

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 4 Final - TCU vs South Carolina

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Sacramento, California, USA

Golden 1 Center

South Carolina Gamecocks

Coach Dawn Staley

Raven Johnson

Agot Makeer

Elite 8 Pregame Media Conference



most calm during chaotic moments of games?

DAWN STALEY: Believe it or not it's Raven. I mean, it's Raven. I mean, to actually see Raven operate when she doesn't even know people are listening to her, and I've heard an exchange, somebody on our staff heard an exchange with her and different players on our team. Like, she only wants to hear positive things.

She only wants to hear things that will help us win basketball games, which is really, I would say, uncharacteristic of her because she allowed other people to do that in previous years, but she's taken on the rein of making sure -- she's asking the hard questions: Are you ready? If you tell her, yes, she'll say, well, it didn't look like it.

I mean, that is really the most beautiful thing that you can overhear a player asking one of her peers. And you know your locker room is good when your leaders are leading out loud and in real time.

Q. Another Raven question for you. She's always been so smart, but I feel like this year her basketball IQ has just been off the charts. Obviously as a point guard yourself, like you know how important that is. What have you seen out of her in terms of the way she's smart about the game that's helped?

DAWN STALEY: Well, I played the position, and I know she's smart, from day one. It took some other people to catch on to see the little nuances that she does for our basketball team.

Everybody thinks she's probably a little smarter because she's scoring the ball a little bit more. But she had the personnel to not have us lean on her to score.

She knows that she lost a lot of offensive firepower last year. So quite naturally, when you are a consummate point guard, when your intellect for the game is way above average, you activate. That's what Raven's been doing, just activating what needs to get done.

Q. This is obviously your sixth straight Elite Eight, but

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by South Carolina head coach Dawn Staley.

Q. Looking at TCU, everyone says you've got to take away Olivia Miles, but outside of the obvious, what have you seen from film on them?

DAWN STALEY: I think they're very calculated and methodical in who they want to shoot the basketball, who they want to be playmakers, who they want to be spacers, and they do a really good job at sticking with that.

They play at a slower pace. They control the tempo. And somehow we need to speed that up, whether that's through pressure or some other way of doing things. So we're up for the challenge.

Q. I was at that game last season at Dickies Arena. How would you compare this TCU team to the one you faced last season?

DAWN STALEY: We've seen a whole entire season of TCU and how they've been able to play. We didn't have that luxury previous because it was one of the first games of the season.

As far as personnel, I mean, Olivia Miles changes things for them. I mean, she's obviously a scorer, playmaker, so she can do a lot with the basketball. She definitely puts her players in positions of being able to probably do a little bit more than what they normally do because of her ability to pass the ball.

Q. Who is the person on this team who gives you the



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I'm curious, what has made this year's journey different than some of the ones in the past couple years?

DAWN STALEY: This year's team, there were just a lot of unknowns. And to add different pieces to our team -- a third of our team is made up of, like, new players, two freshmen, two transfers. A third -- two of them are starting. One of them, you know, plays a significant role off the bench in our depth.

And you don't know how they're going to handle the pressures of playing for us, the pressures of getting back to this point right here.

I think it's attributed to them and their willingness to listen and be coached and be coached hard and actually do the hard things. Two, you have players like Raven and Joyce who are just high-level competitors. They want to win. And they gradually have just kind of put their imprint on this team, meaning the leaders of our team, the ones that will step up and talk.

And then they listen, and they follow. You know, that doesn't often happen because you've got young people who have their own way of doing things. Ta'Niya had her own way of doing things. Madina, Big Mama had her own way of doing things. Goti has her own way of doing things. Same with Ayla.

They all could have just tried to do things the way they survive at doing things. And it takes a little bit of courage to let your guard down to be led so you can fulfill your role to the best of your ability.

Q. I think the second year you made the Elite Eight, you went on to win the national championship as a coach. Are there things you learned from that first trip that you did differently that helped you get along to that title?

DAWN STALEY: I think it's really important that I think rest is equally as important as getting out on the floor. So we strike a real balance of what to do. I think we got an hour on the court on Friday. Then we had an hour and a half offsite.

You practice for an hour. You have your media session. Then you go back out. So we just got everything done in that hour, which was a really good practice.

And I know my team enough to know, hey, they're ready, too. You could tell by the days, the prep days that occur prior to us playing, and they've been good. So you actually listen to your players and you get to know the pulse of your

team in order for you to make adjustments like that.

Q. You guys knew for a few weeks you were probably headed to a West Coast regional. How did the support staff kind of prep for the body-clock change and any interesting logistical changes versus playing on the East Coast, or like Central Time?

DAWN STALEY: No, we've done it before. I do think our performance coach does things that will help our bodies to adjust, which is they've gone on walks when we got here. And they've gone on walks on days in which we didn't play, just to get their bodies adjusted. If not, they would lie in bed, like, all day. And you really can't do that.

But they're young. They listen. They want to win. They're listening more now during this stage of our season than any other time, because they want to win and they want to lock in, which is good and helpful.

If we were just playing in any other tournament throughout the season, they would not want to go on the long walks. They would not. But since they also are confined to the hotel, getting some fresh air is welcomed.

Q. I know you weighed in on transfers a lot, but I'm just curious if your conversation, you know, the coaches has changed. In other words, back in the day you would promise, I want to make sure your son or daughter gets a degree. Now you don't know somebody is going to even be there for two years. So I'm wondering if the conversation changes and what that conversation is?

DAWN STALEY: How much is it going to cost us? That's the conversation. You've got to lead with that. Because you don't really want to waste your time. You either are going to have enough to pay players or you don't. And you move on.

Because although you can promise a young person this or that, if your budget says otherwise -- I don't like to promise anything that isn't available to us. I don't want to have to go out and get the money because you could be told no and then your back is against the wall.

So have you to lead -- I won't say I lead with that question, but I get to it fairly quickly. After the pleasantries are done, you have to get to the question so you're not wasting your time and spinning your wheels on somebody that you can't afford.

The degree isn't really a -- it's a conversation but it's a plan. We always have a plan no matter how many credits you come in with, a plan to get you out on time.

Now, that might be a little bit more strenuous on them as far as how many credits you need to take. There are so many pockets of time in which you could take classes that you know you can get them out.

Like, anytime they come on a visit, you get the transcript and then we send the transcript off to our admissions and all that, and they give us what they need. And that's part of the conversation.

But all of our kids graduate, all of them -- all but one in my career. And I told her, I'm going to threaten her on social media if she doesn't get with the program.

Q. You've been dubbed the Godmother of March Madness for going above and beyond your normal responsibilities and duties -- meeting with the first four teams and spending time during halftime to take pictures with fans that make the journey. Why is that important to you, and what do you think about the nickname?

DAWN STALEY: That's the first I've heard that. It beats T-T. You don't know T-T. Auntie. I don't really like aunts. I don't.

I mean, our game has grown. People want more access to us. I think it's only right for us to give back to the game.

Do you know how much those tickets cost yesterday? Like seriously. I will say this, the people in the arena were really nice.

They started helping to organize it, and then some gentleman came over and he's like, stop, we're not doing this. I was like, well, why? And he said because the NCAA people told us to stop it. Excuse me? I'm going to keep going because this is the way you grow the game.

They did say something about a fire hazard. But we've done this before. We do this at the SEC Tournament. We have our staff members keeping everything organized in a way that is safe for the fans to come get autographs and then exit out, like real organized.

I think it's only right. And people were kind enough to just -- I know people that were sitting around the line of people couldn't really see the court at halftime. So I just did it during halftime.

You didn't ask me for all of that, but I enjoy giving back to the game.

Q. How do you slow down Olivia Miles?

DAWN STALEY: A collective. It's a collective. I mean, obviously we've got an elite defensive point guard in Raven Johnson, who I'm sure will want to match up with her. But you do it by committee, and you do it as a collective.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by student-athletes Raven Johnson and Agot Makeer.

Q. What makes Olivia Miles so hard to guard, and what will have to happen to slow her down tomorrow?

AGOT MAKEER: I think it's the fact she can do everything. She's really good at what she does. She can play make, and she's a senior and she knows how to lead. And she's been here before and so I think that's her strengths.

RAVEN JOHNSON: What she said. She's a great point guard. I think she don't look just for herself. She look for others. She knows how to assist to people. She knows where they like the ball. I think that's what she does a really good job.

But for us it's going to be a team effort -- just different rotations on her, different looks, throwing different punches at her. And I think we're going to practice that today.

Q. Raven, a year ago in Birmingham, you told me that there was some frustration because of all the social media criticism that was leveled at you. How do you block that out? And do you feel like this season you've vindicated everything you've worked for the last three years?

RAVEN JOHNSON: If you asked me, I wouldn't even see -- if I was in the shoes I was in three years ago, I wouldn't see myself where I am right now. I think it was all God, all glory to God. I let go and I let God, honestly.

With the social media things, I think everything happens for a reason. I think the social media, it made me realize what social media is. It's fake. It's literally fake. And social media can either ruin you or -- it can break you or make you. I don't think it does either of that towards me.

So I think I learned a lot with the social media thing, and I think I learned a lot about myself.

Q. Raven, this is obviously your fifth Elite Eight now. I'm just wondering, how has the journey this year been different than years in the past for this team and for you?

RAVEN JOHNSON: Different -- different teammates, yes. I say different experiences, different roles. A different role



for me. Each year I had to play a different role for the team, which is leading or scoring or defending.

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But I don't think, you know, nothing drastically has changed. I think with an Elite Eight game, it's hard. It's hard to play an Elite Eight game to get to the Final Four.

It's about the little things -- the Xs and Os and the intangible part. I know that part.

I think with the newcomers like Goti and other people on our team, I think I'm going to try to instill to them how hard an Elite Eight game is to get to the Final Four. And I think that's going to start in practice today.

Q. Raven, A'Ja Wilson recently said you don't get talked enough about to her. Do you agree with that statement? Do you feel like pieces of your game are underrated?

RAVEN JOHNSON: I wouldn't say I don't agree with that statement. But, like I said, everything happens for a reason. Maybe some people don't respect my game. That's their opinion. You feel me? And maybe some people do respect my game. That's their opinion.

So I really don't really care about what outsiders have to say about me because at the end of the day I am looking at myself in the mirror and I know who I am. At the end of the day, I know what I bring to the table.

So I love what she said. I totally agree with what she said. But I know who I am. If you don't like me, you don't like me. If you do, thank you.

Q. Raven, I was at that game last year when you guys played TCU at Dickies Arena. What do you think the biggest difference is between this TCU team and the one you faced last season?

RAVEN JOHNSON: Honestly, the TCU team last year. They were really good. They had Sabrina Ionescu and Hailey Van Lith, which are two great players.

I think they picked up a lot of pieces -- I don't want to say their names wrong -- but, yeah, they picked up a lot of pieces to the team. And I think they just bring a different dynamic to that team this year. And I think we're going to be ready for it.

AGOT MAKEER: You said Sabrina Ionescu. She's talking about Oregon.

RAVEN JOHNSON: I meant Sedona -- I'm trippin' (laughter). Shout out to her. She's great, too.

