

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship Final Four: UConn vs Stanford

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Target Center

Stanford Cardinal
Coach Tara VanDerveer
Haley Jones

Francesca Belibi

Semi-Final Postgame Media Conference



think we could have cut harder, screened better, whatever it may be. But I think we left a lot out there unsaid, and so that's hard to swallow that pill where you leave the game feeling like as a team you didn't leave your best out there.

But you've got to give credit to Connecticut. They're a great team, great coached, had a great game plan that I think they executed very well. But outside of that I think we want some of those shots back, some of those turnovers back.

Q. Haley, do you feel like you guys had some good looks and you guys weren't knocking them down?

HALEY JONES: Yeah. I think they were definitely good looks. I know I wanted some of those shots back where I had good looks. I'm sure everybody on the team felt that way. What are you going to do? The ball doesn't always go in the basket. You've got to swallow that pill and move on from it, but I think it's motivation for next season. A lot of us are coming back and we're going to miss the seniors. They're the pillars of our team.

Losing them as teammates but also as people is going to be really difficult. But I think there are definitely shots I wish we would have made, lay-ups, threes. I know our three ball wasn't falling as it usually, does which was disappointing and frustrating, but you've got to move forward.

Q. Can you just speak a little bit to what it was like in the locker room just now, and you just mentioned your seniors. Did you guys have anything to say to them? You talked about how you wanted to keep playing, this group together, you're so tight. What are the emotions right now?

FRANCESCA BELIBI: I think your goal is always to kind of end the season on a W, and unfortunately that didn't happen for us tonight. We were just in there, it's some tears but it's a lot of hugs. I think at the end of the day, we're all very disappointed in the outcome of today's game, but we have to kind of take into account everything that we've accomplished and everything we've done.

UConn 63, Stanford 58

TARA VANDERVEER: I'm really proud of our team. I thought we had a great season. I think the improvement of our players was really astronomical, and I think the leadership of our seniors was really special. Whether Lexie, Lacie, Anna, Alyssa, Jordan, they really had a great year.

We did not play very well tonight, and we just -- I think we really struggled running our offense. I think there were some self-inflicted wounds, what we were doing out there, and it was disappointing. But I thought our defense really worked hard, except that we gave up a couple threes that we didn't need to give up, and we gave up some O-boards and some bad fouls.

But I thought Haley really worked hard. She was in the game the whole time, making plays. Fran really came in and helped us make some great plays to keep us in the game, just even at the end, forcing some turnovers.

But all in all, we just came up short, and we lost to a really good team. Connecticut played very well.

Q. Haley, if you could talk about the offense and sort of what was different tonight. You guys have been so good offensively and obviously missed a lot of shots. How much of it was Connecticut's defense, how much of it was something that you did to fall out of rhythm?

HALEY JONES: I think offensively a part of it is not hitting shots, but that's bound to happen. You can't make all of your shots. I think we could have moved the ball better. I

We've been able to play with some people for three, four years. I guess us for three years, Anna has been here six years, so that's been a while. But yeah, it's some tears, but I think at the end of the day, we're thinking back on what we've been able to do here. We've been Natty Champs, we were Pac-12 champs twice over, so we're going to try to carry that and keep with the joy over all the sadness.

HALEY JONES: Great job, Fran. I would echo what you said, and I think also just in the locker room, you're giving hugs and everything, and you're going to miss them. But like the relationships that we have with especially the seniors who aren't going to be on the team anymore, they're not going to end just because the season is over.

We get back tomorrow, we'll probably go get dinner. We're still going to hang out. When they leave we're still going to hang out, we're going to go grab meals, we're going to go out as a team still. I think we're friends first.

Even though this kind of chapter is closing with some of those seniors who are leaving as teammates, I'm still going to be their friend and those relationships are still strong enough to continue. In the locker room, it's difficult. You're closing a chapter with some people, but you're opening a new one, which it's exciting to see. And I was talking to Lacie about her move to Austin and Anna and everybody, and they have so many exciting things on the horizon and I'm excited to see them accomplish.

Q. Obviously once the pain of this loss wears off and you can actually reflect on the season, what specifically are you guys most proud of this group and what you were able to accomplish this year?

HALEY JONES: I think winning is great. We all love to win. We're a very competitive team. Winning a Pac-12 regular season tournament and then the regional final and coming to a Final Four is something to be proud of. I think outside of the win category, I'm really proud of the resiliency that this team has shown, especially in tonight's game. We're down eight with like a minute left and we get it to two. Even though when they're making their free throws and whatnot, we're executing out of time-outs, we're diving on the ground, we're sprinting, we're doing everything that we can possible and continuing to encourage each other.

So I'm really proud of the team for that and the people that I get to play with. The resiliency, their grittiness, their toughness, I think that's what I'm most proud of.

FRANCESCA BELIBI: Yeah, so kind of to echo what Haley said, I think everything that you see on the court is

kind of a testament to who we are off the court. Whether you see Lexie literally getting a steal while on the ground or Cameron knee mugging after a big block, those are their personality traits off the court, and it's been just an honor and a privilege to be able to play with them.

I think I'm most proud of how we've all grown, watching people's evolution from freshman year until now and seeing how they've grown, whether it be literally becoming a point guard for Lacie and Anna or just how Cameron has grown and who she is on the court and how she's carried herself on the court. It's been a real privilege to watch that happen.

Like Haley said, besides all the wins and all the championships, I'm most proud of how I've been able to see everyone grow and become the people that they are and the people they'll continue to be.

Q. Haley, you guys were so out of sync offensively all night. Do you feel like you settled for a lot of threes?

HALEY JONES: I think that we -- yeah, I think definitely late in the shot clock -- I think the shot clock was winding down a lot for us, which doesn't usually happen, so that led to us settling for a lot of threes. But I think a lot of the threes that we took were in the flow, shots we usually take. When Lexie and Lacie and Anna or anybody is open on the perimeter, I want them to shoot it. If it wasn't falling, it wasn't falling, but those were the shots I want them to take.

But yeah, we were definitely out of sync offensively so that led to some shot selection that wasn't our best, and I'm sure we want to get back. But I think the shots that we missed are still shots I want my teammates to take, so I can't fault them for that. I mean, nine times out of ten I think they're going to make it. Tara would probably yell at me for not crashing the O-boards, but I'm like I think it's going in.

So I think it's definitely a mix.

Q. Tara, about the offensive issues, did you feel like you guys settled a little bit too much for threes, and was there anything there you were telling your team in terms of when they were struggling with shots they normally make?

TARA VANDERVEER: We really struggled on offense. When we looked good, we got the ball inside to Cam, and I think she maybe rushed a couple times, but she finished for us. And unfortunately we lost, but we didn't really get on the offensive boards the way we needed to.

I think that some of it is just with different people, we kind

of run different things, and we didn't really run anything really well. I thought Haley made some big plays for us, and we needed to get her at the basket more, and kind of down the stretch, she finished at the basket really well.

A lot of times I think in NCAA play, it's really, I want to say guard play, people that are really used to and can handle. Again, I give so much credit to Lacie for what she did for us and Anna Wilson, who never really played point for us, to be able to step up and do what they did, but tonight we needed more.

They were on the floor. You asked about the locker room. Those two are Niagara Falls. They gave their whole heart, and we came up short.

But a lot of that is just, I think, the experience of running a team, and I think it caught up with us tonight.

Q. You just said that you all lost the battle of the boards but you had an advantage in the post with Dorka Juhasz out. I'm curious what you thought the reason for that was.

TARA VANDERVEER: Well, I thought Nelson-Ododa was extremely aggressive. She had five O-boards. She played really well for them, and she was extremely physical when we went to our post player just in terms of what she was doing, both she and Edwards.

But we just -- we really tried every time-out, every dead ball, move the ball, get the ball inside, and it's just easier said than done.

Q. Cameron Brink played 27 minutes tonight. I know you held her out for a little while, she came back in, she picked up two quick fouls and had to go to the bench. When she's in, she makes a huge difference for your team. How do you make sure she's got that impetus to stay out of foul trouble and stay on the floor for you guys?

TARA VANDERVEER: Well, Cam is a young player. She's extremely talented, and some of it is just really keep continuing to work hard in the off-season. She's a very versatile player, but a lot of it is really I think working with her, and when she was out there, she did great things for us. She's a warrior. She was posting up, and I thought it was very physical. She was knocked down on the ground a couple times.

She's a young player that has a great, great future, and some of it is identifying maybe keeping things maybe a little more simple for her.

Q. Tara, Lexie couldn't throw a basketball in the ocean, I think, tonight. I wondered, did you try -- did you think about trying to do some stuff to get her going, maybe specifically to the rim? And also for someone, like you point out that they've just given everything to this program for four years, how hard was it to watch her go out like that in her last game?

TARA VANDERVEER: You know, I mean, I don't think one game can define Lexie or Lacie or Anna Wilson, what they've done for this program. Did she miss some shots? Yes, she did. This was not her best game. But I wouldn't trade her for any player -- she plays so hard. She had -- both her nostrils were bleeding and she's still trying to be out there, I'm like, Lexie, you're bleeding. She's an absolute warrior.

Honestly if our team can learn from these twins and Anna on how to practice and how to compete, we can be back here next year. They just are so competitive. They are so coachable.

Did she miss some shots? Yes, she did. Did she have some turnovers? Yes, she did. But she battles, and I could not be happier coaching her. I wouldn't trade her for anybody.

Q. You guys have obviously played in a lot of big games the last few years, but is there still on this stage some anxiety? What was the mood like going into the game, and do you as a coach have to sort of manage sold-out crowd, national semis, try to play like you normally do?

TARA VANDERVEER: You know, our team has played really well -- we had a big crowd in South Carolina. We played really well. We didn't win, but we had an opportunity to win. We've played on the road in places -- we didn't go to Arizona this year, but I think that would be an excuse.

Our team came out, we just didn't do what we needed to do. Some of it was at the free-throw line. We didn't make free throws early. We gave up threes. We gave up O-boards. I thought we played really well defensively. It was a one-point game at halftime. We did not shoot the way we're capable of. We come down and step out of bounds, you can't do that. We've got to run offense better.

You know, I think it was something that -- again, people are ready, they're prepared, and just sometimes things don't go the way you want them to or think they can.

It's disappointing, but again, like Connecticut was in this position last year, and I think their players probably learned

from it, and now they've gone a step up. These are players that, whether it's Haley or Cam or Lexie or Lacie, Hannah Jump, they have a championship ring, so they know what they need to do.

Again, we just had some looks that didn't go in for us, and we did not defend the three-point line, nor did we make our free throws, nor did we keep them off the glass as well as we needed to.

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