

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

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Albany, New York, USA

Times Union Center

Iowa Hawkeyes

Coach Lisa Bluder

Caitlin Clark

Sydney Affolter

Kate Martin

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference

Iowa 94, LSU 87

LISA BLUDER: I'm just extremely grateful for this group of young women we have. They're amazing. Everybody kept saying at the beginning of the year, Iowa lost so much, they lost all this offense and two starters and everybody kept focusing on that, and we kept focusing on what we had.

Even when we had an injury with Molly Davis going out of the lineup, Syd just came in there seamlessly. I'm really just proud of this group. They kept the focus all the time on us, and I'm really -- I couldn't be more happy for such a great group of young women than this.

Q. Caitlin, to get back to the Final Four again, to beat the team that knocked you out last year, what does it mean to have Iowa playing for a National Championship?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, like you said, I feel like it's amazing to be back in the Final Four. It's so hard to get there, especially with this region and how loaded this region was. We told ourselves we're the 1 seed for a reason. We've earned this. We deserve to be in these moments. We're prepared for these moments.

I think we came out here and our second and third quarters we played really good basketball. And LSU is a really good team. They're hard to guard. They're such good one-on-one players. They break you down. They make tough shots. They killed us on the glass.



But we were just resilient. We never hung our head when things didn't go our way, and that can get you a long way. I'm just proud of this group to go back to the Final Four. You enjoy this and then you get to Cleveland and you start prepping for your next game. We want to win two more, and I think we have the power to do that.

Q. Sydney, the amount of times you were defending Aneesah Morrow, just take me through that battle, the approach you took to it. And at the conclusion of the game, if you'd take me through -- I know you had family in the stands, what that moment was like for you.

SYDNEY AFFOLTER: Yeah, first off, Aneesah Morrow is a great player, and I think me and Kate both guarded her. Kate guarded her a lot of the game. She's a great post. We know what they like to do. They like to get down in the post, post-up. And we're a bit smaller than them, but we battled down there. And that was most important.

They beat us on the glass, but I think really in the second half, we really stepped it up and focused on our box-outs and defense.

But overall, when I got to celebrate with my family, that was a super special moment for them to be here and share this moment with them. My parents and my brother have been with me through everything, so I'm just so grateful to have them here with me.

Q. For the players, was revenge on your mind coming into this game for what happened last year?

CAITLIN CLARK: To be honest, no. I feel like we prepared for this game. We focus on Iowa, we do what Iowa does, and we'll come out on top. And that was kind of Coach Bluder's message. It's not about last year. You worry too much about the past, you're going to get caught up in that. It's about being present, being where your feet are.

Don't worry about being in the Final Four, be in this moment, be in the Elite 8, enjoy that and soak that in.



That's what's going to allow you to win 40 minutes, and that's exactly what we did.

I thought we just played a really good basketball game. When they went on their runs, we always had an answer, and that's all you can ask of your team.

Q. Caitlin and Kate, you've been there before, so how much more incentive is it to take the step that you came up one step short last year?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I think that's obviously our goal. That's where we want to be. But you've got to win one at a time. There's still two more there to get. That's what makes the Final Four so fun. Anybody can take it. Anybody can win it.

Yes, we want to win the national title. That's probably what 100 other Division I basketball teams said when they started their season. There's only one team of 360 that get to end their season happy. And to me, that's what makes this sport so fun. A lot of people end disappointed. And being so close last year, I think that's what just drives you.

But I know our group has given everything we've got. And at the end of the day, you win, you lose, I feel like our group has given so much to this game and to this program that you can always hold your head high.

But at the same time, that's the reason we've been able to play such good basketball, is we don't want this to end. And we want to keep coming back and working hard with each other and fighting for one more week and extend it as long as you possibly can, I guess.

Q. Caitlin, after your freshman year, the loss to UConn, you said something in the press conference then about I wanted to get to a Final Four; I didn't say it was going to be my freshman year. Thinking back then, what was missing in you and that team to make that step, and what is it that you guys have now that you were able to do it twice?

CAITLIN CLARK: Honestly, I feel like -- well, first of all, we were a young team. We had no experience. Playing with a young point guard, like I was a freshman, and I think the biggest thing has just been my maturity and being able to move on from things when it doesn't go my way.

I feel like that's what I'm the most proud of over the course of these last two games, just being calm, cool, collected and dialed in to what we need to do. I'm not worried about what the other team is doing. I'm not worried about what call the ref is making. I'm worried about Iowa needs.

When I'm able to do that, I feel like that helps my teammates a lot, and I feel like that's the biggest way that I've grown over the last two years. I'm not sure I really did that my sophomore year. And I've always had the basketball skill, it's just been my mind, making my mind better. Lucky enough I've had really good teammates that have held me accountable and also been my biggest fans and been there to support me the entire way.

Q. Caitlin, you had kind of a no-lose proposition here. Either you were going to go to Cleveland for the Final Four or you were going to try out for the Olympic team. How much greater is this than that would have been?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, that's tough. Obviously the Olympics are always your dream, but to be here with this team and to be able to do what we've done and to extend that out another week is all I could have really asked. That's all I wanted is to win this game tonight and be going back to Cleveland with the people I love and get to play for Iowa that's across my chest every single time.

For me, it was like a win-win, I guess. I don't know, but more than anything, my focus is 100 percent on making Iowa really good, and not really too focused on all that other stuff. I know that'll be there when my career ends, and hopefully that's with a win.

Q. Caitlin, were you surprised that Flau'jae -- you didn't get more reps against her defending you? Seemed like her length was a little bit of an issue later in the game.

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I wouldn't say it was too much of an issue. Honestly, no matter what they threw at me, I thought we always had a good answer.

I think our goal coming into this game was to set a ton of ball screens. And that's exactly what we did. I think they started showing late at the end of the game, which can sometimes be a little bit better on me rather than drop coverage. But coming into this game I did expect her to guard me. I will say that.

But at the same time, every team we play throws multiple defenders at us. I don't see one person for 40 minutes. And that's what they did. They brought somebody in off the bench that guarded me too. She guarded me a little bit.

But also you don't want some of your best players to get in foul trouble. So I don't know if that was the reasoning behind it. But coming into this game I think that's what I was more prepared for. But you don't get to know what the other team is going to do.

Q. At the end of the fourth quarter, I think there was about five minutes left, you hit a three and pounded your chest and looked at the crowd. What was going through your head in that moment?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think I just got hyped for a second, honestly. I was trying to be pretty calm and cool. Like, when you're playing a team like LSU, like they're never out of the game. No matter what the time and score is. That's what I told our girls. I think there was 4:45 on the clock, and we were up 11. I was like, Do not start celebrating. Do not start getting too emotional. This game is not over. They're going to fight until the end.

And that's exactly what they did. But sometimes you get a little hype for yourself and you do things that you don't even realize you're doing. I think that was the only three I celebrated.

Q. The three-point percentage has been a little lower during the postseason, but tonight, nine, which ties an NCAA Tournament record, single game. You also passed Diana Taurasi for most threes in the NCAA Tournament. Were you really feeling it from three-point range, and how big that was, especially in the third quarter?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I think for myself I probably haven't been shooting it as good from three over the course of the last five or so games. But even if you told me that, I would still have 110 percent belief in myself and what I've been able to do this year.

To me, everything averages out over the course of the year. I've had games where I've been 2 for 16. I've had games where I've been 9 of 15. It all averages out.

I think that just speaks to the confidence I have in myself and the time I've put in the gym. I know I'm ready for this moment. I thought my shot felt good in warmups. And it certainly helps when you make your first three as a shooter when you can see the ball go in. I think I was 2 of my first 3, and then I made my first to start the second half. And that certainly helped, too.

I thought I got some good looks off the dribble, and I'm really comfortable shooting off the dribble. That's what I prefer rather than catch and shoot.

It was nice to have a game where I got some good looks at three for sure.

Q. Kate, how good is this rivalry or has this rivalry been for women's basketball? And how much do you

think that Angel getting hurt, hobbled, whatever you want to call it, affected not just her but all of LSU?

KATE MARTIN: Well, we really didn't look at it as a rivalry, honestly. To us, it didn't really matter who was our opponent for this game. We were really just focused on ourselves.

But like to have stars that LSU has and to have stars like Caitlin on our team, I think that just really grows the game. In that aspect, it's really cool. I'm sure we got some great viewership tonight in this game. I think a lot of people were looking forward to this game.

I don't know for Angel, I can't speak for her, and obviously you never want to see an opponent go down, you never want to see somebody get injured. I don't know if it affected her or not. She came back in the game, and she played pretty well. I'm not quite sure on that one.

Q. Caitlin, there was a lot of anticipation around this game, in part because of the matchup, but I know you guys are obviously in a win-or-go-home situation, but what did it feel like to be on that court tonight and knowing how many people cared and were going to be paying attention?

CAITLIN CLARK: To be honest, when you step on the court and you're a competitor, you don't feel that. You're there competing. It's five v. five. There could have been nobody in the gym, and both teams would have competed the exact same way.

Yeah, you're playing for a little more with the Final Four on the line, but to me I'm not thinking, oh, my God, there's 15 million people at home watching this game right now. Like no, that's not what's happening. It's like, what can I do for my team to help me win the game right now?

That's what's going through your mind. If you're not worried about everything else, you're not going to be successful. You've got to be completely locked in on what's happening between the lines.

And I thought our team did a really good job of that. It wasn't so-and-so made a bad call, it wasn't like, oh, my God, they've made three shots in a row. It was all about us and what we need to do.

And I think that's one of the reasons we won the game, honestly.

Q. Gabbie Marshall is not a player whose stats necessarily pop off the page, but for anybody who's watching her play, she certainly does. I am wondering

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if you could speak about her and what she's meant to the program, especially today. She played 40 minutes.

KATE MARTIN: Yeah, I mean, nothing pops off the page, but besides, she never got a sub the entire game, and she is working her tail off on defense constantly. If she was tired we never knew it, and that's pretty impressive. Gabbie, she's going to catch fire. 1 for 3, she didn't get too many opportunities from three tonight, but we believe in her, full confidence, 100 percent. She's an amazing shooter, and every single person on our team would say that.

She's probably mad that she shot 33 percent from the field, but we know we're going to need her in later games, and I'm really proud of the way how she never gives up on the defensive end, even if her -- she's not getting all the scoring or all the glory on the offensive end.

She's meant the world to this team, and she's one of the reasons why we are back to the Final Four again this year.

Q. Lisa, if you would, describe what your defensive strategy was coming into this game and how the players executed it.

LISA BLUDER: Actually, we thought we would be playing a whole lot more zone than we did. We started out in zone, and it was good for the first couple of minutes. They had to call a time-out. Then we tried trapping in our zone, and that really wasn't working. After that, we went to our player to player defense.

I was so impressed with how hard our players worked in there, especially in the paint. They're a hard group to defend in the paint when you have both Angel and Morrow in there. It's a lot to guard in the paint.

Q. The third quarter you guys were able to pull away. What defensive adjustments were made at halftime that we saw in the third quarter?

LISA BLUDER: There wasn't a lot of adjustments we made. We just talked about we needed to box out, and we didn't really do that, as you can tell here.

But it's ironic they had 23 rebounds and only 14 second-chance points. That's a really low number for 23. But a lot of it was just kind of like bouncing it off the backboard a couple times to yourself almost.

But I think when we came out, the game is tied, we come out, Caitlin hits that deep three, and it gave us a lot of momentum. Then we get a stop and another score and all of a sudden they have to call time-out after two minutes

again.

I think we started the game and we started the third quarter with a punch, and that really helped us a lot, gave us a lot of confidence on the defensive end.

Q. I asked the other day if there were any wow moments left for Caitlin, and then she drops 41. Can you put in perspective what she did for you guys tonight to get you back to the Final Four?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I mean, Caitlin, I feel like I've talked about her, like used every word imaginable to describe her. But I thought what she said today about her maturity has just grown so much over four years, I really saw that tonight.

Really, it could have been a highly emotional game. It could have been a lot of talking going on out there. Just from what happened at the end of last year. Honestly, she put it aside. She put everything aside.

I think her maturity, just her communication with her teammates was really good tonight. She was in the huddle really building others up, which I love when she does that because it means so much coming from her rather than me.

But her distance shots were amazing tonight. Her logo threes were incredible. How do you defend that, right? It is nearly impossible.

That obviously gave us some great momentum.

Q. On Caitlin, she mentioned ball screens, ball screens being a critical part of this, and you talked about we're going to find ways of getting her to the basket which is not a thing against LSU, but she did right away here tonight. How much of that is a schematic change and how much is just her maturing and getting that much better at getting to the rim?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I was really happy in the first quarter she got to the rim quite a bit and got off ball screens. We encouraged her to do that because we didn't want her to start out with the logo threes. We thought she could get to the rim, and we wanted the higher percentage shots to begin with. I was pretty happy that she did that.

Then I'm telling third quarter, though, she came out with a different look in her eye. I could tell her all I wanted to at that time to get to the rim, and it wasn't going to happen.

Q. Between this game, the West Virginia game a couple rounds ago, your team has had to really be



incredibly physical and play sort of above your height, especially in the paint defense. Has that been for you a big learning point and growth from last year?

LISA BLUDER: You know, we've had to play that way all year. Addie O'Grady went in and played some good minutes tonight for us. She had 15 minutes, I think. She did a nice job in there when Hannah got into some foul trouble. But we've been undersized all year, and it's just the way it is. You can't do anything about it, so don't gripe about it.

Just go out there and play and use what you do have. Do you have speed? Do you have agility? Do you have hops? Use those things instead of focusing on I wish I was four inches taller.

Q. You mentioned throwing punches. They threw punches back. It was such a high-level game and it was so frenetic in the first quarter in particular. What is that like to experience, to be part of as the game is unfolding and obviously to come out victorious? What does it feel like to be in a game like that?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, we always tell our players, basketball is usually a game of momentum swings. You've got to make yours ride as long as you can and hang on during theirs. They had a really good momentum swing there in the second quarter. They had a really nice momentum swing.

I was just happy -- I thought we were going to go up two to go into the locker room, and I was thrilled with that. But then we ended up being tied, and we just went in there and said, hey, we've got 20 more minutes.

They were very locked in at halftime. There was a lot of belief in that locker room. There really was.

Q. How important was it not to focus on what happened last year and just keep the focus on this year and winning the game, getting to the Final Four again?

LISA BLUDER: I can tell you, we didn't talk about last year's game at all. We did not talk about it at all. It just wasn't important to us. That was last year, different teams, different scenario. We just kept focusing on this time we get to play. We get to play today. We focused on ourselves.

I know it sounds elementary and it's what they said, but it's truly what we really believed. We were just focusing on ourselves and not focusing on LSU going into this game.

Q. Kate said it's not really a rivalry but obviously you've had these two huge games. How good is this back-and-forth between LSU and Iowa?

LISA BLUDER: Well, we talked about that last night, and I told the team, this is not a rivalry. This is a competition. It's a competition against an opponent. It is not a rivalry. I just don't feel like we've played them that many times that you consider it a rivalry.

But I mean, I think people were highly interested in this game, and so I think people were excited to see this play, to see this matchup again, so I think that was there, the excitement around the game. But it certainly wasn't one that we feel like is a rivalry. It was just going out to compete.

Q. To bring it back to Gabbie Marshall, from the coaching perspective, it's different when you're a teammate to have somebody who's that consistent, but for you as a coach, what does it mean to have somebody who can put 40 minutes on the floor so consistently like she does and with her energy?

LISA BLUDER: I'm so glad that you noticed her because I think she doesn't get enough credit for how hard she plays. First of all, she is a sniper. She shoots one out of three tonight, it's 50 percent adjusted, but she has two steals, she has a blocked shot. She's the shortest person out there, and she has a blocked shot. She consistently guards the toughest person. She consistently gives it all she has defensively, whether it's getting out and denying or understanding to get her hands up, something as simple as that. She is a great defensive player, and I'm so proud of her effort, and I'm glad that you recognized that, as well, so thank you.

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