

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

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Amalie Arena

South Carolina Gamecocks Bree Hall

Finals Pregame Media Conference

Q. This is your third national championship game. What are some of the memories of your first two? What's your feeling now? I'm sure it's a whole lot different than from when you were a freshman.

BREE HALL: I remember I was scared and nervous I couldn't sleep. But I'm going to sleep just fine tonight because it is what it is. I'm very confident in myself this go-around. And I'm confident in my team, too.

Q. Last night I asked Dawn about you and your contributions. She likes to call you, you're her all-five defensive team. And she said you're just playing free like you alluded to because it's over Sunday win or lose. Describe how knowing the end of the road is near is allowing you to play so free.

BREE HALL: I think you literally said it, just knowing that the game, that my college career will be over on Sunday. I just have to go out there and just play free but. Play confident.

My confidence is at an all-time high. I feel like I believe in my team. It's not just me, but I believe in my team, and I believe in everything that our coaching staff is doing. I just feel like playing confident is going to be very key.

Q. You said recently that you're a crash-out. First of all, how do you think that impacts your game overall, and what does that mean to you heading into tomorrow? How is that going to help you?

BREE HALL: I think it just helps me with my competitiveness. I take a lot of pride in my defense. And I take a lot of pride in to say -- I'm not trying to block, I'm not trying to have the biggest block, I'm not trying to have the greatest steal. I'm just trying to make whoever I'm guarding as inefficient as possible.



And I think my crashing kind of plays in the back because I'm, like, I have to stop them, I have to stop them. I'll do whatever it takes to do it.

Q. You were a freshman on the 2022 national championship team. You had a bigger role the next year when you guys tried to repeat in 2023. What do you feel you've learned from that season trying to repeat that that will help you this year? And is there any advice you're kind of giving the younger teammates about maybe what you guys don't want to do this time or how you want to do it differently?

BREE HALL: I mean, I feel like the biggest thing for me is being a leader. I'm communicating. I'm telling them what I see, what they need to be doing when they're subbed into the game.

I think also that I'm just feeling like I have to do more than just play defense in this game. Like, I have to be everywhere. I have to look to score. I have to play defense. I have to help my teammates in little things on what they should do on the court.

But I think from the 2023 season to this season I feel it's just going to be those little things that's really going to matter and knowing that every team is going to want to do the little things as well.

Q. I know you just said you take a lot of pride in your defense and as you all do as a team. How do you think you're approaching this game tomorrow differently than how you played UConn the first time?

BREE HALL: I mean, that game was just not who we are. It wasn't our standard. So I think it's just going to be important for us to play up to our standard.

I feel we're gelling together at the right time. A lot of people were saying that, you know, like, they don't believe in us and these different type of things. But I feel yesterday we really showed that we can really gel together.

At first, the first part of the tournament, it was not really all



together, but I feel like we're coming together now.

Q. How big was it to see Joyce kind of have the breakout game she had last night? And there's so much experience on this team, but for her how much of an X factor can she be tomorrow?

BREE HALL: She can be a huge X factor. I was so happy to see her have that breakout game because it's been hard for her this tournament just to really go off. But the way she went off -- and it wasn't just her scoring; her rebounding, passing -- it was incredible to see.

I'm so glad because we really did try to pour into her and boost her confidence. I feel she was shaken a little bit at the beginning of the tournament. And she went out there and played how she played last night. It was great.

Q. Particularly facing Azzi Fudd and Paige Bueckers, could you tell us what you need to do, you've played a lot of dynamic guards and you've guarded a lot of them. What do you have to do to somewhat contain those two, if you can?

BREE HALL: I'm not going to tell what we're going to do. That was a trick question. But, I mean, we're just going to have to stay disciplined to the game plan. I don't want to say. I'm sorry.

Q. You mentioned that you know your career is over one way or another tomorrow. How do you manage those emotions knowing that -- you've won a national title -- but when you know that this is it and that's what's on the line?

BREE HALL: To be completely honest, I'm not thinking about that at all. I just want to win. I'm just so laser focused on winning, I can't even think about the fact that my season, that my college career will be ending tomorrow regardless of how it turns out.

But, like I said, I'm just focused on winning. I don't know if I can really fathom the idea of that, that it will be over tomorrow.

Q. I wanted to ask you if you had the opportunity to meet Sarah Strong when she visited South Carolina, and what your impressions were and if you thought maybe she might be leaning toward staying close to home?

BREE HALL: I did not get to meet Sarah Strong. But I will say based off interviews, she seemed like a very sweet girl, very nice and sweet girl.

Q. You've got a lot of NIL deals this time of year. How do you juggle that and manage that? And how have you seen the attention around NIL and the amount of deals coming your way change over the past few years?

BREE HALL: Yeah, I mean, of course, when you start playing more, you get more deals. That's one thing for sure. But the types of deals are amazing. I love to see these companies pour into athletes.

I'd love more makeup companies to pour into athletes because I wear makeup and I do (indiscernible).

NIL is a great thing. I'm so glad that it's happening right now. It should have happened a while back. But it is what it is.

What was the first question?

Q. How do you juggle it all?

BREE HALL: I mean, just -- it is hard, and I do a really good job -- my agency does a really good job making me do things in bulk. If I have a whole bunch of posts I have to do then we'll just take a whole day, record everything that I need to record, and then post -- they'll post them for me or I'll post them.

Q. Could you just talk about your relationship with Coach and how it's grown over the last few years. And what makes her so special for you guys and for the game of women's basketball?

BREE HALL: I mean, golly, she's an amazing woman. The things that she's done for women's basketball is incredible.

My relationship with her has really grown tremendously, honestly. She has really just stepped up big into my life. She's always there for me. It's not just me. She's there for all of us.

I mean, you guys can see the relationship we have with her. You guys call it Dawn's Day Care, so clearly we love her. But she's always there. You can come in her office anytime, text her about anything.

The type of coach she is is incredible. I think I've told a lot of people that at halftime, say we're down, she's coming in there. She has a calm energy. She's telling us we can do it.

But the best thing about our team too with that is she already knows we're going to be talking to each other at

halftime about what we need to do differently out there, what we're seeing. She doesn't have to do too much on that part. But her calm energy, her confidence in us is very essential to our team.

Q. You got to play with the freshies and now you're part of this Dawn's Day Care team. Dawn has talked about adapting her coaching style. What's your perspective on that? What makes her so adaptable?

BREE HALL: It's so funny because me, Raven and Sania always talk about it. Because we're, like, my freshman year, when it was the freshies she would not do the stuff she's doing now.

But I'm glad she's adapted to us. She's realized we're a young, outgoing team that just wants to win. We can have fun. We can play around. We might be a little immature sometimes, but -- a little childish, I guess. But that's what makes us fun to be around. But I'm just glad that she's adapted.

That team was a very mature, very grown group. And they helped us. I felt like they helped the ones that were on that team -- me, Sania, Raven -- motivated us to be vets on the court in that aspect and still have fun off the court.

Q. I know we always as media always ask you to reflect at the end of the season about what this team and this group means to you. I would like you to do that now with even so much ahead of you so you have maybe more of a clear head to do so. Just reflect on why this group is special.

BREE HALL: I think it's just the way we're so connected. This group is one of a kind. It's like family. Seriously, it really is. The way that we have each other's back. The way that we communicate with each other, the way we hang out.

It's not just mandatory stuff that we have to do. Like, we're hanging out outside of that, all together, always together. It's nice to be on a team like that because a lot of people don't have a team where they can all just be so connected on and off the court.

Q. I know most of your time is spent in the gym or at the hotel at this event, but from the time you got off the plane to now, have you experienced some things? Do you have any sense for the vibe in town and what this event's been like for not only the players but for all the fans here?

BREE HALL: Yeah, we went to the mall, actually, when we first landed here. We were just so happy with the mall

because the mall that we have is not like Tampa's, I will say. It is not like Tampa's, which is fine.

But being able to shop, it was great. We had a great time. Ate some food there.

But Tampa is a very beautiful city, I will say. I was, like, dang, I want to live here maybe one day.

Q. You all are a fun group, like you've said. You bring the energy. Not only is it felt on the court but with the fans in the stands who have traveled thousands of miles to see you all. How have the fans played an integral part in your game and you all being here in the tournament?

BREE HALL: I mean, their support is crazy. You see it. They're all out in the crowd. I mean, it's hard -- it's hard to come -- I say at our house, when we're at Colonial Life Arena it's hard to come play because. They play a huge role in how we play. We feed off their energy.

Q. Especially with a team that is as talented as you all are, it's not often that everyone sort of comes together and, like you said, place confident, locks in on defense, is able to withstand other teams making runs. I know you've said your group is special and well-connected. What is it, though, about it that makes you guys play so unselfishly together?

BREE HALL: I mean, I think the biggest thing is that Coach recruits people that want to play unselfish. When you come here, she's very honest. You're not going to be just "the" person. We've got a team full of people that can also play.

And if you're committed to that, I think you're committed to that from the start. It's just kind of naturally in a lot of us honestly. We came here, we wanted to win. It wasn't, we came here looking for awards, accolades. If it comes, it comes. It's that type of thing.

Q. You played with Raven for four years now. She's the one who coined the revenge tour last year, the repeat tour last year. How much do you think she wants this one? Have you seen any change in her demeanor now that this chance is finally here?

BREE HALL: I mean, yeah, of course. This is the biggest game. Just knowing that we have a lot of things on the line for this game, I mean, she's locked in. She's super focused, super, super focused.

I don't know if I've seen her this locked in a while because she is just quite -- what's the word? -- she's just Raven.

Lord have mercy, my God.

But when it's time to play, she's so focused, my goodness. Just seeing her just locked in the way that she is in practice has been really great to see. And we definitely need it going into this game.

Q. Te-Hina was talking about slow starts how you can't get used to that just assume you're going to come back what do you think about the first quarters and do you remember being down 10-0 in the title game?

BREE HALL: Yeah, we do. And the beautiful thing about this team is we're so poised. When we have a situation like, when we're down, we're, like, we're good, we got this. The coaches also tell us -- she believes in us. We have to stay calm and remember we have defense to rely on.

Q. What do you remember about your approach and how you were feeling leading into the 2022 national game with UConn? Do you remember anything?

BREE HALL: Yes, I had to take melatonin because I couldn't sleep, my goodness. But I don't think I'm going to have to do that this year. I'm just confident.

Like, the way that I was so stressed -- I tell myself if I'm super stressed out then it will not work out. So I feel like it's just best for me to go to bed, relax, maybe play some meditation music, I don't know, just to really relax my body. And then go out there and play. Like I said, in 2022, I was just a freshman, so I was very nervous.

Q. You're a veteran of the tournament, and it's evolved a lot from scheduling formats and the way they treat the players over the last four years. I'm curious what are the changes you've seen through from the beginning up until now and then as well opportunities moving forward.

BREE HALL: The way we've been treated?

Q. As players.

BREE HALL: By whom?

Q. The experience, by NCAA, by fans, everything.

BREE HALL: Yeah, the experience has been amazing just to see over the last four years, how consistent it's been, too. Just a lot of the gifts suite and the different things we get has been great, high-quality things.

I'm blessed I've been able to see the consistency

throughout the last four years of the NCAA Tournaments, especially since, I think that was in -- I don't know, 2018, whenever it was, 2019, when it was a huge deal during COVID, of the way women were treated compared to the men's tournament. I'm just glad to see the growth, honestly.

Q. What does the depth feel like on the court? Are your legs a little fresher -- I'm sure they're dead? At this time of season do you feel you can go harder in games, is it more comfortable when, okay, I missed a couple of shots? How does that play out for you guys?

BREE HALL: I mean, being truly honest, I go into the game, and I think a lot of us go into the game, completely exert ourselves; we have a bench that can play. Go out there, play as hard as you need to play and then you can rest knowing that your team's going to take care of business.

When they sub in, it's a very comforting feeling. Like I said, not a lot of people can have that type of comfort with the bench coming in and knowing that they're going to handle business.

So it's very comforting. We trust each other. We trust our bench. We trust what they do. It's a great feeling.

Q. Yesterday Maryam hits a 3 in the waning moments of that game. A lot of us, we don't get to see the behind the scenes what is her fingerprint and impact on this team? And why were you all so lit after she hit that 3?

BREE HALL: To be truly honest, she came here and that's what she typically does is shoots 3s as a post. But I feel there was a slump where she kind of lost her confidence. But just to see her hit that 3, it was such a joyful moment. Just so proud of her.

And this is the biggest stage she's ever played on, ever. And just to see her go out there and knock down the 3 -- the 3 was like the icing on the cake, to be truly honest because she went out there and played amazing, incredible. She had big minutes.

But when she hit the 3, it was, like, oh, my God, this is perfect. This is laying out so perfectly.

Q. Raven talked to us about the Seatbelt Gang and you're a member of that, of course. What are the actual requirements of being in South Carolina's Seatbelt Gang?

BREE HALL: That's a great question because now it done changed a whole bunch times because yesterday I said that Tessa was a part of the Seatbelt Gang. But then Lay said she needs to get four steals in one game to be part of the Seatbelt Gang.

I'm, like, where is this rule coming from? She said, I don't know. I just said something.

To be truly honest, I don't know what it takes. We just you have to show it and you have to show it consistently too.

Q. Who to?

BREE HALL: Well, both captains. But who chooses? I don't know. We just say you're part of Seatbelt Gang if you do great to be honest. Lay said four steals. I don't know if I've gotten four steals in a game. So should I be a part of it?

Q. What impressed you about Coach Staley after the UConn game the first time as far as a message, action or anything that she did or said following that game that you look back, you go, wow, Coach, she kind of said a lot to us. She let us figure it out?

BREE HALL: The UConn game this year or in the championship?

Q. Two months ago, after you all lost that game, what impressed you maybe how she handled that game or said something to you all? Maybe she gave a long speech or she didn't give a long speech, maybe she didn't talk -- maybe she let you all figure it out.

BREE HALL: If I remember correctly, I don't think she really gave us a long speech. She already knew that wasn't our standard. I mean, she doesn't really ever have to feel like she has to harp on things with us.

We already beat ourselves up. We're very competitive. To go out there, lose the way we did, she knew we were talking to ourselves, talking to each other about what we needed to do differently.

If I remember correctly, I know she said this wasn't our standard and that we had to do better. But she wasn't like dragging us or anything crazy like that.

Q. Paopao was talking about the senior group chat you guys have and how it was blowing up after the Final Four win, just about how you guys feel like you've got this. Could you elaborate on what all is being said and how the seniors are really about standing together in this?

BREE HALL: Yeah, I mean, this is a huge game for us, lots of things on the line. Our group chat is lots of talking, lots of talking. Not just in the group chat, we're talking in practice what we need to do in film, asking tons of questions, making sure we're all staying on the right track and same page.

But the biggest thing that we've been saying is that we believe. So somebody misses a shot, it's okay, positive reinforcement all through practice. And we've just been -- literally, like, I'm not joking, we'll literally be in practice saying "I believe." If it's a missed shot, make shot. And I've been saying I'm just going to go out there die trying. We have to go out there and exert every ounce of energy.

Q. There was a moment yesterday where you obviously hit the 3 and then you tripped a little bit running back in transition. But then you laughed it off all the way down the court. What does that say about the joy that this team is playing with right now?

BREE HALL: Well, I mean, it sounds a lot. We goof -- clearly it was a goofy moment. I tried to look back at the video, what did I even trip over? I didn't trip over anything. But it says a lot. I mean, we're literally called Dawn's Day Care. We're always laughing. You saw Coach laughing. It just goes to show that we are a very fun group, a very young group. It is serious. I won't say nothing is serious, we know when to be serious, but a moment like that, you can definitely laugh.

Q. How much did you want a rematch with UConn after the first game with them, and what do you feel like you've learned since then that will help you in this one?

BREE HALL: I mean, we've learned a lot. We've definitely gelled together in different things. Our defense has definitely improved since that game. To be truly honest, we didn't really care which team we played because they both beat us. So it's, like, we've got to get our give back on this. It wasn't really like, oh, we want UConn type of thing. It was either way it goes, we want to definitely come away with a win.

Q. Tomorrow's your last game here. Have you thought about your legacy and kind of the place you have in South Carolina women's basketball history just as an individual or your senior class before you wrap this up tomorrow?

BREE HALL: No. No. I don't want to think about that. I think I told somebody else, I'm just so focused on winning. After we win, then I can maybe think about that. But even

then, I don't know if I still really realize what it means and what we've done at South Carolina as a senior class.

Q. You were talking about the unselfishness that you all come into South Carolina with. When you're being recruited and you're a McDonald's All-American, (indiscernible) classic, all that kind of recruitment. Was there ever a debate in your mind or in teammates' mind, between I can go to a program, be part of something, sit on the bench a couple years, win a title, but maybe I can go someplace else and be the face of the program, be the one star, was that ever in your mind?

BREE HALL: No. Actually it truly was never in my mind. I'll explain why. When I was getting recruited, I just wanted to win. Like that's all I really cared about. I wanted to be with other great players because I felt like -- I just felt like it was going to be really difficult just having one sole person trying to win it all.

I wanted to be around great pieces. I just wanted to win. I don't know how else to really explain it. In high school I was like the person on our team, and I felt like it just was really, really hard to win.

I think every year my high school season I'm pretty sure we lost at like the Elite Eight if that's the right way to put it. Elite Eight or maybe Sweet 16 or one of those. I was so tired of it and I wanted to be around other great people too.

Q. It feels like you guys get a lot of fuel from people doubting you, and there were some doubters after the first UConn loss. Why is it? Why are you guys kind of fueled and driven by people who maybe don't believe that you could get back to this spot?

BREE HALL: It's great. I mean, people don't expect us to win. We just take that and make that fuel to the fire.

I mean, I feel like any athlete is like that. It's like a competitive nature. When somebody doubts you, you automatically, oh, I want to go prove them wrong. It's that type of thing.

Q. What do you remember about the Tuesday practice after the UConn loss? Were you nervous? How much running did you do? What do you remember about that workout in particular?

BREE HALL: Well, for starters, our coaches don't run us to death. I've seen comments. They're, like, oh, I know they did 100 sprints after that. No, we did not.

We just got back to what we do best. We made some

emphasis on different things we needed to do differently. I mean, she was yelling, but other than that, every coach yells. But it was definitely not like running and all that type of thing.

Q. I want you to take me back to your first phone call from Coach Staley when she was recruiting you and talk a little bit about how your relationship has grown over the years and the biggest lessons that you've learned from her?

BREE HALL: Well, first, we actually just -- we were talking to her about getting recruited when we were getting recruited, and it was me Lay and Ash. We were nervous to talk to her because it's Dawn Staley. Come on now.

I was nervous. I was scared even though she wanted to talk to me. I don't know what I was so nervous about. My goodness.

I was so nervous and I'm just so glad our relationship grew. And I am glad I trusted the process, which I feel is sometimes hard for other people. But I'm so glad I trusted her process. I'm glad I trusted her playing. Just to see where I am now -- she told me, she believed I would get to this point in my career, and I'm just so happy. I'm so glad that I chose to be here.

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