

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Final - Texas vs Stanford

Sunday, March 27, 2022

Spokane, Washington, USA

Veterans Memorial Arena

Stanford Cardinal

Coach Tara VanDerveer

Lexie Hull

Cameron Brink

Haley Jones

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference

Stanford 59, Texas 50

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Stanford.

COACH VANDERVEER: First, I just want to congratulate Texas on a great season. What a tough game that was for us.

Second, I just want to congratulate our team because we battled. I think it showed how much people have improved. Just Lacie, Anna Wilson, they really did a great job running our point.

I thought Haley had a great game. She really cared us. Cam had a great second half, and Lexie battled the whole game. I'm proud of our team, I'm really happy for our team.

And we are going to Minneapolis, and we're dancing!

Q. Lexie, what's it mean the way you guys won today? It wasn't pretty, it wasn't a ton of points being scored, but you guys found a way to adapt and still win the game?

LEXIE HULL: Yeah, I think we knew it was going to be super physical, and it definitely was. But I'm just super proud of our team for staying with it, sticking with each other and being gritty.

I think it came down to who was the grittier team tonight and who was willing to get on the floor and battle inside.



Really proud of our team and how we came out on top today.

Q. We're going to need a separate press conference to talk about the dancing situation. Cam, yesterday we all sat in here talking to Anna Wilson about Rori Harmon and how they were going to defend her, and you went out and had an extraordinarily dominant stretch at the end of the third quarter. I don't know if you even understand that there were five Texas possessions, and it went Cam block, Hannah block, Cam block, Cam block, Cam steal. Can you talk to us about what it was like, especially at the end of the third quarter when you guys went zone and you were feeling it defensively? Maybe you blocked it out.

CAMERON BRINK: I do remember us going to zone, and I think it was a great call by Tara. I think that was a great move, and it really threw 'em off. I think I love blocking shots, and that's what I love to do. I love defense so, yeah, it was fun.

Q. Lexie, congratulations. At the 7-minute mark in the fourth quarter, you hit an enormous three to put your lead back up to six and with about two and a half minutes to go. You hit the big is and-one, the celebration was crazy, the fans were going nuts. Talk about how it seemed tonight that whenever your team needed a big shot the ball was in your hands and how you were able to stay calm in those situations?

LEXIE HULL: I think it's a matter of taking every possession like any other possession and trying not to feel any extra pressure regardless of the score.

And tonight we did a good job of moving the ball and finding the open hand. So I think in those moments it's not like any moment, and it was super special to hear the crowd get super loud with us after those big shots.

They were big stretches -- I mean, blocks. People went crazy for Cam's blocks. So from every possession, every single one mattered.

Yeah, I'm just so happy to be going to Minneapolis.



Q. Haley, was there any point tonight where you were comfortable?

HALEY JONES: Good question. I don't think there is ever a point in any game where you're comfortable. I think the Pac-12 conference has prepared us for this season. Maryland last night, we are up by 20-something, and we end up not inning by double digits. So you can never be comfortable if you want to achieve what we want to achieve.

When it gets down to the end of the game, it is still a close game. Texas is a great game. Every team we're going to play down the stretch is going to be a great team. So there's not time to be comfortable because even though you may have the lead, it can go away in an instant. So I think our team does a really good job of keeping that sense of urgency as the game goes on no matter what the score is.

Q. All of us in the room had sort of a front-row seat to the Texas press for forty minutes, but none of us have an idea of how exhausting it is, though it looks that way from our seats. Can you give us an idea of what it feels like mentally and physically to go against that for that long?

HALEY JONES: Texas is a great team, and I think that they pride themselves on defense, as they should. It's a great pressure defense, so I think it's taxing physically, whether you're bringing the ball up or not, because, I mean, I'm taking the ball out, Lacie is taking the ball out, even if our primary people aren't getting open, Lexie has got to flash from half court, and she's sprinting up, but she may not even get the ball.

So I think it's taxing on every player physically. In that sense, you're running interference cuts, trying to get open for your teammates. You may not get the ball, if you're a ball handler, you're going through your legs and doing whatever you can to get it down the floor. But mentally you have to stay sharp on your decision-making.

And I had that lapse that Tara reminded me about when I threw it long, shouldn't have done that. But you've got to stay locked in for the entirety of the game and make the right plays and not be rushed when you do have a lead. But that defense makes you think you might have a layup, and then boom there's a charge. It's very taxing. I'm excited to shower and get to bed after this?

LEXIE HULL: Lacie and Anna today carried the load on that end, and I think Tara mentioned this, they both have improved so much in getting the ball across the court. Like

Haley said, you can't take a possession off, you can't take an inbound pass off because they're right there for forty minutes.

Super impressed by how far they've come, and they definitely worked really, really hard tonight in getting that for us.

Q. I would like every player to tell us how the dancing happened, how many times, was it practiced, and what is your assessment of Tara's performance as a dancer?

HALEY JONES: I mean, I can take the lead on this one. I was Dance Teacher Jones for this past weekend, I would say. Tara came up to me and said if we won, we were going to be dancing. So she was trying to figure out what dance. She knows the Cupid Shuffle, so we had to come up with something new. We were going to do the Electric Slide. So Kiki, Jordan and I had a one-on-one session with Tara. And we never get to coach her, so we had to find out our coaching style, how she was going to learn.

She was very receptive. She was great to constructive criticism, so that was great to see. And after film yesterday, she was like, all right, push the chairs aside, we have an activity. And I had no idea it was going to be dance class by Haley, but it was. And Lexie was eating it up today. I hope you're doing it today, too.

But everyone was getting groovy. We went through the steps, played the song, and I think everybody killed it today. So there was really only one practice. Tara had two. Everybody else had one. And we killed it.

LEXIE HULL: Tara's leg got the highest it's ever been today. Hopefully you're okay.

COACH VANDERVEER: No muscles pulled.

(Laughter.)

Q. Lexie, in your previous time playing in this building, when you were with CB, did you have an opportunity to cut down the net? And what was that like being the last person on the ladder?

LEXIE HULL: We didn't cut down the nets in high school here, but I remember looking out after the game and pretty much every single section of the gym I knew somebody. And it was super special.

And Tara told us at the end of our game at Stanford that if we got to Spokane that Lacie and I would get the nets. So we were excited to have that opportunity tonight and just

felt the love and support from everyone.

Q. When you look at Texas, I feel like the height difference this game was more even. Can you talk about how much you guys leaned into your skill set and how you propelled throughout their really gritty defense?

CAMERON BRINK: I really think, like what Lexie said earlier, huge props to Anna and Lacie because they made everything go today. It was really hard to get into offense; they were denying everything, so I think we just found a way to make it work, and I'm proud of us for finding a way.

HALEY JONES: Yeah, I think Lacie and Anna did a tremendous job today. But I think, you know, dealing with a team like Texas where they're denying every position and they have length, just as we have length at every position, I think it shows how deep we are and how many weapons we have.

And whether it's coming off the bench or in the starting lineup, I may get hot one quarter, Cam had a great third, Lexie is carrying all game, and different people come in and hit big shots make the right plays. So I think when you're dealing with a team like Texas and going down the stretch how it's going to be, we gotta rely on that depth and that trust that we have, 1-17.

Q. Cam, Lindsey asked about the defensive stretch in the third quarter, but you came out hot in the second half. Was there some frustration from the first half?

CAMERON BRINK: Yeah, I was mad at myself for not being disciplined enough. I think what got me fueled was Tara was like, do you want to start? And I was like, yeah, I want to start; I want to go back in. So I think I was fueled that way, and it was fun.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you to our student-athletes. Questions for coach.

Q. Is there going to be a different dance if you keep winning?

COACH VANDERVEER: No.

Q. Tara, we spent time talking about Rori Harmon and how you were going to slow her down and obviously she scored 14 tonight but it took her 18 shots. Sort of felt like a defensive passing of the torch from Anna to Cam, that this is Cam's defensive team now. I know she is really good and has been good at blocking all year, but what was that like, that stretch especially in the third quarter?

COACH VANDERVEER: I think Rori is a special player. Actually I thought when we went to zone, that seemed to help us a little bit. When we got somebody bigger on her and really had people focusing -- she was just going over Anna. She's bigger, and she could really jump.

Like you said, that one stretch with the blocked shots and the turnovers, I think we went big, which we usually don't, but we did in this game with Fran. I thought Fran had a great game rebounding, Ashten helped us, Cam. We had that size. Haley is big, and we could guard people. We could be big with the twins and just be up on people and not let them jump over us.

I thought everyone worked really hard defensively. Rori is a tremendous player, but they have -- you look at what Joanne Allen-Taylor had done the night before, so you've got to guard her. I thought we did a good job on the inside presence. We had a strong inside presence.

Q. What was the impetus for the switch to the zone? What did you think the zone would get you? Also, I was curious about the way you were subbing early in the game. It looked like one foul people were going to sit because you wanted to protect them from foul trouble. Was that it?

COACH VANDERVEER: I pretty much do that all the time. Fouling has been something that we have to -- we're trying to get a grip on and not foul people. Just because people pick up too many of them, and you know who you can trust to play with one or trust to play with two, but for the most part if we're ahead or if it's a five-point game, we're going to sit somebody in the first half.

It's not like -- some people can play through things like Haley has, but you know sometimes it helps Cam to just watch. I thought Fran did a fabulous job in the first half. Lacie played the whole game and wasn't in foul trouble so we could switch her on to Rori as the game went on, and her size I think is different than playing against Anna.

Our whole team worked really hard defensively because they're tough to guard. They're very athletic, they get to the rim, and I think just a little change of pace. I'm a nervous zone coach. I hate giving up three's.

Q. Tara, last year because of the nature of the season this group spent a lot of time together. This year was probably thankfully different. How have you seen this group come together? It's a lot of the same players from last year but without that forced time together. How has this group bonded?

COACH VANDERVEER: They're a really close team, and I think it has a lot to do with having sisters on a team. Even though Lexie and Lacie are biological sisters, I think they're basketball sisters. They really care about each other. Again, I think I have referenced this a little bit. It's tough. We have had -- Alyssa Jerome started for us. We have had so many people step up. Hannah Jump has started for us, Fran has started for us, Ashten.

They're playing a role, and they're willing to go in and do what we need them to do. I mean, I think that takes a mature person. Our leadership with Alyssa, Anna, the twins, Jordan; it's been fantastic.

Q. Tara you were fired you were in the first half. I wondered first of all, do you remember the last time you got a technical? We were wondering if you were going to get one. Did you take that into halftime? Did you get on them intensely at halftime?

COACH VANDERVEER: What I was fired up about probably was some of the -- we didn't concentrate well enough on the defensive assignments, so I would go down and talk to the bench about it. With the refs, for the most part, I thought they did a good job. There might have been a couple calls that I disagreed with. The one I just maybe disagreed with was the push-off with Lacie, because I've seen that call so much, and we had really talked to our team about not doing that. But overall I just -- we knew it was going to be a physical game, and we needed our people to step up, and I thought they did.

Q. Were you fired up at halftime? Did you yell at them?

COACH VANDERVEER: I don't think at all, no. We just knew what -- this is what we need to be doing, here is what's working, what do you think? Sometimes I do get fired up on the bench a little bit but it's more -- I don't know, it's not really yelling at our team.

Now, last Sweet 16 game, this game, I was yelling. That was at Louisville. I did have one melt down in a game this year, but it wasn't this one.

Q. Same five-point lead going into the fourth quarter as the first meeting, and they make a run and cut it down to two. Was there a sense of deja vu? How important was that three-point play by Lexie to turning the tide?

COACH VANDERVEER: You don't have time to have a pity party for yourself. You've got to keep coaching and watching and thinking, who can help us, what do we need to do? What do we need to tell our players, just really get

people to stay focused. Basketball is a game of spurts. We made a run, they made a run, it was all, like, really close.

I think that it was -- I just -- I think Cam was a difference maker in that second half. I thought Fran was a different maker in the first half, and Haley held us together, Lexie held us together, Lacie, Anna, and different people came in and did some different things for us.

Q. Congrats, Tara. Do you feel this game largely came down to free throws?

COACH VANDERVEER: That was a big part of it. We both shot about the same number, and the other night, I don't think they missed in the whole first half. But we did a good job -- Haley was awesome going 10 for 11, Lexie is usually probably 6 for 6 but it did come down -- I think the officiating was really important. I thought they worked really hard at it. I didn't agree with every call but I thought they did a good job.

Q. Can you tell us, Tara, about why you wanted to do the dance? What kind of coach is Haley?

COACH VANDERVEER: You know, sometimes you just think about things, like different things that will help your team stay loose, so I thought after our Maryland game, I had it in my mind, but when we came in for video I said, go out of the room and come back. It was not the morale, the excitement. So I just said, we'll have a little treat at the end of video if everyone is focused and we're doing what we need to do.

Haley and I had already practiced with Kiki and we moved everything out of the room, and they all wanted to get their cameras. I said no cameras; we are not looking ahead, but we have to plan ahead, so if we're in a situation where we can do this, let's practice and make sure everybody knows the dance.

I think it just loosened people up and showed them that I had confidence in them. And that, you know, kind of just the whole idea about dancing, and they know I can't dance so they're watching me and laughing, so it was all good.

Q. At weddings are you the type of person that gets out on the dance floor a lot?

COACH VANDERVEER: No. I would love to be a great dancer, but I'm not. With the Olympic team I had Carla McGhee, and she was a great teacher. Haley was a great teacher. She took charge of the room, she told everyone what to do. One, two, three, four; she was fantastic. That's probably why I could learn it. When you have a

great teacher, students do better.

Q. To metaphorically dance with South Carolina, what are you looking forward to? Just your thoughts coming into your second consecutive Final Four?

COACH VANDERVEER: I am absolutely thrilled that we're going to the Final Four. I'm thrilled because of the team that I'm coaching. It's crazy to say this, but you're always happy to go to the Final Four, but sometimes you're really happy, and I'm really happy! It is a great group to be with. They care about each other, they'll do whatever -- I wasn't worried about the effort at all today.

We have great leadership, unselfishness. I think whoever we play, whether it's Connecticut or NC State, we will be ready and we will enjoy our experience there, and we're excited to have fans, because last year it was more fans than we had all year, but it still wasn't the same atmosphere that it is now.

We've had this on our radar all year. We've never really talked about going to the Final Four. We've talked about it but now we're really going. It does not get old.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, coach.

COACH VANDERVEER: Thank you all very much.

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