

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 2 Final - LSU vs Iowa

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Times Union Center

Iowa Hawkeyes

Lisa Bluder

Caitlin Clark

Kate Martin

Hannah Stuelke

Elite 8 Pregame Media Conference

Q. Like the kids say, you're kind of getting your flowers now after a long career in Iowa. I was wondering how that career has prepared you for these couple years and this kind of run, and what's happening now with your team and you?

LISA BLUDER: Well, first of all, happy Easter to everybody. It's great to be here on Easter Sunday and be with everybody and our team, just for our team family to be together today.

I don't think you change much as a coach. Your values, your morals are what you are. They're the same as when you started coaching. You evolve as a coach as far as X's and O's, and you have to evolve because of the way kids have changed over time, right? You coach differently because of that.

But what you ultimately stand for, what your morals and values are, hopefully they don't change as you have success or have failures. You hopefully are the same person no matter what. I hope that I'm the same person that I was when my mom and dad raised me.

Q. As a seasoned coach, we're definitely in a movement for women's basketball, not a moment, a movement. Players like Caitlin, players like Angel are helping grow things. From someone that's been around for a few, do you notice that? Do you see, hey, these two players are really a big part of the movement that we've seen for women's hoops the last two years or three years, really since COVID hit?



LISA BLUDER: I do. It just has exploded, women's basketball, women's sports. I go back to Nebraska volleyball having 90,000 people to watch their match in the football stadium or our team having 56,000 in the crossover in Kinnick.

It is a different time for women's athletics, and it's the best time to be a female athlete.

I think definitely those two players have had something to do with it. I think there's a lot of great players around our country. You look at Paige and JuJu and Hannah. You could go on and on about the tremendous talent that is coming up.

This is not like the pinnacle in my opinion. This is just the start of it, and I just hope we keep getting the momentum that we need. That's why it bothers me when I see people tearing down these great players. Isn't this what we all wanted is for our game to continue to rise?

To me, it's a shame when people not only -- adults, when adults are tearing down these women when all we should be doing is building them up. They're amazing.

Q. What have you seen from Flau'jae in the last five, seven games, and how much different is she than she was when you guys played them last year?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I mean, I've only had time to watch a couple of films, okay, but it seems like she has really elevated her game throughout this tournament. I mean, in the last five games she's averaging 19 points versus 14 on the year.

Her game has elevated. She's really hard to guard. As a sophomore, she seems to have great leadership skills and great emotion. It seems like the team kind of goes with her emotion. She's an unbelievable player.

Q. Wanted to talk about Syd if we could. Two things, two parts to it. One, when Syd was put into the starting lineup, if you could share the conversation that you had, what you remember, instructions you



gave. And also specific to the system you run, it almost seems like she's the ideal for it when you look at all of her shots coming. Beyond the arc or at the rim, she's gotten more efficient. Did you expect that when she came into the starting lineup specifically?

LISA BLUDER: All year long I was telling her, you're the sixth player in our league. You could be starting on every other team.

I loved what she said one time. She said a lot of people jump when they're not getting the starting position or when they're not getting their playing time, and they jump to where they think the grass is going to be greener. She said, I stuck with it because I love this place. That meant so much to me that she made that comment.

But I think she just seamlessly went into the starting lineup, and I think it's because of the style that we play, that we're kind of positionless so it really doesn't matter what -- if you're a 1, 2, 3 or 4, doesn't really matter, they all do the same things.

It really was effortless for her to move in there. She's always been confident. She's always been just this tough like chip-on-my-shoulder I'm going to prove you wrong type of kid. So it has been very easy.

Now, would I love to have Molly Davis back? Certainly I would love to have Molly Davis back, but I am so happy that Syd is showing everybody what she's capable of.

Q. You guys got to play LSU last year in the national title game. They have some back from that team, some new pieces. Is there anything that stands out about this year's team that is a different challenge that they pose this year compared to last year?

LISA BLUDER: You know, I just think they shoot the three ball. They rebound so well. They're just an excellent basketball team. I mean, it's going to take a complete game by us, but they're pretty balanced. You've got five people averaging in double figures. That's really hard to guard when you have that kind of balance.

They have experience, great experience at all their spots. There's just not a lot of weaknesses there.

Q. I want to go in a completely different direction with this question, but you talked about some of the negative comments that come with the growth of women's basketball, and since it is women's basketball, there are often very sexist comments, and even again because it's basketball, racist comments that come with that. As a coach who is molding young

players, how do you and your staff handle those things as they come to make sure that, first, your players are okay but also that they have an awareness and an understanding of how to be confident and be supportive and stand up for their teammates or others who are experiencing that?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, first of all, that's not done overnight in my opinion. That's something that your culture is built on, that you have to have your teammates' backs no matter what so when things do happen, it's not like we're teaching you in that moment, but it's a part of -- it's ingrained in you. It's a part of who you are.

Building confidence in my women -- we talk all the time, do not listen to outside sources. They don't know you. They don't know your heart. They don't know who you are as a person.

To me, it's like we have a very tight circle, and we really just care about the people in the circle and what they think about us and not what the outside voices have opinions because they don't know us. They really don't know who we are.

To me it's all about what you've established the minute they walk on campus to the minute they leave versus trying to correct something or create something in the moment.

Q. Molly Davis, are you expecting her to be available for tomorrow?

LISA BLUDER: I don't. I'm just really disappointed. I really thought she'd be back for the tournament. I really did. That's too bad, but I don't expect her tomorrow.

Q. Caitlin has talked about how she enjoys talking on the floor. Angel has, as well. Kim earlier said she enjoys it, as well. I'm curious for you, when you were a player, 6-on-6 Iowa basketball, were you much of a talker?

LISA BLUDER: You didn't have a lot of time to talk in 6-on-6 because you stood at the half court line while the other three were playing. Yeah, you got to know the guard that was guarding you pretty well. But no, I don't know that trash talking was a thing really back then. Maybe it was and I just don't remember. Maybe it wasn't where I played. But no, I don't do that to this day.

Q. You have two very good high-profile teams playing on Monday. One of you is not going to the Final Four. Is it unfortunate this game isn't taking place at the Final Four? And understanding the challenges of putting a bracket together, could they have done a

better job of making sure this didn't happen until Cleveland?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I'm sure the committee did what they thought was best as far as seeding this. There's a lot of storylines, obviously, that have been created through the bracket, but I don't think the committee sits there and thinks about the storylines. I think they're really trying to just seed the tournament as best they can, and they felt this is the best way.

Do I wish we were facing -- I just want to be playing in the Final Four, so do I play LSU here or there? It doesn't matter. We just want to play our best game tomorrow and try to get there.

Q. After she broke the scoring record, Caitlin was asked about what 6-year-old Caitlin would think about where she was at right now. What would 6-year-old Lisa Geske think about coaching in two straight Elite 8s and where she's at right now?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I couldn't imagine it. Yeah, my dad put up a basketball hoop for my two older brothers, and they never used it. I'm the one that wore it out and made him take down the bushes so I could shoot from farther out and stuff.

Six-year-old Lisa would have no comprehension of this because you didn't have the role models then. You didn't know what the possibilities were. You didn't know what you could achieve really. Back then, we didn't have an Olympic basketball team back then.

That's why role modeling is so important. That's why women need to see women in spots of leadership and of success so that they can become that, too. I didn't have that growing up.

Q. Angel Reese was just in here talking about how she's played against Caitlin Clark since high school, and clearly a lot of eyes are on the two of them. In your thoughts what makes their matchup, just the two of them, their leadership, so electrifying?

LISA BLUDER: Well, they're both dynamic players. They're both emotional. They're both passionate about the game. They're highly competitive. They're both excellent at their craft.

I think it's just naturally going to happen that you talk about the two of them a lot.

Q. You talked about as a coach your morals and your values shouldn't change over time. How would you

describe yours and maybe how they're reflected in your team and how they play?

LISA BLUDER: Well, I mean, I've always tried to be a coach of integrity. I think that's really important, that your players see honesty when you're talking to them, that you're trustworthy, that you do what you say you're going to do when you're supposed to do it. I lead by my faith. I'm a very faith-based person, and that's important to me.

I think that's kind of where it lands. Be kind to others, man.

Q. How might that be reflected in the team and how they play?

LISA BLUDER: I want them to be -- that's one of our values is integrity. That's a big part of who we are. When you walk into our locker room, it's one of the things that you see. Respect is another one that you see. Respect of your teammates but also yourself. How do you talk to yourself? How do you take care of yourself? How do you self-motivate yourself? Those are all really, really important, and I try to instill those upon my team all the time.

They know -- our values are not just slapped on a wall. Okay, there they are, check it off, we did that one day. If you asked our players what our values are, they would be able to recite them. They know what they are because it's ingrained in what we do all the time.

Q. It seemed like Caitlin was really intentional about getting to the rim yesterday against Colorado, and I know that was something that was a little difficult to do last year in the championship game against LSU. Are there ways you can help her do that a little bit better in this matchup tomorrow?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I think I've got to think about that a little bit more because it is -- they're such a good defensive team. They're so long.

She did a great job yesterday. Her three wasn't falling, so she did what a smart basketball player does, okay, I'm going to score in other ways, I'm going to assist the ball, I'm going to get to the rim. She didn't get to the free-throw line yesterday. I don't remember a game where Caitlin has not gotten to the free-throw line. That was kind of unusual.

I'm going to have to figure out ways for her to get to the rim because LSU is just so good, and I haven't done that yet.

Q. You talked earlier about how you've evolved a little bit because kids have changed. How have kids changed for either better or for worse?

LISA BLUDER: I mean, when we first kind of started out coaching, kids believed everything you said and they did it because you said to do it, and now they kind of have to know the why, and that's okay. That's just how things have changed.

Parents are definitely more involved, and I'm fortunate that I've got great parents on my program that don't get involved, but I know I've talked to a lot of other coaches that parents are highly involved.

Obviously social media has changed players so much, and they're more worried about their brand and that sort of thing than just -- there just wasn't all the distractions that there are now. Kids have changed because they want to be treated -- I want to say more humanely than they used to be 40, 50 years ago. Coaches could do whatever they wanted and nobody really said anything.

Now they're treated like people. They're respected a lot more. I think that's a really good thing.

Q. Caitlin, Angel was saying people might be a little surprised to know that you two are actually on pretty good terms. Can you describe your relationship with Angel, and do you think you guys are going to be defined in kind of the way Larry Bird and Magic Johnson were defined throughout their careers after playing in the National Championship game and then going forward?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I would say me and Angel have always been great competitors. Obviously she played in the Big Ten for a while to begin her career, and that's what makes women's basketball so fun is you have great competition, and that's what we've had all year long.

I think Angel would say the same, like it's not just us in women's basketball. That's not the only competitive thing about where our game is at, and that's what makes it so good. We need multiple people to be really good.

Yeah, I think both of our careers, whether she decides to stay or to go, we'll have great careers in the WNBA, and that's been both of our dreams all along. So I think we're both excited for that, as well.

Q. I wanted to talk about Syd if you could. Caitlin, specifically to the idea that she is going to just continue this Iowa program. But also for any of you, if you could talk to me about what it was like once she entered the starting lineup. How was that conversation?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I think for Syd, she's been so good for us this year, and I think I'm just so proud of her because she played behind two really good players in Kate and McKenna to start her career. She never really got many minutes.

All of us would say Syd was somebody that was in the gym just as much as anybody else. Like she worked on her game. She believed in herself. She came to practice every single day and worked so hard.

Now for her this year to kind of take a step and really make this moment hers has been really fun to watch. Nobody deserves it more than her. More than anything, you're just happy for her.

And then when Molly goes down she takes another step forward and really just embraces the moment, isn't scared of anything.

Syd does things that don't show up in the box score. She's been scoring, she's been rebounding, but she does so many other things that don't show up in the box score, whether it's her physicality, whether it's her mentality of just diving on the floor for loose balls, whether it's boxing out hard every possession. Everybody on the team needs a player like Syd, and we're lucky to have her.

Q. Kate were there any moments or conversations that you had with Syd?

KATE MARTIN: Honestly didn't really need any conversations because we felt so comfortable with her stepping into that role because Molly had missed a couple games before Senior Day, as well. So we felt really comfortable with her because we're super confident in her and she's just a stud.

She's going to work super hard and we know that. And the girl is always in the gym, always working hard, and I've gone against her every single day in practice. I was super confident in her, and she's super confident in herself. No words were really even needed to say to her.

Q. Caitlin, you mentioned it's not just you and Angel. Monday is also going to have JuJu versus Paige. It feels like maybe the most anticipated day in women's basketball in a long time. What does the overall day, the two games, the four teams, the players and the stars everywhere involved mean to you?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think it's just super awesome. I think if I was just a basketball fan in general, I'd be glued to the TV like no other. Paige and JuJu have both been able to have amazing seasons, and I've been able to watch as much as

I can. Obviously I'm pretty busy, but I love turning them on as much as I can, especially JuJu.

What she's been able to do for that program as a freshman to come in and lead them to the Elite 8 with a chance to go to the Final Four is unreal, it's unheard of. She's so special.

Then what Paige has been able to do has been amazing, as well, coming back from injury and really leading her team in the same way. I'm big fans of them.

I think women's basketball fans know how special and cool this moment will be. I think the viewership numbers will show that.

I think the worst part of it is two teams are getting sent home. All of them can't keep playing, but that's what makes this competitive environment so fun. Everybody is fighting to be able to play one more game, come back to practice with one another. I think more than anything, it's just great for our game. I'm lucky to be a part of it.

Q. Caitlin, after the game yesterday you signed it seemed like dozens of autographs, and there were hundreds of young girls yelling your name. What does that mean to you?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think it's so cool, especially when you're in New York far away from Iowa where you grew up and where you play most of your games. It's been cool to see our impact all across the country, and I think that goes back to what we were able to do at the Final Four last year and the way people really loved our team and loved getting to support our team.

Maybe a lot of people didn't know who we were then, but obviously this season every single game we've played has basically been sold out. People love coming and supporting us.

But I think it's just the way we play. We play an up tempo, fast paced offense. We love scoring the ball. We're energetic, we're passionate, we support our teammates. We have a lot of fun doing it.

Our fans in Iowa City have always supported really well, but that's been one of the coolest things is when we go on the road and arenas are packed, people are wearing Iowa gear and still supporting us in that exact same way.

Q. For Kate and Hannah, how much have you thought about last year's championship game (indiscernible)?

KATE MARTIN: I think we're both very different teams

than last year. We've lost a couple starters, and they've had some transfers come in, as well. We're really mainly focused on ourselves right now.

At this point in the season, there's not much you can do to worry about anybody else other than yourselves, but we're looking forward to it. It really didn't matter to us who we were playing in this game because we're just really excited to be back to the Elite 8 and get another shot at making another Final Four.

HANNAH STUELKE: Yeah, I think just getting to play another game is the most important. I get to spend another game out here with these girls, and that means a lot for me.

Q. Hannah, what do you remember from last year's game? You played I think it was 11 minutes. What do you remember seeing specifically of Angel, and what can you take from that for tomorrow's game?

HANNAH STUELKE: I don't remember much from that game. That was a whole year ago.

I think boxing out is really important with Angel. She's one of the best rebounders, if not the best. I think that's my focus for this game for sure.

Q. Hannah, I actually want to ask you to maybe go a little bit deeper there. Angel talked about the matchup, and you in particular. With regard to how you want to play offensively in particular, what do you hope to bring for Iowa? Then Caitlin, I actually maybe want to help out my friend here at the AP. I know you're a Maya Moore fan. What do you remember of the LA Sparks versus Minnesota Lynx matchups, and why do you think those were instant classics?

HANNAH STUELKE: Yeah, on offense I think just playing -- I don't know, we'll see. I don't know yet.

CAITLIN CLARK: Honestly, like I was pretty young. I barely remember some of our games.

I think the biggest thing is the WNBA is what I grew up watching, and those rivalries and competitive games were something I just loved and thrived on. I loved watching their competitive passion and their fire.

I think more than anything, I just loved the Minnesota Lynx, the team that they had, the players that they had. Obviously they built kind of a dynasty there and Coach Reeves, what she was able to do with her players. Whether it was Maya Moore, whether it was Lindsay Whalen, whether it was Rebekkah Brunson, you could go

down the line.

I just loved that team and supporting that team, and what they were able to do for women's basketball, for me, they were my inspiration growing up, and they still kind of are, and that's what I kind of live by.

Q. Caitlin, we talked a lot about trash talk earlier today. Kim said she loves it. Lisa said she didn't do it as a young girl. Angel said she uses it as motivation, and Hailey compared it to hockey fights, as far as drawing people in and some of the outside attraction. How do you utilize it in your game? Do you enjoy it? Do you not enjoy it?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think for me, my competitive passion is just all about the game and what fires me up and what fires my team up. I think that's what I'm focused on.

I think I play with a lot of emotion, but I think our team is mostly focused on celebrating each other. That's what we've always been about. Coach Bluder always talks about celebrating the assists.

We're a team that really focuses on having a high number of assists every night out and a low number of turnovers, and I thought we did that last night. We had 20 assists, could have taken care of the ball a little bit better with 19 turnovers.

But I think that's where my competitive passion and fire comes from is I know how much I expect out of this team. They expect the same out of themselves, I expect a lot out of myself, and we have a lot of fun doing it. That's what makes the game so fun, being able to be in those types of situations.

Q. Caitlin, there's a lot of Caitlin versus Angel talk here and people pointing out the differences between you two. I'm wondering what similarities you see between yourself and Angel and if you can see yourself in her a little bit with the competitive fire and the swagger both of you play with?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I think like you said, there's definitely that competitive fire. Both of us want to win more than anything, and that's how it should be when you're a competitor and you get into a situation like this, whether it was the National Championship, whether it's the Elite 8.

That goes for LSU's entire roster. That goes for Iowa's entire roster. Every single one of us want this so bad. We want to advance to the Final Four so bad. I think that's the main similarity is how bad and how competitive we are. We both grew up loving this game, and we're going to do

anything we can to help our teams win.

Q. A lot of talk about Iowa has been about Caitlin, but can you guys talk about what Lisa has meant to this program, to you guys as a team, what brought you here, and do you think she's getting the flowers she deserves?

KATE MARTIN: I do think she's getting the flowers she deserves. What she's built here at this program the last 23, 24 years is incredible. What I love about Coach Bluder is she really cares about us as people first over basketball players. She's going to do anything to be there for us as people.

She really instills great values in us, and she believes that every single person on our team matters. It doesn't matter if you're Caitlin, who plays 40 minutes a game, or if you're somebody who doesn't really get off the bench. Every single person on our team matters.

I've always wanted to play for her ever since I was a little kid, and I'm so glad that she's still here and that I've gotten to play for her for six years. I'm really glad that she's getting some recognition that she deserves because what she's done is incredible.

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, Coach Bluder is a Hall-of-Fame coach. I think the biggest thing for me throughout the recruiting process that I loved about her is she's a player's coach. She's not going to have a set offense that you have to run. She's going to tailor everything to what she has on her team and what's going to put her team in positions to be very successful.

That's exactly what she's done over the course of my four years. I don't know if I'd have the type of success if I don't have the amazing teammates that I have but also a coach that really allows me to be myself, and for that I'm forever grateful. She's one of the best our game has ever seen. I think she's close to 900 wins now. It's a lot of wins.

Q. Caitlin as great a three-point shooter as you are, through the wear and tear of the season, does it become harder to always have your legs in a three-point shot? And if it does, do you, like yesterday, find some other ways to score and how do you balance that decision making?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I think a little bit. I think especially when you're definitely playing in environments that you're maybe not always used to. I think also when you're playing in these tournament settings where your turnaround time isn't always the greatest, you're definitely a little more sore. But also I think not settling for three-pointers. I think I took

19 threes and 22 shots total versus LSU the last time we played them.

So not settling and falling in love with my three-point shot, being able to get into the paint, drive into the paint, I think that allows my teammates to get open. They're going to either have to collapse and make a decision, or I'm going to be able to finish at the rim.

I think that'll be another key going into this game is not falling in love with my three-point shot, whether it's on, whether it's off, whatever it is, being able to score at all three levels, but also that helps set my teammates up a lot, too.

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