

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 2 Semifinal - Colorado vs Iowa

Saturday, March 30, 2024

Albany, New York, USA

Times Union Center

Iowa Hawkeyes

Lisa Bluder

Caitlin Clark

Kate Martin

Sydney Affolter

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Iowa 89, Colorado 68

LISA BLUDER: I'm just really proud of the way that we played today. I thought we played really good team basketball. We got everybody involved. We had five people in double figures. Did a great job on the boards. They only got four offensive rebounds in the whole second half.

I'm really proud of my group. Caitlin comes out and has 15 assists, only two turnovers. I thought there's so many people that played well in this game. Syd Affolter has the highest plus/minus of anybody, Gabby Marshall knocks down threes, Kate Martin her leadership out there was unbelievable. Hannah Stuelke didn't let their center have a single O-board. That's hard to do. That's really hard to do.

So I'm proud of my group.

Q. Caitlin, it's 48-35 at halftime. You guys come out, it's 6-0 run to kind of step on the gas. How conscious were you of making that the moment that you wanted to put this out of reach?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, that's what we talked about in the locker room at halftime, is really come out and dominate that third quarter from the start and that's exactly what we did, we forced them to use a time-out.

I thought we just really controlled the game. Once we got that lead, we were able to sustain it. Even when they went on a few runs, we were able to switch up our player



defense, our zone defense. I thought that caused them a few problems.

But overall I just thought we executed offensively, whether it was in zone, whether it was in man-to-man, whether it was in transition, and then we did a great job on defense. Just a complete basketball game is what it felt like.

Q. Syd, from your perspective, as one of the and-one on that play, how much easier does Caitlin make things, getting the ball to you in rhythm like that? It seemed like her assists today weren't just leading to scores, but it was just at every point precision where they needed to be.

SYDNEY AFFOLTER: Yeah, I think we get reps like that all the time in practice, and Caitlin is the best passer in college basketball, and that's what we like to do, we like to get out and run, and she always finds us in transition.

Q. Caitlin, thinking about what's ahead now, you get a chance to play LSU again. It's not for the same level of importance but still obviously a chance to get back to the Final Four. What does it mean getting a chance to play them again?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I think we're excited. Anytime you have a chance to go up against somebody you lost to, it brings a little more energy.

At this point in the tournament every single team is good, whether you're playing West Virginia, whether you're playing Colorado, whether you're playing LSU you prep the exact same way. You come in the exact same mindset.

I think overall it's just going to be a really great game for women's basketball. They're really solid one through five. We know we are going to have to rebound the basketball. But obviously I don't know the ins and outs of everything about them because we haven't gone through the scout yet.

But more than anything I think just building off this win today, I think this was the first time in about three games we were able to put together what felt like a complete



basketball game on both ends of the floor, whether it was in transition or on defense or really executing our offense. I think being able to build off that and take that momentum into our next game.

Q. Caitlin, give me a sense of your mindset coming into the game. It looked from my perspective, our perspective, you really wanted to get everyone involved. The passes were there. You also wanted to drive to the bucket to get twos. What were you thinking before the game of how you could produce the best?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I knew they were going to give me really good ball pressure coming into this game, and honestly when we set our first couple of ball screens, they were playing drop coverage. Just kind of their big was just staying in the paint. I knew either Hannah was going to be open on the roll or I was going to be able to get pretty easy lay-ups, and that's kind of what they went with, more just me off all the screens and giving up drives.

Luckily I was able -- I think I only missed one two-point shot tonight. Obviously I didn't shoot it as great from three, but I thought my penetration to the basket was really good.

I think that also led to quite a few of my assists, too, because it made them pick and choose exactly what they wanted to do.

But when we're able to get stops on defense, that's where I really thrive in the transition game, and I think Syd runs the floor really well. Hannah runs the floor really well. Those are tough passes to catch and handle and finish more than anything. I'm just proud of them. You don't get an assist if your teammate doesn't make the basket.

Then obviously the way Gab shot the ball tonight, 80 percent from three. It seemed like she came up with some very timely threes right when we maybe had a couple turnovers. Gabbie was always right there to find an answer for us.

Q. Caitlin, you've talked before about playing in the spotlight and how you kind of thrive on that. What is it like when you come into a game like tonight? The crowd, it was a packed arena again, crowd was wild, obviously there was a matchup looming that everybody has been waiting for. What does that do to your mindset?

CAITLIN CLARK: Honestly I think when I step on the court, like a calming sense comes over me. This is where I'm supposed to be. I have 13 amazing teammates that have my back. These are the moments you've worked so

hard for, this is what you've put the time in for in the gym all by yourself and with your teammates.

I guess it's just kind of like go let your work shine, go have fun, go have a blast, and win or lose, there's a lot to hold your head high about. I thought that's exactly what we did. Everybody kind of played with a smile on their face and had a lot of fun.

I speak for everybody on our team, we did not come into this game knowing LSU had won, and we're like, oh, we want to win to play LSU. We came into this game like, no, we focused on this game, we're focused on beating Colorado because Colorado is a really good basketball team. In my eyes they've played in one of the best conferences in the country, in the Pac-12 all year long. They've gone up against really great competition, and I thought we defended really, really well.

I think that's the biggest thing is, I came in with a sense of a calming presence and knowing that I have people that have my back and this is a game that I put a lot of time into, and I'm only promised 40 more minutes. Might as well go win it.

Q. Caitlin, obviously the goal is to win a National Championship, but it's one game at a time. How often do you think back to that National Championship game last year, and what comes to mind from it, with LSU?

CAITLIN CLARK: Oh, gosh. Honestly not that much. Ever since this season started, my focus is like 1-0 every single time we take the court. I think that's exactly what Coach Bluder preaches. I'm not caught up in the past, not caught up in the future. I try to keep my feet right in the present and be where my feet are, and prepare one game at a time. I don't think I wouldn't be able to be the player I am if I was too worried about what has happened or what is going to happen.

Yeah, you can learn from everything, but to be honest, the run we went on last year, it goes so fast, and it kind of is a blur at this point. I almost remember everything in between the basketball games better than the actual basketball games.

I think the biggest thing to take away from that is everything comes down to one possession. I think that's what our group learned from that journey is, we played in a lot of really tight close games, and being able to execute down the stretch is really important.

I don't know, I think that's the biggest thing. Sorry my memory is not very great, but that's all I've got.

Q. Gabbie and Caitlin, obviously you guys go out there, you don't have necessarily the biggest team on the floor. You saw some size in Colorado, you're going to see some size in LSU, but you don't seem to really need that. Talk about what you do as a team to play to your strengths, to use that speed and to show off the ball movement that you ladies can have?

GABBIE MARSHALL: Yeah, I think you kind of have to pick and choose with our team. Obviously there's a lot of attention on Caitlin, and she's going to get one or two people who have to look at her throughout the whole possession. So I think that leaves other people open.

I think she does a great job of finding her teammates, finding who's open, reading the defense before the defense even does what they're going to do. I think that truly speaks to what we try to do. We pass up good shots for great shots. We really pride ourselves on our assists.

We are kind of just hard to guard because you have to pick and choose. If you're going to stay out on Hannah, the shooters are going to be wide open. And I think that's kind of what you saw tonight is just a complete basketball game. 20 assists, that's Iowa basketball for you right there.

Q. Sydney, how important was it to get you and Kate and others involved early in this game to set the tone that this was going to be a team effort tonight?

SYDNEY AFFOLTER: Yeah, we always preach that there's five players on the court, and everyone on the bench, and no one is more important than anyone else in our circle. When we go out there, we know that they're going to have a lot of their eyes on Caitlin, and that's going to leave us open.

We're confident in each other to knock down those shots, and that's what we're going to do.

GABBIE MARSHALL: I think she said it perfectly. Just makes us harder to guard. If we move the ball like we did tonight, it makes the defense even harder. Things open up when you're hitting shots from the outside and there's balanced scoring. So I think it makes Caitlin's job a little easier when we are all hitting shots and can provide some of that offensive threat.

Q. Gabbie, speaking of hitting shots, you did a pretty good job today. What do you think was working offensively, and what did you see that was kind of given to you by the defense to get you in position to make those shots?

GABBIE MARSHALL: Yeah, I think when they went into

that zone, it kind of opened up like more passes and they were pretty spread out and they had to worry about Caitlin up at the top and that gave me more room to shoot it. It led to pretty much, I don't know, a lot of open looks at the three. So I think just having my feet set, being ready to shoot is kind of what I did out there when they switched to that zone.

Q. For any of the players, this isn't Carver-Hawkeye Arena, but it seemed like you definitely had a home crowd here. How did it feel out there? Did you feel like the crowd was in your favor?

GABBIE MARSHALL: I mean, yeah. When you look around you see a bunch of Hawk fans, a bunch of black and gold. It was loud in there, and I think that's kind of what we're used to. We love those environments. We love when it's wild, crazy, energetic, and we kind of feed off of it, and it gives us momentum.

Q. Gabbie, this last year of work has all been about getting to Cleveland, getting to the Final Four. Now that you guys are 40 minutes away, what is that feeling?

GABBIE MARSHALL: Yeah, I think it's exciting. Obviously we're going to have the same mentality every single game. It's been one game at a time, and it's going to continue to be that way, and we're going to prep the same way for LSU as we have all year.

I think we're focused on this next game. We're not going to get too far ahead of ourselves. Obviously that is the goal, but we're just going to focus on this next 40 minutes and know the coaches are going to have us prepared and just play Iowa basketball.

Q. Obviously the offense is pretty much exactly where you'd want it to be. You held Colorado to 37 percent shooting, below 30 from three, and a lot of that came late, as well. What is the state of your defense, and what were you guys doing defensively so effectively tonight?

LISA BLUDER: I thought our three-point defense was really good. We didn't want to let them get on a roll in the three-pointers.

I know they've still got 16 offensive rebounds. Better than the 21 we gave up last year, but they only got four in the second half. So we did a better job boxing out in the second half.

I think Gabbie is such a good defensive player, and people don't give her enough credit for that. There are games



she'll not score a single point for us and just come up with key play after key play.

I thought we were physical. I thought we did a really good job communicating on defense tonight.

Q. The start you guys had, it seemed you threw the first punch and they didn't recover from that to make it competitive. How good was it to get off to a good start against Colorado?

LISA BLUDER: I thought it was great. It didn't feel like -- when you said it wasn't competitive, it felt to me like it was. But I thought we came out in the third quarter and really had that punch to begin the third quarter. We had three straight stops that turned into pushes for us. I think we set the tone early in both of the halves. I think it was really important.

Q. I know you probably aren't caught up in this, you're looking at the game Iowa versus LSU, but this is the game everybody has wanted since last April. How big of a deal is it for women's basketball and how fun is it to be a part of something that's really kind of changed the narrative of the game?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I think everybody is pretty excited for it. 12 million people tuned in last year to see this game. Might be the same this time. Who knows.

I know that these are two really good basketball teams, and it's almost unfortunate they're meeting this early. But everybody that's left now is really good. LSU is certainly that.

Again, I haven't looked at our scout yet. I haven't gotten ready for that. But I just know it's going to be highly emotional and highly competitive.

Q. I know you all are saying one game at a time, you don't want to live in the past. As a former athletic though, I can imagine competitiveness is what it is. With that said, your last matchup with LSU last year was a lot of -- there was a lot of things happening on the court and off the court, meaning a lot of press, a lot of social media attention. There's energy behind that, and I can already feel the energy and the momentum building up even with the fanfare here today. How do you temper that with your team? How do you keep them focused as well as keep them competitive and really ready and excited to possibly avenge what happened last year?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, we got run out of the gym last year. It was pretty bad.

But honestly, we try to keep looking straight ahead and not listen to the outside noise. I think my team has done a good job of staying off social media, trying not to get caught up in that.

I think when you get caught up in all that, it takes your energy off the focus that you need at hand, and that is to prepare for a really good LSU team.

Nothing else matters. Nothing matters that happened last year. Nothing matters except for being ready to play this really good LSU team.

I just don't think my players are going to get caught up in listening to outside voices. They haven't all year. They've handled it all year. I think that they'll continue to do so.

Q. When you're coming into a new arena and a new community this week and you see the fans that are here today. I know a lot of them were the home faithful, but does it ever catch you by surprise to see how many people come out to watch and experience this team?

LISA BLUDER: Do you mean Hawkeye fans specifically or anybody?

Q. Anybody.

LISA BLUDER: Quite honestly, everywhere we go, the average attendance increases a lot because people want to see Caitlin Clark play. So right away, she's a magnet for fans. Wherever we go, it is the highest crowd that they have all year long, so it doesn't surprise me at all.

What does surprise me is as many Hawk fans that are here because what I had heard before this was announced that it was already sold out and we weren't going to get many tickets and all that. So to see so much black and gold here, they must have worked really hard to get their tickets. Again, Hawk fans are absolutely incredible.

Q. Caitlin got her second personal with six minutes left in the second quarter. You don't take her out. I've seen players taken out automatically for that time after time after time. Why didn't you, and obviously it was a good thing you didn't?

LISA BLUDER: I thought the two fouls she got we kind of touch fouls. They were just kind of like, eh, that could have been called, maybe not called.

To me, she's so smart. I just talked to her a little bit, just said, hey, be careful, you've got two. We put her out at the

end, we were taking her out for defensive possessions. But she is one smart basketball player, and I really trust her.

We also went to some zone to try to protect a little bit, too.

Q. You haven't done your scout on LSU yet, obviously, but given that you have such a tight turnaround to get there and it's such a big game, what goes into having such a short turnaround and coming up with hopefully the kind of game plan that gets you into the Final Four?

LISA BLUDER: Well, you don't wait until tonight to do it. Honestly, we've been working on -- I have different coaches assigned to different teams and I have somebody assigned to LSU. When I go back to the hotel, they'll have a scout ready for me to look at, and then we'll all sit down as a staff and try to figure out a game plan.

But you don't wait until now. You've got to do your homework ahead of time. Believe me, there was a lot of wasted paper and hours on UCLA and some other people, but that's the way it is this time of year. You have to be ready for everybody.

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