

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

Saturday, March 23, 2024

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Purcell Pavilion

Kent State Golden Flashes Head Coach Todd Starkey

Janae Tyler

Katie Shumate

Media Conference

Notre Dame 81, Kent State 67

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with an opening statement from Coach Starkey and then questions for the student-athletes.

TODD STARKEY: We tried to make it interesting down the stretch, and that was our goal to let everyone know, win or lose in this game, that Kent State was here and that we compete and we play together. So I'm really proud of our team, the way we played.

It was looking early like it was going to be a 35-, 40-point blow-out, and we wanted to have something to say about that. I thought our players did a really good job of executing at times and really keeping it close.

Defensively I thought we did a really good job on Hannah Hidalgo. You have to take something away from a team as talented as them. We just didn't expect Citron to have 29, a career high. She was just unconscious.

Now, we helped her out. She had some open looks, but she hit some difficult shots as well and really was what separated them early.

So proud of our fight. Fourth quarter we made it interesting, and we knew they had to play the rest of the game.

Last thing I'll say in the opening statement is I'm really proud of these two and their teammates. Janae Tyler, obviously, for a freshman, the level of composure that she's had and how she's played the last couple of weeks



has been phenomenal, just phenomenal. She's put everybody on notice that Kent State is coming. Okay? We're coming next year too.

Then Katie Shumate, just one of the best competitors I've ever coached. Katie and I have continued to get along for five years because she hates to lose as much as I do. Her teammates all love her. That's the most important thing, the type of relationship that is these players have formed this year. We have a MAC Championship that can't be taken away from us, so these girls as sisters for the rest of their lives will be championship teammates.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Can you talk about what enabled your team from your perspective, Katie, to cut it back to 13 and then fight back in the fourth quarter, cut it to 12?

KATIE SHUMATE: Yeah, I would say that it was just our will and our determination. We were playing for each other, and everyone knew that we didn't want to go out by giving up and that we were going to continue to press forward and keep trying to make it a game and play hard.

All the credit to my teammates for that. From the bottom of our roster to the top, we never gave up, so...

Q. Katie, I just checked the stats. You led all players out there in rebounding. KSU had a plus-5 edge. You had 11. I know that's who you are. I've seen your stats, and you get a ton of rebounds every game. Just tell me, you're a guard. You're a guard who fights as hard as heck out there on the glass. Tell me a little bit about that part of your game.

KATIE SHUMATE: I guess I've never been the tallest or the strongest, so I kind of just have to will myself to do it, and just the energy that we get and my teammates get from when we get second possessions and when we get a push in transition, it's just you put your mind to it, and you try to do it.

Q. Janae, I believe it's four of the last five games you've been in double figures. What has allowed you



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to have this much success in some of the most crucial games maybe you've ever played?

JANAE TYLER: Definitely my teammates. I'm doing it for my seniors. This isn't an individual game. These girls have worked so hard to get us here, so I'm just going to work just as hard, maybe even harder to do it for them. That's definitely what's gotten me this far.

Q. Then, Katie, just from your perspective, what has it been like watching Janae from when she first stepped onto the team to where she's at right now?

KATIE SHUMATE: You know, it's been great. We've always believed in Janae, but just the way that she's been able to step up and especially in big moments it seems like Janae is always there, and she's always fighting. She is just showing us what she's capable of and staying under control.

I think as a freshman that's extremely hard to do, and we are just lucky to have her on our team.

Q. Katie, I was just curious, obviously if something has to end, it might as well be giving a great team like Notre Dame a heck of a fight. That environment, that crowd, getting this program back to March Madness. Just what did today as a whole mean to you in terms of where you have left this program?

KATIE SHUMATE: You know, I'm not upset at all about the way we went out. We won our MAC Championship, and I got to play with these girls, and I think especially playing here it was really fun. It was a great environment.

They cheered us out. Great fans here. The girls, getting to play against them, it was a great experience. Every time I get to play with these girls, it was great. So it was a good way to go out.

Q. Janae, what have you been able to learn from Katie and the other seniors?

JANAE TYLER: I've learned a lot. Not even only basketball-wise. I've learned just my presence outside of the court, but definitely on the court I've learned how to have composure, be confident with what I am, and just follow in their foot steps. Definitely great mentors.

Q. What impact do you hope you left on the Kent State basketball program?

KATIE SHUMATE: I think just that you work hard and play together and get more accomplished. You can be goofy sometimes, but when it's time to be serious, it's time to be

serious and to be about business and just play hard. It's more fun when you are playing hard and playing together.

Q. With the overall coaching staff, Coach Lex, Coach Paige, Coach Fran, and Coach Starkey, how has your relationship grown throughout your five years?

KATIE SHUMATE: I would say that it's not wavered at all and that it has grown and that they've always believed in me and been here for me, and they're the reason why I'm able to do -- or I was able to accomplish the things that I did and what we did together.

Me and Coach Starkey have known each other for a real long time now, and I just think that -- I know that I wouldn't be here without them. Our relationship, it was good from the start, and it's only gotten better.

Q. Yeah, I'm curious about the courage. This is a team that has a lot have length, and you're a freshman, and this is your first time in this environment, and you were going up against women who were two, three inches taller than you and going up without fear. I think you were 6 out of 7 from the field at one point. Just talk about the courage and how you overcome some height disadvantages sometimes out there?

JANAE TYLER: Definitely just knowing their weaknesses and how to get to the basket, being undersized. Knowing just to get around their body rather than just trying to go straight up. That's really all I can do.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much to our student-athletes. We'll now it open it up to questions for Coach Starkey.

Q. My first question, you mentioned trying to take Hannah Hidalgo away. What was your strategy? What did you employ to try to limit her game?

TODD STARKEY: I can't give all my secrets away. They still have games to play. I think one of the biggest things was we just wanted to make sure we were extended to the ball.

For the last three days we've just been yelling in practice, "To the ball, to the ball, to the ball." If you give her space to operate, man, she's just so explosive and so dangerous.

We knew that we didn't have a chance in this game if she got 25, 30 points because what that means is then she's able to get points and distribute. She affects the game in so many different ways. We just wanted to make her shots difficult, really crowd her.

We also wanted to try and attack her and get her in a little bit of foul trouble. They had a little bit of foul trouble. We didn't get quite to the point we wanted to, but man, she's a tough matchup. So, once again, our defensive game plan on her was good, but it backfired in that Citron had just an unbelievable shooting day.

Q. Just following up on the foul trouble comment, you got Westbeld and Marshall in pretty early foul trouble, and you guys were in the bonus. I'm not sure if it was second or third quarter, like almost six minutes left. How intentional was that, and what was kind of your thinking there?

TODD STARKEY: Yeah, definitely the second quarter is when that happened. The third quarter was kind of the opposite of that.

Well, she was just sitting here. Janae Tyler and being able to throw the ball inside to her and her level of composure to be able to -- I mean, to be a freshman in this environment. She did it in the MAC Tournament last week as well. You just threw her the ball, and she didn't get sped up. She took her time and finished over bigger opponents, and she just has a knack for scoring around the basket.

So we're fortunate to get a few fouls on those two early. It paid dividends for us for sure as the game wore on. We just wanted to get to a point where the score was diminished so we could actually take advantage of some of that.

Q. Just curious, obviously a tough shooting night at times, but you guys actually out-rebounded a team that has a ton of length. 37, 32, 12, 6 on the offensive glass. Obviously she may have had 11 as a guard. I'm just curious, what does that say about the fight of this team? I think that's probably what stood out most from today is just how hard you attacked the glass in the game overall.

TODD STARKEY: I think we're walking out of this building, and our fight is not in question. Our players came to play. Some things didn't go our way early. We had a hole to dig out of, but we had -- I guess you don't dig out of holes. You crawl out of them. We did some crawling. They kept fighting tooth and nail.

Notre Dame is the type of team that can make runs on you real quick and get it to a 25-, 30-point game, and we didn't let them do it. I'm proud of that.

I think it just speaks to what this group is about. They're about each other, and they fought for us as coaches. They fought for each other more than that. I mean, this is a

sisterhood. What Katie said about that, she means that. You hear Janae Tyler speak about the mentor that is she had in the upper classmen. That stuff matters. That stuff matters.

The other statistic I want to point out is in Katie Shumate's two games against top-ten opponents... at LSU 22-11, at Notre Dame 20-11. She averaged 21 1/2 points, 11 rebounds against two top-ten opponents. The kid is a future pro, without a doubt.

Like I said, just really proud for the Kent State community and for our players.

Q. Now that you saw Janae do this throughout the MAC Tournament and today, what can be the expectation for her in future years with your team, and what type of performance could we see her rise to in the following years?

TODD STARKEY: We're going to run a lot of plays for her. We're going to get Janae the ball. I think she's one of the -- the thing about Janae that's really unique is as a freshman, she's got a lot of composure, but she's one of the more coachable student-athletes I've ever had.

She really wants to -- we talk about being coachable. There's two phases to that. You have to be a good listener, but if you don't try and apply that, it's not being coachable. Applying what you are told is being coachable, and she does that. She really tries to go out and do what you ask her to do. She wants to get better. Her teammates love the type of energy she brings to our team.

Q. After making one three-pointer in the first half, your team got hot in the third, making 4 from 8 at one point. What did you say at halftime, and do you think the quality of those looks changed?

TODD STARKEY: That's a good question. We talk about this a lot. Don't pass up good. I thought the shots that we got in the first half were good shots. They just didn't go down. Some of the first quarter shots, you were watching the same game I did, the ball was halfway down and bounced around and bounced out, and theirs just went in.

Sometimes that happens, especially -- it's different than the men's tournament. You're playing against the No. 7, 8, 9 team in the country on their home floor. I mean, they're used to shooting in this environment.

At halftime the message was keep shooting good shots, keep shooting good shots, and they're either going to go in or they're not, but you don't make -- what's the old adage? You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take. You

miss all the shots that you don't take. It doesn't make sense, but for us it's, like, keep shooting good shots. Don't change what's gotten us here and then just keep being who you are. They played with a lot of courage.

Q. What do you hope this team as a whole learns from this experience?

TODD STARKEY: There's a lot of lessons to learn. I think the biggest thing is that it was possible. That's the biggest thing, that you are capable. We have a lot of good underclassmen that are coming back, and they're capable of this. You get a taste of this; you want more of it.

They also realize that -- it makes you be a more effective coach because some of the things you've been telling them all year came to fruition, so all of a sudden you got a lot smarter as a coach because it happened.

They'll learn a lot of stuff. I think the biggest thing is just the sisterhood. They've had the best time this past week and a half just enjoying the tournament, fighting through that, winning a championship, confetti falling on their heads, and coming to Notre Dame and just all the hype around it. They'll look back and have a lot of incredible memories.

Q. Going into the second half, how did your defensive game plan change?

TODD STARKEY: Yeah, we talked. If we didn't get more rigid on the defensive side of things, and really we had to turn up the volume. We're a good defensive team. We did not show that in the first half. So we talked about that. Like, this isn't who we are. You're more capable than this. We've got to get more resilient, tougher. We've got to talk better in screening action and come out and show people what you are made of.

I was more worried about the defensive side. I knew shots were going to fall for us, but we had to get more rigid on the defensive end. We made a couple of slight adjustments, but other than that, we just got tougher and did a better job defensively.

Q. What has it meant to you to not only coach Katie, but Abby and Mikala?

TODD STARKEY: I could spend a lot of time on that, but all three of them got to this situation where they are in different ways. Mikala Morris is a fifth year transfer who just blended right in and made a huge impact on our program from the start.

Abby Ogle, all the ups and downs that she's gone through

with injuries and that type of thing, but to keep fighting, and she made some big plays for us today. She gave us a great spark off the bench.

Then Katie, I could talk for hours about her. She's just been a phenomenal student-athlete. She's going to graduate with a bio/pre-med major. Her plan was to go to medical school, but the way she played the last year and a half, she's going to play. I told her, keep playing as long as you can, and you can be a doctor the rest of your life.

Q. What can you say about Dionna Gray and her ability? Corynne Hauser goes down in February. You don't have her for the rest of the year. Dionna ties a career high in the MAC title game and puts up 12 today against the defensive ball pressure of Hannah Hidalgo. What can you say about her impact and development going forward?

TODD STARKEY: I'll give you a better stat than that. Five assists, three turnovers against maybe the best defensive guard in the country.

The grit, the toughness, the fight that she had, she wasn't backing down from anybody today. That's the Dionna Gray that we recruited to Kent State. She's capable of that. I'm really proud of her toughness. I'm really proud of how her teammates continued to encourage her even though she had a couple of rough moments as she took over that starting role. They believed in her and kept encouraging her, and that set her up for the success she had done the stretch.

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