

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Women's Final Four

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Stanford Cardinal Tara VanDerveer Postgame Media Conference



Stanford 66, South Carolina 65

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. I'm not going to ask you about this game. I'm going to ask you, Kiana is really tight, not playing like herself. You can tell she's getting down on herself. How are you guys going to make sure that she plays like she's capable Sunday night? Does someone need to tell her some jokes in the huddle to loosen her up?

TARA VANDERVEER: Yeah, I think she is putting a lot of pressure on herself. She's in her hometown. I think being in the championship game will help her a lot.

But, yeah, this is how it's going to be. They're going to focus on her. She'll respond. I know she's got a great game in her.

Q. In that last 13 seconds, the camera showed Haley Jones. Her face was poised and relaxed, like it always is. I'm wondering what you were thinking in the last 13 seconds. I know you know Haley pretty well. How is she able to stay so poised in those clutch moments?

TARA VANDERVEER: Haley had a great game. She is a poised and relaxed player. She had a great game, made some really big plays for us.

But I think that everyone recognized what we had to do. It was a real exciting ending obviously. Just Haley was ready for whatever we needed her to do. She got the ball inbounds, then we just needed to hang on to it.

Q. With so much time on the road this year, the players weren't able to pop in the gym and get shots up whenever they wanted. How did you adjust practices this year to try to make up for that or if it was sort of something you realized was going to be a

reality of this year?

TARA VANDERVEER: It was a reality of this year. I mean, we were in a high school gym, just the fact that people really wanted to play and have a great season (interruption in audio.)

Q. What does it mean to be in the title game again?

TARA VANDERVEER: It's awesome. I just want to credit Dawn and their team and their staff. It was a battle. It was a really tough game. We had to work really hard. They rebound really well. They shot the ball really well. Cooke had a great game. We just really didn't have an answer for her.

But I thought Haley really stepped up big for us and Lexie. We got different plays. I thought Ashten had another really good game.

Q. Different players stepping up every time. Again today it was Haley Jones, 24 points. Then you had Lexie with a double-double. Can you talk about that, Coach.

TARA VANDERVEER: Our free throws were huge. We went 11-for-12. That was great. We got out-rebounded but not by much. They're just a really, really athletic team. I think usually defensively one of our strengths is our guard defense. Anna Wilson has been a lockdown defender for us all year. We really just didn't have an answer for Cooke or Henderson. They both had great games. We'll have to play better on Sunday in order to be successful.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Lexie, the 13 rebounds, six on the offensive end. Talk a little bit about how she was able to impact the game even as she had, by her standards, a not-so-efficient shooting night?

TARA VANDERVEER: She's a hustler. She's scrappy, gets on the floor. She's not afraid to battle. It was very, very physical out there, right down to the last play which was -- you've got to be aggressive. You've got to be aggressive and you've got to be able to handle the ball.

But it was a great win for our team and our program.

Q. Talking a little bit more about rebounding, obviously South Carolina came up with a couple really clutch offensive rebounds. Overall what did you think of your team's performance on the boards?

TARA VANDERVEER: South Carolina, they really depend on their rebounding. I think we can be more aggressive. Again, to them, it was hard to rebound offensively because their guards are so fast, we wanted to get back in transition. I thought we did a pretty good job of getting back and stopping their transition break with their guards.

But I thought Ashten did a good job. She was trying to box out. They're really, really a tough matchup. I think for us, having played against UCLA, their rebounding, we knew what we had to do. I thought our team tried really hard to do it.

It's a lot easier said than done against a team like that.

Q. Are you going to have a chance to watch the game tonight? What would it be like to have a Pac-12 national championship game?

TARA VANDERVEER: That would be awesome. We're rooting for Arizona. It would be really exciting to -- it's just I think a credit to how competitive the Pac-12 is.

We'll be ready for either team. We're excited we play the first game so we can get a little rest. Our team with the travel and everything, the number of games, I think we can use it.

Q. I talked to you yesterday a little bit about some of the years you had a team you thought could win it all and had some snake bitten luck with injuries to key players, different things that have happened. When you have the turnover at the end and they get two good looks, a little karmic pay back for you?

TARA VANDERVEER: I mean, you got to hold onto the ball at the end of the game. Cam was really upset with herself that it got away from her.

But they did have two good looks. This is one of those survive and advance. It was not a pretty game for us, but that's credit to USC -- South Carolina, how aggressive they are, how athletic they are. We're going to have to learn from it and play better.

Q. You mentioned it earlier, that you told the team their middle name needs to be "flexible." For you, what do you love most about this team? What makes

this group so special?

TARA VANDERVEER: Well, I think what I really like the most about them is they're so unselfish, they're so team-oriented. Obviously Haley had a big game. But throughout the tournament, Ashten has had a big game, Kiana has had a big game, Anna Wilson or Lexie or Lacie, Hannah. A lot of different people can contribute for us.

I think they're really very team-oriented, very focused on our team doing well, not out for themselves. They're very unselfish.

Q. You mentioned the final finish there. How key was it that Hull was one of the first back? By the time the second put-back attempt went, there were three defenders there trying to help contest.

TARA VANDERVEER: Lexie, she's a winner. She just really did hustle back. I mean, obviously we could look at the last possession, which was critical. But I really think the game was won in the first quarter when we were down I know at least nine and came back in that first quarter. We battled back.

I think our team has shown a lot of grit, a lot of heart. It is nice to have a little karma going your way.

Q. Haley found her three-point shot in this tournament. It wasn't something that you guys utilized as a weapon a lot during the regular season. Where has she found the time to work on that? You needed it today.

TARA VANDERVEER: We did. Haley has been working really hard. I said to her today, I thought her practices have been very focused, she's been talking. She's really made a step-up. She knows it. She's not a freshman. She really was a leader out there.

Obviously she has confidence. She plays with confidence. Knocking down that shot was a real big shot for her.

I thought her two on the Lexie miss was a game-winner, too.

Q. Can you take a little trip down memory lane to the last time you were in the championship game, 2010. Same building, I think.

TARA VANDERVEER: Correct.

Q. Potentially the same opponent, correct?

TARA VANDERVEER: Correct.



Q. Do you have bad memories of that game? Jayne Appel broken foot.

TARA VANDERVEER: That was tough. One of the things, knock on wood, we can be really thankful for that we have been healthy. We'll see who we're playing. I think probably Connecticut is the favorite. But we've got to play really well, no matter who we play.

I don't have any kind of skeletons in the closet or ghosts or whatever. This is a team I have confidence in, confidence in themselves, really plays hard for each other. They were absolutely thrilled to be in the championship game. They know we did not play a great game tonight.

Q. On Haley, there were a couple times where she turned the ball over, had that weird travel call.

TARA VANDERVEER: That was weird.

Q. But when the camera zoomed in on her, she was smiling, laughing, I'm okay, I'll figure it out. Is that just who she is? She didn't panic at all, wasn't tight at all.

TARA VANDERVEER: No, no, that's Haley. I mean, I think she has the ability to play through things. I'm going to have to see that travel because I could have thought there were some other travels that could have been called, too.

Haley just stays with things. That's great. She doesn't get frustrated, doesn't get upset with herself or her teammates. I think you really saw Haley have a fabulous game tonight.

Q. Your team really played incredible defense tonight. Can you just discuss your team's defensive effort.

TARA VANDERVEER: Pepper, you are so sweet. I didn't really like some of our defense. Their guards, I thought their guards got some good looks, open looks that we could have done a better job on.

I'm going to listen to you because I think you have a really good question. I think we can even play better defense, Pepper. Our post players I thought played well inside. They really frustrated their bigs. So they went to their guards and their guards responded for them.

I think we're going to have to play better on Sunday, Pepper.

Q. Good luck on Sunday.

TARA VANDERVEER: Thank you very much.

Q. I'm curious if the "T Dog" sweatshirt that the team gave you after your 1,099th win made it to San Antonio?

TARA VANDERVEER: No, it didn't. It's really, really hot. It's for winter. It's like a sauna, it's so warm.

I do have some real good pictures of it (smiling).

Q. Can you talk about the resilience factor in a game like this when you're probably not making some shots you would normally make to just keep grinding it out the way you guys did?

TARA VANDERVEER: I agree 100%. Kiana had a great open look. Credit their defense. They made it tough on people. But like Fran had some layups, Lexie had some layups. Thankfully Haley was awesome, 11-for-14. She finished really well.

But maybe we're just saving them up for Sunday.

Q. Talk about UConn or Arizona, what is the one thing that's going to be something you have to work on tomorrow for that game on Sunday?

TARA VANDERVEER: Obviously we'll wait and see which team it is. If it's Arizona, we'll just be reviewing what they did, the good things we did against them, the things that they hurt of with.

If it's Connecticut, KK has them scouted and ready to go. It will be learning new personnel. A lot of these players, they know each other, been watching them play. It's just going to come down to Sunday getting after it. Probably who is most aggressive. We'll have to be aggressive.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, congratulations on the win. Thank you for your time tonight.

TARA VANDERVEER: Thank you.

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