

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Four - Sacred Heart vs Presbyterian

Friday, March 22, 2024

Columbia, South Carolina, USA

Colonial Life Arena

**Presbyterian Blue Hose
Coach Alaura Sharp
Bryanna Brady**

Tilda Sjokvist

Media Conference

Carolina's 68, Presbyterian 57

Q. Both you guys, it seems like you guys were having to play in fast forward, whether it was their speed or their length. What kind of problems did they present for you guys, especially defensively and on the boards?

BRYANNA BRADY: They are a very physical team and they're strong. I think that definitely affected just us playing. They pushed the ball. We had to try to slow down -- slow ourselves down because we kept finding ourselves getting sped up by their offense and transition.

I mean, they're a good team. It is what it is. We play hard. We go out there and we try to dictate things and box out and do the things that we can control. I think that is an area that we definitely grew from the first time.

TILDA SJOKVIST: Yeah, I mean, we all know they are an incredible team. They have such a lot of talent in their team. They were undefeated this season every team has struggled with their talent and basketball. But, I mean, yeah, we were fighting. Yeah, they are a good team, but I thought we did better than last time.

Yeah, they're a good team.

Q. For both players, coach mentioned that Dawn Staley stopped by the hotel Tuesday night. How did that come about and what was it like to meet someone that means so much to the women's game in general?

TILDA SJOKVIST: No, it was so cool. I mean, she is such



a good coach and she's changing the women basketball. Like we have said before, the women basketball are just growing and she is definitely one of them who makes the women basketball grow.

It was very cool seeing someone and talking to someone asking questions to someone that has changed basketball. I mean, we all look up to her and that team that she's coaching.

It's such a cool experience talking to her, seeing her, and also now got to play with them or against them.

BRYANNA BRADY: I agree. When she first -- when we were trying to figure out like who was coming, we knew it was a surprise but we didn't know who was going to come through that door.

When she did we were all you have all kind of starstruck. She was like, hi, guys. We were like stuck and she said hi, and we broke that barrier that we were stuck in.

It was so cool being able to talk to her and hear what she had to say to us and congratulating us and stuff like that. From somebody as great as she is it means so much.

It was good to be able to pick her brain a little bit and see what she had to say, how she was feeling. And just anything. We took anything. We soak it had all in. Everyone says enjoy the moment, the process, and that was definitely a very cool experience to be able to meet one of the greats.

I appreciate her taking her time to come out there. It was really cool for me. You look up to people like her as you go through this process as well. We're all in the basketball world, in the women's basketball world, and it's really exciting to meet somebody who is doing such great things in that side.

Q. Coach mentioned how happy you guys always are. This might be a weird question coming after a 50-point loss, but was that fun?

TILDA SJOKVIST: Yeah, I mean, I thought it was fun. We



were hustling and everything. I mean, obviously it's not fun to lose any time, but if we're going to lose, we better do it to the No. 1 seed.

I think small school like ours doesn't want to play on the big stage like this. I think I heard someone from the last game saying at least we don't play South Carolina.

I'm so grateful for the experience. We did what we have worked on and I loved the experience, playing on the big stage, that's what every athlete want to do. Obviously the score wasn't on our side. They are such a good team. This is an experience I've going to bring forever in my basketball, and so grateful I got to play these two times. And in the NCAA tournament, it's been a journey.

Finishing like this, I mean, we want to be sent home against the No. 1 seed and I'm happy we did. I'm cheering for South Carolina this tournament, yeah.

Q. For both you guys, coach was talking about how special the season is. When you look back on this season, you won an NCAA tournament game. What can what you accomplished do for the program going forward, the campus, and everything that's involved with Presbyterian College?

TILDA SJOKVIST: Yeah, I mean, we have just such a journey. I mean, we got to remember this season for not the last game. But the whole season, especially the last two weeks. It's been so cool experience. We just kept on making history going just to the semifinals in our conference tournament.

I'm so happy for this experience. Yeah, like I said, we need to remember this season for what we have accomplished and not the last game.

BRYANNA BRADY: I agree. We definitely put PC out there, and brought a name to the things that we've accomplished. Making history not once, not twice, but three different times, four different times, I think that's -- it says a lot about just our character, too.

And we believe in each other. We go out there and we do what we're supposed to do. We had the mentality of going out there and doing what got us here and showing our growth.

As for PC and the school, I think it just brings the community closer together. People took the time to come out and watch us and come down the road and greet us when we came home the first time, all these things.

We're just making the community so much stronger, and

I'm really, really glad Tory a part of it. It means a lot.

Q. Bry, you came out late in the game and had one last chance to get a hug and hear everybody cheer for you on the sideline. What was that like?

BRYANNA BRADY: Yeah, I don't know. It's different for me this time around because I've been through it once before. Last year I thought my career was over. I went through those emotions and all of that and thinking that it was done, thinking it was over.

So when the time came again and Coach Sharp gave me a hug, it's like making me realize it's over but it's okay. You know what I mean? Hearing everybody around, like I came back for a sixth year to do great things. I accomplished my goal.

I wouldn't rather do it with anybody but these girls, these coaches, and everybody around me. It was definitely -- felt good to hear everybody cheering, and of course those emotions come through because it's my last career game.

But regardless of that, I wouldn't have wanted to end it any other way.

Q. Tilda, was this the most packed or loudest game you ever played in? How did it feel to be on the court with that many fans cheering?

TILDA SJOKVIST: Yeah, I said it to my teammates in the warmup, this might be the game that I have the most fans and other people watching us.

I mean, we have a lot of people cheering for us and they knew who we were playing against. I'm just happy they came and watched us still. They know what they have -- we have done, too. For them coming up here and watching us and supporting us, that means a lot.

Playing on the big stage, that's so fun to me. Yeah, I want to do it again.

Q. Coach, you talked a lot yesterday about how good they are. To see them in person, what did you learn about why this team is 33 and 0 and title favorites?

ALaura SHARP: I think there is a lot of reasons why they are 33 and 0. The first thing is it's hard to put a game plan together because there is so many pieces and so many weapons. If you help off this person this person is a really great shooter.

And they're bringing scorers off the bench. They had two of their best scorers not even suited up today, and the way

they defend and their length, the pace they play with, there is just so many things that they do so well as a basketball team.

And in their last five games they have been offensive rebounding 44% of their missed shots. I looked at the stat sheet and they do it again today and shot it so well. They didn't miss a lot of shots.

But they're a great basketball team, and I think Coach Staley is not afraid to coach her kids either. She brings them off the bench and plays the ones that deserve to start. That's why their toughness and how hard they play.

I thought Chloe Kitts was a real handful today. 9 for 9 from the field. I thought she played really well for them off the bench.

They're a great basketball team. They have got a lot of athletes and it's hard to help and dig and really team defend because there is always someone else ready to knock a shot down.

Q. I think it was Tilda said that she thought that you guys played better this time than in December. Did you feel that as well, that it was a better game for you guys than in December?

ALaura SHARP: Yeah, and I think we were in a little bit of a better position to be successful, just, you know, not playing the night before. At least we had two days before and we did a walk-through yesterday to try to get our legs back under us.

I thought we were a little back on our heels. I didn't love the way we started the game, but loved the way we continued to compete. I think I told them in a timeout there is potentially a million people watching us play and all the people in here, and we want to make sure everybody knows how we fight and scrap and what really represents a PC basketball player.

It's why we're here. It's why we survived, advanced. It's why we won three games in a row as the 5 seed in our conference tournament, is because of the toughness and the grit and the resilient spirit of our team.

Q. Coach, can you talk about just the rollercoaster of the low lows, and then to finish where you are right now?

ALaura SHARP: Yeah, I think there were obviously some low lows and most seasons are a little bit of an up and down season. Most times you can't get to where you want to get as a straight line. It's always bumpy and rocky,

and I think there has been times where the been frustrated with me and I've been frustrated with them.

But I just feel like we have these deep seeded human connections with each other, and because of that, we were able to really just stick together. It's almost like the rockier it got and the more rough it got the better we got.

The thing about it is I worked for Joye Lee-McNelis, the head coach at University of Southern Mississippi and everybody knows she's battling cancer. In our Pete game we did a McNelis strong game, and I FaceTimed her after we won the championship game. She gave me the chance at the Division I level. I had applied for a million jobs and she took a chance on me.

I FaceTimed her and told her that ever since we wore those T-shirts we started playing so much tougher and scrappier, and I just love that we were doing it in those T-shirts.

That's what we want our program to be about, is just resilience and family and relationships, and if you notice our team, they high five, support each other. Dagne Apsite she is on the bench, hardly ever gets in the rotation, and she's one of the greatest humans I've ever coached. Her attitude and how hard she is goes every single day. Her emotions after the game knowing our season was over. She was very emotional.

So top to bottom, injured players, coaching staff, I just feel like we do it the right way. You know, just really trying to put culture and character first.

Q. Coach, from Wednesday to today, did you notice any change of atmosphere in this building? Did it make you appreciate that early game with the home feel even more?

ALaura SHARP: Yeah, and I know there is a lot of talk about feeling that they want regional sites and stuff for the first few rounds of women's basketball. I love the environment. I think it's awesome for the game. I think it's -- I mean, I even looked up and I bumped the assistant coach and I was like, do you see the people in the upper deck?

I don't remember there being people up there the last time that we played. I'm so thankful, like Tilda said, to be able to experience this type of atmosphere again.

I think it was even a little bit more incredible than the first time that we played here. But it's just what Coach Staley has done with her program, when she took over, where it was and where it is now and how many people have rallied

around her.

That's the goal of all of us as head coaches. That's what I feel like on a lot smaller scale we have done that in the last couple months with our own program where students have started showing up to our home games, and I think we were like last in attendance when I took over at Presbyterian and we've been able to move the needle.

I just hope one day we can have sell-out crowds in our own gym on the smaller scale. That's the goal. That's what we're trying to do. Being able to compete in an environment that has done that, it's just awesome and I'm thankful.

Q. Your players mentioned Dawn dropping by the hotel. That's something she could have said no to. What does it mean for South Carolina to roll out the red carpet to ya'll as a 16 seed outside of the game itself?

ALAUURA SHARP: Yeah, we felt the same, way, too, at our Big South tournament. I thought our Big South administration did a good job putting together. Then we come to the NCAA tournament and the experience that our players have had, I mean, we told them there was a surprise coming.

They were guessing. They were guessing like Barack Obama since he had picked us in the bracket. Jay Cole. Really kind of giggling around all the people they were guessing.

I watched the video of their reaction when she walked in probably 12 times because I wanted to see each person and how they reacted.

I mean, their faces, just shows what she means to everyone that's either coaching or involved in the women's game. Our players were excited, and I made sure to tell them, you know, she didn't have to come by. She didn't have to do that.

But she knows that she has a platform and how people feel about her. I just think that shows why she is who she is. She's just a good person. I appreciate her investing in our program.

Q. We talked about some of the history that you guys have made this year. What can it do -- you talked about wanting to move the needle there on campus. You still at PC are going to face some limitations in enrollment size and things like that. How can this help, this season help build your program going forward?

ALAUURA SHARP: Well, it's another step. You know, I think that you lay a foundation for your program, and I think the foundation has been lifted up a little bit of where we'll start going forward and into the future.

But I think what happens when you have a group of kids that experience winning and experience what a championship feels like, and knows that every time you make it the next round there is more surprises in the locker room and just all the fun that comes with winning and competing with some of the best. I mean, we played after North Carolina, Michigan State. That's awesome, and a dream come true for our program.

But once those players experience this, then they teach the younger players, this is what we're competing for. This is what we're working for every day. Then it's engrained in your program.

We have a lot of young players and I love what Tilda said. We got to clip that. We got to send that out to recruits. She said, I want to be back. I want to come back. These the kind of winner that she is. She competed like a senior. She's a winner.

Our program is full of those.

Q. You talk a lot about growing the women's game and how important that is to you. I think after the First Four win there was a clip of you talking about that that went viral. How does it feel to become such a big part of that?

ALAUURA SHARP: Well, I hope I'm a part of growing it. I know that is something that I want to do. Focusing in on our own community, I mean, I got a text message today that someone's either second or third grade class watched the game in their class. When we got back from the Big South Championship, there were like 25 pictures from an elementary school that drew pictures congratulating our team and our players.

So all I want to do is be a role model in our community and our players want to be role models. We have pen pals we write back and forth to. That's something we've always tried to and wanted to do.

But like I said before, this team, the way they carry themselves, there is just -- when you're around them, you start experiencing the fun and the joy and that is why we've kind of lit a fire in the Clinton community.

I'm so glad people have finally realized it. Winning helps obviously. I'm just hoping it springboards the future of the



program for people to continue to rally around our women's basketball program in our common specifically.

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