

2023 NCAA Division II Women's Basketball Championship: Minnesota Duluth vs Ashland

Thursday, March 30, 2023

Dallas, Texas, USA

American Airlines Center

Ashland Eagles

Kari Pickens

Annie Roshak

Hallie Heidemann

Finals Pregame Media Conference



KARI PICKENS: Really thankful to the NCAA for putting on such an amazing event for us, giving our student-athletes a first-class experience. It has been everything we hoped for and more. A lot of thanks to the NCAA. We're really excited to be here and honestly just to play a basketball game.

It'll be 10 days since our last one whenever we step out on the court, and I know our girls are ready and eager to be playing one last game together.

Q. Hallie and Annie, at what point during the season did you feel like this moment was possible?

HALLIE HEIDEMANN: Yeah, I knew as soon as this team was assembled completely, I knew that we had what it took to win a National Championship. It was just a matter of whether or not we were going to come together and put it all together and put it together come tournament time.

I'm super proud this team has been able to do that, and the job is not done yet.

ANNIE ROSHAK: I think I kind of agree. Coming in preseason we knew we had all the pieces necessary, and so like Hallie said, just getting that buy-in, and I think this team has obviously done that really well or we wouldn't be where we are right now. We're really grateful for all this opportunity and just to put it on the line one more time.

Q. Hallie, this is going to be your last game of your career. How do you manage your emotions heading into this game, and have you thought about your career ending at all?

HALLIE HEIDEMANN: How do I manage my emotions? First of all I would say talk to my Lord and savior Jesus Christ about it, and then also staying with my teammates, staying in the huddle, not making it too big, because at the end of the day it is just a game and it's supposed to be fun, and so getting to do it alongside my teammates just reminds me to enjoy it.

Yeah, taking a step back, I think being a senior and having it be my last game, I've been able to just take a step back and know that this all goes by so fast, and this moment is so special. So taking the time to take it in.

Q. Heading into your final game with an undefeated streak, do you guys feel like you have an advantage heading into Saturday?

ANNIE ROSHAK: You know what, at this time of the year, everybody is on even playing field. You walk into the tournament, and it's 0-0, and even right now we're both fighting for the same thing. I don't think that our record gives us an advantage at all.

Obviously we should have some confidence going in knowing what we've accomplished this year and what this team can do, but Duluth is a really good team and it's going to be a dogfight, and I'm just really excited to put us to the test and see how it goes.

HALLIE HEIDEMANN: Yeah, sticking to what we do and staying in our huddle, I think believing in our team and what we've done so far, but then also buying into what the coaches prepare for us scout-wise and being ready to execute what specifically we need to do against Minnesota Duluth.

Q. Another 36-0 team plays tomorrow evening. I was wondering if you have any inside jokes about their copying you or trying to keep up with you guys or something like that. Being here on this big stage, does this enhance the experience of playing for the National Championship?

HALLIE HEIDEMANN: No inside jokes. I don't think so. It's really cool, but no jokes at that really.



It definitely enhances the experience having all three divisions here. It's been really cool just to have them be part of our experience and then us getting to be a part of their experience and just everything that the NCAA has done and put on to make this a really special time for us.

ANNIE ROSHAK: Yeah, I guess I haven't thought a ton about South Carolina also being here, being undefeated, but what a cool opportunity, what a cool experience this has been. Even last night at the salute event having all the D-I teams along with the D-III teams, to just getting to share this experience with them, we all kind of -- we started the same. We started as little kids with dreams to play college basketball and compete for a National Championship, and we're all getting that opportunity. I think that in itself has been such a neat experience.

Q. You guys have the opportunity to finish it all off, win a National Championship undefeated. Tell me how it feels as a player to be able to have this opportunity to do it.

ANNIE ROSHAK: I'm just really grateful for the game of basketball, for Ashland University, for just all the experiences that I've been given through a simple game. So to be here, to be 36-0, playing on the big stage for a National Championship is -- I've said it so many times before, it's like 10 year old Annie's dream.

So just continue to take it in, and then again realize we have one more game, one more thing to take care of, and hopefully go home with that National Championship title.

HALLIE HEIDEMANN: Super exciting. The word for me through most of this tournament run has been joy, just experiencing joy after joy alongside this team. Looking back at all that we've accomplished this year and then just at my five years at Ashland and all that this school and this program has done for me, I hope that this team can go out with a National Championship on a big stage.

Q. How has the coaching staff helped this team in-game and in the locker room in these high, tough-pressure situations?

ANNIE ROSHAK: Yeah, I'm going to stand by the fact that we have the best coaching staff in the nation, and I think having -- that's not just because they were the National Head Coach and National Assistant Coach of the Year, and also I think if there was a National GA of the year, Coach E would have gotten it.

But they prepare us so well, and I think what makes them special is they care about us more than players. They care

about us as people, so that makes buy-in to what they say and believing what they say really easy.

Yeah, there's nobody else I'd rather play for, and they do such a good job of preparing us and just -- Coach P has been here a lot of times, and so just kind of her leadership in that has just been really good and easy to follow.

HALLIE HEIDEMANN: Going off of what Annie said, because our coaching staff loves us so well and cares for us so much as people first, I think it's easy to buy into what they're asking us to do, and it's fun to follow them and easy to trust them.

We know going into every game that we are prepared and equipped as we could possibly be because of their investment in us, their preparation in the scouting report, and then another thing that Coach P especially talks about a lot is operating out of love, not operating out of fear.

So in a moment like this where we're on a big stage and a big game is on the line, choosing and making the choices to operate out of love instead of out of fear.

Q. I know how much you enjoy personal accolades, but if you win on Saturday you'll be the first D-II woman to ever win a National Championship in women's basketball in three capacities, player, assistant, and head coach. How special would that be for you?

KARI PICKENS: It would be really special for this team. I have been so blessed to be surrounded by amazing people my entire career that led to two of the other National Championships, but I'm really excited for the opportunity to do it with this team because this team has been really special, and that's all I care about.

Q. Two incredibly proficient coaches came before you Robyn Fralick and Sue Ramsey. What has it been like to learn from them and create your own path on the grand stage?

KARI PICKENS: I've had incredible mentors my entire life, and I guess this could go off Dusty's question, as well. I have with that, whether it be my mom, who was my high school head coach, was an All-American at OU, a three-time All-American at OU, whether it was Coach Ramsay, who's a beast in every way, whether it's Robyn, whose record was 104-3 in her three seasons at Ashland. I've had incredible people come before me that I've had the opportunity to learn from.

And so my hope is that if we were to win and I were to be recognized as the only woman in Division II to be able to



do those three things, I hope that they can just leave a small -- I can be a mentor in some small way to someone else who's going to follow and try to do even bigger and better things, too.

Q. You've answered a lot of big-picture questions, but focusing on the game, could you give us an overview of what you've seen from Duluth?

KARI PICKENS: They're a really good team. I think that they dominate on both ends of the court. You can tell that their entire starting lineup is seniors just by the way that they play. They play really poised. They were down by I think it was 12 with two minutes to go in the regional championship game. I have never seen a comeback like that before. They just played like they were going to win.

We definitely have our hands full with them because they know how to win. They have a lot of hunger to do it. So we have to be able to, I think, dictate the tempo and attack them in different ways because we've got to be able to get them on their heels a little bit, and one of the best ways I think to do that is by attacking them in transition offense and also doing our best to shut down Brooke Olson and making someone else really step up.

Q. Coach, you guys had a big game against Glenville State; ended up pulling off the victory. Pulling off that question alongside Duluth, what did you learn from that game against Glenville State?

KARI PICKENS: That we have to continue to play our game, no matter what the score is. I know personally for me we got up by 19 against Glenville and it was like, okay, now we almost just need to hold on instead of, no, let's keep our foot on the pedal and let's keep attacking and let's keep pushing.

I think when we play really aggressive and we have just an attack mentality that we're a really hard team to stop.

Q. How has your coaching staff Jenna Kotas and Erin Daniels helped you find your footing this season?

KARI PICKENS: They've been awesome. Jenna is the exact opposite of me in the best way possible. I actually said that about my former assistant Stephanie Gelhausen, and I didn't know if I could find it in another person, and Jenna has done that for me. She's a ton of fun. She brings a ton of energy. Usually someone who's like, oh, we don't need to do that.

She's like, Kari, come on, it's a great experience, let's go do it. She's really helped bring out that fun energy this team needs, and she's really good at her craft, too. She's

made our guards a lot better. Savaya Brockington, when she came in I think she was shooting in the low 30s, high 20s from three, and now she's at about 40, and that's all Coach J and her working together. So Jenna has done a great job.

And then Erin is as great of a grad assistant as she was as a player. I loved her as a player. She was reliable. She was hardworking. I knew what she was going to get out of her every single day, and it was going to be a smile, and Coach P, whatever you need me to do, I'll do it. That is exactly what I've gotten out of her as a grad assistant, as well, so I couldn't be more thankful for my staff.

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