

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

Friday, April 2, 2021
San Antonio, Texas, USA
Alamodome

Arizona Wildcats

Aari McDonald

Postgame Media Conference



proud of 'em. We wasn't scared. I mean, it showed tonight. I'm just extremely proud of them.

I'm very appreciative of my teammates and my coaches. We just beat a great team. UConn, that's a powerhouse. I mean, it doesn't get any better than that.

Q. You've talked all week about not having the pressure on you, going out and playing loose, playing free. That looked evident tonight. Maybe UConn with the pressure was a little tight. Did you think that was the case?

AARI McDONALD: Definitely. We were the underdog. I mean, we kind of felt that way all season. That kind of boosts our confidence, makes us play harder than nobody think we can beat these top teams, just accomplish the things we've accomplished.

They were tight. My teammates have been playing free this whole tournament. I mean, hey, we're made for it, like Coach says.

Q. At the end the game when they're making a run, which you probably expected was going to happen, were you feeling pretty calm about it? Did you feel like you were still in a good spot?

AARI McDONALD: Oh, yeah, for sure. Everyone knows that basketball is a game of runs. We knew we were going to take a couple of their punches down the stretch. The maturity that my team showed, we never got rattled. We kept being more feisty on defense, talking to each other. Hey, we have to lock up, take pride. We have to value every possession, whether that's defense or offense. We stuck with the game plan.

Q. You led the entire duration of this game. There were points where it was tied. Coming into today's game, everybody talked about how Arizona was a one-person show. Your teammates stepped up big-time. Talk about the effort from the whole entire team.

AARI McDONALD: I mean, my teammates, everybody has

Arizona 69, Connecticut 59

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin. Aari McDonald, we will begin with questions.

Q. That defensive effort tonight, to be able to start the game with that run, take control, lead wire to wire, answer each time UConn tried to start a run, what does that say about the defensive effort?

AARI McDONALD: That says we have a stingy defense. Everybody takes pride in their defense. Definitely you've seen that on display tonight.

Q. To think about where this program has come since you transferred, the lows from when you started to where you are now, what does it mean to look back?

AARI McDONALD: Man, it's crazy. I can't even describe to you the adversity that myself, my teammates and my coaches went through. Just like looking back, reflecting, it's amazing how resilient we are. We never gave up. We kept faith. We kept working our tails off. We trust each other, would do anything for each other. You definitely see how that came, how we're sticking to that.

It's been a crazy three, four years here. Just seeing that is definitely momentum.

Q. I wanted to ask, in your last press conference you said that you had your chance with your teammates, that you were ride or die for them. What did you know that everybody else didn't know, everybody that might have counted you guys out wasn't thinking about?

AARI McDONALD: My teammates are dogs. I mean, it start with me. I think that effect rubbed off on my teammates this last stretch of playing basketball. I'm just

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been perfecting their role. They've been coming up big. I mean, it's not a one-woman show. I mean, I have a great supporting cast. I believe in my teammates. Never have any doubt in them. I always boost them up.

I mean, I'm happy. We can be more balanced. Hey, that's great. It helps me relax, I can distribute, which I love to do. I'm extremely proud of my teammates for converting, starting to step up and really perfect their role.

Q. You and Adia have a really close relationship. On the sidelines, she's very chill, smiling a lot. Laughing a lot. What does that do for the mentality of this team that even in a Final Four game you have your head coach against UConn cracking jokes or at least it appears so?

AARI McDONALD: Definitely. We feed off Coach Barnes' energy. With her laughing, cracking jokes on the side, it makes us even be more loose. Okay, Coach is not uptight at all, she's not tight at all. Let's have fun, keep on smiling.

Her energy, it's definitely -- how do I want to say- it rubs off on us. It's contagious.

Q. How much were you guys bothered by and motivated by the NCAA leaving you out of the pregame video?

AARI McDONALD: Oh, we were highly upset. We definitely took it as a sign of disrespect. We all got the call to go down there and do media. For us to be left out, it wasn't cool at all.

But that was one of our motivations coming in. Okay, y'all think it's the final three. Okay, we going to show y'all. We shocked the world tonight. Keep betting against my teammates and I, we're going to show you wrong. We're going to prove you wrong, so...

Q. They did a close-up of the huddle afterwards. It looked like Coach maybe said "F the NCAA." No? Did that happen?

AARI McDONALD: I don't -- I don't recall hearing that. Maybe because I was pointing to my family. But I definitely didn't hear Coach Barnes say that.

Q. You took a lead right away, came out and did your thing. Was there a moment that you're thinking, Wow, this is going to happen?

AARI McDONALD: No. I mean, we were confident. I mean, we've been playing with confidence these last four or five games. I mean, we know that the first five minutes

of the game, they're crucial, they're important. We were hitting. We were getting stops, playing solid defense. I mean, it wasn't like a wild moment. It's like, We're confident, we do this.

So, I mean, hey, that's our identity. We've been doing this from the start. I'm loving it.

Q. You came out, hit that three-pointer right off the bat, then Sam hit one before they even scored. How important was that to make that first one?

AARI McDONALD: That's definitely important. I mean, honestly, Coach Barnes, like, she hates when I take threes on the first possession. But, I mean, she's not going to tell me to stop shooting. I'm feeling it from downtown. I was just watching how the defense was playing me.

It was momentum. To see Sam hit that three, I mean, if we can get Sam involved any way, I love her to shoot more. I mean, definitely gave us momentum and made us play defense even harder.

Q. In the second quarter you hit a big shot, did a shoulder shrug. What was going through your mind?

AARI McDONALD: I was thinking in that moment, I'm the dog, I'm the stuff. I was thinking, Nobody can stop me. That's what I was thinking (laughter).

Q. Stanford won. You guys won. The Pac-12 is going to be in the national championship. To be in that conference, to see the conference represented, how exciting is that for you as a player facing another conference school?

AARI McDONALD: That's so exciting. That's a telltale sign we're the best conference in the country. How many times have that happened? This is crazy. We're going up against a talented team. We know each other. I mean, it's going to be exciting.

Q. 92nd straight game with 10 plus points. That's the longest active streak in Division I. 90 points in your last three games, hitting it from behind the arc. I thought tonight you used your speed and quickness. Talk about it, this performance tonight.

AARI McDONALD: Yeah, I didn't do anything different. I just kept playing my game, taking what the defense was giving me. I just wanted to see how they were going to play me, and I did. It's not checkers, this is chess. I'm always the next step ahead of my opponent.

Nothing different. I'm just going to keep playing my game



and stay confident.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Aari.

AARI McDONALD: Can I add one more thing: My name is Aari, not Ari. That's all I wanted to say. Thank you.

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