

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Kent State vs Notre Dame

Friday, March 22, 2024

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Purcell Pavilion

Notre Dame Fighting Irish Maddy Westbeld

Player

Sonia Citron

Player

Media Conference

MODERATOR: All right. Good morning, everybody. As a courtesy to your fellow media members as well as the coaches and student-athletes, please silence your cell phones. Please provide your name and media affiliation each time you ask a question during press conferences. If you're joining us via Zoom, please use the raise hand function for questions. We will address questions in the room first and then we'll get to Zoom if time allows. Recording the press conferences on cell phones or cameras is prohibited and also just a heads up, we'll have the microphone passed around here.

So, with that we'll get started with Sonia Citron and Maddy Westbeld.

Q. Tyler Horka. I've got one for both of you guys, the same question. Third time that you guys are going into the NCAA tournament. I'm curious just on the eve of it what feels the same as the other two times and maybe what feels a little bit different.

MADDY WESTBELD: Um, I think what feels the same is just kind of that feeling of a new season. Practice is different, the energy. Every day is really consistent and I think everybody is just kind of on the same page of like it's 0-0 now. I would say something that feels different this year is kind of just that chip that we have on our shoulder. You know, we're kind of -- we rode a high for a little bit with the ACC tournament, and I think right now we're really getting settled and we're really just trying to stay consistent and treat it like we're the underdogs.

SONIA CITRON: Yeah, similar to what Maddy said, I think a lot of it does feel similar just because this is our third time



doing it now, and I think what feels different is also that chip on our shoulders because I know, like, mid season people didn't even know if we were going to host or what was going on, so just, like, we proved we could do it and we still have a lot more to prove, so.

Q. Then one for more from me for Soni. Last year you were in the unique position of playing point guard and kind of playing do everything for this team but now you have someone who does that really well in Hannah, so I'm curious going into this, I guess how comfortable is that to know that I have a legit point guard and you can kind of play your game while she's going to play hers and Maddy's going to play hers and the rest kind of takes care of itself.

SONIA CITRON: Yeah, it's definitely nice. I'm not a point guard, so I didn't love doing that, but, yeah, it's just nice that I feel like I can play my true position and just play the game that I know I can play with Hannah being the point guard and just doing what she does and I'm going to do what I do to the best of my ability, and I know Maddy will be the same. We can all be true to our position, so.

Q. Eric Hanson with Inside ND Sports. Maddy, Kathryn was part of some pretty good teams here and I wondered do you guys talk about the NCAA experience and if so, what does she have that's good wisdom for you?

MADDY WESTBELD: Yeah, absolutely. She's overseas right now in Hungary so it's a little bit of different time zones so it's hard to communicate sometimes, but, you know, she's always -- we've always talked about it. I've watched her for a long time and we have conversations of just how locked in you got to be with your team, and how much it doesn't matter anything off the court. The only thing that matters is the chemistry that you guys have on the court and how much you guys are on the same page so, like I said, I think we're in a good spot with that, but, yeah, Kathryn's always said just make sure that you're in rhythm with your teammates, no matter what it is, if it's high or if it's low.

Q. And then just growing up, how much did she



influence who you became as a person, who you became as a basketball player, and if you guys still ever play competitively, does it get chippy?

MADDY WESTBELD: (Smiling) Um, yeah. She was my biggest role model since I was a little kid. I wanted to be just like her. You know, I did literally everything just like her because she just, everything that she is about is true. She's so authentic to herself and she's just somebody who works so hard and she's a champion in everything that she does, so it's no wonder that she has a ring because of it, because in every detail of her life outside of the court, she's just like that. It's nice that she has an accolade to prove just those little details that she ensues in her whole life but, yeah, she's everything to me, so.

Q. Thank you. And one for Soni. I'm curious who in your family influenced you, especially from a toughness aspect. Who, you know, developed or helped you become the person that we see as a really tough competitor on the court?

SONIA CITRON: Yeah, I have to give that to my brothers and my cousins. Growing up, I was two, three, four years younger than all of them, but we played in the backyard every single day and they never, ever took it easy on me, whether it was soccer, basketball, handball, they would treat me like I was one of the guys, so I would definitely give it to them.

Q. Kurt, Associated Press. This is for Soni. You referenced maybe midseason you guys weren't sure if you'd be hosting. I think after that NC State game maybe you dropped to like 17 or so. What turned things around so you have the seed you have and that you're playing at home?

SONIA CITRON: Yeah, I think the NC State game was definitely a wake-up call and I think after that game, our team really got together and we had a meeting, we talked to each other and we were just like we need to figure it out because this is not how our season's going to go. So, I think it was after that game that we really just took the steps we needed to to get back on the same page and we did that, so.

Q. Anthony Anderson, South Bend Tribune. I have the same question for both of you. You have both done a remarkable job playing foul free. You've never fouled out of a game, Soni, and you've only fouled out one this year, Maddy. With the depth so compromised, do you have to be constantly conscious of fouls and are you able to play free and easy the way you want to play, or do you have to adjust to the officiating? That's for both of you.

SONIA CITRON: I would say we can't play as freely as we want to. Definitely have to adjust just because we can't afford any fouls, especially early on in the game, so I'll always tell my teammates be smart in the first half and then maybe second half if you have zero or if you have one foul you can play more aggressive on, you know, just play more aggressive because we can't really afford people to get one or two fouls in the first half. So, we definitely got to play smarter and just adjust our game a little bit.

MADDY WESTBELD: Yeah, I would say the same thing, just kind of start out, read the refs, read how everybody is calling it and just play from there. If they're letting things go, then you can be more aggressive. If not, then you kind of got to step up and just play solid.

MODERATOR: We'll have time for just one more question here, folks.

Q. Matt Lucas, Goshen News. For both you guys, during this eight-game win streak in this ACC tournament run, how important has the defense been to getting you guys out to leads and being able to hold them throughout the rest of the game, even with the depth concerns?

MADDY WESTBELD: It's everything. It's the way that we start playing defense. I think that's been the key to us for these last eight games is just how we start on the defensive end and how that continues and carries on to the offensive end, so, you know, with this team, we're a trending team and our identity is on defense and I think that's something that we haven't experienced really yet, but right now I think we're just trying to ride that, and, yeah, like I said, it's just the beginning of games.

SONIA CITRON: Yeah. I think Maddy said it all.

MODERATOR: We can actually probably fit one more in if anybody else has another question here.

Q. I just had a follow-up for Soni. Was that a player's initiated meeting that you had? Was it players only?

SONIA CITRON: Yeah.

Q. Or did the coaches say, hey, you guys need to talk?

SONIA CITRON: No, it was players only. It was -- I think more Maddy, Maddy texted the group chat. She took it upon herself as the senior and leader she is and got everyone together and, yeah, it was players only.

MADDY WESTBELD: Thank you.



Q. Can we get a clarification?

MODERATOR: Sure.

Q. When you said no recording, is that the video or video and audio.

MODERATOR: Just video. Just video, right? You can record audio? Yeah. Sorry. Yeah, sorry about that, just going off the NCAA here.

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