

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Final: Texas vs South Carolina

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome - Hemisfair

## South Carolina Gamecocks

## Zia Cooke

### Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference



well, but we just came out with the victory.

**Q. Zia, just kind of going off of that, I remember you saying very early in the season that, when you put it all together, it would be scary. Have you guys put it all together yet?**

**ZIA COOKE:** No. That's why it's even scarier because it's not there yet. We're getting closer and closer to the goal we want to get to, and the pieces are falling into place. It's coming, though. Almost there, like this much.

**Q. Hi, Zia, firstly, congratulations on the win, and also congratulations on becoming the most outstanding player. Just a statement, towards the end of the third quarter, what was on your mind after that reverse layup you had going off that run to end the quarter?**

**ZIA COOKE:** First I thought it was a foul, but we moved past that. But I will say like towards the third and fourth quarter, it was hard for me to not get too excited. I'm like, wow, look at the score. We're winning. I had to keep myself calm and stay composed out there. I was very excited seeing the clock run out, knowing we'll be headed to the Final Four.

**Q. Zia, congratulations on the win and on being named Most Outstanding Player. Can you just talk about the resilience of this team and all the things that you've gone through this season, going through ups and downs, having some not so good games on a big stage, but now to come in the NCAA Tournament and lead your team to the Final Four. You were cooking with grease out there tonight. I mean, you kind of got to showcase your ability in the open floor. Just how good does it feel, after everything you've been through, all the ups and downs this season?**

**ZIA COOKE:** I just want to say it starts with Coach. She's resilient. So we're a reflection of her. The way she teaches us out there is the way we play out there on the court. We don't back down from anyone. We've been through a lot, but we fall, but we get right back up.

That's just our main goal. Any time we're down, any time

South Carolina - 62, Texas - 34

**Q. How's it going, Zia? You're kind of showing off the trophy. A lot of people thought it was ingrained because you guys were supposed to get here last year. How hard was this season? How difficult was it to get to this point and win this game to get to the Final Four?**

**ZIA COOKE:** It's been very difficult. We've been hit with a lot of different stuff. We lost four games this season. A lot of teams might not be able to come back for stuff like that, but we were able to stick together as a team, and we were able to come back, and now we're on our way to the Final Four.

**Q. Zia, congratulations. Just yesterday you were talking about how you dreamt of playing in a game like this. Now you're holding the trophy, headed to the Final Four. What does this moment mean to you?**

**ZIA COOKE:** It's very surreal for me. I was out there, and I was just staring like, wow, I'm really here, like we're really going to the Final Four. I feel like our work isn't done yet. I don't want to get my hopes up too high. We still have two more games to go, but I'm ready for it.

**Q. Zia, you guys held Texas to zero points in the fourth quarter. That's the first scoreless quarter in NCAA women's tournament history since the quarters have started. You talked about not being done yet. Is the defense going to be what makes the difference between winning a National Championship?**

**ZIA COOKE:** Definitely. I think defense is what wins games. Of course, you have to have the offensive part, but if you're not a well put together defensive team, it's going to be tough. Texas was definitely a good defensive team as

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we're doubted, we've got to keep the foot on the gas.

**Q. Zia, congratulations. I apologize if you have already been asked this. This is going to be the first time there are going to be two Black women head coaches in the Final Four. What does that mean, and what kind of a message does that send, especially after the year that this country has had?**

ZIA COOKE: That's history being made. It's a beautiful thing. Just the way that the women are being inspirations to everyone in the world, it's a beautiful thing.

I think that a lot of people has also been watching women's basketball more. So it just shows that we're on the radar now. If women are standing up and doing the same things that men can do.

**Q. You mentioned those four losses you guys had earlier in the season. I was just curious, those were against some pretty high caliber teams. What did you learn about yourselves in those losses that's prepared you now for this tournament run?**

ZIA COOKE: We've got to play as a team. We've had sparks where we weren't playing as a team. Everyone was getting involved, and the flow wasn't there. That's what we're making sure now is the flow being there. Everyone is running it through Aliyah. She's a key factor to this team, rebounding, and doing everything we need to do to win.

**Q. Real off topic here, but there's been some legislation introduced that will be voted on soon about athletes being able to monetize their image, and being as how you have a lot of social media presence that could be in the future, you could monetize that and make money off of your social media posts. What do you think about that?**

ZIA COOKE: I'm not really too worried about that right now. That's good to know, but I'm kind of focused on the main goal right now. So I don't really have any thoughts on that.

**Q. Obviously, the job's not finished, but embracing the moment, that's something you guys have been able to do each round of this tournament. You waited 383 days to get to this point. What does it mean seeing you guys throwing up the confetti, just enjoying the moment and the accomplishment?**

ZIA COOKE: It feels great. I keep saying that like it's still a surreal feeling for me. It takes me a while to process things. So when I get back to the room, I might shed a tear or something because it's a dream for me, and I think it's a

dream for any young girl.

I've been working hard my whole life. My teammates have been working hard our whole lives. Like Coach said, she feel like we deserve it, and we think we deserve it as well, so we'll just go out and play our hardest.

**Q. Can you talk a little bit about the process that this team has to go through each year, bringing in players like yourself, who are highly regarded high school players, and putting that all into one team, where everybody has to take a little away from maybe what they are individually to make it all work as a group and how that got you to this point?**

ZIA COOKE: It's always an adjustment at first, but coach was saying the other day, all of us could have went to a different school and have 30 attempts a game, but for us all to come together and play as a team together, it's awesome. To have a group of All-Stars come together and play together, I feel like it's showing for us right now the way that we're playing as a team.

**Q. A lot was made about Texas' defensive performance against Maryland and how they were able to kind of shut them down. Going into this game, did you guys kind of take it as a challenge to show off what your defense could do? Going into this game, it seemed like Texas showed what they could do against Maryland.**

ZIA COOKE: We just play with our guard up. We knew that Texas was a good defensive team. You can't take any team lightly. Maryland was supposed to win that game, but they didn't, and the same for this game. We were supposed to win, but it could have went the other way. We just made sure we put our foot on the gas, kept our guard up, and do what we needed to do.

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