

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Final: Louisville vs Stanford

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Alamodome - Alamo

Stanford Cardinal

Coach Tara VanDerveer

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference

Stanford - 78, Louisville - 63

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by head coach Tara VanDerveer, and the alarm has gone off. Let's resume this press conference.

Q. Hi, Tara. First of all, I just want to say that you sitting there so calm and steady while a siren was going off behind you epitomizes Stanford women's basketball. Can you tell us -- Ashten told us, before she had to evacuate, that you ripped into them a little bit at halftime, which you don't usually do. I'm curious if you can kind of take us through what was said. Did you have to remind them how good and how deep they are?

TARA VANDERVEER: Honestly, I didn't recognize the people in the jerseys in the first half, and I just -- I thought we were taking a lot of bad shots. We weren't taking care of the ball. I just said, you know, don't worry about winning, compete, and be aggressive. We were not aggressive enough.

I did go through a couple statistics that I think got people's attention. We are better than that, but I will say this. I'm so proud of our team for the battle and just how hard we fought and how well we played to be able to go to the Final Four.

Sometimes you just have to go through adversity, and we've been going through adversity all year long, and our team really stepped up. Obviously, Ashten had a great second half. Lexie was there the whole game. She played a great game for us. Anna got her defense going in the second half. I thought Fran had some good contributions for us, Haley got it going in the second half, and Kiana did.

In some ways, the first half, some of the people rested a



little bit, and they could get it going, and we made some big plays.

Q. Can you talk about Kiana's game a little bit. I mean, I think it was -- it looked obvious to those of us watching the game -- I mean, she wants it so badly. She's home. She looked like she was pressing. I'm curious what you said to her specifically.

TARA VANDERVEER: I agree 100 percent. I told her, I just said run your team. Be a leader on the team and play through spurts. I got on her. I'll be honest with you. I got on Kiana and really our whole team, and Kiana stepped up just so big in the second half.

Q. You talked about that, the resiliency. Did you -- I mean, that's been such a theme almost hammered to death with your team, but everything that's happened to you this year is something you haven't experienced before, and you have not experienced winning while being behind by double digits before.

TARA VANDERVEER: You're right.

Q. Do you think the fact that this team has handled everything that's thrown at them helped in this very unusual situation, where you've really never had to dig down deep for a comeback?

TARA VANDERVEER: I think that our team has had to deal with things. Again, I think I -- I challenged our team at halftime, and I'm really proud of how people stepped up. Now, obviously -- you know, Louisville is a great team, and to play a second half and beat them by 27, I think it really says a lot about just how hard people were playing, how much they wanted to do it for each other, and how they were willing to listen to me instead of just saying, oh, she's just -- she's mad or whatever.

It was a total team effort. Again, I'm really proud. I told our team, I said, my dad always would say, it's not the start of the race, but the finish. When we come back in this locker room, let's be able to say we competed, and we did.

Q. Let me say it was not my cooking that set off the

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fire alarm here. Two questions, just what made you think to give Ashten a shot there in the second half? She didn't play in the first half, and yet she was the hero for you guys in the second half with her 6 for 6 shooting and 16 points. The second question is what does it mean to be back in the Final Four again?

TARA VANDERVEER: Let me answer the second one first.

It's great to be in the Final Four, Doug, and it didn't look like it was going to happen in the first half at all.

You know, we have played a lot of different post players, whether it's Fran, whether it's -- and cameras doing well, but she was limping a little bit, and she wasn't getting back on defense. So I did go with Ash. I went with Fran first. Fran, defensively, didn't understand what we needed her to do, and we didn't have time to explain it. But Ashten came in, and she gave us -- she was a two-way player. She played great defense. She rebounded. Honestly, I thought her three was the shot that really just kind of said, all right, we're back. We can win this game.

It was really exciting to see her play well. She's been doing great things for us all year. She really picked a great time to shine.

Q. Congrats, Coach, on the win. Just talk about that third quarter, 17-2 run to get you back in the game, Coach. I thought literally knocking shots behind the arc and also points in the paint were huge in the third quarter. Could you talk about that stretch, Coach.

TARA VANDERVEER: What really helped us, actually, we did make some shots. Our first half, shot selection was really poor. Our second half, we talked about it at halftime, I think we improved our shot selection, we moved the ball better, and we got stops defensively. I thought Anna Wilson really stepped up defensively for us. And then different people just relaxed and played.

Q. Coach, the competitiveness seemed to be maybe most needed on the rebound and the defensive effort. What do you kind of give credit for turning that around in the second half?

TARA VANDERVEER: I think that people just -- you know, we came out, and if we were like in a heavyweight fight, we were on the mat. We were getting pummeled. I think just our team just decided that we were going to be throwing the punches instead of being the recipient. We got more aggressive, and it started, I think, with Anna's defense. Kiana stepped up defensively, got steals. We didn't allow them to get second shots.

Ashten, Cam, Fran rebounded, and we took care of the ball. We had nine turnovers, and we had seven at halftime. We forced them into more turnovers than we had. They were more aggressive than we were, and when we turned that around, we got better.

Q. A quick follow-up. Lexie Hull, you mentioned she was there the whole game, and you've talked about her intelligence and grit before, but can you comment on just how many extra possessions she earns you every day?

TARA VANDERVEER: I thought Lexie played a great game. She played within herself. She worked hard at both ends of the court. She scored for us. She defended well. It was -- and she just -- she was playing -- she was aggressive from the get-go, and she was our leader out there in the first half, and then other people said, all right, she was kind of the engine of the train, and other people in the second half got on that train.

Q. Coach, congratulations on the win. What does this do for you guys moving forward in terms of confidence, when you were in a battle, a player comes off the bench, sparks the whole team, and then they realize, okay, we can turn it around, and we can play our game?

TARA VANDERVEER: I definitely think, to have a game like this, to win a close -- to be down and come back and basically win a close game is a confidence boost. More confidence never hurts.

Q. Just a quick question. Can you just comment on Haley Jones and her play, especially in the second half? She had to, I felt, a really quiet double double in the game, a really calming presence that kind of helped you guys out in the second half.

TARA VANDERVEER: I thought Haley had a great game too. Like you said, she rebounded. She was talking out there. She had some big baskets, going to the basket strong and finishing, just doing what we need her to do. I think she stepped up her defense more in the second half too.

Like you said, the only time I took her out was I just thought she was just a little winded, and I said, Haley, tell me when you're ready to go back in. We needed her out there, and she did a great job.

Q. One quick question. Is Cameron okay? Is she hurt at all?

TARA VANDERVEER: I think -- you know, I'm not sure. She did get hurt a little bit. We'll have to wait and see how she's doing. She told me she could go back in, but when she was out there, she didn't move the way I wanted her to. I'm hoping with a couple days and treatment, she'll be fine.

Q. Congratulations, Coach. Second half was obviously great. Everyone has commented on it. Twitter was speculating that you threatened to take away the ping pong table, and that's what sparked all the second half glory. Looks like we're set up for a rematch of the 2017 Final Four in South Carolina. Wondering how this team compares to the last time you faced off against the Gamecocks.

TARA VANDERVEER: Well, they had a great post in Asia Wilson, and they have a great post this year with Aliyah Boston. They have a great coach in Dawn Staley. Obviously, she's back on the bench. They have a terrific team. They're extremely well coached, athletic, they score, they run. We will have our work cut out for us.

Q. I just wondered if you could talk about Ashten coming in off the bench kind of epitomizes, I think, Stanford's greatest strength, which is your depth. If one player isn't hitting, can't do something, you've got a long line to look down the bench. Is that what you were thinking at halftime and then in the second half when you put her in?

TARA VANDERVEER: It probably looks like I should have put her in the first half, but I thought she did a great job for us. Maybe watching the first half, she understood what to do better, and when she went in, she did a great job.

Obviously, you can't expect someone to go 6 for 6 every game, but what I liked how she rebounded, she finished inside. She looked very confident. Our team was so excited for her, and that's -- having depth like that, where everyone is excited for other players is really important.

Q. Tara, I know sometimes in the immediate aftermath of a game, it's hard to have perspective on history, but I'll ask you a historical question. Where does that comeback rank in Stanford women's basketball history?

TARA VANDERVEER: Steve, I don't know this for a fact, but I do know, what I remember is that we were down 12 or more at halftime twice in an Elite Eight game. Once was when we beat Georgia to go to the Final Four in '91 and also against Notre Dame when we played them in the last final fours we went to in 2017.

So this is right up there, and I think especially because of this whole COVID situation. We've been in a hotel for two weeks. Maybe other teams would just say, oh, that's enough. We're ready to go home. This team really showed in the second half what they're made of, and I'm so proud, and I told them so after the game. I just love how we competed.

I really believe that going forward this will help us a lot.

Q. I've got to ask you one more thing. How are you going to celebrate tonight? You're not, like, going home. It's not like party time. You're just going back to the hotel. So just like ping pong for everyone, or what's happening?

TARA VANDERVEER: Well, we do have our finals of our ping pong tournament coming up, so that will be fun. Just being with our team, and that's been the best thing all year, like celebrating even the -- setting the record. It was with our team. So we'll be in the meeting room. I'll be wearing my mask.

I think our team will be just -- I told them let's enjoy it tonight, and then we've got to get to business tomorrow. It's the way to celebrate in COVID is to be with your team, and I'm very excited to be with them.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time and for sticking with us after the alarm.

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