

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

Sunday, April 6, 2025

Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

South Carolina Gamecocks

Coach Dawn Staley

Joyce Edwards

Bree Hall

Finals Postgame Media Conference



BREE HALL: It's been amazing. I'm glad I came up here and could do this presser because I'm just not as upset as you would think I would be. I'm so appreciative of everything that this program has done for me.

Coach has put me in a great position. I've won two national championships. It's upsetting, of course, to lose and you're right there. But, I mean, I can't express how appreciative I am of this program, and I just had such a great experience here.

UConn - 82, South Carolina - 59

DAWN STALEY: Here's where I must say that much respect to UConn. They did a masterful job in executing on both sides of the basketball.

And at the same time, I have to say goodbye to a senior class that had a historical impact on our game and our program and our conference and our city and our state.

Although they won't be in our huddle anymore, I'm sure they'll find their way in another huddle at the next level. And I just want to show my gratitude, my appreciation for all they've done for our program because they elevated us and took us to a place where we could only imagine.

Q. Did you feel a point in the game where it was starting to get away from you?

BREE HALL: I mean, yeah, it did start getting away. But we just told each other to keep fighting. We weren't going to go down without a fight. I feel like we just had to keep battling. It was tough.

JOYCE EDWARDS: I agree. They had us by, what, 21 points in the second half. At that point you realize you're not going to win the game. But you just keep fighting. That's all you can do. You don't go down without a fight.

Q. Bree, Coach just talked about the senior class these last four years. Now that it's over for you, how do you sum up the last four years and the impact you guys had on this program from where it was to where it is now?

Q. Joyce, you scored in double figures in both games. I'm wondering what you feel like you learned from this Final Four you plan to take forward? Bree, what did you see from Joyce and what is next for her in your view as she keeps growing in this program?

JOYCE EDWARDS: I feel like last game, the Final Four game, it was really a bounce-back game for me. I showed my resilience. I feel like I pushed through, and that was the game that showed it. This game, I know what it feels like to lose and I don't want to be here again.

BREE HALL: I mean, it shows that Joyce is a dog. She's an incredible player. I'm so glad I've been able to enjoy my senior year with her by my side. And she's going to come back for more. It's not over for her at all.

Q. Bree, obviously not the way you wanted to end your career here, but what can you say about the legacy that you helped lay along with the other seniors? And what will be your closing remarks to this younger team as you leave them?

BREE HALL: I don't know if I've thought of a closing remark. Maybe let it settle in a little bit longer. I don't really have an answer for that.

But I will say that, I mean, it just goes to show how resilient our team really is. We're going to keep fighting. This is not the end for this team at all, for this program. They will be back here -- next year. I'm saying it, next year. Whenever it is, I believe in them.

And I know that Coach has something great up her sleeve. And it's just going to keep being a great program, honestly.

Q. Joyce, what do you take from the seniors like Bree going forward with your career as you watch these guys and they've set the tone for you to be a leader going forward?

JOYCE EDWARDS: I feel like the resilience. Obviously they're one of the winningest classes that have been a part of the Gamecocks. But their resilience. Their worlds have changed over the years and they could have transferred at any moment, especially earlier in the beginning when they may not have been playing as much. But you see how they've just grown into themselves and they stay resilient. And they just kept pushing and fighting and ended up winning.

Q. Bree, you said you're not as quite as upset as we might think. Is that appreciation for the four years or part of that you just ran into a better team today, or both?

BREE HALL: A little bit of both. They did their thing. I mean, I gotta give them their credit. Talking about UConn, of course.

But this is just -- to sit here and be so upset about something like this when I've had such an incredible four years, made history at the program, it's just no reason to be super, super duper upset.

Of course it hurts. Of course I'm competitive. Of course I want to win. That's a no brainer. But I can't express how appreciative I am of this program.

This is something that people dream of having, of experiencing. So I just gotta keep moving on. It is what it is. Like I said, a lot of people dream of being in a position like this.

Q. Bree, how do you reflect on your relationship with Coach Staley now that your playing days are over? And is there a lesson she's taught you that, I don't know, stands out in your mind for whatever reason in this moment?

BREE HALL: That's a hard question. I mean, there's so many memories, honestly. But there's one standing out right now, no, just because we just lost, so that's the only thing I'm thinking about.

But she's a great coach. My goodness, our relationship has grown over the last four years -- I'd say like five because she did recruit me. But it's been great. It's been

great. I know I can text or call her and she'll respond quickly because I do it now.

I'm so appreciative. I can't thank her enough for what she's done for me. I'm so glad I trusted her. I'm so glad I trusted her plan.

Q. I know this loss stings a little bit but the reality of the situation professional basketball appears to be on the horizon. How much do you guys look forward to the next challenge, that you can take your game to another level and get paid for it and become a bigger factor in ladies basketball?

BREE HALL: Yeah, I'm very excited. And I'm very excited. The WNBA is growing exponentially right now. I know there's more teams that are planning to expand. I'm really excited. I'm excited for what the W has got going on.

JOYCE EDWARDS: I mean, I've got to focus on next season. I don't really have that on my mind right now.

Q. Bree, just in your time at South Carolina, what impact have you seen your team and your team's success and Dawn have on not just obviously your guys' team but the athletic department as a whole?

BREE HALL: That's a hard question. Wait a minute. I don't know if I was prepared for this one. Can you say it one more time?

Q. Your success, have you seen it have an impact on the athletic department, your peers, other coaches, anything at all?

BREE HALL: Yes, definitely. A lot of other teams support us. You see Coach Beamer at our games. The men's coach, Lamont Paris, is also at our games too. We also get love from other teams, equestrian. It's love from a lot of different sports. The administration is amazing, and they all support us a lot.

Q. Joyce, the team had a hot start to the game offensively but over the next 25 minutes, between the second and third quarter, the team didn't shoot well from a player's perspective. Why was UConn's defense so tough?

JOYCE EDWARDS: I feel we missed a lot of shots. To be honest. I feel a lot of the easy shots we usually hit we missed.

But credit to UConn's defense. They're in the gaps. But at the same time I feel we got to where we wanted to be. We just had to finish.

Q. With three or four minutes to go, the cameras caught you with your arms around Raven on the bench. Do you remember what you said and what was going through her head as clarity was starting to set in on the game?

BREE HALL: Somebody actually sent me a picture of that. It was a really cute moment.

But I will say I was telling her, it's okay, it's fine. Keep your head up. I didn't want any pictures of her crying because she has been amazing to us. She's been amazing to this program.

I mean, this is just a small bump in the road. We made it farther than what a lot of people thought we would even close to make it. So I just told her just keep your head up, it's okay.

Q. Between the two UConn games, was there anything different considering that they went the same way on differential and then the last time, anything new?

DAWN STALEY: Well, I thought we did a great job protecting the 3-point line. That was one of the things going into the game if we could make it a two-point game, meaning 2s, we could keep it close. I thought that the 3s they did get were momentum-changing for them.

They only made four of them but the one at the end of the third quarter -- I mean the second quarter, going into halftime, was a dagger, because we had everything under control and we could have had it in single digits. When it gets to double digits, it's hard to come back from a UConn team that is pretty great at executing their offense.

I thought their rebounding was good up until that point. I mean, the game plan was being executed in the first half. We just couldn't get the looks that we normally make. If we just made layups you might be able to make it a little bit more interesting.

But at the end of the day we didn't take care of the basketball. We took a couple of bad shots. We didn't make layups, and they make you pay.

Although the score may be very similar in the results, I thought we had better execution on what we wanted to do coming into this one.

Q. I know it's obviously still so soon after this loss, but you talked and praised the senior class so much really all year. Knowing how important they've been to this program, I'm curious if you can put into thoughts

what they mean to you right now and what it's maybe like to see them leave the court for the last time?

DAWN STALEY: I'm one that I give them their flowers all the time. Giving them their last flowers of just being in the locker room. It's hang your head up high.

There's no other college -- women's college basketball student-athlete has what they have, experienced what they've experienced, won as much as they've won -- and that's championships and that's games. That's the experience that they receive every home game. Most of them are sell-outs. Most of them are 16, 17,000 people playing -- I mean, they're playing in front of -- everywhere we go, on the road, we receive so much love and support from even the visitors' fans.

So it was them that built this and it's them that will go out again as the most winningest class -- I'm going to venture to say in the country. So I'm proud of them.

Q. Flipside of that is the younger players, the ones who will be back next year. What do you want and hope they take away from the experience and today?

DAWN STALEY: I hope they're crying. I hope they're boo-hooing because from crying they have emotion about losing, makes you work hard in the offseason. Makes you look at it and really analyze what the separation is from their program and our program and how we close the gap with that.

They're very talented and I think they got a great experience of playing at this level that I hope they have a desire to get back here and do all the things it takes to play in the national championship game and to deliver the blows that's needed to win.

Q. All tournament you all have made really good adjustments going into the second half, which has been the difference every time. What was your thoughts coming out of halftime to make those changes to get back into the game?

DAWN STALEY: Just what I said. Most teams are down a lot more than 10 points against UConn at halftime. I thought if we can get some easy buckets, I think we even-rebounded at halftime -- easy buckets. We kept the turnovers down to a minimum, but the turnovers that we did have led to easy buckets. So it just puts a lot of more pressure on our offense to perform.

I mean, our ball-screen coverage was not great in the third and fourth quarters as much as it was in the first two quarters. So they got loose with that. But I just tried to get

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

our team to hone in on making shots because to beat UConn you've got to score the basketball.

Q. Another one on the seniors. You talked about how they impacted the program and the state of South Carolina. How did those three impact you as a coach, as a person over the last four years getting to know them?

DAWN STALEY: They're just great human beings. They've allowed me to coach them being my uncensored self. Not a lot of coaches are able to just be who they are. I could have real conversations with them that maybe would probably hurt other people's feelings, and they allow me to be me because they know I'm just coming to them from a place of wanting them to get better, wanting them to continue their winning ways and also preparing them for the next level.

Because when you go to the next level, it is sink or swim. It's probably not going to be from a coach's tongue, more so probably from a teammate, from somebody that is highly motivated, highly competitive and wants to win. Hopefully I've prepared them to be able to take in that and have some staying power at the next level.

Q. You held them to a single 3-point make at the half. You guys are down 10. I'm wondering whether that feels like victory or that feels like a negative indicator because obviously they were at 38 percent. And just related to it, whatever the game plan is, at the end of the day, they've got Strong, they've got Fudd and Bueckers. You held Paige to 16 on 17 shots, but still 24 and 24 and that's it. Is it they just had too much?

DAWN STALEY: Yeah, it's a victory. You hold them to one 3. And that was at the end of the second quarter that would have put them up just in single digits. And that is a victory in itself and it gives you a little bit of hope to say, hey, if we continue that, we can keep this thing close and maybe them being in a close game would give them angst and put them in the situation that they haven't been in a whole lot that could be advantageous to us.

It's hard. They're good. They're good. They work well together. Super unselfish. They're incredibly skilled. And the role players dagger you with the 3 -- Shade in the corner. So you've got to have a really good day in order for you to beat them.

Q. Can I ask how you're wrestling with the sting of the loss today, being the first time you're experiencing coming up short in the national championship?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, our kids gave it all they had.

When you can understand why you lost -- and when you've been on the other side of that three times, you understand it. You can swallow it. We lost to a very, very good basketball team. That they beat our ass but they didn't make us like it. There's a difference. (Laughter).

Q. With those younger players, what do you think they have learned and should learn from watching the senior class every day, not just in the games, but how they conducted themselves?

DAWN STALEY: Well, I don't know. If I'm them, they have an example of how it's done on a daily basis. If they aren't bringing it like they brought it on a daily basis, we're probably not going to end up here anymore -- which I doubt. Which I doubt.

So, I mean, it is next-woman-up. We lose a large senior class with a lot of experience. So although our team will look different, what will be similar is the way we approach things, the way we work, the way we prep each and every season.

They still are experienced. They still have Final Four experience under their belt. They still have national championship experience under their belt. So hopefully they can, in their own way, top this class that's leaving. They can top it. They have an opportunity to top what's happened over the past couple of years.

Q. If you got to make a pitch for each one of your outgoing seniors as they head into the draft, what would those be?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, I can actually bottle them up and just be going, you know what? They're winners, number one. Two, they've been coached up. So any situation they'll be able to handle, any role they'll be able to handle. The issue will probably be the terminology once they get to the next level.

But they defend. They'll have a really good understanding of how to defend.

And they are young people that are good people, good to be around, can handle any role, and will be an asset to any franchise.

Q. In the immediate aftermath, with a player like Joyce who you know is going to be a huge part of the team, did you pull her aside and say anything specific to her about, hey, bottle this up or remember it, or did you let her just be?

DAWN STALEY: I let her sit in her sadness. Sometimes



letting them sit in their sadness is much more powerful than breaking that train of thought.

But we'll talk about it. And she'll express how she feels and what she needs to work on in order for her to get us back to this place.

Q. It's easier to recruit the position, it's harder to recruit the player. What kind of intangibles are going out the door with your seniors?

DAWN STALEY: Oh, wow. I mean, they are the epitome of who we need to be successful. Their approach to practice, their approach to life, they've got great parents. It's losing parents too. It's losing great parents. We have a great pool of parents that get it. And they're able to shed light on what's happening to some other parents and what they're going through. So we lose a whole bunch of great parents that have been great advisors to our new parents.

It will be hard. But this happens every year where you lose a senior class, a really good senior class, and we find a way.

But they'll always be a part of our program because they'll always give back and they'll always come back and they'll always be cheering. They'll probably stay in the team chat. So they'll always have encouraging words to give to our young players.

Q. You alluded to the senior class, that they're holding their head high for what they have accomplished. The younger, you want them to be crying and feel this. From a coach's perspective, what's the balance of throwing this one out the window? And how does it light the fire under you guys -- there's turnover moving forward?

DAWN STALEY: Anytime your season ends in a loss it should light a fire. But you also have to look at it from, how did we get beat? Did they flat out beat us? I think they flat out beat us because we tried to throw a lot at them and they rose above it. They rose above it all. That's what happens when you have super talented players like that.

We've been on the other side of it. We've been on the other side of it, so we get it.

Younger players are just going to have to step up. They've got to have a great summer. They've got to have a great fall. We always are going to play a competitive schedule. So they'll have opportunities to grow and play in a competitive schedule.

But I'm as excited for what our team will look like next year.

I am because I do think they'll be talented enough to get here, especially with getting in the transfer portal and getting some experienced pieces that can help with this young group.

Q. How much do you relish the challenge when you beat Geno the first time and now you get to compete against him today. What do you gain by competing against an iconic coach? I know you have a history with him. I know there's something you should feel good about, wins lose, or draw, and then winning and winning today?

DAWN STALEY: UConn has been the standard. Anytime you can get any wins, you are breaking into moving ahead in the game. I would say from the first time we played UConn since I've been at South Carolina -- I think it was 2008 or 2009, first year -- got our heads beat in.

And I'm the same way. I'm going to shake your hand the same way. I'm going to look in your eyes the same way because I know at some point we're going to win. I won't give anybody the psychological advantage.

They know when they kick your butt and you know when you kick their butt. It's the same way.

I think they had the better team this year. It's not that you always win when you have the better team. But they had the better team this year and they won. And that's what you're supposed to do.

Q. You talked about letting Joyce sit in her sadness. Has that always been your philosophy as a coach with players during tough moments? And is that something that you do personally as well?

DAWN STALEY: Not always. Joyce is a pretty tough cookie. So breaking her thought process in that moment, for me, I thought it would be less helpful. No, you treat each player differently in how they handle success and failure. So it is a player by player.

So I just want to wish our assistant coach Winston Gandy very good luck at Grand Canyon. He's done a great job for us. He is a coach that, he was with us for a short period of time, but his impact was huge.

But I'm very happy that he gets his dream of being a head coach. Not very many -- the pundits, it's not very many Black men that get head-coaching jobs. And the fact that he does, he's one of the few Black men that got a head coaching job, I'm super proud of that. So thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

