

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 2 Semifinal - Minnesota vs UCLA

Friday, March 27, 2026

Sacramento, California, USA

Golden 1 Center

Minnesota Golden Gophers

Coach Dawn Plitzuweit

Mara Braun

Amaya Battle

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

UCLA - 80, Minnesota - 56

THE MODERATOR: We have head coach Dawn Plitzuweit and student-athletes Amaya Battle and Mara Braun.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: First of all, UCLA is a great team, and they can attack you in so many ways, on the offensive end and on the defensive end. And so just made it really, really challenging for us throughout the course of the game to find ways to score. I think that made it really, really challenging.

We couldn't really control the boards the way we've had a chance to in some other games. That really hurt us as well.

Not really from a lack of effort from our young ladies. I'm really, really proud of how our young ladies have competed all season long. And certainly have done something, and these two in particular up here, but all of our young ladies in how they've embraced the adversity that we face not only this season but in seasons in the past and have continued to build and continued to work and have continued to not only help grow this team and this program, but help put Minnesota women's basketball back in a stage where we're being considered at the national level and talked about at the national level and able to compete against the best in the Sweet 16.

So really proud of our young ladies. Didn't go for us the way that we certainly wanted it to go. Really thankful to all



of our fans who came out here and all the ones who have been supporting us. So certainly just really, really thankful for this group and really proud of these young ladies.

Q. There at the end, when you guys subbed out, all the emotion that came out, did that just speak to how you guys feel about each other and what this team really represented?

AMAYA BATTLE: I think it just speaks to how we feel about each other. We always talk about the power of friendship. That's genuinely our team. We just love being in each other's presence every day, going to battle every day. We went through these three, four years together, so you're just bound to get close.

MARA BRAUN: I think it just showed how close we are, and we honestly wanted to give everything we had in that game. There wasn't a possession that we weren't still talking to each other and our huddles weren't close. We kept our huddles close the whole time. We were still communicating. We just said if we're going to go down, we're going to go down with a fight.

That just speaks to the season and our approach to every single game. No matter what it was, we were going to give 100 percent for the person next to us.

And I think this season has just been so memorable. I've just been so grateful to be back and healthy and playing with them. We're going to miss them a ton, our seniors, but they've really left a mark on this program and this season. It's just been amazing.

Q. You are both Minnesota natives, Minnesota on your jersey. What does it mean to be a Minnesota Gopher? And talk about the pride you have on your representing your home state and also the kind of the season you had and how the community has kind of just embraced you guys. Can you talk about what it means to be a Minnesota Gopher and how proud you are to represent the University of Minnesota?

MARA BRAUN: It means everything, we came here to change this program and to turn it around for the better.



And we got the right people. And Coach P came on and helped us out.

And obviously we came under Coach Whay. She's done so much for us and so supportive. Coach P came in and we just really bought into what she wanted for this program and the vision she had. And we got the right pieces and the transfers that came in, they just also bought.

And I think everyone just did an amazing job of giving 110 percent of everything they have every single day and every single practice. And there's not one person that didn't make an impact on this team and especially this season.

Yeah, we love it. This is what we came here to do and I think that we really showed Minnesota the pride we have for the team.

AMAYA BATTLE: Yeah, I think it means a lot. There's a ton of talent in Minnesota. And growing up watching them play in high school, a lot of talent would leave. There are some players that would stick around.

So I think all of us from Minnesota who stuck around we showed that you can leave a legacy here at home and then kind of just make it cool to stay here again. We had a time doing it and so we just want to show you can do it.

Q. How much does their size just disrupt what you are trying to do offensively? And the third quarter there, the start, first six, seven minutes, what did they do differently to take you out of what you wanted to do defensively?

MARA BRAUN: They're physical. They're big in every position they're guarding. I think we knew that going into it, but we obviously didn't rebound the way that we needed to.

We needed, 32, Dugalic she killed us on the boards. She was really physical inside. And I think that we were prepared for that. We just didn't execute.

And so, yeah, obviously they're a very talented team. Really big position 1 through 5. And so just didn't go the way we wanted to, but we'll learn for next year.

Q. Amaya, as a senior leader on this team, what was the messaging to your team in that locker room right after the game?

AMAYA BATTLE: The power of friendship. I mean it's just, like, we all like each other. And going into the game, and honestly, like going into this tournament, we were all like let's just do it for each. Like G was talking about, let's just do it for us. There's never going to be a group like us

again and that's because people are going to -- I'm graduating, people are graduating. You have freshmen coming in.

You're never going to have the group you have right now. And especially we've had the core group for the majority of the time.

The messaging was just genuine, like, we love each other. And we're just glad that we went through everything we went through together with who we had.

Q. Mara, I talked to Tori downstairs. She cannot find words to express how much the seniors mean to her. I want to send that question to you. How much do the seniors have meant to you both on and off the court, their leadership, their friendship? Could you give us an answer on that?

MARA BRAUN: I came in with her. We've played against each other in high school. We've seen each other. She's obviously gone through a lot with losing her mom, and just the way that she's approached just life in general has been really inspiring to me.

And to have this last game, all the emotions, I think it just really flooded. I don't think it's going to hit for a while, probably not until I step on the floor again next year without her that it's really going to hit.

But they just mean the world. And every single senior brought something different. They were all so impactful in my life in the way that each one of them approached this season and just the want to make an impact on this team. And come in every single day with a smile on their face.

Whatever it was, every senior had such a big mark on this program, and I'm really going to miss them a lot. But they know how much I love them, and we'll see a lot of each other coming up, that's for sure.

Q. Do you feel like this group set the standard and the expectation going forward in terms of how you play and how you compete all those things?

AMAYA BATTLE: Yeah, I think it goes with that legacy part. I mean it's really cool that we made it to the Sweet 16 in the tournament for the first time in however many years. But just leaving this program, hoping that this becomes the standard, it's always going to feel nice to do this, but understanding this should be done every year and then growing from there.

Q. A lot in that first half didn't really go your way, but you were still in it. I'm wondering what the talk was at

halftime?

MARA BRAUN: Well, Gianna got that bucket in the end which obviously put us down I think five going in the half. So we knew we just couldn't dig a hole deeper than that. We had to come out and we had to punch first.

Obviously that didn't go the way we wanted it to go. But we weren't going to go down without a fight. We were going to still keep coming back and just take it possession by possession -- not get too high, not get too low.

And that was just really our approach in the second half, just go down with a fight and give it all we have.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. I know a tough loss for you guys, but still, like the last question, how important was this season that you guys had in regards to laying the foundation for what's to come?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: I think when you look back and you really take a look at three years ago and getting into the postseason and the WNIT, and we talked a lot about gaining momentum, what that looked like. Then we got a lot better within the course of Big Ten scheduling and then all of a sudden the Big Ten expanded and the Big Ten was even tougher than it been in the past, and we were getting better as well within that.

And we were just on the cusp, I felt like, of making the NCAA Tournament and didn't. But then played in the WBIT and made that run and had a chance to just continue playing.

Then for this team, when you look at how things started, we struggled at times. I remember telling our team at Thanksgiving time, we had a couple of early-season losses at that time already that really believed that this was going to be the team to get us back to the NCAA Tournament, fully believed that. Kind of expected that to be the case because we felt like we had young ladies who not only had size, skill, talent, experience, all those type of things, but had this desire that was just second to none.

And the time that they put in outside on their own is something that -- it sets the standard for this program moving forward for all the young ladies to see that and then to understand that that's what it takes.

So it's really, really special to have the group, the core group that's been doing this for a while and the young ladies who joined us this year as seniors, in Tracey and Finau and Brylee, and to have them all, again, make an

incredible impact like Sophie and Amaya did as well, it's something that is hard now to appreciate in the same way as we will as time goes on.

Q. The turnovers, is that a product of their size and physicalness, or what do you attribute that to?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: I think there were a couple inside trying to score, trying to get opportunities at the rim. There were a few that were shot-clock scenarios, again, kind of challenging, trying to score over the top.

I think at halftime we were trying to get the ball moving but we got the ball moving and maybe we didn't attack in the same way attack quickly. But if you attack quickly and you don't make it, then you get going in transition too.

There were just a combination of things that went against us at that point in time. I think they really just imposed their will and their size against us on both ends of the court, and that made it really challenging for us.

Q. Beginning the third quarter, kind of didn't start off a great way, but you finished strong. Can you talk about the resiliency of this team both through the season and also in this game, just to never give up? They just continued to battle. Talk about the character of this team.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Yeah, it's something that we talk about, the resiliency, the fight back, toughness, embracing adversity. Adversity is maybe what happened in the game. All of that are just great life lessons for these young ladies.

I'm here to say that regardless of what they decide to do in life, whether basketball is their journey for a while longer yet, or whatever it is, I really truly believe that they'll be very, very highly successful because they have great character. They lift each other up. They work their tails off, and they deserve to have good things happen for them.

Q. With this being her last game, what does a player like Amaya Battle mean to both you and the program, given she was somebody who stayed when you came in?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: And Amaya Battle is someone who, when you look at the records and what she's done, and not just the games that she's played, but the impact she's had on the games in the way that she scores and the way that she rebounds and assists and everything else, but I think also just the genuine love, not only for the game, but the love to be at Minnesota, and that's a contagious energy in a very positive way.

I think players kind of joke a little bit about Amaya being their favorite player, but I really believe that's true because she just has this infectious character to her, and the moment's not too big for her in whatever that case is. And I just again think of the last weekend for her to have that kind of special moment is something that not everybody gets to have that. I think she not only earned that, but it was really, really fitting, and it was really very special.

Obviously today didn't go the way we wanted. But what I told her on her senior day and again after this last past weekend before we got here, she came to Minnesota with a couple of other young ladies, but she came to Minnesota to build the program. She wanted to be a key factor. She wanted to leave her legacy.

And I remember her senior day and looking around at the crowd, and it was just starting to build. There was excitement building for our program at that point in time. And told her just look around and take it in and enjoy this because it's something that she's been a major part of building.

So just really thankful for her and what she's done and her ability to continue to get better and continue to, I think, grow her game and grow her leadership and all of it is something -- we're really, really thankful for her.

Q. You were getting quite frustrated with the refereeing and the illegal screening was something that you mentioned. What was kind of your frustration with the discrepancy there?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, I think it's tough to get through some of those, but that didn't go our way. So...

Q. What's your message to future recruits about why they should pick this university moving forward?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: I think it's a great question. I think we are a program right now that is a program kind of on the rise and a program that is continuing to grow and a team that is continuing to kind of make some adjustments and make some noise.

It's certainly a whole lot of fun. For anyone who wondered if Minnesota women's basketball is fun to be a part of and a great environment, just go back and look at what happened last weekend and what The Barn looked like and also look at how our fans traveled.

I think there's great excitement for our program and certainly going to continue to work to build it.

Q. Along those lines, you talked about having a

player-led program. Do you think you've accomplished that this season in terms of the players coming back the players that join you next year know what the expectation is for this program now?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, I do. I think that this group of young ladies has really taken the reins on all of it and are really a team that has figured out how to really work their tails off and how to compete at a high level and also really build each other up and celebrate each other's success and really enjoy the journey together.

Q. Sophie just talked a lot about what it meant to play for you and for Minnesota. Obviously she wasn't playing 100 percent healthy. Can you just talk about Sophie real quick, what she means to you and this team, again resiliency and her character?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: A lot of toughness in Sophie in the way that she continued to grow and develop through the course of not just this year but during her career. And then also I just think Sophie's someone who has had such great leadership skills. I think the physical part of the game, she's someone who has continued to kind of evolve her game, continue to develop her ability to play longer stretches and all those kind of things and had to do it this year through some injuries and through some load management things and the fact that she was able to do that is something that we're really thankful to our strength and conditioning coach and our athletic trainer and our doctors for finding ways to help her through that.

But for her to really take all of these things that go into this to heart, whether that's how she conditioned, whether it was nutrition, how she recovered. But I think Sophie is just someone who just has this contagious, infectious energy to her. She was always a team-first young lady and someone who -- I've never been around a player who traveled with more stuff than she did and took games along for the team to have team activities. So just someone that certainly we're going to miss at a high level both on the court and off.

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