

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 2 Semifinal - Maryland vs South Carolina

Friday, March 28, 2025

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena

South Carolina Gamecocks

Dawn Staley

MiLaysia Fulwiley

Chloe Kitts

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

South Carolina 71, Maryland 67

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by South Carolina Head Coach Dawn Staley and student-athletes MiLaysia Fulwiley and Chloe Kitts. Questions for the players?

Q. MiLaysia, 16 points in the second half, 23 for the game. Did you feel like you were in takeover mode?

MILAYSIA FULWILEY: I wouldn't say takeover. I think I would say I honestly just went out there and tried to help my team get closer to our next goal, the Elite Eight and I think I did that well.

Q. MiLaysia, was there a moment that you kind of felt like you needed to do more? Because it seemed like you kind of what he was hinting at, went into that mode of okay, we need me. Let's pick it up right now?

MILAYSIA FULWILEY: I think every game I feel like I need to do more. My teammates they kinda tell me every game that I need to be on top of my game, do what I do best, driving or scoring period.

I think today I kind of just was locked in and determined and kind of really scraped forward with what I wanted to do, which was score.

Q. Chloe, when we were in Greenville We were talking about how people don't realize how mentally tough basketball is. Could you walk through the mental strength it took to pull out that win? The clutch free



throws at the end there, the highs and lows?

CHLOE KITTS: Basketball in general it's very mental, it's more mental than actual basketball. People don't really realize that. In the game we kind of just realized our highs and lows and towards the end of the game we came together. We knew what we had to do and that was locking in on defense. And I wasn't the only one who hit clutch free throws, Lay did, Breezy did, and so that was good for us.

Q. Can you talk about the shift going into the fourth quarter to take over and getting the lead?

CHLOE KITTS: Going into the fourth quarter I just feel like, like I said, we just kind of -- Coach talked to us and relaxed us, we needed to relax and get more in the flow on offense. And Lay had great moves to the basket and was making her layups for us, and that was really good for us.

And rebounding, our rebounding was also very good. So Maryland is a great team and we're just happy we got that win.

MILAYSIA FULWILEY: What she said. I think basketball is kinda really about a game full of runs and I think we kinda made a lot of runs toward the start of the third quarter, right? That's what you asked? Fourth quarter. Towards the start of the fourth quarter. I think we were all intentional about what we wanted to do, which was win this game and we all had that mindset that we had to go out and do whatever it's going to take to help us win this game, and I think our fans helped a lot with it.

Q. MiLaysia, following up on the plays you made, the spin move dish to Pao, behind the back and score, I think a lot of people here were like -- the crowd went a little bit crazy when they saw those plays. How would you describe what you were feeling in those moments when you made plays like that?

MILAYSIA FULWILEY: Just score, get the ball in the hoop. I kinda seen a double team a little bit once I crossed the half-court line on my transition moves. So that let me know someone was open.



And on the behind-the-back pass, they were like, come on, come on, she's not going to score this and I just let my confidence finish the rest and it went in. So I was excited to prove my haters wrong.

Q. How did you guys try and keep your momentum with the stops and starts and the reviews? How did you keep a level head and try and keep pushing through that?

MILAYSIA FULWILEY: I think we all just had to lock in and be focused. We would rather stay here for longer than we want to than to be home. Nothing is long when you are in March Madness. You want to be on the court as long as you can. That's what it's all about. And we was all in the moment. We were in the moment. We were sitting in the moment. If the refs needed to review a play we were fine with that. It gave us more time to work on what we needed to do next play, whether it was offense or defense.

Q. Both of you pulled out Euro steps in the fourth quarter, Chloe you did it first and Lay you copied it. Where did those come from? Was it spur of the moment?

CHLOE KITTS: I don't know. That was my high school bag so I was like, why don't we do a Euro? You did a Euro?

MILAYSIA FULWILEY: I copied you. So, I don't know, I don't know. I'm just trying to score. Chloe kind of gave me the idea.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies.

Q. Yesterday MiLaysia said she felt like she has done a better job of internalizing the coaching that you've given her and that it's made a difference. How have you seen that in the last couple of weeks and how did that manifest in the game today?

DAWN STALEY: Lay just wants to win. This is probably the time that she locks in a little bit more than others because it's win or go home. There was an instance in this game where I got in her. I got in her big-time. She was able -- two months ago she wouldn't be able to recover from it, two months ago. Shut down, we probably would have lost the game because she was the only one that could really manufacture our shots and make baskets. But she just wants to win. I think in those moments is when I feel like I can coach her the most, where she'll listen the most.

Then she'll go back, tonight, and just reprocess, you know,

what happened and then we'll talk about it maybe tomorrow, maybe another time. But she's grown to the fact where it gets hot, it gets hot. Everything is not spoken in a soft tone, like it is. Kitchen gets hot when you're trying to survive in the NCAA Tournament. So she's gotta handle that.

Because it's not just going to be me, her next coach, her next coach in the WNBA is gonna scream, too, it's what we do. It's our livelihood, it is to get their attention. I'm glad she responded.

Q. Dawn, I think there was one play where you put Lay back in the final three minutes or maybe motioned to slow down the offense and she cut to the basket and laid in. You remember that play? I know you've seen this for two years but does it keep blowing your mind about how she is able to do that so easily?

DAWN STALEY: Well, I expect it, actually I really do. I expect her to do the things that she was doing out there for us. I don't know how it's going to look, because it looks a lot different than most, because she's got a lot of gall to try some of the stuff she does, but it's part of who she is. It's hard to guard and it's hard to double because she has really good court vision and she's got really good ability to make layups in traffic, passes in traffic. Her three is pretty good as well.

I think she is just continuing to grow. The bigger the stage, I think the more she wants to shine.

Q. Coach, can you speak on what you're telling your team to keep the momentum going into the second half?

DAWN STALEY: Did we have momentum? I mean, I just wanted to get a unit out on the floor that could resemble what we practiced, and how to execute our game plan. It just wasn't working with the combination of players that we had in in the first and second quarters. Then the third quarter we went back to our starters and it just really didn't feel right, the fluidity of it.

And I think if it's that kind of game, Lay is the perfect guard that you can call on to manufacture points and she did that.

I thought she did a really good job on the other end of the floor, not dying on screens and, you know, chasing 'em over the top of screens.

Then, you know, everybody just started to flow around her. And we haven't really had to play that way a whole lot, so it was a little bit different but refreshing to know we can call on the youngster and she can come through for us.

Q. It's two games in a row now where you have been challenged and had tested and had to come back to win games. What have you learned about this group as they've been able to do that?

DAWN STALEY: We're a resilient group. People thought we had the easiest region. I think so. It's not easy at all, it gets harder, because we've got to play Duke.

I just think our team has been through so much. They're unshakeable, you know. They're unflappable. Our conference gives us a lot of credit -- sorry, confidence to be able to be in a tight-knit game and find a way to win because that's what it's about at this stage of the game.

Is it ugly? Yes. Are people going to say this doesn't look like a national championship team? Well, I mean, we didn't look like one last year to most in the beginning of the season. Probably didn't look like one -- we looked like one in '22. '17 we didn't look like one. I think we're back to where we don't look like one and hopefully we can win it and even it out.

Q. Dawn, you said you had to get into her a little bit, big time. What was the scenario and what caused you to have those stern words?

DAWN STALEY: It's more of -- when I get on Lay it's more of does she take bad shots? Yes. I mean, she makes a living off of making bad shots, which is good. Everybody is not capable of doing that. You can take bad shots and never make the bad shots. She makes them. I just -- when you take a bad shot or if you miss a shot and you get back on defense and you execute like we need you to execute. So she was dying on screens and the guards were posting her up and she was playing behind and allowing direct entry passes into her player. We just can't afford to do that, not against a team that works well around the paint with their big guards. So it was just that, just correcting that part of it.

She took it and found a way to really respond. I'm most proud of that.

Q. Dawn, was that in the first half when you laid into her or third quarter, if you remember?

DAWN STALEY: I think that was third quarter.

Q. And the last three minutes you were down 1 with 3:25 left and they didn't score until Saylor's three, talk about what you did when the game was on the line?

DAWN STALEY: That's our normal defense. If we would have connected those possessions early in the basketball

game, we might have found ourselves with a little bit of a bigger lead, but we were down at that point and we had to lock in.

I thought our assistant coaches did a great job at just suggesting to put different players in, substituting offense for defense and getting Breezy because she is our defensive stopper, because she sat almost a whole quarter, probably 10 minutes within the third and fourth quarters and we got her back in.

Our players just want to win. Do they want to play? Yes, they want to play. Everybody would love to be in the game at the end of the game, you know, but some of them perform better in those situations and it's a game-by-game situation for us, but we locked in and defended because we didn't want to go home.

Q. Dawn, I saw you have a few animated conversations with the refs, how would you assess today's officiating and how it impacted the flow today?

DAWN STALEY: The officials have a hard job. They have a really hard job. I don't have thick enough skin to do their job.

The animation was probably more we having a jokingly conversation rather than a heated conversation. They're really good at just communicating out there on the floor and that's why they're officiating in the Sweet 16, and probably some of them on their way to the Final Four, because they're able to handle those type situations, communicate with the coaches, in a way that really deescalates the situation.

But they have to do that. They're being graded. They can't just say okay it's .5, the game is in hand. They can't do that. Because ignoring those situations will decrease their opportunity to go further in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. You spoke on thick enough skin. I had the pleasure of meeting Kristen Lappas who directed your biopic and also did an excellent job on Giannis' documentary. Although Columbia is now home, it's no secret that Philadelphians are tough, resilient people. What are you looking forward to people learning in your biopic about the role that Philadelphia has played in who you are and how you've built this team to stay in this tournament?

DAWN STALEY: Let me get back with you on that. I don't think that's supposed to be out there like that. I'll back with you.

Q. Coach, your bench outscored your starters today.



Can you talk about the importance of having a bench to rely on in crucial moments this late in March.

DAWN STALEY: Yep, our bench, they do a really great job at -- when they're inserted into the game, they're able to play more free than our starters. Starters have a job to do, they've got to get us off to a great start, they have to execute the game plan at the start of the game. They have to be the example of how we need to play, especially from a defensive standpoint.

Then when our reserves come in, you know, the tone is set. They lift the tone. They are probably a little bit younger, they're able to get up and down the floor a little bit freely and play free, because the amount of freedom that they have, the starters don't have it. If I told the starters that our reserves, our bench players come in and they play with a certain freedom, they might want to come in off the bench and play with that same freedom.

But it's important. I mean, you cannot win a national championship without having depth. You can't. I think I was -- I used to recruit and say, hey, come help me win a national championship, right? Until you've won, you really don't know. Then when you have won them, you know what is the commonality. We have had depth, we have had health, like when we were at our most healthiest, we win. Like we win a whole lot of basketball games.

So knock on wood. We have that. I hope that we can utilize that on Sunday afternoon when we have to play a really good Duke team.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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