

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Vermont vs Louisville

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Louisville, Kentucky, USA

KFC YUM! Center

Vermont Catamounts Coach Alisa Kresge Nikola Priede Keira Hanson

Media Conference

Louisville - 72, Vermont - 52

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Kresge and student-athletes Keira Hanson and Nikola Priede.

ALISA KRESGE: I want to start with the most important thing, how proud I am of this group, how proud I am of everything these two, especially, have done for this program.

What, 27-8 on the year says a lot about you guys. Couldn't be more proud of them and just how they represent Vermont, how they represent themselves and their families. It's really, really been impressive. So just really, really pleased.

Obviously when it comes to the game, first half, I thought we did a lot of things that we really, game plan-wise, wanted to do. A couple of free throws and layups go down, you feel a little different going into halftime, up a couple.

Then the second half got away from us. I think we were pretty exhausted, all that we did in the first half. We had a thin bench this year, which is on me and something we're going to be ready for next year.

But I think Louisville is a very talented team. And the mistakes that we made they capitalized on. And they kind of ran with it there the second half.

But a lot to be proud of. As I told our players, we're going to hold our heads high and, again, be really, really thankful for everything this group has done for us, our program, our university, our state.



Q. Keira, second time in a row that you guys come to the NCAA Tournament and you're able to put up a big night offensively. What went into that? Why were you able to kind of find those openings? And why were you able to kind of knock down those big shots that helped keep your team in it that first half?

KEIRA HANSON: I think just not believing in myself, but all the belief from my teammates and how much we believe in each other. It's really hard to stop one really good player let alone five and even more. So I think just as a team believing in ourselves the whole time.

Q. Nikola, it's your final game here with the Catamounts. What are you going to take away most from your four years here in Vermont?

NIKOLA PRIEDE: I think the culture here. The teammates, the coaches, all of our -- amazing, you know? I'll miss this place, obviously. Burlington, the fans, all the fans in the stands. Just amazing the support we get every single year. Everyone shows up, and it's amazing.

Q. Keira, if you're able to get another year of eligibility, would you consider returning to Vermont?

KEIRA HANSON: It definitely would not be off the table. It's such an amazing place. Obviously I have to weigh how I'm feeling and everything else with that. But definitely not off the table.

Q. Sorry if this makes you cry, but for both of you, what have the fans meant to you, especially showing out and the pep band and kind of that sea of green and the corner of red? And Nikola, I saw you kind of give them a bow, blow them a kiss, what have they meant to you?

NIKOLA PRIEDE: They're amazing. They've always been there for us. Especially this year, got really close with them. Just all of them are parents, fans. Like, it's amazing, obviously, and the pep band and the dance team, they're always supporting us.



They, again, they're super cheerful people. I just love talking to them. And being so far from Vermont and so many people show up, obviously it's amazing. So I really enjoy it.

KEIRA HANSON: They make this place so special. I'm also not -- I'm from far away, not as far as Nikola, but since day one they have welcomed me with open arms and I feel like I have like 20 grandparents now. And they're just the absolute best to make Vermont a gem.

Q. How does the depth or lack of depth play a part in you guys kind of falling apart in the second half?

ALISA KRESGE: Yeah, you know, this is the most physical game we've played all year. They were able to go into their bench. And then it just felt like more pounding came. And our players definitely gave everything they had. And then to handle that for that first half. And then the second half, the pounding never stopped.

So when you don't have some reinforcements to help you kind of when we need those breaks, it's hard. So I think that's what the biggest jump was, was the physicality got the best of us in the second half, and we were a little bit, I think, tired there. And they capitalized off the mistakes that we made that we know better, but when you're exhausted you lose that mentality sometimes to stay focused.

Q. Keira, what has this season and the NCAA Tournament run meant for you to get to experience that with your sister, if I'm reading the roster correctly?

KEIRA HANSON: It's been amazing. I say it all the time, I feel like the luckiest girl in the world. My parents, it makes traveling a little easier. So if they're happy, I'm happy.

And I it just makes all the memories even more special, seeing her interact with my teammates. It just makes everything more like family. It's been one of the biggest blessings of my life.

Q. Keira, you were a freshman at the end of the bench when you guys were at UConn. You got the final couple of seconds of that game to see your sister get some March Madness seconds today, what does that mean to you?

KEIRA HANSON: It's kind of symbolic handing off the torch. It makes me really proud. And I remember UConn. It makes me proud that I've come a long way. So hopefully Lia and the rest of the freshmen take this as inspiration for the years to come and it shows them what they're capable of.

Q. Obviously this program has been to three tournaments in the last four years. This year's game was probably more similar to last year's than it was to that UConn game a couple of years ago. How do you guys kind of try and take the next step to get to that point where you're not only being competitive in these games, but having a chance to win them at the end of the game?

ALISA KRESGE: Yeah, I think we've been definitely been trying non-conference-wise -- and, again, big credit to our administration supporting all the travel we've been doing. We were trying to schedule non-conference games. You've got to go win them, too, but challenge us, and then put us in the best situation to get a better seed.

So we don't have to go play in an hostile environment, which is incredible, don't get me wrong, but to go play a neutral site game in the first round, I think it moves the needle.

So we're trying to do things in the non-conference to help us get more set up for success at this time of year.

And I do think we made that jump. We got a better seed this year than last year. But it's something that we've got to continue to look at as we're scheduling non-conference. And obviously as we continue every year, a new roster and try and find that depth, I think that depth, big key I think in winning these games on neutral sites is hitting 3s as well.

I thought we had two shooters able to hit shots. But I think we've got to find that a little bit more later in the season as well. So those are just a couple things that initially jump off the paper to me.

Q. On that note, the scheduling has been a topic of conversation on the men's side of the tournament. Have you found any, I guess, difficulty more so maybe recently than in the past in trying to find high major schools to get in your schedule to better your seed?

ALISA KRESGE: Yeah, I think the challenge for us is we're willing to go play on the road, but also we want to give back to our community. We want to play home games as well. It's easy to go play everybody on the road, but we have an obligation to our community to get home games as well.

So trying to find some of those home games, teams that will be home-and-home series, those are the kind of things that we gotta figure out how to get.

Of course, I'm sure any Power Four team would play us at their place, but it doesn't help us when we're not getting

home games as well. So trying to find that balance of playing those talented programs, but not always having to go on the road.

Again, the administration has allowed us to do these neutral site events. I think that's important, too. You get some of these teams on neutral sites, I just think it moves the needle, in my opinion, in a way to go steal those wins.

Q. You mentioned this in your opening statement, but just what have the seniors, but especially the two that were sitting up there with you, meant to the program, and how have they helped it grow?

ALISA KRESGE: Yeah, so these two, especially, they really didn't play much as first-years, and they stayed with it. And the way they did it was so special. They never griped at anything. We coach really hard and they just ran with it.

So to see them develop from first-years that got in for 40 seconds at UConn and really didn't play much, to where they've really wrapping up their careers, really talks about them as human beings, being bought in, staying, staying in an age that it's easy to move on, right? And wanting to do it with people they love. It's just been so remarkable.

And you guys, again, I say this all the time, but you guys get to see how impressive they are on the court, and I get to see all the amazing things they're doing off the court. They're just wonderful human beings. I think they came into a culture that was really set and there was a strong foundation. But they continue to elevate us, and that's really impressive because it was in a good place. So to be able to elevate it even more says a lot about them.

So they're incredible. I'm so grateful for them. I'm so grateful they stayed and they've given everything to Vermont.

Q. Thinking about the construction of next year's roster, for the first time, at least that I've been covering you don't have a Nikola Priede or Anna Olson or Delaney Richason waiting in the wings to take that 5 spot. What are going to be your biggest priorities this offseason in the transfer portal and on the recruiting trail as you guys look to get back here and not just be here and be happy to be here but to get a win in the round of 64?

ALISA KRESGE: Yeah, we definitely need some post play. We know we're graduating. We've had some injuries to this year's roster that I thought would help us in that area.

But it's a little unknown, and that's the piece that's hard. So we'll definitely be looking for some size, some post presence. And then, honestly, best available. I think, what I give our staff a lot of credit is they find a way. So as long as we have some size that can contest inside and be a defensive presence, I think we can make things work on the offensive end.

So those two things, post presence and then best available players is going to be important this offseason.

Q. You get to watch Jadyn for four years as an opponent, and just being able to welcome her in this year, what did she bring to the team, and how happy were you to get to see her go out there and play well today in her first NCAA Tournament appearance?

ALISA KRESGE: Well, when we were a year ago in the portal, when I had my first conversation with her, I said, you know, I've been scared to death of you for three years -- because she had a redshirt year, and just how talented she was. And just she's always made big plays.

And I was like, I would love for you to be doing that in a Vermont jersey. I think she exceeded expectations to me, especially because then she had to take on a point guard role. Like I thought, she was going to be able to just go make plays and do her thing.

And while she does have point guard abilities in her, Catherine, that was Catherine's niche for us. And so I thought that would really be good with each other. And then we lose Catherine, and then Jadyn has to step up and run the team, and understand me and our system, and it's not easy.

I was just blown away with how she handled it all. And again another person that really cared about the name on the front of her jersey more than her own name. And it was amazing. We wouldn't be sitting here if she didn't decide to pick Vermont, and I'm so thankful for her and everything that she's given to this program.

And she's picked Vermont to be here, and she willed us to be here. So incredible, yeah.

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