

2023 NCAA Women's Lacrosse Championship

Monday, May 22, 2023

Cary, North Carolina, USA

WakeMed Soccer Park

Northwestern Wildcats

Kelly Amonte-Hiller

Media Conference



you a great gratitude for the opportunity that you have on a week-to-week basis.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome and congratulations on a successful season this far. We are looking forward to an exciting week in Cary.

If you want to start off with a few thoughts on the season so far and what it took to get here, and then we will open to questions.

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Sure, yeah. I just feel really grateful and blessed to have the opportunity to take the team to the Final Four and just really happy with, you know, all of the lessons that we've learned this season, how hard our players have worked to kind of just get better on a day-to-day basis. That has put us in a position to be here together, and just really excited that we get an extra week together and get the chance to compete at this new venue.

Q. For you, you've seen Izzy Scane go through tearing her ACL, rehabbing and now reaping the rewards of staying the course and leading this team. What's it been like from your perspective to see the journey she's been on to now be in the final in our?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Absolutely. Actually, Jane Hansen was on the recovery path with Isabel, too. It's been really cool to kind of see those guys come back really, really strong physically, mentally. We worked on the mental side of the game, as anyone that's got injured knows that's a big piece of it.

It's just excited to see her be able to go out and do what she loves to do. I think that was the most difficult thing last year is just, you know, when you -- when you can't play, it's like, you know, you've been doing something for so long, it's part of your identity.

You know, you just kind of have to learn -- learn to make an impact in other ways and then that teaches you lessons that you never would have learned before, and it just gives

Q. First of all, congratulations to you and your team for an outstanding season. One of the key things you've talked about this year is working together. Maybe share with us a little about what that means and how that's been successful for you to date and how you envision that playing out against Denver and hopefully winning a National Championship this weekend.

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Well, I think, you know, we have one opportunity on Friday, and we're really not getting ahead of ourselves, and we are really not getting ahead of ourselves.

We know what an unbelievable team Denver is. I've been in their shoes before, where you're coming in undefeated and maybe people don't think you are as strong as you are and I know for a fact how strong they are. They are a very strong team and they have proved it on a week-to-week basis.

So we are really preparing for that, and I think this team is -- you know, we've learned a lot of lessons over this year but even in the past, and you know, I just think that we're not getting ahead of ourselves and we're really just excited about the opportunity that we have on Friday.

Q. The zone that Denver has, how do you feel -- what have you seen of it and how do you feel like you might be uniquely prepared to kind of handle this defensive challenge ahead of you?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Well, I think their zone is fantastic. They have shown week-in, week-out, they can play against anyone, and we know that they have a lot of weapons on both ends of the field, and I think that we have a lot of weapons as well. So I think it's going to be a great, fun, exciting matchup, and we need to have a lot of key people stepping up.

I mean, the only way you are successful against a great team or a great defense is that you play together, and you



know, Denver forces you to do that by how well they play.

Q. Obviously you guys have Denver first, but one loss all season was to Syracuse in the first week of the season. What's different about this team compared to other teams that you've played in the tournament and a lot of times beaten in the tournament?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Different about the Syracuse team?

Q. Yeah.

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Okay. Yeah, I mean, I think Kayla has done a phenomenal job with this team. Obviously Dari (ph) started it with the recruiting process and just kind of teaching some of those players.

But they have, I mean, so many weapons. They are really dynamic. You know, their D has really stepped up this year, even though they lost a lot from last year. And they just really fight back, and I think they have a really special energy about them.

You know, I've been texting with Kayla here and there, but I just think, you know, you can kind of see how much they care for each other and they are really fighting hard for each other.

Q. This team, if you watched after -- after the last game, just the way that they were celebrating, they had the funny signs on the sideline. It just seems like they have a very lighthearted and fun approach, while also being very serious competitors. How did that mix kind of come about this season?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Are you talking about my team or Denver?

Q. Your team, sorry.

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Yeah, I just think that, you know, we have a group of girls that is really close. We have a really big senior class, and then we have five fifth-years, two of them are new and then the others are returners.

So I feel like we have a lot of older players who have been around and had a chance to really get to know each other, and I think that we also just have the mentality that we know that it's just a game, and we are going to put absolutely our best effort forward.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, I think we lost you towards the end of that.

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Can you hear me?

THE MODERATOR: Now we can.

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Sorry about that.

And so I was just saying, yeah, we have a lot of fun with this group, and you know, I think that the older players have really brought in the new players, whether it be first years or the fifth-year transfers.

Everyone is just committed to each other, having a good time together, and you know, we want to walk off the field feeling like we have given our best effort and our most focused effort, but we also understand that this is a journey, this is an experience, and we are going to soak that up as well.

Q. Just a follow-up question to what you just alluded to in terms of you've had two key transfers, obviously Molly and Hailey on the attack as a lefty. I know in the past you've been slightly reluctant to go into the transfer portal but obviously these two players have played a really instrumental part in your team. Maybe just elaborate on their role at this point?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: Sure. We only had one transfer before, and her sister had played in our program. So we knew the family really well, Sammy Mueller.

And I think, you know, when these opportunities presented themselves to us, we got to meet Molly. We got to meet Hailey, and we just really felt like they kind of fit who we were, and it has to be right.

I think that they have really stepped in seamlessly with the group. They actually room together and they are great friends, as well, so I think that's been a nice thing for them to be able to lean on each other. But it's been pretty cool to kind of see them step in, take roles. I think initially they were kind of feeling their way but I think they pretty much feel like full-fledged members. They feel like they can say things and step up and do things when needed, because they come to us with a lot of experience, both being top players and leaders on their team. That's huge, and we embrace that, as well.

Q. Just wanted to ask, what do you feel that this year's team mentally has done differently, as opposed to going obviously after that loss last season, what do you think is the outlook, mindset and differences going into this year's Final Four versus last?

KELLY AMONTE HILLER: I think that in order to be

successful, it takes a lot of belief, and in order to have belief, there's a lot that goes into that on a day-to-day basis, and I think we worked a lot on that, starting last year, and then moving into this year, just kind of building off that.

So I think that's probably the biggest thing is just the players believing in themselves, believing in each other, and what we're trying to do together.

I think that's probably the biggest thing that we've been building, and honestly it hasn't been just last year and this year. It's been a culmination of many years of building this back up.

I feel like we had so many championships early on, and then you know, there was a lot of expectations on us and you know, that can be hard, and I think we kind of at one point just hit the reset button, and we've been building it back up since.

You know, I think we've done a great job over the last number of years, winning some Big Ten championships, making Final Fours and whatnot.

So we are really excited to have another opportunity this year to go to the Final Four. We don't take that lightly, and we are just going to play our hearts out.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions from the group? All right, Coach, thank you so much for taking time out of your day. I know you had a busy week. Appreciate you being here. Safely travels and we'll see you in Cary.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports ...