

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

Saturday, April 6, 2024

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse

South Carolina Gamecocks Te-Hina Paopao

Finals Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll open up the floor for South Carolina senior guard Te-Hina Paopao.

Q. You spoke last night a little bit about Kamilla. Can you just talk about kind of her maturation during the season and what she means to you guys, especially now.

TE-HINA PAOPAO: She means so much. Her presence inside has done so much for us. Seeing her growth over the season has been so much fun to watch and experience with her.

Coming into the summer, she wasn't really looking to dominate her kill like she is now. It's a great sight to see. I'm really excited for her journey. We've got one more. So I know she's going to dominate tomorrow. We're really excited for her.

Q. Watching her in pregame stretch last night, and she was dancing, playing soccer, trying to hit the scoreboard with the ball. She's just kind of a free spirit. Can you describe her and her personality?

TE-HINA PAOPAO: She's our beautiful Brazilian girl. She's just amazing to be around. She's light. She's always funny, always energetic, always smiling. She's just a loving person. She's an amazing person, and I'm really fortunate to have someone like her in my corner and someone on our team.

She just keeps everything light but also tells us to lock in. Hearing her voice and being a leader is something that I've always admired.

Q. Did you know Raven before you got to South Carolina this past summer?



TE-HINA PAOPAO: I did know a little bit about her, but I knew what type of person she was and what kind of player she was.

Q. When you got there this summer, that was kind of the first time you really got to know her. How have you seen her grow since last summer, just in terms of her confidence? You would have met her at a time when she was struggling with that. To see her get to this point, what is that like?

TE-HINA PAOPAO: Yeah, I love seeing her growth. I think everyone on our team has been growing so much. Seeing her confidence grow as a person and a player and being who she is and being outgoing. She's just so much fun to be with and so much love from her.

Seeing her growth is just an amazing thing. She's been in the gym before and after practice. She's been working on her shot. She's been growing as a player. Just her mindset, it's been different. Her mentality, her revenge season, it's something like that for her. It's been amazing to watch. She's been killing it ever since, and she's just got to keep riding that wave. I'm always going to be there for her.

Just seeing her, it's an amazing feeling. I'm really excited for her journey to keep improving and just keep putting people in the right spots and doing what she does.

Q. When you first talked to Dawn about coming to South Carolina, what was the conversation like? Was it, hey, maybe we can get back to the Final Four and win a championship? Now that you're here and the season you've had, did you think, hey, I could help this team get to where we are now?

TE-HINA PAOPAO: The talks weren't even about the Final Four and the natty. The talk was you're going to come in here and compete. You're going to need us, and I'm going to need them. So it's been a great marriage between the two, an amazing journey, an amazing ride.

The fact we made it here with our team, it's been amazing. I'm kind of shocked, but at the same time we were



prepared for this, we got ready for this. And to know that we play in the championship game tomorrow, it's a great feeling. But at the same time, we're also locked in.

I'm just really blessed and grateful for the opportunity to be here, for her to give me the opportunity. It's surreal, and we're really excited to get it going tomorrow.

Q. Te-Hina, you've talked a bunch of times about how important family is to you. I was talking with one of your uncles yesterday. And he said that a bunch of your family members have been estranged from each other, not hanging out, not getting together, and have rallied around your performance and being able to be here for the NCAA Tournament run. What does that mean to you that your performance and this team's run is something that's brought your family together?

TE-HINA PAOPAO: Man, it means so much. I've had family members come to games, but nothing like this. I got, like, 20 members here from all over the States. Just to know that my performance in basketball brings families together and just bringing people together from afar, it's an amazing feeling.

I really appreciate their support and their love, and hopefully we can get a ring tomorrow and just share it amongst my families. It's just an amazing feeling to know that family is going to support me no matter what.

Q. One of your aunts came up to me after the interview and gave this to me and said welcome to the family. What does that say about your family, how welcoming they are, and just the vibe that they try to have around all of your members?

TE-HINA PAOPAO: Man, that's just my family. They're very welcoming. It's part of our Polynesian culture to welcome people and just to open up with open arms and join us with love and unity. It's just something that I've cherished.

It's something that I've spoken about here at South Carolina, how it feels like a family, and how we open up with open arms and with love. Just how this program has brought so much attention to my family. Just being able to share that light with them, it's amazing.

Q. Coach last night talked about how you guys were able to turn up the heat defensively. How much does Kamilla have to do with that, the idea that you guys can extend out when you know that she's protecting the rim?

TE-HINA PAOPAO: It helps a lot, especially with her and

Ashlyn. But just to be able to apply pressure on the perimeter knowing that we have help side and 6'7", it's great.

Like I said, our team is about team defense, and just being able to have a 6'7" post player block everything that comes her way, it's an amazing feeling. I'm hoping she'll get some blocks tomorrow as well.

Q. Te-Hina, you talked about last night, how you came here to compete for championships. I was wondering, now it's sunk in that you're playing in the championship game tomorrow. What does this moment mean to you? This is every player's dream. How would you describe what this means for you personally?

TE-HINA PAOPAO: It's an amazing feeling. Everything is sunk in already. Everything is sunk in, all the emotions and everything else. I know we're not done yet. We've got one job to do. We've got to take care of business tomorrow.

It's just an amazing feeling. Everyone has been telling me it's a special feeling, especially championship day. I'm just really blessed to be here. Without God, I wouldn't be here, without his grace and mercy. I just want to thank him for that.

It's been a long journey. To know that we're here finally, it's an amazing feeling, and I'm definitely going to soak in everything, whether we win or lose, because at the end of the day, we've still got a life to live.

So I'm just really blessed, and I've been loving every part of it.

Q. Te-Hina, I wanted to ask you about your personal journey. Was there like a particular moment playing basketball where it kind of stands out to you? And even before South Carolina, before Oregon, even before Gatorade Player of the Year, McDonald's All-American, was there a point in your basketball career that really jumps out to you or really where you felt like you were going to make it to the next level?

TE-HINA PAOPAO: I'm going to have to say when I got here to South Carolina. The journey has been so long, and just to know that I'm playing for the National Championship tomorrow, it's a great blessing.

Just realizing how far I've come and how much God has given me the ability to keep playing this game and keep giving me that confidence. It's something that I hold dear to heart. And knowing we've got one more game tomorrow -- it's been, like I said, a long journey, and to know that

journey is coming to fruition, it's a blessing, man.

I just can't even put into words how far this journey has gotten me, and I'm just blessed to be here.

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