

2023 NCAA Division III Women's Basketball Championship: Transylvania vs. Christopher Newport

Thursday, March 30, 2023

Dallas, Texas, USA

American Airlines Center

Christopher Newport Captains

Coach Bill Broderick

Gabbi San Diego

Sondra Fan

Finals Pregame Media Conference



BILL BRODERICK: Just want to really thank the NCAA for everything that they've done, putting on this experience for our young ladies has been awesome. To be one of two teams to represent Division III here in Dallas in the joint championship for the biggest celebration in women's basketball, we truly feel blessed and honored.

Couldn't be more proud of our team, what they've done this year and accomplished, and with all the adversity we've had with injuries and things like that, for us to be in this place, it's pretty amazing, I think, and I'm really proud of these guys.

The best thing about this is getting an extra two weeks with this group.

We're excited to be here, and we're going to go out and leave everything we've got on the court on Saturday.

Q. What does this mean? You're only the second Division III -- what has this experience meant for you so far being part of one giant women's basketball fest?

GABBI SAN DIEGO: It's been remarkable. This whole experience has just been incredible. Ever since we've touched down everyone has been awesome. The hospitality here has been amazing, from the hotel to the gyms, everywhere we've been has been just super incredible.

Everywhere we go we're seeing signs of the championship, and not just the D-I but D-II and D-III stuff is very special. It makes us feel very special, and just excited to be here and

to compete at this stage with some incredible female athletes.

Q. Sondra?

SONDRA FAN: Extremely grateful to be part of only the second time this has ever happened. It's something I'll remember forever. Just getting to spend extra time with my teammates, meeting D-I and D-II athletes is absolutely incredible, hearing their stories, as well.

So very excited and very grateful for this experience.

Q. Your journey to get here started here, and now you come back here, and some of the adversity that you talked about during the week, as you prepare for Saturday, can you just kind of elaborate on that journey to get here through the adversity?

GABBI SAN DIEGO: Yeah, we've had a very tough season, a lot of highs, a lot of lows. We've had the injury bug all season, as well, unfortunately. I was out for about five weeks. Missed eight games. And in the first round of the NCAA Tournament we lost our All-American Anaya Simmons, and then losing another starter Katy Rader was just extremely tough and that emotionally has been tough for us, but I think the resilience that we've shown and how much our sophomores, juniors, freshmen have stepped up in practices and in the games each week has been super incredible and we couldn't be more proud as leaders.

Yeah, I think we've embodied the next woman up mentality and trying to show up every day and compete and leave everything we have out there on the court.

SONDRA FAN: Just proud of the underclassmen and obviously the juniors for stepping up and filling those roles. We did lose Gabbi. We have a freshman step up as a starting point guard and she did absolutely amazing. Just our team is so special because we are so bought in, that if anything happens there's always a next person there, same energy, same mentality.

Q. I know your schedule is probably very busy, but have you had a chance to interact with the other teams

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with the other divisions, and if so, what was that like?

GABBI SAN DIEGO: Yeah, so they had the salute event last night which was awesome. I don't think we knew that the Division I teams were going to be there, so I was quite surprised seeing Caitlin Clark walk in the building. Definitely kind of took the breath out of my lungs for a second.

But they were awesome. I got a couple pictures in that I was very happy to have, and I definitely had a fan girl type of moment for a second. It was cool to be in the same building as them. They're people that we watch on TV and admire, and it was just awesome to be in the same room as them.

And just from a female athlete standard, just cool to see people at that standard at like 6'5" compared to my height was funny. But it was a very cool experience for sure.

SONDRA FAN: I had a chance to talk to Aliyah Boston and we were like, we were so scared to come up to say hi, and she reminded me that they were human, too, and they enjoyed that interaction with us.

Q. Having to face another team that was undefeated this season, is there any added pressure heading into the championship game?

GABBI SAN DIEGO: I don't think so. I think our coach talks about it a lot. When you get into the tournament everyone is 0-0. Your record doesn't really matter anymore. It's a win-or-go-home kind of mentality, and I think we both -- we're undefeated, but I don't think that's what's coming across our minds.

I think we're focused on the next game, which is what we try to keep our focus on. We're proud of the season that we have, but the job is not finished and we're looking forward to competing against a really, really good team on Saturday.

SONDRA FAN: Same here. Not really focusing on the records but the game plan that we have set for this game and just having a positive mindset. Just going out there in our shootarounds and our practices just to really focus in on what we have and the film that we've been watching and just the scouting report.

Q. Can you just talk about Sondra's commitment to the team and the amount of time you've spent with her over the last three years and what her leadership has meant to the team the last three years?

GABBI SAN DIEGO: Yeah, for sure. Sondra is probably

one of the easiest competitive people I've ever met. She's pushed us from day one since I've gotten here. I don't think I've ever shared the court with a shooter like her, but that's not really what I think of when I think about Sondra.

I think about the leadership, the grit, the resilience that she has. She's our energy, she's our motor, she's our heartbeat, and I'd follow her through anything and I'm super thankful to have played three years with her -- I wish she could have a sixth year but they don't do that unfortunately, but I'm grateful to have shared the court with someone as great as Sondra.

Q. You talked about being focused going into the next game. What can you say is the process of being so locked in going into the next game?

GABBI SAN DIEGO: That's the key this week especially. It's tough with all the stuff that we've had going on. It's obviously a remarkable experience, but I think the key is still being locked in on our practices and our shootarounds, and especially in the game.

I think there's obviously a lot of media stuff and the salutes and red carpet, which is awesome to experience, but we know that the key for us is still being locked in when we're having film, having practice, and all the other stuff, too, like stretching, eating well, getting good sleep.

I think it's a holistic process to be the most successful that you can be, and I think we do a good job of setting those standards for our team.

But yeah, it's just trying to stay present and enjoy the moment.

Q. Are there any games that you played during the regular season that you feel have prepared you for the championship game?

SONDRA FAN: I think every single game has taught us something different. Every game there's something to learn from, and I think we just have gathered that through all the 31 games that we've played. And yeah, I think every single one has really taught us something and is the reason why we're here today.

GABBI SAN DIEGO: Yeah, I think the last one, playing Rhode Island, I think we learned a lot from that game for sure. I think in the tournament you can't really come out flat. That first quarter, that first minute is super important.

I think we definitely learned that from that game. A couple other close games in the season playing UC Santa Cruz where we were down at halftime and had to battle back. I



think Tufts was a tough one too, playing in that environment and showing that we could be resilient.

I think we're trying to play to a standard and not the score, and we're just trying to get better, one percent better, each and every day and every game.

Q. I'm guessing you've been to the Final Four before. Did you ever dream, hey, I'd love to have my team playing here in this?

BILL BRODERICK: You know, no, I never did. I guess when I first started coaching Division II 11 years ago, this didn't exist, so didn't really know that it was an option.

I knew that our school had had a Final Four before, so I think our goal was definitely get to the Final Four.

That's kind of become our goal every year.

The fact that we were -- the fact that it was here this year, we definitely, I think, put a little bit of extra inventive to getting here and to be a part of this.

For me, like you said, for being at many conventions and Final Fours in the past, I knew a lot of the things that they had here, and I know how our team really takes time to just embrace the moment and really appreciate everything.

I've just been so proud as a coach. They've really taken in everything. They've been very thankful for everything, very appreciative.

For them to get an opportunity to do that is amazing. I know I'm going to get a chance to coach for years, but they only get four years, and so for them to get a chance to do this is pretty special.

Q. It's not normal for you guys to have two weeks off between Final Four and the championship. I'm sure part of you is like, this is cool because we get to do this, but as a coach you've got two weeks to keep your team together and game plan for the championship game.

BILL BRODERICK: Yeah, I will tell you, I've said this to a few different people, that I think if our season would be kind of where we've been like a regular season for us and routine, I think it would have been a little bit more difficult.

I think we would have wanted to keep playing right away and play the next day as soon as we can.

But I think this year the last few weeks have just been just so different with losing so many people that we have had to

switch lineups. We've had to switch roles. We've had to change things that we do.

Actually having some extra time was pretty nice. We gave them some time to take a break. We also let them have a full week of school, which was pretty good, because unfortunately they still have to go to school during the basketball season.

So yeah, I think for us, I think it was a good thing. I think we really needed that time.

Q. Being able to actually just game plan and have to change your game plan due to injuries and that stuff and still be undefeated, how do you keep your team humble?

BILL BRODERICK: Yeah, you know, I think first of all, you got a chance to listen to two of them, and I think when you've got two young ladies of this quality that lead, that makes my job a lot easier.

But I think kind of like they said, we really just focus on the next game, next woman up. I think it's really easy to do the, oh, me, and this person is hurt and whatever, but we just talk about it's part of sports. People get hurt. Someone goes down, so next person's opportunity to step up.

We have players, we have young players that have taken advantage of it and have probably showed me more than I even knew they were capable of at this point.

So yeah, I think just living in the moment, not really talking about records, like they said. They know. We talk about it even at halftime. We come out at halftime, we, hey, score is 0-0, let's go out and start and play.

Just really keeping ourselves focused, not listening too much to the media or the hype, and also realizing when you're as successful as we are, everybody is going to be coming after you. You always have an X on your back. When you're undefeated and No. 1 in the country in post polls, nobody wants to hear about injuries and all those other things.

They're just coming for you. That's okay; we wouldn't want it any other way.

Q. Even though you've been here before at conventions and at this level this year, you have your other divisions with you. Similar to what I asked the students, did you get a chance to interact with the coaches from the other divisions, and what did you guys talk about, strange ideas, get any tips back and

forth?

BILL BRODERICK: Yeah, before I started working at San U, all of my prior experience was at Division I level, so Dawn is a good friend and Kenny is a good friend, and I know Kim a little bit. So we were talking last night.

It was nice to get a chance to catch up with them. I've actually been texting with some of them throughout the process. Kenny and I both -- Virginia, and trying to bring this thing home for Virginia, two out of the three.

Yeah, it was really nice last night to get a chance, but I think we also realized, too, that there's just so much going on and so much you have to be focused on, and when you're trying to keep tabs on a party of 25, there's not too much time for other stuff.

But it's definitely neat to see everybody, and to watch my young ladies last night taking pictures with other people and some of their idols was pretty special.

Q. Sondra has a great story, and certainly a young lady who is a great face to have for your program, working, academic All-American, will be one of the all-time leaders when she leaves. What has her presence embodied, do you think, and trickles down to your team?

BILL BRODERICK: Yeah. You know, the thing -- I hit on the same thing that Gabbi said, was Sondra is one of the most competitive people I've ever met. It doesn't matter whether we're doing a three-point shooting contest, a National Championship, checkers, first one to the bus. I mean, she is just competitive in everything she does.

Her parents, I think, have really instilled that work ethic in her.

For her to come in and really just -- she's changed so much over the five years. She's grown so much, not just as a player but as a person, and I think when you've got your top players -- and this goes for Anaya Simmons, as well, before she got hurt -- when you've got your top players also being some of your hardest workers, that just doesn't leave any room for anyone else to slack.

They set the tone for us, and I think she's done that, and more than just the records and the scoring and the All-American, I think just that work ethic and what it means to play in our program, she will leave that legacy with us.

Q. You mentioned earlier next woman up, so what player comes to mind when you say next woman up that's stepped up the most this season?

BILL BRODERICK: Yeah, I mean, we've had so many injuries, we've had to have a few next women up.

Three of them really come to mind. One would be Camille Malagar. She got a chance to play a little bit in our COVID year. We didn't have a COVID season. We played a few exhibition games. So that was her freshman year. Was working really hard, was probably going to get some playing time as a freshman coming back, and tore her ACL before the season started. So that was devastating. That was hard.

We actually canceled practice after that, and I went up to my office and closed the door and cried like a baby for her. I was just so upset because I know how much work she put in.

So for her coming in and kind of learning things, really listed as a junior but really kind of a true freshman, she had to step in and run the point for Gabbi when she was out.

Then when Anaya went out, she had to step into the lineup, and she's just done a great job. She just has a great attitude, is willing to do whatever, and really enjoys the game.

I think she's definitely someone who's stepped up.

Hannah Orloff has stepped up big for us. She was getting 10, 15 minutes here and there, and she had to step into the lineup when Katy Rader went down. It's like, okay, by the way, you're going to have to guard Maggie Russell, All-American post player first game here, and did a great job and held her -- we held her to 18 points, which may sound like a lot, but she was like 8 for 22 from the floor, so I'll take that.

So she's really done a great job in stepping up.

Then I think Alivia Giles, as well. Great athlete, has played really hard and has taken advantage. Had eight points, 11 rebounds the other night. Just plays with a motor.

I think those three have all kind of been forced into action to play kind of double the minutes that they have played.

So just really proud of them and knew that given the opportunity, it maybe came a year earlier than we thought, but we talk about if you stay ready, you don't have to get ready, and so I think they were ready and they've taken advantage of that opportunity.

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