

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal: Arizona vs Texas A&M

Saturday, March 27, 2021

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome - Mercado

Arizona Wildcats

Adia Barnes

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference



Arizona 74, Texas A&M 59

ADIA BARNES: We just beat a really good team. Gary Blair is a legend. He's an amazing coach. He's been here so many times. He has so much experience. He always has a competitive team that's capable of winning a championship. So we knew this was a very tough game.

I'm proud of the way we played, but we beat a really good team that could have won a championship. I'm proud of how we showed up today. I think in our room we believed in each other. We believed that this was possible. We weren't satisfied with being in the Sweet 16.

Aari led the way. But other people stepped up around here and made some really big plays. I'm just proud of our defensive effort. I'm proud of our pressing. We really put pressure on Texas A&M. I think it affected them. I'm just so happy with the way we played. We played with our hearts, won the 50/50 balls, did all the little things. I'm just really proud of how we played today.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open up the floor for questions.

Q. When you moved Aari off the ball, had her playing more of the two, you really seemed to excel in your offense then. How much harder is it to stop her when you don't know if she's going to be dominating the ball or coming at you off the wing?

ADIA BARNES: I think she's very hard to stop either way. When she was running the one, I think they had a really tough time with (indiscernible). Bringing her at the two, you have to guard her. She demands a lot of attention. Shaina also really good at going downhill.

Shaina and Aari were a terrific combination today. Very hard to guard. When you have Sam hitting shots, making big plays, stretching the defense, they were tough.

Yeah, decided to move Aari off the ball a little bit. It had success.

Q. What does it mean as a lifelong Wildcat to get this team somewhere they've never been before?

ADIA BARNES: I mean, it's amazing. When I think of Arizona, everything started there for me. When I first signed at Arizona, we were not a good program. They hired Joan, who had had success, went to the Final Four when she was at Long Beach. She hired Joan to build a program. I believed in Joan, had a connection with her. There were seven freshmen. We did something special. First-year growing pains, then kind of got better. Really the same trajectory as we have now with me. They're parallel.

It means a lot. It means a lot because it's where everything started for me as a player. Their dream is to go back to their alma mater and do something special. We always talk about completing our legacy, and we've done that.

I'm just proud of this team. We've been resilient. This has been a tough year with COVID. It's been different. It's been hard. There's been a lot of adversity. We've stayed mentally tough. We've stayed together as a family. We don't just say family, we are family. There's ups and downs in family, but we found a way to get better throughout the year. We're peaking at the right time. That's what winning a championship is all about. You get hot at the right time.

I remember at Washington going to the Final Four. We got hot at the right time and did that. I feel like we're playing our best basketball right now. Yeah, I think it's just being the beginning for us.

Q. Obviously Aari had a great game with 31 points. You had eight different scorers scoring the basketball tonight. Talk about the versatility of your team.

ADIA BARNES: Yeah, I think a lot of people have questioned our offense. It's really quite irritating because



it's not who we are. We are a very good defensive team. We are going to grind you out. We are going to put pressure. We're going to make it ugly. We're going to turn you over, that creates our offense. That's our personnel.

Aari can score at will. She can score a lot of points. A lot of times they're 10 feet in the paint. We knew defensively, we thought Texas A&M hadn't been pressured the way we were going to pressure. We were able to convert. Obviously on the back of Aari. Aari had an amazing first half, she was unstoppable off the pick and roll situations, getting to the rim. She had a great night.

If you look at people like Sam, she just fills the stat sheet. She's incredible. One of our most valuable players. She hits threes. She always guards a tough guard. She plays the one, two, three, four, five for us. She runs the offense. She does so many things. She's so valuable. She's hard to have off the floor.

I thought everybody stepped up at different times. Everybody played their part. Shaina came in, went downhill right away. Got to the free-throw line. Trinity and Cate, offensively they were a little bit undersized. Got huge rebounds, hit big threes, made big plays. Everybody did their part. We're playing some of our best basketball and peaking at the right time. We always talked about that's what we wanted to do in the tournament.

Remember, I don't know if you remember, we've been to the NIT. This is uncharted territory. We've never been here. Everybody we're facing has been here multiple times. Last year we were supposed to go to the tournament, host the first two rounds, then COVID happened. We don't have the experience. This is all new for us. I'm even more proud of how we've handled everything. We didn't get rattled. We took their punches. We fought back. We got stops and scored when we needed to.

I thought we played a really good game. We beat a really good team that's coached really well.

Q. You talked about alums coming back, what does it mean to see the alums?

ADIA BARNES: It means a lot. LaBrittney drove here. She says she can't stay because she has to go to work on Monday. My goal at Arizona is to make it a player's program, just like on the men's side. I watched when I was assistant coach at Washington what Lorenzo Romar did, how he had all the former NBA players back, how they worked out at Washington, how he just embraced that. He would have pickup games, use NBA players to mentor his players.

I am doing that at Arizona. Creating a bond that I didn't have when I first graduated. I wasn't in touch with Arizona. So it's my goal to bring these former players back, to touch our team, if they're playing pro or overseas, I want them to work out in our facilities. That's what I'm creating. That's important to me. I want them to want to come back. I want them to meet us on the road, talk to our kids. If there's an alumni that's a doctor, former player, I want her to inspire the next doctors on my team, all those things. I think that's what it's all about.

Having LaBrittney in the stands was so meaningful. Having former players text me, feel a part of this program, is very meaningful to me. It is very important to create that environment at Arizona.

Q. Why do you think more shots are falling for Aari? She shot 38% during the season, but she's shooting 53% here.

ADIA BARNES: Great players show up on the big stage. That's what she did. We're peaking at the right time as a team. She is letting the game come to her. She is not forcing shots. She was 12-for-21, that's a pretty good darn stat line with I think only one turnover. She doesn't want to turn the ball over. She's running our team and she's a player with the ball a lot.

For her to be able to do that, it's amazing. What's more amazing, there are a lot of good players in the country nationally. But there are not a lot of great players who are good on both ends. She is phenomenal on the offensive end, she's hard to guard, you have to put two or three people on her or have multiple people in the paint. Defensively she presses the ball for 39 minutes a game. To have the energy she has on offense, I don't know how she does it. She would play 40 if I didn't give her a minute here and there.

But that's who she is. That's what makes her unique and special. That's why she's the best point guard in the country. To me she proved that in the tournament. There was no other player that has impacted their team more than Aari has impacted Arizona. There's other players that are really good, they've done a lot of great things. But they have a lot of -- they have All-Americans next to them, multiple 40% three-point shooters, we don't have that.

She takes us on our back and takes us a long way. Other people step up. She believes in her teammates. She sets them up. Sam made huge plays. Sam had huge blocks. Helena came in, had huge plays. Trinity, Cate, everybody is playing hard for her. We're peaking at the right time. She's stepping up on the big stage when she should and

that's why she's the best in the country.

Q. You know this program as much as anybody. You know where it's been. Personally just you, what does this mean to take this program somewhere it's never been?

ADIA BARNES: I mean, it means the world. I'm just so proud. I knew today would be a really tough game. I thought we were capable of winning. I didn't know how we were going to show up. We've never been here. It's not that there's pressure, but we were the underdogs. They're a really good team, one of the best in the SEC. They're coached by a legend. So we knew it was going to be tough. We just fought it out. We talk about winning five-minute wars, play in five-minute increments at a time. We want to win every war. We didn't look at the overall score. When we were up 10 or 13, we didn't look. We said win the next five minutes.

I thought we had huge defensive plays. We're playing some of our best basketball at the right time. That's how you win championships.

Just happy. We're not satisfied with going to the Elite 8. This is uncharted territory, so we have nothing to lose. No one in the country expected us to be in the Elite 8. When they talked about the region, no one even considered us, we weren't even in the conversation. In the Arizona room we believe in each other. That's all that matters. That's what we're going with. We fight for each other. We play hard, play with passion, grit. We don't take plays off. That's why we're having success.

Q. As the last seconds were ticking off, what are the first things that come to your mind?

ADIA BARNES: We just beat a really good team, we're going to the Elite 8. Just looking around, really happy with how we played, happy with the manner. We came out prepared. Our team executed the game plan, did every single thing I asked every time. Played with their hearts. Did all the things that we said we would do.

So when they're able to execute that, it feels good. When I see them correcting each other on little things that I've been correcting them on the whole year, it feels good as a coach.

It's more meaningful for me because this is my fifth year at Arizona. When I took the job, it was a bad job. Everybody said don't take it. I don't know if anybody said take the job. All my mentors, friends, legends in the game, said don't take it, it's a bad job. You can't win. It's hard to recruit there.

We did it. We were like 300 in the RPI. Now just to turn it around and be doing something special, going to the Elite 8 when no one would have thought. We didn't get tournament experience last year. To just be doing it, I'm just so proud.

We play in the best conference in the country. The Pac-12 has prepared us for this. Night in and night out in the Pac-12, we're playing teams like Stanford, UCLA, great teams, Oregon State, Oregon. Coming and playing an SEC team is just different, but we're prepared for that.

So I'm just so happy that I'm doing it with the kids I'm doing it with who came to Arizona on a leap of faith. There was no success within the last 10 years. We were not a good program. They came, they took a chance, they believed in me, they believed in Arizona. They believed one day we'll do something special.

So Sam's first year she cried all the time. I know she thought about leaving. We won six games. Aari sat on the sideline that year. I talked about, we're going to be better. But it was hard because she had never lost that much in her life. So to turn that around, win the WNIT, get Tucson backing us, selling out. Not to go to the tournament last year because of COVID, that was devastating. To come here without any experience, go to the Elite 8, it's amazing. It's all from these young ladies that believed in Arizona and themselves when no one else did. That's why it's more special to me.

Q. After your film study, what did you positively, absolutely think had to happen for you to win?

ADIA BARNES: I think we had to play phenomenal defense. I knew that we had to turn them over. I didn't think that they had handled a lot of pressure like we give pressure. So knew we had to have really good pick-and-roll defense and had to be able to hit some shots.

Obviously I didn't know if Aari would have 31 points, but I knew we had to hit some threes because I knew they were going to congest the paint and play percentages. We faced a lot of congestion in the paint, we were able to hit some shots. But had to have a solid defensive game because that's how we create our offense. Then just hit some big shots. People stepped up at the right time and we did that. But we had to do those things in order to win because they're a really good team.

Q. You talked about uncharted waters. This regional final is going to be two programs that have never been to an Elite 8 before. Last two WNIT champions. You and Teri took programs that you didn't think could get

here. Talk about what that means for women's basketball, to have two young coaches like you guys be in the Elite 8, also two schools known for men's basketball?

ADIA BARNES: It means a lot. It means a lot because we haven't been there. I think that it's special. Yes, both programs are really good on the men's side. I know Arizona, on the women's side, they've kind of been sleeping for a long time. We kind of woke them up the last couple years.

It means a lot. They have a little bit more experience being in a tournament than we do. We have nothing to lose. People didn't think we'd be here. So I think we both have changed the programs. They're a really good team. But I think at this time of year it's survive and advance.

For us, it's like we don't care who we're playing next. We know every team we have respect for, we know every team is really good. For us, it was kind of like we're on to the next. Now we're all Indiana. We're not looking at anything else. We know it's going to be a tough game.

All these games at this time of year are tough. I always talk about in the game, it's not the last possession, it's the missed 50/50 ball in the first quarter, it's the missed box-out, it's the little things that matter. One day at a time. We're going to watch some film tonight. It's going to be light. Walk-through tomorrow obviously for both teams. We just go out and play.

I'm happy because we're peaking at the right time. But it is uncharted territory. I think it doesn't matter because we're playing some of our best basketball. I don't mind the uncharted territory. Honestly, before the game I didn't know if we would be a little bit tight. That's not what I'm seeing. I'm seeing a look in their eyes that's a look of confidence. I am seeing they are ready to go to war. I'm seeing they believe in what I'm saying and what I'm asking them to do. There's no question. They look me in the eye. They're ready. So I'm ready to go to war with this team. I wouldn't choose it any different way with any different team. We're ready for the next game.

Q. You were talking about the support of Tucson here locally. On social media throughout this tournament, tonight after the final buzzer, Dave Heeke, Robbins and Coach Fisch who just got done with football practice out there, what is that feeling like?

ADIA BARNES: It's amazing. For Jedd Fisch, who has been amazing since he's been at Arizona, I think he is perfect for what Arizona stands for, what we're all about. He's like the biggest fan. His family is the biggest fan.

But for our football coach to come down to San Antonio from Tucson after practice to support the women's team, it means a lot. Like, I am so appreciative. I think he's amazing. So thank you to him for taking the time to do that.

I think at most universities a woman's basketball team, you don't even see the football coach. Usually you're not at the same meetings, you really don't even have a relationship. It's been opposite of that at Arizona.

Arizona is a special place. We're like a family. Coach Miller and I, Coach Candrea, I have amazing, legendary coaches down the hall and we help each other. That's what make Arizona is amazing. It's not like relationships at other schools. It is different. The proof of that is Jedd Fisch coming. President Robbins, president of the school, flew down for the first game, flew back, flew back down for the second game, flew back, now here for the third game. It means a lot. They support me and love what we're doing.

Dave Heeke to come here and do the same thing, some of our biggest donors. They support women's basketball. In a lot of places around this country, women's basketball is not supported. It's all about men's basketball. At Arizona it's not like that. They support me. They believe in what I'm doing. I would not have been able to build the program without the support of my administration and the president of the school.

I'm fortunate. I know it's not normal at every place. I have a lot of friends that coach in this business, and they don't have support. It's very hard to be successful when you don't have support. I have it at Arizona. I'm fortunate. I love what they do. I love how they treat me. I love that they support our program.

THE MODERATOR: We appreciate your time. Congratulations on an outstanding win.

ADIA BARNES: Thank you.

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