

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 2 Final - Duke vs South Carolina

Sunday, March 30, 2025

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena

South Carolina Gamecocks

Dawn Staley

Sania Feagin

Chloe Kitts

Bree Hall

Elite Eight Postgame Media Conference

South Carolina 54, Duke 50

THE MODERATOR: We will take opening comments from Coach Dawn Staley and then questions for the student-athletes.

DAWN STALEY: First, I just want to thank the Birmingham region and all the people that poured into this regional site. Everybody felt welcome, from our hotel to just walking around the street, to being in this arena. It really felt welcoming to our game.

Then just congratulate Duke on a great season and an hell of a basketball game. It's unfortunate that one of us had to win and one of us had to lose, but it wasn't from working super hard trying to get it done.

Q. Chloe, I saw you after the game walking around talking to the fans and I think you were taking pictures with some of the kids who were in the stands. Between embracing that moment and in the fourth quarter you hit 8 of your 14 and your 4 free throws, put into words what it's like embracing this moment on the court and off, also with the fans there as well.

CHLOE KITTS: Fan-wise, the fans mean so much to me. Those little boys and little girls look up to us. Just watching Coach throughout my years here go and really try and say hi and take a picture with everyone, made me feel like I need to do that more. So that's why I've been doing that more.



The points, I just made my free throws when it mattered and made a few layups but the free throws were, yeah, scary but, yeah.

Q. Bree, you had the charge then you caught the air ball off the three point shot. Most nerve-wracking 20 or so seconds of your life or career?

BREE HALL: I'd definitely say yeah, when I got that charge. Coach Mary came up to me and said it's okay, it's all right, you have to get a defensive stop and I was like okay, let me turn the page as quick as possible because I was ready to have a meltdown.

But I turned the page and I was ready to catch the rebound.

Q. Sania, after Chloe hit the two free throws to make it four-point game, everyone was starting to smile and I heard you say, it's not over. It's not over. Talk about your desire to focus and lead in the final 2 minutes especially.

SANIA FEAGIN: I stayed disciplined, I followed the game plan. I just tried to stay disciplined with it. We're used to being up but we wasn't up that much and when Chloe did make her free throws, I was just like, don't get too high with the highs and too low with the lows. Realize there's 5 seconds left, a lot of time on the clock and stay ready for anything.

Q. Bree, going into the fourth quarter you guys were down 4. What was the conversation that you had amongst yourselves before you went out there on an 8-0 run to grab the lead? What was the conversation going into that moment?

BREE HALL: I mean it was a really calm environment. We at halftime just came together and talked about different things we saw out there that we felt like we needed to do different. We did have, I don't know at one point it was 2 to 10 and they just kept coming back and kept coming back. I felt like we needed to change a few things, I'm not going to say, of course, I'm not going to say that.

But I felt like we had to change a few things and it was our calm energy that helped a lot. Coach is always calm with us in telling us what we need to do, and I think we did a good job executing.

Q. Sania and Bree, four Final Fours in four years, when you signed four years ago, I'm sure you wanted that but did you think it would come out this way?

SANIA FEAGIN: Yes, I did.

BREE HALL: I didn't think it would be this good, I'm not going to lie, this is like something a person would dream of.

SANIA FEAGIN: I did because they all do is win here.

Q. Chloe, you go to the line up two and you have to hit both, what was going on in your heard? What were your nerves at?

CHLOE KITTS: Well, Coach drew up a play and she said the ball was going to get to me. So I walked out there and I was like, Pao, can you get the ball? Can you get the ball? And Pao was like, girl what? Go get the ball.

So I got the ball and I went to the line and I was just taking a deep breath, and I told myself that my coach wanted me to have the ball at the end of the game because she knew I could make my free throws, and I told myself that I'm really good at basketball and I made both of them.

BREE HALL: I was at the free-throw line, I was screaming, You're unshakeable! You're unshakeable! You got this.

SANIA FEAGIN: And I was like take a deep breath.

Q. To know you are stressed in that moment what does it feel like for you, what does it mean that she trusted you to put the game away?

CHLOE KITTS: It feels amazing because I feel like I worked so hard and my process is different and everyone's process is different and I'm just so thankful to be in that position at the end of the game to go the Final Four.

Q. If all of y'all could touch on this, how big was Pao especially heating up late in the third quarter when it seemed like she was working so hard to get a shot and then she hit two jumpers and kept going in the fourth?

SANIA FEAGIN: She was really big, every time I passed it to her I said, Don't be afraid to shoot that mid-range. They send two to you or to me, don't be afraid to shoot that mid-range.

CHLOE KITTS: We're happy she made those shots for us, and it also calmed us down.

Q. Chloe, I saw Feagin look at you and tell you to take that deep breath. What has her leadership been like? And it's obvious where your dad is standing during the games and he seems to look at you. I can't tell if you avoid eye contact with him, before the free throws especially what was going through his head and did you look at him?

CHLOE KITTS: I do avoid him a lot during the game but I've been starting to look at him more because he'd be saying the right stuff at the right time. I didn't look at him before the free throws because I was scared.

But Sania, her leadership means so much. She is just a vocal voice out there and I'm just so proud of how she's been playing and, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, you're dismissed. Questions for Coach.

Q. Dawn, it seemed like Duke's game plan was to junk it up on defense, try to keep the score low. How effective were they in doing that and how difficult was it to solve that?

DAWN STALEY: I thought they were very effective. I thought that -- I thought they forced us into taking some bad shots that almost ended our season. Really. Especially in the first half. And then the second half I thought we -- I thought we tried to get the ball where it needed to go. Sometimes they disrupted that.

But at the end of the day, I thought when we had to make plays off of broken sets, we did it in the fourth quarter, and I think that was the difference between them coming back and building the lead and us bearing down and making sure we win those broken play battles.

Q. Dawn, have you signed a baby's behind before?

DAWN STALEY: Have I what?

Q. Signed a baby's behind before?

DAWN STALEY: No, no, that was a first. Yeah, my hand was shaking.

Q. And you guys went with a different style, just a grind-it-out, tough defensive effort by you, made the plays at the end. How much will that help you going to Tampa, that type of win more so than an offensive aesthetically pleasing type?

DAWN STALEY: I think we either play Texas or TCU, right? With Texas, we're going to muck it up just like we do in the SEC conference. If it's TCU, much the same because they can score a lot of points.

I just hope that we can get our offense going a little bit. We can't seem to just to play a little more fluidly. I thought that we played with a lot better pace than we did on Friday. So I mean the pace will help some, but, you know, when you have two teams that really defend, it's going to look like that.

So I thought both of us accomplished what we needed to accomplish while trying to get a win.

Q. Going off of what Sania was saying about after Chloe hit those free throws, she was telling them it's not over. Your players take that accountability and leadership and pull the best out of each other during a game that wasn't easy, how important is that and how big will that be going forward?

DAWN STALEY: Super important. You're hearing from young people who have dealt with things in realtime. I'm not surprised, but I'm proud, because they have great self-talk. They have great talk amongst each other. You know, they want each other to do well. They want to win. So it's all communication that's helpful in those moments.

Now, we're probably communicating something else and they're balancing us with that kind of talk, especially out of a timeout, they walk on the floor and they're talking each other through what needs to happen. That is a team and players that have played with each other a long time and team of players that have done life skill sessions together, a team that's done the practices and the breakdown. Like we have the best video coordinator, ever. Realtime they want to see where they made a mistake in practice, and we'll walk over and look at it and we'll say, hey. And they'll say, I was out of place, I was wrong. Or hmm, looks like I was right this time.

So it's great we can have those things impact actually realtime game time when we are in those situations.

Q. Coach, I want to ask you about something that happened off the court, right after the game before the trophy presentation you went up to the band and shook hands with Dr. Ray and the band. Why is it important to you to do that?

DAWN STALEY: I think it's customary for us to do, that's one. Two, I think that the bands don't probably get enough credit that they deserve. They are at all the sporting

events. They are injecting energy, like it's -- when they're playing their songs, like, no matter what we're doing, no matter how locked in we are, it just feels familiar.

So when they are able to give us some familiarity, you can lock into what needs to happen out there on the floor. I really enjoy them. They've been with us over -- some of 'em have been here over the past four years and are going to their fourth Final Four. So I want them to feel a part of it because they really are part of the atmosphere that's created in the gym.

Q. What was the message going into the fourth quarter after a rough third? What does it say about them that they not only responded but immediately responded right at the beginning?

DAWN STALEY: The message was basically we gotta operate -- one, it was the offensive rebounds were killing us, okay? Two, we have to operate in broken plays. Because they blew up some of our sets and when they blow them up, we have to stay calm and we have to get a shot at the basket to give ourselves an opportunity to make a basket or get an offensive rebound.

But it was just about runs. It was their run and we just talked about going on one of our runs.

Q. Dawn, you said Friday at least on that day you didn't look I think like a national championship team. How do you feel now after that game?

DAWN STALEY: You went for that? (Laughing) Look, I mean, at this point it's not going to look pretty. Okay? It's not. There are stretches in each game that is not going to look pretty. If you watch all the games, maybe the score at the end of an UConn game is not indicative of how it looked in the first two quarters. So some of it's not going to look as smoothly as us coaches and players envision or how you practice, but you certainly have to get down and play the kind of game that's presented in front of you, and we'll do that.

If we're not scoring a whole lot of points, then we gotta up our defense. If we're scoring a lot of points, we gotta up our defense.

So it is that type of year that, you know, for us there's not any blowouts. We have to grind for every single win that we can get and manufacture.

Q. Dawn, on Chloe talking about being scared to walk up and take those free throws, I'm curious on your thoughts on her growth in this program, and what it says about her ability to kinda push through that and

nail those free throws? And, two, for you personally you talk about Birmingham and how much people have embraced the regional. I'm curious as someone who is such a figure in this sport, if you've given yourself time over the season to really kind of look at the sport and see where it's grown and how much it's grown?

DAWN STALEY: As far as Chloe, I am super proud of Chloe. Chloe came to us, she skipped her high school year and came to us halfway through the school year, probably thought it was the worst decision that she made when she was going through it, but then the following year she was a lot better.

But her maturation process from everything, like, she's grown in every aspect of her life. Mentally, physically, emotionally, like, you know, we have grown-up conversations and I can't believe it sometimes because of how she came in. Now she's really thought-provoking, like she is really asking all the right things.

What I really like about Chloe is, you know, whether she makes you laugh at something that she says or, you know, or she says something off the wall, it's her. She is comfortable in her skin. Like, that's what I want for my players, to get to know who they are, don't care about what anybody else thinks of them and just continue to move on. But she is growing, right?

Then our game is so good. Like I feel like everywhere I go, I feel the love. Like everywhere. It's incredible how much people recognize a figure like myself in women's basketball. I could walk our campus and students are coming up to me saying, My dad loves you. My mom loves you, right?

We're here in Birmingham, walked through the hotel, they were not all Gamecock fans. They are people who are part of this community, wanting pictures and autographs and showing their appreciation. Like, it's an honor to give it back to them. It truly is an honor. It's a necessity, and it's something that we have to do, but the love is felt.

Q. Dawn, Sania has been so crucial for you guys this postseason. You went with the seniors and Chloe in that fourth quarter. How would you describe the trust that you have in Sania and what's it like to see her become that player that you trust to help get the team across the line to make the Final Four?

DAWN STALEY: Feagin has been a part of our program for four years now. Her growth, her maturation process has just been on an upward trajectory. I've always said she was the most talented big. Whatever big that was on our roster, she was the most talented as far as being able

to make moves and understand the game and communicate the game. To see her just out there performing like a senior, that's what you want.

I wanted her there a lot sooner than this year but, you know, people's process is their process. We try to fast-track it, but some of them just have to go through it. And once they've gone through it, you know, there's not very much communication that's needed. They just go out there and do it.

So very happy. We got to lean on her for, you know, hopefully two more games, and that entire class will leave here as the most decorated, if they can get another championship.

Q. Joyce hasn't had a great three-game stretch. What's the mentality there? How do you treat that going into the Final Four? She is your lead scorer, but she has struggled.

DAWN STALEY: Yeah, teams are scheming. It's a gift and a curse that you are our leading scorer, so people are going to zero in on that and scheme to cut her production in half, and because of that, there is a short gap between us winning and losing basketball games.

Just got to talk her through things. Don't overcomplicate things. We're just try to simplify, just really simplify things for her. Things are coming fast at her, so it's hard. I know she wants to play well. I know she wants to help our basketball team, but sometimes, you know, in situations like this, I mean, you've helped us all season long, all season long and it's okay to allow some other players to help in those situations. But hopefully we have a week of practice, we can get back and simplify and hopefully we can show her some film where she can be effective. But we need her. We going to win a national championship, we need better production from Joyce.

Q. Coach, when you look back on the team, specifically, you been, from the end of the regular season to now, what intangibles do you think you will remember and what are those intangibles that helped them up their game like they did today?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, I know I'm sounding like a broken record, but we've handled things in realtime. I really don't think I've had a team that has been able to communicate as early, like when we see something we act. Like it looks like and feels like -- they will say what's happening. And you can deal with it in, like, in that moment. They don't wait until a week later. Like, they really want to win. They really want to be the best that they can be and they're unafraid to be vulnerable and discuss

shortcomings. They just want to know, how I can hurdle that, what I need to do to get through that, through that moment.

We can be us as coaches, we can just, okay, she wants this, she really wants this, like, let's talk about it. So that's been pretty cool that this team has been able to give in to real talk. I think that's what gets us over the hump. They just talked about what their process is in stressful situations and they talked their way through them and they help each other out, and then we execute. Because Chloe missed back-to-back free throws which is something that she doesn't normally do

So we went back to her, she finished it and now she is a lot more confident than she was after she missed those two free throws.

Q. Coach, the landscape of college athletics is constantly changing with the transfer portal and NIL. Can you talk about how you've been able to adjust and to help your team make it to five straight Final Fours in this climate?

DAWN STALEY: We've done it with great parents. We've done it with a roster full of players that you can give real talk to. I don't think we're paying the most in the NIL space, but I don't even if it's fair, to be quite honest. It's what it is.

Then I just think that the state of our game is forever changing and although with the revenue sharing coming up, it's supposed to streamline things, but we're right in the middle of change. We either have to be able to pivot and deal with it and communicate what needs to happen, or -- or we going to have to retire and go into a different profession.

I think it boils down to just communication. You either have it or you don't in the NIL space and then you just have to communicate that to agents and parents and give them a choice. You know, you got non-negotiables, you got priorities.

What are your priorities? Is it NIL? If it's NIL I'm quick to say, go get the money. Put it away. Let it compound. Okay? If you want something different, you want a different experience, you know, we've been to five straight Final Fours. We know what that looks like and feels like and sounds like, and what goes into that. We're going to give you a different experience, you know, that's going to cost you a few dollars.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

