze a lot of stats, especially after the season, in areas you can get better on.

In today's world, they have a stat about literally every single thing you could ever imagine. What's it like shooting off a screen, a downscreen, a cross-screen, flare screen. So many different stats, which I think is really cool. Coach Bluder is a huge stat person.

So, no, I don't think I will have arrived when we win the National Championship tomorrow. I have another year in college, and then hopefully a long professional career as well.

Q. This is actually a pretty good segue. You just talked about stats and breaking down film. What I'd like to know is what's the Caitlin Clark scouting report on Caitlin Clark?

CAITLIN CLARK: You just watch Debbie Antonelli's videos



she's been putting on Twitter because I gave an entire scouting report and I still do it in the game. I'll tell you, but if you just watch my games, not much ever changes.

I like the stepback going to the left. I think the thing that makes it really hard is we run a read-and-react offense. You never know what's going to happen. You can't scout that. You can try all you want, you can work on actions, but you never know what you're going to do because we don't even know what we're going to do.

I think that's the best way to play basketball. You're just making reads. You're using your brain. Coach Bluder says, just be a basketball player. Don't be a robot. Be a basketball player.

That's why people like watching Iowa women's basketball. We make reads. We have fun. We play up tempo. We want to get out in transition.

I think for me the area that I want to thrive in is always transition. That's why I take pride in getting on the defensive glass and pushing the ball because I think it's so hard to guard us, especially with the way our fours and fives run the floor. And Kate and Gabbie can spot up for threes, I think that's really, really hard for us.

Everybody knows what I'm going to do at this point. It's just, I don't know, that's what I always tell myself is just be you. That's all you can do.

Q. You're obviously the leader of this team, but Coach Jensen was talking last night about how you're also the emotional barometer of this team, and when you hit those big shots, obviously, that can be a huge burst of momentum for your team. Also on the flip side of that, when you get frustrated with calls or something's not going well, sometimes that can seep into the team too. I'm curious over the last three years how you've sort of evolved in that way or matured in that way to maybe not let that flow into the team as much?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think that's where my biggest growth has been honestly over the past year is just understanding things aren't going to go my way. Sure, do I get fiery and competitive and still talk to the refs? Absolutely. I'm never going to completely stop doing that because I don't think I'd be the player that I am if I did.

I have teammates that come up to me and calm me down and things like that. I think my teammates understand I am fiery, I am competitive, and I think that's what they feed off of honestly. I think they do, whether good or bad. I think they've just had my back through it all. I'm lucky enough to have teammates like that that understand the competitor I

am and I think that's what makes us who we are.

Q. Coach said one of the stats she cares most about is high fives and leading the league in them. Where do you rank in the Iowa high-five list?

CAITLIN CLARK: I've got to be up there. I've got to be up there in the chest bumps too. I've got to be up there. I don't know. We always talk about that. We always want to high five, but also just smile, be happy to be here. We're happy to be here. We love this game. We love one another.

And I think, if you watch our bench, the girls that never get in the game, they're the most excited people in the world. I think that speaks to the culture Coach Bluder has built. They know that they're a part of this. They know that they have a role. They know that we wouldn't be here without them, and I truly mean that because those girls put in a lot of hard work, and they never get to see the floor. That's such a hard position to be in.

It's hard coming from being your star at a high school and you come here and you don't even get in the game. So I think it speaks to the culture that Coach Bluder's built. We always talk about just loving your person to the left and right of you, and that's going to get this team really far.

Q. The second part is I know in Seattle you looked at the stat sheet after a triple-double and go nine turnovers, ugh. And then the eight turnovers yesterday. Do you know what you did in the game? First player to have back-to-back 40-point games in an NCAA Tournament, triple-doubles. Do you have any clue when you're playing what your numbers are during games?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think somewhat. I think at times a lot of the turnovers I have are self-inflicted, which is frustrating for me. But at the same time, as a good player, you can always feel when you're in the zone a little more, and that's what I've kind of felt throughout this tournament, and that's what I want to carry into tomorrow is just stay right there, stay in the zone.

Be confident in yourself. Be confident in your teammates. I know they have all the confidence in the world in me. When I miss a few shots, they come up to me, they're like, that was good. Keep shooting it. That's a great shot.

That's even when Coach Bluder says. When people miss a really great shot, they're not going to be mad. They're going to be happy you shot that. That shows you believe in yourself. We always want people to shoot really great shots.

Q. There's a phrase, with great success comes great responsibility. I think you've seen that, very much so. So you and your teammates, there's so much attention and so many pesky media requests from people like us, which thank you for taking them, but are you able to get that downtime, the quiet time, the recharge time? And in those quiet moments, what are those conversations with you and your teammates? What are you saying to each other?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think those are really important times, but also like all of this and all of the media, I really appreciate you all being here because this is how our game grows. To all the local media that's traveled from the state of Iowa, I really appreciate that as well and the way you've covered us is certainly incredible. It means a lot to this team and our program. So thank you.

But also, I think it is very important to take time to yourself and reflect and focus and get off your phone. I think is the biggest thing, and that's something we've really talked about throughout this whole postseason.

Quiet time is really good, but also I understand I've got all the time in the world to sleep after tomorrow. So, yeah, I'm going to give it everything I've got, and then I can sleep for two weeks.

Q. Just talk about playing in the Big Ten and how that's prepared you for this tournament and today.

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I got to give all the credit in the world to the Big Ten. I truly believe we could have had three to four teams in the Final Four, and I really believe that. I feel for Indiana. They had a tremendous, tremendous year, and then to have an early exit, that was us last year. It really stinks.

I thought Coach Moren coached those girls incredible all year long. Mackenzie Holmes had one of the best seasons I've ever seen. I thought Indiana was amazing, but also Ohio State, Maryland. I mean, Illinois beat us. Just so many great teams. Purdue gave us a great game to start the Big Ten tournament.

I believe it's the best conference in America. I think we've had the work to show for that. And it's prepared us for this moment honestly. It truly has. The.

We've been put in a lot of end-of-game situations where you're down two, you're up two, where you really have to execute and things like that. You saw that on full display last night, and I think you're going to see that on full display tomorrow too.

Q. What was that moment like in the circle yesterday when you got to hold on to Dr. Grant's sweater?

CAITLIN CLARK: That was tremendous. Dr. Grant, I think it's really incredible that we're doing this in the year that's 50-year anniversary of Title IX. 50 years may seem like a long time to a lot of people, but it's really not. It's not that long. To be able to have an opportunity to play for one of the universities that was at the forefront of women's athletics and giving women the same opportunity as men and to be able to play a sport and a game you love is pretty incredible.

I know -- I wasn't one that ever really got to know Dr. Grant too well just because she was at the end of her life, but Coach Bluder was the last coach she ever hired and very close with Coach Bluder. So she's always passing along things that Dr. Grant taught her, and I'm very grateful for everything Dr. Grant did because I know how proud Dr. Grant is up above of us because she believed we could be in this moment. She believed Coach Bluder could lead us to this moment.

So for her to save something for Coach Bluder when she made her first Final Four, that's very thoughtful. Just an incredible moment.

Q. Two parts. What time did you finally get to sleep last night? And when you close your eyes and visualize winning a National Championship, what do you see?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think I went to bed like 2:45. It's always hard to sleep after a win and competing so hard. But I got like seven hours. I woke up at 9:45. So that's like good sleep for me, and we'll have some downtime later today.

Like I said, it's really easy to wake up for a National Championship. Being tired is not going to be an issue with me. Having bruises is not going to be an issue. Being sore is not going to be an issue for anybody on our team.

Yeah, I think visualization is one of the things I always do before games is see yourself where you want to be. I think that's so important. It's something like I always talk about with our sports psychologist is visualize greatness. See yourself hitting game-winning shots. See yourself hoisting a trophy because why can't that be you? Because it can.

Q. Lisa talked about Jan scoring 66 points in a season on average and 105 in a game. What do you remember or what do you know about that 105-point showing? Do you and Coach J ever talk trash?



CAITLIN CLARK: We talk trash, come on now. Yeah, Coach J, I always give her crap and tell her to go shoot at practice and stuff. She did the other day, and she shot this crazy weird hook shot thing that I've never seen in my life.

Yeah, Coach J, like one of the best players to ever play in our state as well. She's a legend. She's way more popular than I even am. You should see this woman's phone, it's incredible.

I think the thing about Coach J is people love her to death, but it's because of the person she is. She's given up a lot of head-coaching opportunities to help this program get where it is, and even Coach Fitz, those three have been together since their time at Drake.

Yeah, I like to talk crap to Coach J because she likes to think she can score better than me, but she can't.

Q. You talked about growing up a Lynx fan. I wonder if you could talk about that in two ways, if you have specific memories of seeing them in person or just what that experience was like. Also just the fact that there was a model franchise, that there was a team with these great players to be able to look up to in the same way that so many young players are looking up to you now?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, absolutely. It's actually kind of a crazy story. I've loved the Lynx, and I forget what happened, but my dad, like I couldn't go to something. So he was like, all right, I'll take you to the Lynx game instead. So I was like, all right, let's go.

So we're road-tripping to Minneapolis, and we're in like the hotel, and I think I went swimming before all my myself, with my dad in the hotel pool. He called the ticket office, oh, I want to bring my daughter to the game. The guy at the ticket office, no clue who he is or where he is now, he's like, oh, do you guys want to come before the game and sit on the court and see all this stuff?

My dad was like, oh, absolutely, she would love that. He got me like a Rebekkah Brunson shirt and like Lindsay Whalen came over, Seimone Augustus came over. Clearly, I don't even know how old I was, but these are vivid memories in my mind, and they were playing the Seattle Storm.

So I think it was just -- I think that just shows how much I love the game from a very young age, and at the same time, that inspired me even more. When I got to go and experience something like that, but also the arena was packed for the Lynx. They love the Lynx, but because the

Lynx were really, really good. They had dominance there for quite some time.

And Lindsay Whalen is one of the best point guards ever to touch a basketball. So I grew up really inspired by that team, and I think, you know, when I was able to go to a game that only encouraged that more.

Q. (No microphone).

CAITLIN CLARK: I don't. I had to be pretty young. That's probably a question for my dad because he probably remembers.

Q. I remember a couple months back you said, "People need to play with that fire. I play with that fire." Now here we are at the National Championship Game. Social media is buzzing over the, quote, unquote, two best trash talkers in the country, you and Angel Reese. I presume you view that as a positive thing, not a negative thing, playing with passion. Do you view that as a good thing for this game?

CAITLIN CLARK: Absolutely. I think I view matchups that people get really excited about as a really good thing for this game. I think that's what excites people and gets them to the TV. When they turn the TV on, they understand it's not an individual game. It wasn't Caitlin versus Aliyah. We weren't even matched up against each other at all. It's not going to be Caitlin versus Angel. That's not going to win a National Championship, but that's what gets them excited about watching the game.

I think more than anything people are starting to understand women can play with excitement and a passion and a fire about themselves. That's what's fun. That's what people want to see.

But you leave it on the court. When you step off the court, you're friends. You support one another. You love the game. You love getting to watch them. I've loved watching LSU this year. They've been tremendous. And what Kim Mulkey has been able to build there in her short time is nothing short of remarkable.

So I have all the respect in the world for them, and I think it's going to be a tremendous game.

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