

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal: Michigan vs Baylor

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Alamodome - River Walk

Michigan Wolverines

Kim Barnes Arico

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference



opportunity to be in the position that we were tonight because I felt so confident about them. Just our experience and our maturity, how we handled every single thing that was thrown our direction, it was absolutely incredible.

I don't know if I've ever had a team like this. I felt really good about 'em. Doug, even you and everybody else out there that doubted us so many times, or we said disrespected us so many times, because we hadn't played enough games, or because we were shut down/on pause again, or because we had another student-athlete that was out with COVID, pretty much we were thrown into every difficult situation all season long. If the rest of the country didn't see that we're one of the best basketball teams out there, I don't know what you have to do to get that kind of respect.

But just proud of our team. It's really hard because when you're the underdog and you're always playing the Baysors and UConns, the Stanfords of the world, you get in a position to win the game, man, that's going to be a tough one. It's going to be a tough one to get over. It's going to take a long time.

Q. The emotion obviously is running high. Take us into that locker room just now with some of those girls that have battled through all the things you just kind of mentioned.

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, this is the kind of team that they are. They're looking at themselves. Danielle Rauch, I mean, she just, like, has stepped up to everything that's been thrown our way. She said, Man, I made a mistake here, man, I could have done this, man what if I had done this, if I had that possession back.

They're winners. They're winners. Their character. Even Mulkey came up to me after and said, I never saw a team that played that hard, that played for each other, with fight, never quit.

Obviously we're led by an All-American in Naz Hillmon. But the pieces that were around her and the confidence that they all had around her was incredible.

Baylor 78, Michigan 75 OT

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by head coach Kim Barnes Arico. We'll start with an opening statement, then take questions.

KIM BARNES ARICO: I thought that was a great basketball game tonight. Baylor is obviously one of the top teams in the country. We had them on the ropes. Actually thought we had them for a period of time there. We put ourselves in a position in regulation and in overtime to win the game.

So just really proud of our team. We persevered through a tremendous amount this season and had an opportunity to beat the national champions tonight. So it's tough. We have a great group of players and a great group of seniors. It's tough to end the season tonight.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. You look somewhat emotional there. I can't tell completely. I'm guessing it was not a happy locker room. Talk about what it was like this year, what you went through, and to put the defending champions on the rope, one possession away from reaching the Elite 8 for the first time.

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, our season, even from last March, all the way through today, we didn't know what tomorrow was going to bring. We had been put on a number of pauses, university shutdowns, COVID. It just felt like all through the year one thing after another thing was being thrown in our direction.

But we had such a tremendous start, and we had such a positive group of young women, that really I felt so great about them. I was hoping that we would have the



So they're devastated. They're distraught. They knew the moment was theirs. We thought we were going to be able to get it, really confident we were going to be able to get it. They were confident coming in. Everybody doubted us from Florida Gulf Coast, nobody thought we would win that game. Then certainly not playing the SEC and Tennessee. Then Baylor, national champs, not winning that game. But everyone in our circle believed they were going to win the game.

It's definitely emotional. When you coach for a long time and you get a group of young women that have that belief and that confidence and that camaraderie, you know you have something special. So it's hard to say goodbye to this year's team.

Q. Can you put into words what Leigha Brown did for you today.

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, I talk about it all the time. When Leigha called and wanted to come here, she said, I love watching you guys play. I love watching your team. I want to be a part of that. I want to play with Naz. I want to be surrounded by Naz. When Naz draws so much attention, that opens things up for Leigha.

She's just such a competitor. She has ice in her veins. She missed 39 days in the middle of the season. 39 days. So from January whatever it was, 8th, she didn't come back till February something. And we were still competing and persevering and going through everything without her. You guys see how special she is.

We held our ground. Other people stepped up. Every time we lost somebody on our team this season, the next person stepped up. It was like we never missed a beat. We never missed a heartbeat. We never missed anything.

Now Leigha is back to playing with a lot of confidence. Such a dynamic 1-2 punch with her and Naz. So many teams just focus on Naz that it really opened things up for Leigha. I mean, she's an incredible, incredible player. She's a competitor. I love her. Her teammates love her.

She's pretty distraught because she knew we had this one, too.

Q. That last sequence, could you take us through that, what you wanted to see from the last shot.

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, I don't even know which one was the last shot. I mean, there were so many last ones. Do you mean the one with 0.9 seconds?

Q. Yes.

KIM BARNES ARICO: We thought originally they told us we were going to have 1.1 seconds on the clock. We drew something up for that to get a three. Then we found out later that it was going to be 0.9 seconds. We ran a stagger screen. Leigha got a shot. She got a shot. We just ran her curling off of a stagger screen to try to get a shot.

She had a look. It was short, it was deep. It was short. But the game didn't come down to that second.

I thought our kids did a fabulous job of executing, and executing down the stretch, getting the shots that we wanted. Also being able to make plays. But really getting the shots we wanted down the stretch.

I mean, we were down seven late in the fourth quarter. We were able to execute stuff out of timeouts and dead balls and make extra passes and make great shots. Even till the end, our kids were really confident that Leigha was going to get that shot and be able to make that shot.

Q. You touched on the last shot of overtime. But can you touch on the last shot in regulation. How was Naz able to get so open there?

KIM BARNES ARICO: What did we run? Yeah, I think obviously, and you guys see this a little bit, Naz draws so much attention, so much attention. So our whole game plan is wrapped around Naz getting the ball. But people take that away every single time with two people, with three people, with four people. It's so important that you're able to knock down shots around her.

In the first half we weren't able to do that. But our confidence continued in the second half. That gave us the ability to knock down some other shots. When you knock down some other shots, then Naz gets a little bit of a space.

I think they had to pay attention to Danielle who had made a couple shots, and Hailey who made a couple shots, and Leigha who had just made a couple shots. That gave Naz a little space. She rarely ever gets a little space. Thankfully we were able to get that at the end of the game.

I mean, everything we run, we run through Naz. Obviously every team in America knows that. So that was once again tonight. People do a great job of taking it away, but she was able to get that touch late.

Q. You were talking about the adversity this team has faced, obviously getting a little emotional. What did having a year like this mean to you?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, when everybody comes to play at the University of Michigan, their goal is to win a championship. Most teams at the University of Michigan have won a championship. But the fact that Michigan women's basketball hasn't is what drew me here, what made me leave my life of 40 years, because I believed in Michigan and I believed that we could create something special.

But it doesn't matter what I believe. We need players in our program that believe the same thing, players that could have gone anywhere else in the country and chose Michigan because they believe that they could come here and they could make a difference. They believed that they could come here and they could win a championship.

You saw those players tonight. I mean, Naz Hillmon, she could play anywhere in the country. She's an All-American, one of the best. She chose Michigan. Hailey Brown, another player. Leigha Brown, another player. You can go up and down our roster. But they wanted to come to Michigan to create something incredibly special.

What they were able to do this year, when we had to battle so much adversity, I mean, we played the last three games without our point guard, who is amazing. She's one of the best -- I think the best point guard in the country. We played without her. They played for her. It was the next person up. That's kind of what we've done all year long.

So when you get a group of people that believe in something and believe in each other the way that this group does, you have the opportunity to create something special.

They created something special, and it's something that we'll never forget. But anybody that's listening, you go back and you look in the records of Michigan women's basketball. Like, what they were able to accomplish this year is pretty incredible. We had to face some programs with some rich tradition this week, and we battled in every single one of them.

I just think it speaks volumes about these kids.

Q. I want to know about your seniors, Akienreh coming back for that extra year, Hailey. What was their mood after the game and what they brought for you this entire year and their whole careers at Michigan?

KIM BARNES ARICO: They're two incredibly, incredibly special young women. Hailey Brown, she's a Canadian kid, another kid that could have gone anywhere. Decided

between Duke, Florida State and Michigan. Those are two programs that have reached the pinnacle of basketball. She decided to come to Michigan.

Since she has stepped on campus, we've done nothing but be successful. A large part of that is due to her. She deserves credit for that.

This year with COVID and everything else, she wavered, she wasn't sure if she was going to come back. Her family couldn't come across the border. She hasn't seen her family maybe once in the last year. The sacrifices that she's made because she told me, Coach, something keeps drawing me back here. Something keeps drawing me back. I feel like we could really have such a special season and I don't want to regret that for the rest of my life.

So I'm going to sacrifice, I'm going to sacrifice seeing my family, I'm going to live by myself, I'm going to socially distance and stay away from COVID the best that I can.

She has done all of those things. I had a coach say to me at one point in this year, Well, why are you worried about COVID? Haven't all your kids tested positive already? I was taken aback. No, not every one of our kids has.

That's really hard to do. The sacrifices that you have to make, because it is so contagious, it's so prevalent. You really isolate yourself. I've had three young women that have lived by themselves this year, and they haven't tested positive for COVID. They've sacrificed so much. Hailey was one of those people.

We would not be here today without her. Akienreh is another one. She was nervous about COVID, playing through COVID, not sure with coming back, not even sure about coming back the fifth-year. This is a kid that suffered through two ACLs. When she got back from her second ACL, she broke her hand. Her first three years as a player at Michigan, she hardly played. If you watch anybody nowadays, they transfer. If you don't play immediately, you're in the transfer portal the next day.

This kid stuck with it and persevered. Wasn't getting playing time all. Became one of the best defenders, arguably the best defender in the country. If anybody can take anything away, Kim said this to me as well, our defense was ridiculous, all tournament, all tournament, against Florida Gulf Coast who averages 15 threes, against Tennessee who scores the basketball, and tonight against Baylor who scores a hundred points a game.

Akienreh leads that defense. She leads that defense. Without our seniors and their experience, their maturity. Some days we would come to practice, get to the circle, every day we'd say, We don't know what tomorrow is going

to bring. That happened to us last March. There were about three or four different times this year where tomorrow was no tomorrow and we were shut down. When we're talking shut down, we're not saying go to the gym and you can have practice, go to the gym, you can put your hand on the ball. Our university was closed, we were in isolation, quarantined, not allowed to leave our house in the middle of our season. Now come back, here you go, let's play upon return, let's play Iowa at Iowa, let's play Maryland, let's play Northwestern, let's play Indiana after a one-day turnaround from Michigan State. That was our schedule upon return from a two-week pause.

Then we weren't recognized as a top team in the country. I want anybody else to do that. But our kids, they kept fighting and they kept plugging along and they kept believing in each other. Here we are today.

So, yeah, I can't speak enough about them.

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