

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

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Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse

Iowa Hawkeyes

Caitlin Clark

Finals Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: At this time, we'll open it up for senior guard Caitlin Clark.

Q. Caitlin, you and Lisa and your teammates have talked about how you've grown emotionally, maturity-wise, and Gabbie said yesterday you would have had a very different reaction to yesterday's game than in years past. How have you grown, or what went into that growth?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think the biggest thing for myself is at the beginning of my career, I thought everything I did had to be perfect, whether it was -- a lot of it always relied on my shooting. I think over the course of my career I've been the one that's been able to realize I'm not going to be perfect every game.

There's going to be good games. There's going to be bad games. But I still have to be somebody that my team can lean on in those moments. And I think also accepting I don't have to score every single point for my team to win. That's exactly what you saw last night. I didn't shoot the ball great. I made some shots there at the end. I thought Nika played tremendous defense, picked me up 94 feet. That's something that South Carolina is going to do too.

In general, we went in the locker room at halftime, nobody was flustered. I wasn't frustrated with myself. I just continued to chip away and make some big shots in the fourth quarter and set my teammates up for success.

I thought Hannah Stuelke played really good. I was trying to get her the ball as much as I could. I thought Kate came up with big plays.

I definitely think that's the biggest way I've matured and grown over the course of my four years is just never get rattled by things that don't go your way. Basketball isn't a



perfect game. That's what's going to happen. That's what honestly I'm the most proud of.

Q. Two-part question. First part is as an Iowa native, Iowa kid, to know that you're now one game away from bringing the first title to Iowa, what does that mean to you to finish off your legacy at the school? Second part is just the bigger picture of it's you guys and South Carolina, who's going for a perfect season. I don't think women's basketball could ask for a better championship game than this based on the success this season has had or the attendance and viewing or that other stuff going on.

CAITLIN CLARK: I think to bring back a national title to the University of Iowa would be super special. Obviously it's special in its own regard, making back-to-back national title games. I know everybody would come up to me before the season started and was, like, only one thing left to do. I don't think people realize how hard it is to get to this point. So I'm just proud of our group.

We lost two people who contributed a lot to our program last season. All we focused on was, it wasn't what we didn't have, it was what we had inside the locker room.

I couldn't be more proud of our group and just the resiliency we showed all year. We've had a couple of tough losses, and that's what's made us ready for these type of moments.

I think this matchup, you can't ask for anything better. I think it speaks to the way women's basketball has been tremendous on all levels all throughout the year. We know we have our hands full. Everybody around the country knows South Carolina has been the team all year. They've observed that. They've earned it. They've just been incredible.

I've turned on the TV. Most of the times they've played because they're so much fun to watch, the depth that they have, the way they rebound the ball, the way they're shooting the ball. They've just been incredible.

This is, we have five people on our team that this is the last

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time you get to put on your college uniform. I don't think you need much more motivation than that. We're going to give it every single thing we've got.

Q. That game last year against them, do you study that tape? Do you use it all as a point of reference? Or with how much both teams have changed, does it not matter?

CAITLIN CLARK: It doesn't really matter. We don't look at it at all, to be completely honest with you. It's kind of similar, we've had familiarity with Colorado and LSU. And the only team I really went back and watched was Colorado just because they had everybody back from the previous year. LSU obviously was completely different in what they had, obviously some people returning, but added two different starters.

This South Carolina team is completely different. Some of the stuff they run is completely different. We have to guard them completely different. The way they're shooting the ball. I mean, they start five different people. They switch up who they start at the 4 position from game to game. So we'll be prepared for either of those.

I don't think it's something you go back and watch. I don't think it's very helpful at all, other than the fact of maybe what we did.

At this point, there's only so much you can do to prepare on the court-wise. It's more so watching film of their recent games. And that's the biggest thing the coaches have been preaching.

Q. I just want to ask what have you seen from South Carolina's recent film? What is the most difficult part of their game to prepare for for Sunday?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think it's everything. They're just so disciplined in every single thing that they do. They shoot the ball really well at all three guard positions. They bring guards in off the bench that are really good. Obviously their height poses a challenge to us. And their rebounding poses a challenge to us. It's going to be very important that we try to box out.

But I think going into that game last year, to say we're going to beat South Carolina on the glass is probably something that's not going to happen every single time we play them. But you have to be able to manage it the best you can.

And I think we did that versus LSU, and that's where you get confidence from is just you kind of weather the storms on the glass, you try to come up with big ones when you

can.

But they're going to get some, but you have to limit some. I think those are the biggest challenges that they pose to us.

Q. You said after you declared for the WNBA or at least you seemed very, very loose in your playing. Now that you know this is the, quote, unquote, last dance, are the emotions similar? What are the emotions like, Caitlin?

CAITLIN CLARK: To be honest, like I don't have many emotions of, like, this is the end for me. I certainly know it is, but I don't think I can go into the game feeling that. I don't think that would allow me to play my best.

I think it's kind of similar to senior night for myself, or my last game in Carver versus West Virginia. You're so focused on competing and enjoying every single second that have and helping your team win that you're not too caught up in this is the last time I'm going to put on this uniform, this is the last time I'm going to be playing in this arena, this is the last.

Like that's not how we view things around our program. It's, like, you're competing for this opportunity. You love this opportunity.

Once the buzzer hits zero, whether we win or whether we lose, I'll definitely be hit with a wave of emotion, especially over the course of the next week, as things kind of change in my life quite a bit.

I think just trying to enjoy every single second because I'm fortunate enough to be able to be in the National Championship again and give it everything I got.

Q. Caitlin, athletes all have their different ways of measuring success. You and a lot of your teammates obviously have had so many great accomplishments. But for you, when it comes to your college career, is your measurement of success going to be dependent on whether or not you win a title?

CAITLIN CLARK: I mean, no, I don't think so at all. I've played basketball at this university for four years, and for it to come down to two games and that be whether or not I'm proud of myself and proud of the way I've carried myself and proud of the way I've impacted people in their lives, I don't think that's a fair assessment.

I guess going forward -- and I've talked about this with my legacy -- I don't want my legacy to be, oh, Caitlin won X amount of games or Caitlin scored X amount of points. It's I hope it's what I was able to do for the game of women's

basketball. I hope it is the young boys and young girls that are inspired to play this sport or dream to do whatever they want to do in their lives.

Yeah, I think it's just the people that we've brought together, the joy we've brought to people, the way people are recognizing women's basketball as a sport. It's fun to watch. Everybody loves it. It can be on the highest of stages. I think you see that with the viewership numbers.

To me, for it to come down to 40 minutes and for me to validate myself within 40 minutes, I don't think that's a fair assessment.

Q. You talked the other day about your vision, your ability to see things on the court before they happened. I know you envisioned being back in this moment when you came back last year. But did you envision everything else that has come along with it? Have you had a chance to appreciate it at all, or will it be something 5, 10, 15 years from now when you guys have reunions and you'll think, oh, my God, what a crazy time in our lives?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think after last season, it was like, oh, my gosh, how can I possibly replicate the season we had? I think what we were able to do with that season was simply magical. The teams that we beat to get to the point that we were was really special.

I think for myself it's, like, I always believe in this team. I believe in the people around me. Coach Bluder is so good at building teams. So I think there was always a belief from day one of we can get back to this national title game.

A lot of things have to go your way. You've got to stay healthy. You have to make shots at the right time. You've got to have a little luck, things like that.

I think it's been something that I've tried to soak in the best I can. Obviously it's hard when you're going from game to game and preparing every single weekend for two games.

But I think it's something that you can't really dream and imagine these type of moments. Like, yes, I'm one that dreams big, but for it to be on this stage and this magnitude is something that's super special.

I think once my career ends is when I'm really going to be able to soak it in and look back and enjoy every single second of everything that we did.

Q. I wanted to ask you a follow-up to what you were just asked about, your legacy. Over the last couple of weeks as you guys have made your run here, there has

been a big debate about whether you need to win a championship to cement a GOAT legacy, whether it's on TV, radio, that sort of thing. How does that make you feel knowing that that's a talking point about you going into this game?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think the biggest thing for myself is when you're in the spotlight like this, there's going to be a million different opinions on you. For as many people that are going to love you, there are going to be people that don't like you. That's the case with every professional athlete, men or women, playing at the highest stage.

I think what I've been able to do over the course of my career is just focus on the opinions of the people inside our locker room. That's what I really care about, the people that I love to death, the people that have had my back every single second of my career, have been the ones that have believed in me more than anybody.

To me that's really the only opinions that I'm concerned with are my teammates, my coaches, my family, the people that I want to make proud every single day.

Q. Caitlin, you talked about post-game, savoring every moment, and you talked about it briefly a little bit ago. How many times have you caught yourself appreciating the small things? What's that process been like? Do you have any examples of that?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think the biggest thing is like, no matter what we're doing -- whether it's media, whether it's open practice, whether it's a closed practice -- you just try to enjoy every single second and go about it with a smile on your face because there are so many people that would kill to be in our position right now. There's, what, 360 Division I basketball teams. And to be one of two left standing, that's a really amazing accomplishment within itself.

I think the biggest thing is before every game I try to take a deep breath and look around and soak in the environment because, whether we've played on the road this year, whether we've played at home, whether it's been a neutral court, whether it's been here at the Final Four, Sweet 16 and Elite Eights, the crowds have been incredible. The way people are not only showing up, but cheering about the game and invested in the game. They understand the game. They know what's going on. They're passionate about it. To me, that's the coolest thing.

So I just try to take a deep breath and look around as much as I can before the game starts and soak in every single second. I think that's been one of the coolest things for myself.

Q. You're being asked about how other people feel and think about what a championship would mean for you and your teammates, but I'm curious how you feel about it. As an athlete, as a competitor, as a teammate, what would a national title mean to you that everything you've done individually, for this sport, and record-wise just couldn't accomplish in your own mind?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I think that would be the cherry on top. That would be the top of the list, the thing that you're most proud of. That's something you get to share with your teammates.

But at the same time, it would be for every Iowa women's basketball player that has come before us. There has been a long list of really amazing talent that have played in this program. Going back to when C. Vivian Stringer coached the Iowa women's basketball program, they were in the Final Four, I believe, twice, maybe once with her.

So many tremendous players that have laid a foundation of people wanting to support our program. Before I showed up, there was people -- we averaged 10,000 fans. It wasn't magical all of a sudden that once we got good that people started showing up.

They were there. They were supporting. That's the coolest thing about women's basketball in the state of Iowa. People appreciate it and know how good it is.

To be able to win a national title for this university in a place that has loved women's basketball and done a lot for the game would be super special, not only for myself, but for my teammates and just this program and the university overall.

Q. You're an inspiration to so many young girls, but you're also an inspiration to so many women who played sports and basketball when they were growing up. What message would you like to share with those women who helped blaze this trail to have women's basketball shining like it is today?

CAITLIN CLARK: I would say the biggest thing is just thank you. That's what I always talk about is women's basketball isn't just suddenly good. It's been good.

I'm lucky enough to be surrounded by coaches that have been in this game for a really long time. They coached when 50 people showed up to the game and nobody wanted to support them and what they were doing. Coach J, our associate head coach, who is one of the best women's basketball players our state has ever seen.

For them to be at the forefront of laying a foundation of this is what women's basketball is and still nobody wanted to support it, for them to see how it's evolved is pretty incredible. They deserve it more than anybody else for them to be in these moments too.

It isn't just the people that are in the college game right now. It's every single person that's come before us. Now you're seeing we are on ESPN, we are on nationally televised TV stations that people are, like, wow, this is so much fun to watch. They can't get enough of it. It is scheduled in their night. They're sitting down and watching.

And I don't think it's only women's basketball. I think you see it across the board, whether it's softball, whether it's gymnastics, volleyball. People want to watch. It's just when they're given the opportunity, the research and the facts show that people love it.

Q. I was just at Kate Martin's breakout, so I'm going to ask you a couple of questions. Tomorrow will be your 139th consecutive game playing next to Kate Martin. Of all the "lasts" tomorrow, I want to talk about how that ranks. I also want to get your perspective on what you hope Iowa women's basketball fans remember about Kate Martin's career.

CAITLIN CLARK: I could talk about Kate for a really long time. If I played 139 games with her, I don't know how many she played, which is kind of crazy, because she's old.

That girl is tougher than nails. This is her sixth year. She starts her career off with a torn ACL and misses her freshman season. I think Kate would tell you that was the best thing to ever happen to her. It gave her perspective on what basketball really is. It made her a better leader. She was a naturally born leader.

But Kate is one of the best teammates I've ever had, the best teammates I've ever had. The thing about her is she's going to have her teammate's back every single day, every single second.

To see the growth that she's taken as a basketball player this year, she's really upped her game, her play, while also being the best leader for this team.

And if you don't have Kate Martin, we're not in this position. I don't know where our season ends, but we're not right here. That's how much she brings to our team. And every single person on our team would say that, player or coach.

Kate grew up with a poster of Iowa women's basketball

glued to her ceiling. That's what she fell asleep looking at every single night. And she embodies that in every single thing that she does. She truly cares about and loves every person she's been teammates with. I know it will be special for her to take the court one more time in an Iowa jersey.

Q. Caitlin, I remember on media day last October, I think one of the things you said was, what you would judge yourself on is what sort of leader you were for the younger players on this team. We saw last night how Hannah was kind of glowing about the things you said. How have you learned to use your voice in terms of empowering people?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think that's like one of the biggest things is my teammates ride my emotions whether I like it or not, whether it's positive or whether it's negative. That's something I've had to learn, they're going to feel what I feel. I'm their emotional leader.

It's something I've embraced, and it's a powerful tool, like you saw. The things I can say about my teammates and truly believe and instill that confidence in them, that's one of the coolest things as a point guard, as a leader, as a friend, as a teammate. That's how much better you can make people by just believing in them and telling that to them, to their face.

I think that's the biggest thing with Han is she's somebody who feeds off confidence. She feeds off the belief of her teammates. We know what she's capable of every single night. And being able to tell her that, not just show her that -- tell her and give her those words of affirmation and how much we believe in her, I think it just shows, as a teammate and a leader, how much we've all grown and how much she's grown.

Q. The mention earlier of your appreciation for Iowa hoops, and I think as a state, Iowa, to the outside, may not have been seen as a big hotbed for basketball. You know better than us. Could you just speak briefly on the scene that you grew up in and how much it means to you, especially at this moment?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think anybody who's been to the state of Iowa knows how good women's basketball is there. It starts at a very young age. The AAU program I played for was Nike EYBL team, All Iowa Attack. And we were in three Nike Nationals during my time there.

They consistently produce really good talent in the state of Iowa, whether it's the high school basketball, whether it's the AAU circuit.

But I also think it's the college programs we have in our state -- whether it's Iowa, whether it's Iowa State, whether it's UNI, whether it's Drake -- all four of those teams are teams vying for NCAA Tournament bids every single year. Drake and UNI obviously being in the same conference, usually both of them don't make it, but at least one of them do.

Drake had a tremendous year, were in the NCAA Tournament. Really played Colorado pretty solid.

But I think that's the biggest thing is people in the state of Iowa know how special women's basketball is there. People aren't just showing up to Iowa women's basketball games. They're showing up to Drake. They're showing up to UNI. They're showing up to Iowa State games.

People love our game there. Every single year everybody plays each other. It's kind of like our state championship. That's one of the goals every year is you want to be state champion of playing those games. They're fun games to play. They're intense. They come down to the wire, and that's what makes them so fun.

Q. Raven Johnson was talking to us earlier, and she said she watched the tape of last year's game a hundred times. She said looking back she doesn't blame you for waving her off in that one sequence. I'm just curious, when you see her play now, how is she different now than she was a year ago?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think Raven's had a tremendous year. I think not only from a shooting perspective, but as the point guard of a team, as the guard of a team, she's been a true leader. She's led that team.

After losing five starters, after losing Zia Cooke, who in my eyes was one of the best players in the country last year, I really admire everything that she's done this year. I think she's shooting over 50 percent in her last five games, has shot it over 40 percent all year.

That just speaks to her work ethic. She got in the gym, and she got better, and I admire that. I think that's what makes great players great. And that's exactly what she did.

I know this South Carolina team poses a totally different challenge. Obviously it's similar in some ways, but the way their guards shoot the ball is incredible. It adds a whole other dynamic for us to be prepared for.

Q. You've accomplished so much this season and broken so many records, but you're also ranked No. 1 in women's college basketball for NIL deals. How have

NIL deals impacted you? And how do you think they're going to impact the growth of women's sports?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think NIL has been a cool journey for myself. It's kind of evolved over the course of my career. Obviously we didn't have it my freshman year during COVID, and then that summer is when it really began.

And nobody really knew what all it entailed, and I still feel like it's kind of that same way. There's just so many questions and not a lot of answers.

Lucky for myself, I've surrounded myself with people that have my best interests at heart. They want me to be my best. And I think the biggest thing for myself, regarding NIL, is my focus has been 110 percent on basketball. If it's not, all that other stuff doesn't matter. That doesn't come along with it.

I've been lucky enough to partner with a lot of really good brands that have the same values and same beliefs that I do, that are truly invested in women's basketball, they care about women's basketball. They want it to go to a place that it's never been before. So I think that's been the coolest thing for me.

Additionally, the way student-athletes have been able to use it to make it their own. Everybody is passionate about different things. To be able to use that to show people, I don't know, things that you're interested in and change the lives of other people, I think has been the coolest thing. Also the way people have been able to give back to their communities and things they care about has been super special as well.

Q. I just saw in the press release last night that last night's game was you and Kate's 138th consecutive start together. Tell me about how special these last four years, 138 games, have been, and how special it's going to be knowing you guys get to play the maximum, start 139 tomorrow in the championship game.

CAITLIN CLARK: It's crazy to wrap your head around 139 games. That seems like a ton of games. Lucky enough, we've had postseasons where we've gotten a lot of extra games, whether it's the Big Ten Tournament or the NCAA Tournament. We've been able to have some long seasons, and that's something I'm really thankful for.

To be honest, I don't think I'd have the type of career if I don't have a teammate like Kate. She's been one that has had my back. She holds me accountable. I hold her accountable. But I think at the same time, me and Kate are wired so similarly that we get each other on a different

level.

She's so competitive. Her dad was a football coach growing up. She's one of the best leaders I've been around. She wants the best for her teammates. She's one of the most selfless people.

Yeah, she's pushed me, and I've pushed her. I know, when we walk off that court tomorrow, win or lose, we'll have a lot to hold our head up about. I'm just grateful to not only have a teammate like her but a friend like her.

Q. When people talk about experience at this level, sometimes it means this as well, doing a lot of media, living out of a hotel for a couple of weeks. What did you learn from last year doing this week for the first time? And also, how do you handle sort of that feeling of responsibility because you are relied upon to grow the game so much?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think coming into last year I wasn't totally prepared for all the obligations that you have at the Final Four, whether that's media, whether that's certain events, whether that's open practice, whether that's X, Y and Z. There's a whole long list.

But I think the way I've tried to look at it is how lucky am I. I get to have this opportunity. I get to do these things. Our team gets to do these things. I think being able to have the experience of last year has certainly helped me more than anything.

I don't view it as any type of responsibility. Sure, it's a responsibility, but this is something that has just come along with the way I've been able to carry myself and the way that I love this game, the way that I've been able to have fun with this game over the course of the last four years.

It's been special. And if it's something you view as a responsibility, I'm glad I can be able to do it. So more than anything, I'm just thankful.

Q. I'm just wondering what you, losing on such a big stage is its own kind of monster sometimes. What can you take from those feelings and emotions last year? How have you grown from that? And how have you changed from that?

CAITLIN CLARK: One thing, it's hard when your season ends, no matter what stage it is. Then it's hard when you make it to the national title game and you're so close to accomplishing something so great -- we obviously accomplished a lot of really great things last year, but to be so close to a national title is, like, being able to

compartmentalize all that at the same time was really hard.

I think the biggest thing for myself is. I wasn't really upset that we lost the game. To be honest, LSU deserved to win. They beat us. They shot the ball great. They played a great game. I think it was more so the feeling of I don't want this to end. It was so much fun being in the Final Four, advancing to the national title game.

I think it's the same thing right now. I don't want this to end, whether it's with a win or with a loss. I think the biggest thing is you have that little fire inside of you. It's been the same throughout my entire career. I've had some tough losses, and I think those are the moments that have prepared me for right now for this opportunity.

At the end of the day, it's a game of basketball. You give it everything you've got, but I have a lot of appreciation for the way our team has carried ourselves and all the stuff that we've established, and we're going to give it everything we can to be able to go out there and be able to hoist the trophy tomorrow.

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