

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

Monday, March 29, 2021

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome - Mercado

Arizona Wildcats

Adia Barnes

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference

Arizona 66, Indiana 53

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for Coach Barnes.

Q. Aari has had phenomenal back-to-back games, phenomenal games throughout the entire tournament. Where does this rank in your mind as some of the best tournament performances of all time?

ADIA BARNES: To me this is the best. She's been amazing. I mean, stars make big plays, they step up when it really counts. No one remembers how you start, they remember how you finish.

Aari said it perfectly. At times this year she struggled a little bit. I think she wasn't letting the game come to her, really trying to really carry us so much. I think I've seen a different Aari in the tournament. Just more relaxed, more at ease, really leading the team in so many different ways, letting the game come to her. She's been unstoppable. I mean, no one can guard her.

Just for her to have 31, 33, then to shoot the percentages she shot. Aari is only about 5'2". Just kidding. She's 5'5", but to have 11 rebounds and four assists, she's just been playing at another level.

I'm just so proud of her because all her hard work is paying off. She's just been phenomenal and she's leading this team.

Q. When did you think this was a real possibility in the Arizona program? She thought it was last year. When did you think you guys could legitimately do this?

ADIA BARNES: If you would have told me this year we're going to be playing UConn in the Final Four, I would have



said, I don't know about that (smiling).

You know, it became a reality that we could do something really special last year. Last year, just the way that we won games, I think it really helped -- we lost like three or four double overtime games the year prior to that. We couldn't win. Like against Oregon State, UCLA in triple overtime, against elite teams in the Pac-12, we weren't able to get those wins.

The following year, which is last year, we were able to convert and get those wins because we had that experience of playing really good teams down the stretch. It was unfortunate for us we didn't get that tournament experience last year.

I thought last year we had a chance, I felt like we would have gone deep in the tournament.

Then you look at this year, we didn't have last year's tournament experience. But since the Pac-12 tournament, we played bad, at the end of the Pac-12 tournament. We got back, we rested mentally and physically. We worked on a couple key things. We just played at another level starting from the tournament.

Like, it wasn't perfect today, but I felt like we just found ways to get wins, found ways to make big plays.

It's the small things that everybody is doing, but everybody has found a way to bring their game, to raise their game a level. That's why I'm so proud because I'm looking in their eyes, and there's a fire, there's a belief, there's a confidence, there's a will to win. I love that.

I wasn't super nervous about the game. I thought they're going to give it all, so we're going to do everything we can. If it's meant to be, we'll win. When you look in your players' eyes, there's this look of belief, confidence, I love coaching that. I try to coach my heart out and do my best for them.

Q. What does it feel like to achieve a goal this big? In that moment when it's done, what does it feel like to do it?



ADIA BARNES: It's amazing. It's surreal, like Aari said. It's kind of like, Wow, we're going to the Final Four.

I don't think anybody in the country would have thought. No one really believed I think but the people in our room believed we could do anything. I'm just proud of this team. I'm proud of the way Aari has led us. I'm proud of Sam, our other team captain. I'm proud of just the whole team. We've worked hard. We've made a lot of sacrifices. This has been a year full of adversity.

COVID has been hard for student-athletes. It really has been. So I give my team so much credit for being at the Final Four, being in lockdown, just finding a way to make the best out of it and still have a good attitude, still want to stay here and play.

So I'm just so proud of our team and our players and our organization, everything. Just words can't describe how I feel.

Q. Sort of the full circle thing of your college career as a player ended going against UConn, the Sweet 16. Now you'll face them in the Final Four. If you could talk about the fact that you said all along that confidence you're seeing in your players, how important that is facing UConn? Also you mentioned yesterday I think it was that you represent professional basketball players going into coaching. We've seen so many WNBA players tweet at you and are proud of you. You're the second WNBA player taking a team to the Final Four. Dawn being first. She might join you. What does it mean to have that sorority in coaching?

ADIA BARNES: It means a lot. It means the world to me because I've created so many lifelong friendships throughout my years being pro. Lauren Jackson, Sue Bird, Sheri Sam, Tully Bevilacqua they all -- we had a championship team. I have lifelong friends that I loved dearly.

It feels good when they're all reaching out, texting me. Swin texted me. Everybody texted me. I think there needs to be more players, WNBA players, former players coaching women's basketball. I don't think there are a lot of us because I don't think a lot of us have had a tremendous amount of success.

I represent that. I want to see more of that. So I'm proud. Dawn has always been someone who believes in me and sent me a nice message. We all support each other because it's meaningful when you can play pro, you walked the walk. I think a lot of people want to play for players, coaches that have been there, done that. It's not something you read about in a book. It's something you've

actually experienced and went through. I've been cut, I've been a role player, I was an All-American in college, I've been a role playing trying to make a roster in the league. I've been there and done that. That speaks volumes for people that have been there.

I just want to see more coaches doing it. I'm happy I can represent that. I said before I represent more than that. I just had a baby. I have a six-month-old. It's been a hard year for me. A lot of sleepless nights. I represent moms that can coach and they can be great at both things. A lot of people say you can't be a great mom, a great coach, this and that. I think you can do it all. I think you can play pro, I played 13 years pro, so I had a baby late. I had my second child at 44, 43 actually. Most people say you can't do that.

I represent a lot. I'm proud. I think you don't have to stop coaching when you're a mom. You just have a village around you. I have some great support. So I bring my six-month-old whenever. I'm feeding her right before the game. When we can represent more than one thing, I think women are kick-ass, we can handle a lot. I wouldn't have been able to handle half the stuff I could handle if I didn't play pro and handled adversity as a pro player. Maybe that made me more resilient, stronger.

Q. You talked about your team's confidence facing UConn. You said they haven't felt pressure. How big is it to go against UConn, that confidence, a factor?

ADIA BARNES: It's really important because UConn has been there so many times. Coach Auriemma is a legend. It's kind of a shock when he doesn't go to the Final Four and win a championship. He's just done an amazing job. One of the best coaches there is.

They're a confident team because it's chartered territory. It's uncharted for us. This is something they're used to.

Having confidence is really important this time of year. But I feel like our team is playing our best basketball. We've peaked at the right time. To win a championship, all it does is you have to beat that team one time. I feel like anybody this time of year can win one time on any given night.

I think for us there's no pressure. No one expects Arizona to win a championship. No one expected Arizona to be in the Elite 8, Sweet 16, Final Four. We don't have anything to lose. We can play loose, free, because we don't have the pressure.

We're just going out, we're having fun right now. We're playing good basketball. We're playing for each other,

enjoying the ride. We're going to put it all on the line. We play hard. We're not soft. We don't take plays off. We play with our hearts. It may not be pretty, and that's okay. We're going to give 100%. Whatever happens at the end of that, whether we win or lose, that's what's meant to be.

We can control what we can.

Q. What makes this team so special that they're here now and the possibility of doing what you think is doing so much more than this?

ADIA BARNES: This team is special because if you look at, like, top to bottom on our roster, we don't have multiple All-Americans. Aari is our All-American, our go-to player. But we have a lot of people that were maybe overlooked or just not stars.

But we've had people that have really stepped up. Sam Thomas had one Pac-12 offer. She was with me the first year we won six games. That's what Aari was sitting out on the sideline due to transferring. So Sam is the last of her class. She just stuck it out. She never had lost so much in her life, stuck it out. She's so valuable.

We have some players on our team that they started for us, wouldn't be starters for other teams. But it's very hard for us to have Sam off the floor, keep her off the floor. It's hard. She have plays the one through five for us. She does everything we ask.

We have Cate Reese who has improved so much. She scores inside, scores out. She makes tough plays. She believes in everything we do. She runs the floor like a gazelle. We have Bendu, transfer from Indiana who is an amazing defender, who brings us toughness, experience, drives the basket, does everything we ask, plays different roles. Then we have Helena, sharpshooter off the bench. Lauren Ware, young, who is getting great experience, is going to be a star in our conference and in the country. Shaina, I don't know too many people that can guard Shaina going downhill. She's one of the best athletes in the country. She came to Arizona to do something special also.

Then Trinity. No one thought Trinity would come to the best coast, I always say the West Coast. She's a Florida kid who has made a huge impact on our program. She's brought muscle, toughness. She showed up big in controlling the boards. She has been phenomenal. I wish I would have coached her for four years.

Our whole team does their role, no one tries to step outside their role. They play for each other. We play hard. So I just can't ask for anything else in a team. They do

whatever I ask. They'll run through a wall for me. So I love coaching a team like that. I can't ask for anything more.

Q. Cate specifically tonight. You might look over a stat sheet with five points and six boards, but what did she do that didn't show up?

ADIA BARNES: I think she made tough plays. There were a couple physical plays that I thought could have been fouls. But she stuck with it. She was in foul trouble. I think that last foul, or the fifth foul, was a tough call, but before that just the reach. We talked about not making those type of plays, taking that chance, because we need her on the floor.

I thought she gave us buckets when it counted. She played some good defense. I thought she played strong. It wasn't her best game. But a couple weeks ago, if Cate would have only had five points, we wouldn't have won. She still have four offensive rebounds. I think she still played a pretty good game. It wasn't her best. But for us to have other people step up, it's important. We still found a way to win. But she did help us when she was on the floor.

Q. You have been around the Pac-12 for a long time. Obviously you played in it, then you coached at Washington, now you're coaching at Arizona. There have been five new teams to the Final Four in the last five years, including you guys. Four of them are from the Pac-12. Why is this conference so good? More importantly, how has it gotten so much better overed last decade?

ADIA BARNES: I think it's the best conference in the country. There's no doubt about that. It's so good because I think we have elite coaches. You have coaches like Tara VanDerveer, one of the best in the world, who is always good, just really tough to play against. Then you have Oregon State, Scott Rueck is a phenomenal coach that has won a lot of different levels. Then you have Kelly Graves. You have Cori Close. We just have a tremendous amount of good coaches.

Every game is really hard, top to bottom, one through 12. There's no guaranteed win. I think other conferences, you know you could beat the bottom two or three teams. In our conference you can't.

I think the preparation for every different team, you're going to play Oregon State, they're going to play a certain style, you're going to play ASU, they're going to play a certain style, then you're going to play Stanford. I think the preparation of that prepares us for tournaments. I think that's why we have so much success in the NCAA

tournament, because it's hard.

In the Pac-12, we chose to play 22 games. Most of us didn't get to 22 except for Stanford. Even to play 17, 18 games against top competition, it's really challenging. I think the coaching is elite. I think that's what separates us. I think that's why we have success in the NCAA tournament.

Q. Talk about from a national perspective recruiting, national media. What does this mean to the program going forward?

ADIA BARNES: It means a lot. I think when you win, I think you have the proof that you're doing something right and are successful. I think in our program, like our players improve. If you look at Cate as a freshman, you look at Aari two or three years ago, you look at Sam her freshman year, our players get better. We pride ourselves on player development. We pride ourselves on a lot of little things that I think a lot of programs don't do. It's just our philosophy. It had to be our philosophy because we weren't getting McDonald's All-Americans. Some programs have a lot, we don't. We have one who is Cate Reese.

We have to get our players better, prepare them, and figure out to grind it out. I think our defense this year has been phenomenal. I think our style of play is fun. I think players want to play in an exciting style. We go do that. We don't sit back in zones, play percentages. We get out and guard you. That's the way I loved to play as a player. That was fun. Turning people over, going in transition, that's a fun style. I don't think it's fun walking up the court and playing percentages on defense. That's what we do.

I think I'm a player's coach. Aari, I let her go. She's one of the best guards in the country. I guide her. They go out and play. I think a good sign for a coach is when your players play hard for you. Nothing's perfect anywhere, but they play hard and they believe and they have confidence. We work on the things -- I feel like they're prepared. We do our best. I think the players have done their best to get us this far. It's all a credit to them and what they do. I'm just along for the ride.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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