

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Four - Washington vs Columbia

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Chapel Hill, Maryland, USA

Carmichael Arena

Columbia Lions

Megan Griffith

Riley Weiss

Kitty Henderson

Media Conference

Columbia - 63, Washington - 60

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us. We are joined by Columbia, the advancing team in today's First Four game here in Chapel Hill.

We have Head Coach Megan Griffith as well as student-athletes Kitty Henderson and Riley Weiss. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

MEGAN GRIFFITH: I've seen this team. It's a great team. I have a ton of respect for Tina. I said that in our presser before.

I've gotten the chance to battle against her when she was at Rice, and it was one of my first years here at Columbia. She gave us a little whupping there, so I knew what she was capable of and I knew she has a great, talented team. I just want to say kudos to them. I thought it was a great battle.

I'm really proud of our team for responding. Halftime was a big turning point for us, just in the trajectory of the game obviously, but also us understanding we were beating ourselves a little bit there too.

Credit to especially these two sitting to my right for really locking in. Kitty was just a menace defensively, wreaking havoc everywhere, and Riley hitting big shots, wanting the ball, wanting the moment. It was good to see some of the shots we took early in the game fall and then just build that confidence back.

Outrebounding a Big Ten team is a big deal too. Number



14 gave us everything she had. I thought we adjusted our post coverage as well. Happy with the effort in the second half, and hopefully we can build off of this one.

Q. I had just a weird question about the signs on the bench. I've never -- I don't see a lot of women's college basketball teams do it. I see football teams doing it. Where does that come from? How does that help? How have you guys, I guess, adjusted to it?

KITTY HENDERSON: I think in this program we're just big on the details. It's just another way to communicate to your team. I think, when we're all on the same page, it's a huge advantage, and like why not just be very clear with what we're doing?

I think it's just a one up, and it's just something that we do. As I said, we just have a lot of details, and that's one of them.

Q. Kitty, you came out of the halftime break looking incredibly driven. What were you thinking coming out that have?

KITTY HENDERSON: I think I just had a lot of fuel coming out of halftime because I knew we weren't giving them our best. Obviously they're a really good team, but we weren't giving them even half of what we could, especially me as well. I had missed so many layups, I just needed to get onto the next thing.

It started with the defense. I think we made adjustments, and that there, that just fuels everything. We always say that, but defense always fuels your offense. I just came out and did what I could defensively, and then my teammates -- I mean, Riley's a beast, and everyone did their part. So I'm really proud of everyone.

Q. A couple for you. First of all, you guys have accomplished so many firsts for this program, but how good and how significant does it feel to get the first NCAA Tournament win? I know you guys have been working for this for a long time.

RILEY WEISS: This is something we've been working



towards all year, and this is our goal at the beginning of the year. It's what we set out to do.

It feels really good to get this win, but after we get this win and celebrate a little bit, we're onto the next game. We're focused on winning the next game because I know we can make a deep run. We have a ton of potential, and we're not even close to it yet.

Q. For either one of you, Coach mentioned how you kind of switched up your post defense and really limited Daniels, 14. I think she had 10 rebounds towards the middle of the second quarter, so you really only let her get one more for the rest of the game. How did you do that? Is there a sign for don't let her get any rebounds?

KITTY HENDERSON: Yeah, it's a big stop sign. No. I think Perri really stepped up. She was just a beast on the boards. She was jumping up, getting everything.

It was a really physical game, so I think we just adjusted to that and just went up and had to win those 50-50 balls. That's what you have to do to win.

In terms of just like we were sending a couple more people at her making her think, and I think that just like got in her head a little bit, yeah.

Q. For the players, I'm just curious, like what was the vibe at halftime at the locker room? What was said? Who said what? Clearly something was said, there was a message sent.

RILEY WEISS: I'll take this one. I think Coach G knows how to get us riled up in the locker room at halftime. She just told us -- I mean, we knew it wasn't our best nearly. She just told us we needed to be better pretty much. And I'm proud of us because I think we rose up to that challenge in the second half.

Q. Riley, tell me about that shooting groove you got into in the second half. How did that feel? Did you sense that was coming at halftime? Kitty, I love how you all found her, and what it means when she gets on a roll like that.

RILEY WEISS: My shots felt really great. My teammates, they do a great job of finding me with the ball. My coaching staff tells me to keep shooting, make or miss. So just moving on to the next shot, make or miss. I'm going to shoot the next one. My shot did feel good, though, yes.

KITTY HENDERSON: I just love when Riley plays with confidence. No one can stop her. She was a beast, like I

said. I'm really proud of her.

She's gotten so much better at knowing when it's her time, and that was today, so boom.

Q. For both Riley and Kitty, yesterday when I talked to Coach and said what's the big difference between your two teams, and it was speed and physicality. Can you both talk about how that was the big turning point for tonight.

KITTY HENDERSON: I think in the second half we just sped them up a lot more. We stuck to what we were supposed to do, and it worked. But also I think, like I said, it was just a really physical game, and we were ready for that.

Yeah, we go to battle every day in practice with our scout guys. They prepare us really well. So we were ready for a physical game, and we just needed to get out and run and get steals on defense and let it fuel our offense. I think that's what we did in the second half.

RILEY WEISS: Kitty said it well, but I think in the second half we did a better job of pressuring them and turning the ball over. So that fueled our offense, and that's what got us going.

Q. Riley, Kitty, congratulations to you both. Wondering if -- it seems like the major difference from last year to this year is you both have NCAA Tournament experience, and I'm wondering if there was a moment in each of these games where you felt that experience kind of manifest itself.

RILEY WEISS: I think last year was a ton of emotions going on, it being our first time in the tournament. Like we were just so happy to be here.

I think this time being our second time, we're super focused, like we know we belong here. Yeah, we're really focused on the games and giving our best every game and winning.

KITTY HENDERSON: Yeah, and I think like we just stayed so connected today. We weren't getting caught up in anything that was going on, any distractions. We were just so connected. No matter whether the shot went in, out, we were so connected getting on to the next thing.

Coach kept talking about dominating the next decision, and I think we did that really well. So I was proud of us.

Q. Riley for you, just want to ask you about Kitty real quick. When Kitty comes out at halftime that

determined and starts kind of doing her thing there, getting to the hole, all that stuff, like how much did that kind of lift everybody else up in terms of being able to kind of follow the leader there and get going?

RILEY WEISS: Kitty's an amazing leader. She's like our engine. We go as she goes. It's great to play alongside her. She's at her best when she's being aggressive and looking to score as well. Yeah, it's great to play alongside her.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Questions for Coach.

Q. They talked about the locker room at halftime. I wonder if you could go into, from your perspective, what was said at halftime and what you think fueled that second half.

MEGAN GRIFFITH: They heard what they needed to hear, I'll say that. It's like even we could hear -- I think we gave confidence to Washington, and they should be confident. They're here in the tournament just like us. I said to them, you're just getting punked right now basically.

We even heard their players saying like we should be up 30 right now. So I'm like all right, cool. So we tell our team, hey, listen, this is the game. They think they should be beating you by more. For them, I think the sense of pride came back into their heads.

There's nothing wrong with that. Teams do that, as players. They're players, right? I said to them, you need to realize this isn't about them. This is about us. This is about what we're doing.

You've got to realize like blue heads -- we talked a lot about blue heads, red heads. We were being blue headed in that first half. We were making chaotic decisions, erratic, throwing the ball around, not trusting our process. Having a blue head is all about clear, confident decision-making, honestly, and trusting.

So we kind of wrapped it up with that nice little bow, and then came back out ready to attack.

Q. I'm asking about the signs again. I'm just kind of curious like where that came from and how hard or easy it is to kind of coordinate all that? Like you have players and coaches raising them and flipping them and how that helps your team.

MEGAN GRIFFITH: I think the game of football is like really intriguing, right, because there's so many details and such a high level of communication coordination that happens. There's people that are having signs and hats

that are throwing the other team off.

I think we've learned a lot from that, and we said as a staff -- and I give a lot of credit to Coach Allie Bassetti on my staff, she was like, what if we created signs for them? If we're going to be this multiple press team and we want them to have a greater awareness of when we're about to be in the bonus or they're about to be in the bonus, why don't we just visually show them?

I'm a big believer in communications. I think the best teams, the best leaders communicate at the highest levels, and that's really hard to do just verbally. So we're like, all right, let's visually bring that in so there's a nonverbal and a verbal for everything that we do and every way we communicate.

Q. Last year after going out in the First Four, you insisted you'd be back. You came back and won. How does it feel to be another part of Columbia basketball history in that way?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: I mean, this is my home, right? This is home for me. This is my alma mater. It amazes me what we can do when we have great people understanding why we're doing what we're doing. I just think you can do so many hard things together.

That's the greatest reason I'm coaching. I want to teach these young people to do hard things together. I think that's somewhat lost in society right now.

Honestly, I'm blessed that I get to do that. Peter Pilling, our Director of Athletics, hired me when I was 30 years old to lead this program. I was just a kid, really hungry, and I'm sure he was like, all right, Megan, cool it a little bit, but here we are doing what I always thought we could do. It's just special seeing a group come together and doing hard things together.

Q. Seeing Riley just have the second half that she had, I think she had 19 points in the last two quarters alone. She really provided an offensive lift for you guys. How have you seen her just evolve throughout this season and just what makes her ready for these big time moments?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: Riley is -- she was a prolific scorer throughout her entire high school career. That was something we knew we would get from her, but it was teaching her how to play the next game. College basketball, high school basketball are like two different games. I don't know if they're the same sport.

We told her, especially coming off of last year, hey, listen,



you're not going to be a role player anymore. You want to be a starter. You want to be a star. You want the moment. You want the spotlight. We just told her what she needed to do, and she's one of the most coachable kids I've ever had in a program. You tell her once, and she does it the very next moment.

I was like, hey, you need to get in the weight room and gain 15 pounds this summer, and she did it. Then she came back, and she was a more durable athlete. She was able to defend and do the things we were asking her to do and not just be a scorer. She's going to score. That's what I said to her, that's like your baseline. You're going to go score. But how many other ways can you impact the game and build confidence in your teammates that you're doing it with them?

I just think, like I said, coachability. She's a coach's kid. She's been around basketball at a high level and has a really high IQ for the game. We're just seeing the beginning of Riley Weiss, I can tell you that.

Q. Just to kind of follow up on your halftime speech a little bit, I'm curious for you as a coach, how do you know which buttons to push with this team, and how did you decide kind of how you wanted to go in there and kind of address all that you were seeing in that first half?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: Honestly, it's love. That's what I would say. I love these players like their my family. We spend way too much time with them, but that's what you do in this crazy profession, right?

I always say, if I were to characterize our staff, we're a work hard, play hard, love hard staff, and that involves them. I want them to be able to call me up and challenge me if, hey, Coach, you were too hard on us today, or we might need a day off. That's the relationship I have with Kitty Henderson.

For me, I know what they need in those moments because I know them, right? We're not just coach and player, but we're in the fire together. I just think that takes time.

The other beautiful thing is we have four-year players. I get to grow with them over four years. That's the thing I love about the Ivy League. It's really about higher education, and players really want to come for that degree. I'm one of them, right? So I can speak to that.

I would just say it's because we love each other and we can trust each other. It's no ego/mego. That's what we like to say.

Q. Congratulations on the win. I have a general one about what we saw as a difference experience brought. The fact that there were nine turnovers for you guys in this game. You had 18 last year against Vandy. Just beyond that, just a real quick specific if you could reflect on Kitty Henderson winning her 100th game at Columbia.

MEGAN GRIFFITH: You beat me to it. That was going to be mentioned today.

First of all, in terms of ball security, that's a big sign of maturity. We talked about that the end of this season, and just all big opponents we play, especially in the nonconference, we always say whoever takes care of the ball more is usually going to have better control just offensively of what they're doing, not being sped up.

Even in the first half, like we barely had any assists, they barely had any assists. It was kind of just like a one-on-one game, and that's so not how we play. We just got back to trusting each other, trusting the play calls, echoing play calls. Obviously that paid off for us. To be in the positive in assist-to-turnover is a major key to success.

With Kitty, wow, what a winner, like what a winner. She's absolutely my most favorite player I've ever coached. I love Abbey Hsu, everybody hear me say that, but wow, Kitty's a winner. She's the winningest player to have ever played at Columbia. To have 100 wins in your career when we play a shortened schedule -- we only play 27 games in the Ivy League. We had a deep WNIT run before it was WBIT, and she's played in postseason every single year.

But to get 100 wins in our her four-year career when we don't have a big conference schedule, that is even more impressive in my opinion. Just the most selfless human and basketball player and leader in our program that we've ever seen.

Q. The big three for Washington had 31 points, 14 rebounds, and only 4 turnovers in the first half, but then they were down to 23 points, 6 rebounds, and they were up to 8 turnovers. What specifically did you all do to create that situation?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: Well, first half honestly we were really trying to close off the exits and let 14 go to work, and she went to work. So halftime, we just said, listen, we've got to be better in the gaps. We've got to move on air time. We're going to send doubles in the post to make her think -- she's a nice passer, but let's really make her -- speed her up. We didn't want to do it right away. We wanted to do it on the dribble, and I thought we executed that well.

Then our press was just way more in sync. Talk about, again, their major ball handlers, 0 is a really special player, wow, but to make other people have to pass through the press and make decisions was the main goal.

For us, I thought those adjustments our team executed really well in the second half. Again, that was just part of the game plan honestly. That was the big adjustment we made at halftime.

Q. I know Riley and Kitty and Cece always get a lot of praise and credit for what they do, but Perri Page, she does a lot of the little things really well. I'm just thinking about that last rebound where she went from literally the 3-point line and hustled to jump five feet in the air to grab that rebound. How important is it to have a player like that that just does all the things that you need for her to do?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: Perri, another player that -- I just think you're seeing the beginning of Perri Page. She is a force, I can tell you that. I was just so proud. I said to her today, just go be you. Stop trying to conform and do everything perfectly.

She's, again, such a special human. She has her own business, and she's got an internship with the NBA already this summer. She's just that kind of a human where she wants to be so good at everything, wants to be so good at life, and sometimes I'm just like, yo, just be a basketball player.

Today I thought she really embraced that well. She was super present, super focused. She's like, I'm guarding 24, I'm guarding 24. I'm like, all right, let's go, P. When I see that version of her, I mean, the sky's the limit. She's got such a bright future in this sport ahead of her.

I told her, you're going to be our best player next year. Riley is going to be Riley, but you're going to be our best player next year. I'm like just don't wait. Why wait? It's March right now. Let's enjoy this while we can together with your seniors that I know she loves. Yeah, she's a force, I can tell you that.

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