

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

Sunday, April 2, 2023

Dallas, Texas, USA

American Airlines Center

Iowa Hawkeyes

Lisa Bluder

Caitlin Clark

Monica Czinano

Finals Postgame Media Conference



in the third, please?

CAITLIN CLARK: Obviously foul trouble not really what you want in a National Championship Game, especially for our two seniors who have given so much to this program and had to finish their career on the bench. It's not something they deserved by any means.

I thought they called it very, very tight. I don't know about the two push-offs in the second quarter. I'm sure they saw that I pushed off and they called it and whatnot, and then hit with the technical foul in the third for throwing the ball under the basket.

Sometimes that's how things go. I thought all I could do is respond and come back out there and keep fighting and keep trying to help this team crawl back into the game.

I'm just proud of this group because we never gave up. We could have gone into halftime and been like what did we do? But our halftime locker room was like we're fine. We got this. We believe in one another. We have the offensive fire power to come out here and cause some damage.

I thought it showed our fight. It showed our fight, this team, and that's what the story has been all year long, just a bunch of fight and mental toughness.

You've got to give a lot of credit to LSU. They played an outstanding, outstanding game. They made some tough threes, some tough jumpers off of ball screens, and sometimes you have to live with some of that. So, yeah.

Q. Monika and Caitlin, I know it can be hard to be reflective at this point when you walk out of the locker room, but I wonder if both of you could speak to what you've done for the women's game the last three weeks. The numbers the other night were bonkers. A lot of people tuned in today, and I think that she probably single handedly made a lot of little kids want to play basketball. How will that impact be felt next year and the year after if she stays and beyond?

MONIKA CZINANO: She's a phenomenal basketball

LSU - 102, Iowa - 85

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the Division I women's basketball National Championship post-game press conference featuring the Iowa Hawkeyes. We'll hear an opening statement from Coach and follow up with statements from our student-athletes, from my left to right, Caitlin Clark and Monika Czinano.

Coach, at this time, if you could make an opening statement.

LISA BLUDER: I just want to congratulate LSU. I thought they played a phenomenal game. They shot the ball really, really well today. Jasmine Carson came off the bench and played extremely well. Last year, she did better than what we thought. They just were ready to go. They did a great job.

I'm so proud of my team. I'm proud of the women they are. I'm proud of what they stand for. The Iowa fans that came here in droves, I'm so thankful for them. I'm thankful that I get to coach at a university like the University of Iowa.

I'm telling you, this is brutal. It's really tough to walk out of that locker room today and to not be able to coach Monika and the McKenna ever again, that's tough. I'm very grateful for the season we had, and I don't want anything to take away from that. We played the National Championship Game.

Q. Obviously foul trouble was a significant story in this ballgame. Can you talk through the two offensive fouls in the second quarter and then the technical foul



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player. She's showed that time and time again. But I think the biggest thing is the way she holds herself and the way she plays the game.

She's doing it the right way. She's doing it the fun way and being a role model for little kids who want to grow up and be like here. That's a great thing.

So I think in these past three weeks, she's done so much but it's not just these three weeks. She's been doing it since she decided to play basketball. It's a progression to this point. We all know what a phenomenal basketball player she is, but it's the person she is behind it all that's inspiring these kids as well.

CAITLIN CLARK: I think the biggest thing is it's really, really special. I don't think it's going to set in for me for quite some time. (Crying).

I want my legacy to be the impact that I can have on young kids and the people in the state of Iowa, and I hope I brought them a lot of joy this season. I hope this team brought them a lot of joy. I understand we came up one win short, but I think we have a lot to be proud of and a lot to celebrate.

I was just that young girl, so all you have to do is dream, and you can be in moments like this.

Q. Despite losing, what does it mean for the program to just appear in the National Championship Game for the first time?

MONIKA CZINANO: I think it's huge for us. It just shows the hard work that Coach Bluder and this coaching staff have been putting in. It was long before this team did this.

They're just doing it the right way. I keep saying it all the time, but we truly are a family. They built something truly special there. I wouldn't have wanted to do this anywhere else, with any other team, with any other group of people. So it's truly been an honor.

Q. Monika, you might have a little more freedom to address this, but this has been a phenomenal tournament. You guys were on ABC today. Numbers have been through the roof. And the officiating today was not great. The 37 fouls is a record for the tournament. What needs to be done? I mean, does that hurt the women's game? And what would you like to see going forward?

MONIKA CZINANO: I don't really think that's a great question for me to answer honestly. I'm going to leave that up to whatever powers may be.

We can't live in the past. All we can do is live in the moment. That game happened. Those calls were called. Going forward, we'll see what people decide what to do about it.

As of right now, I'm just so proud of what this team has done despite adversity. Throughout the entire season, we've come out and given it our all. That's all you can do in any given situation is put your heart into it and believe, and we did that.

Q. Congratulations to you both on a terrific season. Caitlin, I'm hoping you can take me through the moment when Monika fouls out and you come over and share that moment with her. Obviously your time with her was going to come to an end today, no matter what happened. Just what was said, and what were you thinking in that moment?

CAITLIN CLARK: Well, I was really bummed that somebody who has made me a really, really good player had to spend the last five minutes on the bench out of six minutes on the bench, and somebody who has given so much to our program.

Monika is one of the most fun people to be around. She's goofy, and she deserved a little better than that. Monika would tell you when she first got here, she never dreamed to be as good as she is, and I still don't think she realizes how good she is, and other people don't realize it either. She doesn't get the credit she deserves.

I told her after the game, I'm nothing without you. She's made me a better person, a better basketball player. And I'm just really lucky that I was able to play with Mon and share a lot of really fun moments with her.

I think we're one of the best post-guard duos to play the game, and I'm just really lucky and grateful to have had these years together.

Q. Just for either or both of you, what kind of turned things around when you came out of the halftime locker room and went on that run?

MONIKA CZINANO: I think just the belief we had in the locker room. Nobody doubted, we know the offensive fire power we have. We know no game is unachievable for us. Unfortunately it ended the way it did.

We're the No. 1 offense in the country. We have the means to get back into anything. I think that was the talk coming in.



Obviously we know on the defensive end we had to sharpen it up a bit, and I think we did. We had stretches of that. Basketball is a game of runs. I think we went on a pretty great one.

CAITLIN CLARK: I think it's just the belief in one another. We know how good our offense is, and at the same time, they might cool off a little bit. I'm not really sure if they cooled off a little bit.

The story of the first half is No. 2, she comes in, Carson, and makes quite a few shots, and ends it with a banked three. It's like all right. You never hang your head. You just come out and keep fighting.

We just know it's only one possession at a time. You've got to get a stop and come back and score. We cut it to seven there eventually, but we couldn't quite get over the hump. Having foul trouble can hinder you at times too.

Proud of this team's fight because a lot of teams would probably hang their head and give up with a halftime deficit like that, but that wasn't what we're going to do.

Q. Monika, during this game, Twitter was blowing up about how powerful your drop step is. It's easy for Caitlin to talk highly about your game, just seeing you progress, but how would you describe the mark that you left on this tournament, the NCAA Tournament this year?

MONIKA CZINANO: I just hope people saw how much fun I played with. I love this game, and I love it for the team. Basketball is fun to me, but I didn't even like it all the time growing up. But I love being on a team and feeling like a part of something. That's what I felt here at Iowa.

I'm glad people like my drop step. I worked hard on it, so did she. I think it's more just the whole legacy we have here. Yeah, I don't even know what I just said, but go for it.

Q. Caitlin, talk to me about you set the record for the most three-pointers made in the NCAA Tournament. You know, you guys had a timeout after that. Talk to me about what you were feeling after you dropped that last three-pointer.

CAITLIN CLARK: I didn't know that. I don't know, I just think -- first of all, I probably could have attacked the rim a little more than I did tonight. I thought they played really good defense. I thought they had people waiting in the paint for me a little more than South Carolina did.

Took some there at the end of the game that you just kind of have to get up in hopes of drawing your team back

close. It certainly helps breaking a record when you get to play the maximum amount of games in a season, and that's what I'm proud of.

This group, we got to play the entire time, and I think that's what bums me out the most about this is I knew this was our last 40 minutes together, and I was just trying to cherish it. Yeah, I'm sad that we lost, don't get me wrong, but I'm more sad that I don't get to come back to practice with my best friends tomorrow, and that really stinks.

Q. Caitlin, can you tell us at the end of the game what happened? There's a lot blowing up on Twitter about Angel Reese following you around, pointing to her ring finger and taunting you?

CAITLIN CLARK: Honestly, I have no idea. I was just trying to get to the handshake line and shake hands and be grateful that my team was in that position. That's all you can do is hold your head high, be proud of what you did.

All the credit in the world to LSU. They were tremendous. They deserve it. They had a tremendous season. Kim Mulkey coached them so, so well. She's one of the best basketball coaches of all time, and it shows. She only said really kind things to me in the handshake line, so I'm very grateful to that too.

But honestly I have no idea. I was just trying to spend the last few moments on the court with especially the five people that I've started 93 games with and relishing every second of that.

Q. My question for the student-athletes is how will this loss motivate you for what lies ahead it?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think -- you know, I'm not really worried about what's next, not right now. I'm just going to enjoy what we did. We made history, and there's a lot to be proud of. There's a lot to reflect on these last couple weeks. Three weeks have been crazy, to say the least. I'm just thankful that I got to be on this journey with these people.

I think more than anything we're losing two seniors that gave their heart and soul to this program. Obviously I think they set a really good example for other people that we have in that locker room of what it takes to be able to play at this level on this stage. I'm really grateful that that's what they did because we have to bring people along and bring people up to get back to this point.

This is our goal every single year. We're not just going to be satisfied with making it here one time, but at the same time, I'm not worried about what's next right now. It's been



a really long, really fun season with this group. I just need to take some time to reflect and appreciate all that's come with it.

Q. I don't know if you all have been asked about this yet, but over 6 million people tuning in to the last round. Can you speak to that, the growth of the game, I'm sure the numbers will be even higher tonight, of what that means to have such a historic viewing.

MONIKA CZINANO: I love it. This is the game we love and seeing it get the recognition it deserves is obviously super rewarding. It's about time women's basketball gets this kind of viewership, and it can only go up.

So I'm super excited. I'm super proud to be part of this team that gets to be part of this journey. My past five years here, I've seen the game grow more than I ever thought it could.

I'm just so grateful that the sport we love and give our heart to, I'm just so glad that so many people are tuning in and loving it so much.

Q. This is for both Monika and Caitlin: First of all, congrats on a phenomenal season and also tournament. But how were you able to overcome obstacles throughout the season, and what successes did both of you experience?

MONIKA CZINANO: Right now I honestly can't even remember all the adversity we faced, but I just know that me as a person, I'm a better woman, a better person, because of this coaching staff and this team. I've grown individually, not even considering basketball, in a way I never thought I could. That's just a credit to my teammates and my coaches.

I truly, I keep saying it, but I wouldn't want to be anywhere else because I wouldn't be who I am now, and that's the best version of myself. So I'm super proud of everybody, and I wouldn't have wanted to do it at any other place.

Q. I just want to go back to what you just said, Monika, about it's about time. This is for both of you. What would you say to people who are just tuning in now to this incredible sport?

MONIKA CZINANO: Buckle up. I mean, it's only going to get more exciting and more fun. The game is evolving in such a great way.

I'm glad you're tuning in now, but keep it up.

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I think the same. I think once

people really turn on the TV or come and sit in the seat, they see how good the product is and how fun the game is. Our team plays it the right way. They play basketball the right way.

They have a lot of fun doing it, but at the same time, they understand there's more to life than just basketball. I think that's the biggest thing is just when people come and watch and understand the game, they see how fun and how great the product is, and they keep coming back for more. So it doesn't surprise me.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies.

At this time, we'll open it up for questions for Coach.

Q. Lisa, what was going through your head right there when Caitlin's talking about she wants her legacy to be about little kids? Of course she wants to win a title, but that's not what she said. How does that make you feel? And also you get to coach her maybe two more years?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, that's -- I'm sorry. (Crying). That's what our whole team is about. They're role models. They relish in it, and not just for young kids either.

This team has brightened the lives of so many people of all ages. Yeah, of course I'm happy I get to coach Caitlin another year, maybe two.

Q. I'll ask you about the fouls. The game has progressed in terms of the players, the coaching, everything else, and today we saw the officiating has not kept pace yet. Just wondering your thoughts in general and maybe what you would like to see going forward.

LISA BLUDER: I can't comment on the officials. It's very frustrating because I feel like I can't talk to them. They won't even listen. That's what's frustrating is there wasn't even a conversation that could be had.

When your two seniors have to sit on the bench -- they don't know they're seniors. I get it. But those two women didn't deserve it. I don't think so. And then Caitlin getting a T. I don't know. It's too bad. Yeah, it's too bad.

Q. Two moments I'd like to isolate on if I could. First of all, when you're walking out there, when you're hearing that Iowa crowd, when you're standing there next to the two women you've coached with for 30 years, what's going through your head just in the leadup to this game?



LISA BLUDER: Just gratitude. I am so thankful. I mean, Hawk fans that came here, traveled from all over. I look up, and I see my family up there. I have the best family. I am so blessed.

I don't know why I'm upset about this. I shouldn't be. I'm sorry. I honestly have such gratitude. I love to do it. People that really make a difference in people's lives, and I get the best family in the whole world. I'm just so thankful.

Q. And just related to it, when you're gathering with that team after, if you can just take me through what some of your message was to them when this game was done.

LISA BLUDER: I'm sorry. I'm going to try to get it out here. I'm just proud of them. I just told them that, for them, don't remember this. Remember that they played in a National Championship Game. Remember that they made it to the Final Four. And I asked them at the beginning of the year if they would have been happy playing in the National Championship Game, all of them would have. I just told them there's nobody else I'd want to coach except for them.

Q. What was the focus of your message during that timeout in the fourth quarter?

LISA BLUDER: I don't know if I can remember. The one that I called when they went up 14 or whatever? Just keep believing. Stop, score, stop.

We went through switching one through four, small screens, just a little bit of a change. Focus on what we can control and not on what we can't control. There's a lot of things out there we couldn't control, and I just didn't want my team getting wrapped up in it.

I think at times we did, though. We didn't succeed 100 percent in that. I probably didn't succeed 100 percent in that. But we'll learn.

Q. Just wanted to ask you about a couple of your, for lack of a better word, role players. Kate Martin, Gabbie Marshall hitting some shots. We talk a lot about Caitlin and Monika, but how big were those two tonight?

LISA BLUDER: And their defense too. They work so hard defensively. I understand we gave up a lot of points. I know that. But we weren't expecting banked-in threes and those type of things that really can hurt your momentum.

Again, those two women are such amazing people. Are Kate is 3-for-4 from the three-point line. We have four people in double figures, almost five. Gabbie, she's been

shooting like that for such a long time after a slow start to the year, and I'm so proud of her for continuing to believe that she could do it and would do it and she did it.

There's just so many people on this team -- I mean, they're great kids.

Q. Can you comment on Angel Reese following Caitlin around? Did you feel like it was taunting?

LISA BLUDER: I'm sure she was really proud of her accomplishment. And I would be really proud of my accomplishment if I made it, won the National Championship too.

We're all different people, and we all have different ways to show our emotions. Again, I've got to focus on what I can control.

Q. You've got a team that's captured the nation's attention and players that have too. What do you think this means for women's basketball and where do we go from here? And Iowa basketball too.

LISA BLUDER: If people are excited about women's basketball because of Iowa, I am so thrilled with that. I do believe -- and even though we didn't play it all the time tonight, I do think we play with a joy, we play with teamwork.

It's so fun to be able to be part of this game at this point. As you all know, when I started playing, it wasn't like this at all. It wasn't like this even 15 years ago. You know what, it's just great to see people realizing the power of women athletes and people respecting women athletes. It wasn't like that when I was growing up. Kind of looked down on for being an athlete.

Now these women are strong, they're leaders. And for people to recognize that and want to support them -- businesses, corporations wanting to support them, it's wonderful. And I'm just so glad I've gotten to see this happen.

Q. So y'all cut it to seven points late there in the third quarter. What's going through your head? Do you feel like that weird stoppage in play killed any momentum y'all had?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, we got it to seven points in the third quarter. Man, I felt good right then. I really did. I felt like, okay, we got this.

Then of course we have the foul, the technical foul, that stuff, and it just gets out of hand at that point.



Yeah, I felt really good when we got it to seven. I thought we were going to do it. I really did. My team thought they were going to do it.

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