

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Final: Indiana vs Arizona

Monday, March 29, 2021

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome - Mercado

**Arizona Wildcats**

**Aari McDonald**

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference



Arizona 66, Indiana 53

**Q. You looked like you were trying to keep it normal, but you were all about to burst. When did you really start to feel like this was going to happen?**

AARI McDONALD: I would say when it was like a minute and like 20 something. We was up like a couple of possessions. I knew they had to foul us. We were getting stops towards the end, so I had no doubt we were going to -- I was like we got this, we sealed it.

**Q. Aari, what does this all mean to you at this moment? This is what you said you were going to do and you're on your way.**

AARI McDONALD: This means a lot. It's a surreal moment. Literally I was on Facebook yesterday, and yesterday made it a year that I said I was coming back. It's just crazy how things come full circle. You make goals, to see yourself and your team achieve them like this, it's crazy. I'm just so excited.

We just beat a great team. I mean, man, I'm proud of my team so much. It's crazy. I give thanks to God. This is a big deal. We just created more history (smiling).

**Q. Can you just talk a little bit about what happened there in the fourth quarter to allow you guys to get control of the game? Just emotionally, what were you going through when you went down on the floor with your ankle setback?**

AARI McDONALD: Yeah, fourth quarter we had to get stops. We knew that. We knew we couldn't trade buckets. They're a good offensive team. We knew we had to buckle down on defense, take pride in our individual assignments. We were rebounding, as well. It's not too

often we win the rebound war, and we did today.

I never cry, so that's how you kind of knew I was in pain. But, I mean, I shook it off. My team needs me, I wanted to get back on the court. I had to suck it up, but I'll be fine.

**Q. 64 points in these last two games. Can you comment on how you stepped up and how your teammates helped that?**

AARI McDONALD: When you know, you know you're feeling it. I knew I wasn't doing too well in the regular season, conference stuff. I was taking bad shots. But I'm letting the game come to me. My teammates are putting me in successful positions, the coaches are putting me in successful positions as well. I'm really just taking what the defense is giving me, honestly. Credit to my teammates and my coaches.

**Q. Can you talk about just with the growing confidence that you guys I think clearly have, what that means going into a national semifinal with Connecticut?**

AARI McDONALD: It means a lot. We need the momentum. I'm just so happy, my teammates, they're finally believing. They're having the confidence. Like I knew they could. I mean, just my teammates, they keep stepping up. They keep hitting big shots when we need them. I love that. I'm happy when my teammates are converting. I love that.

We just need this confidence momentum going into UConn. UConn we already know what they're about. Powerhouse, well-coached, skillful players. Hey, I got my chances with my teammates, ride or die, going to war with them.

**Q. When I was watching the game, you're from California, you're a West Coast kid, did you imagine you would always go to a Pac-12 school? Why did you want to play in the Pac-12? For a long time this was not the top conference in women's basketball.**

AARI McDONALD: Yeah, just the type of person I am. I'm



very family oriented. I always want to go somewhere where my parents can reach me. I always knew I wanted to stay on the West Coast. The Pac-12, they evolved. We have some great players. We have great teams in our conference.

Hey, we're the best conference in the country. You could say, yeah, I belong in a Pac-12. I pretty much knew I was going to end up at a Pac-12 school.

**Q. I saw some stuff from Dominique's mom cheering you guys on. What does it mean thinking about the players from last year who didn't get to do this?**

AARI McDONALD: Yeah, just referring back to my article. This is truly for them. We were bummed that our season got cut short last year. Just for us to perform at the level we're performing and on this big, like, stage, it means a lot. I know they're smiling, watching us, supporting us from wherever they are. This is truly for them. I hope they're enjoying the ride, enjoying watching us.

**Q. After you got to Arizona, when did you think something like this was legitimately possible? When did you think you guys could be here?**

AARI McDONALD: I would say last year. I started with last year. We were talented, a very smart team, defensive oriented. Everybody can go get their buckets. Last year, I knew we were destined to make a big run how we were playing.

**Q. I know you had a chance to go pro before this season, and you decided to come back. Is this the moment that you're feeling right now, after cutting down the nets with your teammates, this is the reason you decided to come back to school?**

AARI McDONALD: Oh, yeah, for sure. I came back to make history. I also came back to sharpen my game. People said I can't shoot. Now look what I'm doing. I'm making my teammates better as I'm actually getting better as a player, as a leader. It feels amazing.

Like I said, I'm flourishing under great people who trust in me and believe in me.

**Q. Coach Barnes always talk about the five-minute wars. Take me through the last five minutes of the game.**

AARI McDONALD: Yeah, we were taking punches. We were going back and forth. We were fouling. We knew we had to stop fouling and play solid defense. Berger was getting hot, hitting clutch pull-ups. Hey, take it one war at a

time. Coach said the last timeout, we got to win this war. Hey, we really tuned in, we really locked in. It was gritty. I like that. We were fighting. Everybody took pride in their defense.

**Q. Are you willing to share a little bit of what you and Adia had to say to one another after this game tonight?**

AARI McDONALD: Yeah, of course. Coach, she was hugging me. She just said, Who would have thought? She just said she's glad we're on this journey together. We faced a lot of adversity. Nobody believed in us, but us. She's so happy. She just said, We can go get this whole thing.

**Q. Take me through your ankle injury, what happened on that play, how you were able to overcome that, how you're feeling now.**

AARI McDONALD: Yeah, I was driving on the right side. I tried to do a kick-up to one of my teammates on the side. As I passed, I stopped, my ankle kind of turned. No. 4, she put her pressure on my ankle. It hurt pretty bad.

But it's a little sore, but I'll be fine. Just going to recover and just rest honestly.

**Q. For you and for the seniors, what does this mean for you guys as a class? What does Coach mean to you throughout your journey at Arizona?**

AARI McDONALD: As seniors, this means a lot. Like we said, we got to go out with a bang. We're definitely doing that.

Coach Barnes means a lot to me. She's like an older sister to me, like a mother to me away from home. Always helping me. I know I can go and talk to her not just about basketball but life, what I'm going through, what I'm dealing with.

You just always want to have a relational coach on your side. I think that's how it kind of plays a part in basketball. I trust her, she trusts me. I mean, just a young player, playing in a coach who believes in me, very relational. Not just cares about you on the court but cares about your well-being.

**Q. You talked about it being a team game. 24 out of the last 41, two double-doubles in the last three games, 11-of-18 from behind the arc. You've logged 76 minutes. Talk about what's worked here in the last couple games. Trinity with a double-double, Helena hitting a couple huge three-pointers there in the fourth quarter.**

AARI McDONALD: Just taking what the defense is giving me, being patient on offense, just using my arsenal. I work on stuff and skills with Coach Salvo. Everything is coming full circle. I'm having confidence. I'm playing with high energy. My teammates are setting me up. I'm hot. When I'm feeling it, I'm feeling it. Coach isn't going to tell me to stop shooting and my teammates aren't either. So I'm just feeling it.

I'm happy that others are converting. Yeah, we had two people in double figures, but people are stepping up and doing their part, perfecting their role, hitting big shots when we need them.

**Q. Can you talk about when the buzzer sounded and you were celebrating, got to cut down the nets? Was it everything you ever envisioned?**

AARI McDONALD: Oh, yeah, for sure. It kind of brought back memories NIT. We cut the nets down. Nobody thought we was going to be good that year. What really helped -- at the moment before we left, coach had us visualize what we're going to accomplish up here. We cut down nets before we left. At first I was kind of like, This is crazy, what? Now actually visualizing it, actually now doing it, it's crazy. It worked. I'm just excited.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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