

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

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San Antonio, Texas, USA
Alamodome

Arizona Wildcats

Adia Barnes

Postgame Media Conference



Arizona 69, Connecticut 59

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

Q. I'm disappointed the baby isn't in this postgame with you. But you worked for Mike Neighbors, you're close with Mike Neighbors. Mike Neighbors beat UConn earlier this year. What did you learn watching his game film?

ADIA BARNES: Well, we play two totally different styles. They are just an offensive shooting machine. They get to the free-throw line, they hit tons of threes. We're really different. I kind of watched more teams that play a little bit more pressure and looked at strategy that way.

Yeah, if we can shoot threes like Neighbors, we would have won a lot more games. But yes, he's a mentor, friend, someone I definitely talked to this week leading up to this game.

Q. Some of your players talked about the disrespect of not being in the video earlier this week. I wonder if you drew from that at all?

ADIA BARNES: No, we didn't draw from that. But I think that was just another -- that was a small thing. That was just another thing that we dealt with.

I think it started early. First of all, I get why, we hadn't been here. It's uncharted territory, so I get the whole thing. But initially we weren't mentioned when they were talking about our region. That was the first thing. Those things are motivating.

Second thing, when you're going to play Texas A&M, we were barely in the highlight video. It was already them.

Everybody thought Texas A&M. Then you fast forward the next thing was the highlight video; we weren't in it, there were three teams. Those are just things that motivate a team. It means nothing. We don't care. We believe in each other. We believe in what we do. That's just motivating. That's something like, I'm, okay, show them, be on the next video.

It doesn't matter. It just motivates us. I love it. I love it. I've been an underdog all my life. Too small to do this, too this to do that, too inexperienced to do this. We prove it wrong every time. I don't care. It just motivates me and my team.

Q. Obviously a lot of focus on Aari's shooting tonight. What did you see from her on defense? Pretty scrappy game from her.

ADIA BARNES: I think she's really underrated on defense. I thought in my mind she should have been the national defensive Player of the Year. There was no other player that impacts the game on both ends of the floor more. There is no other player that for the 37 minutes presses full court and gets steals, rebounds, all these things that she does. I feel like she's a great defender. She's our catalyst on defense and offense. Not a lot of players in the country can play on both sides of the ball.

She's a great defender. She disrupts things, makes it difficult. She didn't allow Paige to really get in the flow at the one. I think she's just a great defensive player, and our team feeds off her. We built our defense around her quickness and her pressure.

Q. Between your game and the Stanford-South Carolina game, there were two high-quality, entertaining games to watch. What does that say about the state of the game now? How great is it to have on this big a stage two really phenomenal games?

ADIA BARNES: I mean, it's really important for women's basketball because I think today there's so much more parity in women's basketball. Geno, Tara, Dawn Staley, they're phenomenal coaches with amazing programs. For

me to get here one time, it doesn't really mean a lot. They've been here so many times. That's what I aspire to have my program do one day.

But it means a lot. To have a game like South Carolina and Stanford, it came down to the last shot. I think that's amazing for women's basketball. It's not fun to see a blowout at this time of year. So that just shows that different people can win.

There's two Pac-12 teams. I've been saying all along Pac-12 is the best conference in the country, hands down. I think this is proof of it. Stanford won the Pac-12, we were second, and we're playing for a national championship.

I think nowadays there's so many different teams that could win - NC State, Texas A&M. There's so many factors that go into getting this far. It's the right matchups, it's the right momentum at the right time, it's peaking and playing your best basketball and getting hot in March.

I think there's a lot of different things that lead to this. I don't take for granted how hard it is to get here. It's very hard. All the chips have to fall, the stars have to be aligned, all those things have to happen.

I'm just glad that it happened to us. I'm glad that we got momentum when we needed it and we're playing some good basketball. I think we're very lucky and fortunate to be here. UConn is an amazing team, with one of the best coaches there is, who I respect so much. I mean, they're an offensive machine. They're very hard to guard. They're good on offense, good on defense, they're elite.

We just played a little bit better tonight. But now would I want to face UConn in a seven-games series? Absolutely not. No, I would not. I think this time of year beating a team once, you just got to get hot. I thought we played good defense and we disrupted some of their offense. But they're really good.

Q. Have you had a chance to let it soak in? You mentioned being able to be here now. You've coached your team to an appearance in the national title Sunday night.

ADIA BARNES: No, it hasn't settled in yet. It's amazing. This was a really hard game. We did not have any pressure. It's a much easier situation to be us than it is UConn because I think the program is so good, you're expected to win, and that's hard. We had a little bit of experience with that this year, being like a top-10 team or being a top-12 team, it's a little bit harder than it is to be an unranked team chasing and trying to get wins.

For UConn there was more pressure. For us, it's a lot easier to play loose when there isn't pressure. But I'm just happy. We got hot at the right time during the tournament. If you look back at two or three weeks ago, we weren't playing our best basketball. We started to change some things and got better. Just became more united right before the tournament, just found ways.

I'm just so proud everybody has stepped up in different ways, everybody from Sam, Cate, Lauren, Helena, Shaina, Aari, Bendu, Trinity. Everybody has done a little bit more. That's all I can ask for. They're playing their hearts out. They believe, I believe. We don't care if anybody believes.

I did not cuss out the NCAA. I did say a cuss word. The cuss word is basically, forget everybody, more of a chosen word. Forget everybody if they don't believe in us, because we believe in us. That is my team. I believe in them. I will run through a wall for them. I'm just so proud because they do whatever I ask. They believe. That's all I can ask for of the team. They played hard for me. So I give it my all. That's always -- at the end of the day whether we won or lost, if we play the hardest, we do everything we can control, then I was going to be happy with the result, I can walk away with my head up. I'm just so proud of this team.

Q. In a season where nobody played a lot of non-conference games. Who you played in your conference and how made they made you mattered, what does that tell us about the Pac-12?

ADIA BARNES: So the Pac-12, I think a lot of people thought that the Pac-12 was crazy for going to 22 conference games because it's like the gauntlet. It's very difficult to play at the level we play every single weekend. But I think you're seeing and you saw in the tournament it's paid dividends. For us going against UCLA, Oregon State, Oregon, Stanford, the whole Pac-12 season, it got us ready for this time.

I really truly believe that. I think we had a slight advantage today because we've guarded a ton of chin action, a ton of it this season, guarded it with Stanford because they're like an offensive machine. It gave us a little bit of preparation in playing against some really good teams that prepared us for this moment.

For us as a program, it kind of hurt us not playing those 12 or 13 non-conference games because that's usually where we can work out some kinks. We can refine our defense and just some deficiencies we had early. We were trying to do those things and work out some things in the Pac-12. That was a little bit more challenging.

But I felt like we did a great job, got better. We were getting better against really good competition. So the Pac-12, I think it's superior to other conferences. I think it's the best conference in the country, and I think it's showing because you have two teams in the national championship game and no one would have thought that.

Q. It seemed like they started fouling really early at the end of the game. Were you surprised by that?

ADIA BARNES: No, I wasn't surprised because if you look at the way we shoot free throws lately, I was not surprised. We're actually sometimes shooting the three better than free throws. So, no, I wasn't surprised.

I think we missed some pressure free throws down the stretch that I felt we should have made. 22 from 31 from the free-throw line is not great. So it's not surprising.

A couple times, I don't know if they were trying to, but we got some calls. I think trapping Aari is very difficult. I think she did a good job of drawing fouls. Aari got fouled nine times in the game; that's a lot. Nine out of our 23.

I thought we made the big one when it counts. Sometimes we only made one out of two. Those are important free throws. We have to do a better job of that on Sunday, I don't even know what day it is. I have no idea what day it is. Been here for three weeks (smiling).

Q. What did it mean to you and how did it feel to have the entire stadium full of Arizona fans, former Arizona basketball players, some of your teammates, some that came after you? The whole place was rocking tonight.

ADIA BARNES: Yeah, it meant a lot. Like we've never been here. Last year we didn't even go to the tournament. So no one would have thought we'd be here. I had so much love from everybody. It just fills my heart, the first thing. Lauren Jackson, one of my best friends from my playing days in the WNBA is, like, texting me from Australia, just having surgery. I hope she recovers well. Sue Bird, actually, Tully, all my WNBA teammates, Arizona alumni flying from all over the country to celebrate with us. Jason Terry, all my friends came down to support me. It just means the world to me. All my former players from Washington, Kelsey Plum, Jenna Moser, Amber Melgoza. All these people showing love means the world to me.

What we did today, I think we shocked the country. I just couldn't be more happy to look up and see all the red because I know UConn has amazing fans that I feel like they're everywhere. You always see UConn fans everywhere. I thought that our fans were just happy,

excited, and a lot of red in the stands. That feels good. We didn't do it alone.

Remember, our players, these players have not played with fans the whole year. It wasn't even a packed arena like it should be because of the pandemic. But there was still love and support. I think we play hard for everybody. We play with heart. Just happy our fans could be here to celebrate. Our president Robbins, our A.D. Dave Heeke, Jason Terry flew down, he's on the men's staff. Been a friend of mine from college. I have actually watched him win a championship when he was in college. We were in college together. He won under Lute Olson. Hopefully he can witness us winning.

It feels great to see all the love and support.

Q. Does it help you're playing Stanford, a team you know pretty well, as opposed to South Carolina you've never played?

ADIA BARNES: Yeah, it does help. But not that I love playing Stanford. I wouldn't love playing Stanford or South Carolina.

Yeah, it does help because we have played them. They've beat us twice this year. They have to beat us a third time. I mean, Stanford is so good. They have so much depth. They're young, extremely talented, very hard to play against. It's going to be a tough game. But at this time of the year, everything is tough. South Carolina is tough, too. They're both coached by phenomenal coaches, some of the best in the business.

Yeah, but it does help that we've played them. We're familiar. So I think that's definitely an advantage. Now we got to go out and do it on the court, which is the hard part.

Q. Tonight your defense as usual really got in the way of UConn. Do you think it was an advantage having a senior-heavy team versus a team with a bunch of freshmen that have never been in this moment?

ADIA BARNES: Well, I mean, we have two seniors. Well, actually three. Sam has a choice to come back. Yeah, I think it does help for just experience. Paige is a phenomenal player. One of the best in the country. But she is a freshman. I think it does help having some senior leaders. It's their last time. Aari, it could have been my last game coaching her. There's a different sense of urgency.

Paige and UConn, these high-level players. Mainly a team of talented, All-Americans, USA Basketball. They have a lot of experience. So different experience than we do.

I think Sam, Aari, this is our first time being in these situations. We didn't get to go to the tournament last year. We didn't have that experience. Our last one-and-done experience was the NIT, which is very different.

I'm just proud that we were able to beat a really good team that's really hard to guard. I was not comfortable even at five points in a minute and a half is scary against them. This year they've stolen a lot of games down the stretch. The clock couldn't run faster.

Just proud we found a way to bear down and get stops. We beat a really, really good team. We just played a little bit better tonight.

Like I said, I would not want to face them in a series because they're very, very good.

Q. Tonight you made history as the fifth black head coach to advance to a national championship. What does this moment mean to you in terms of the significance of it and is your message for young girls and boys who may be looking at you right now for inspiration?

ADIA BARNES: It means a lot. I actually didn't know that. It just means the world. I think I represent a lot of different things, but representation matters, opportunities matter. When we're given opportunity, we can flourish.

I was given an opportunity by an A.D. that believed in a young coach that had only been coaching five years. This is only my fifth-year as a head coach. I was a five-year assistant, a 13-year pro. Someone believed in me, saw something in me that maybe I didn't even see in myself at the time.

We're not just recruiters. We can recruit but we're not only recruiters. Don't allow yourself as a female, as a black female, to be pigeonholed into one thing. Learn, work on your trade, study, pull someone else along as a woman, as a woman of color. Aspire big, do big things. Don't let yourself be pigeonholed in one thing.

I think given opportunities we can definitely flourish. Also as a former WNBA player, work hard like you worked on your game, worked all those years to be a pro, work to be better. When we're given the opportunity, we have to be successful. I know the reality is as a black female if I get fired, I probably will not be recycled. That's the facts. That's what happens in this profession. Most black women, if you look around the country, they do not get a second opportunity. That's unfortunate. So I think people like me with a voice, Dawn, who I look up to, I just respect

more than anybody, we give people opportunities. A lot of other people do.

Reach for the sky. Don't settle. You can be a woman of color and be a head coach at a big Power 5 job. You don't have to be afraid to be a mom and be a coach. I have a baby, I'm up at night with a baby. You can have a six-month-old, you can do a job, don't have to stop coaching because you're a mom. You can be a former player, work and learn how to teach. That's what I'm doing. I'm not perfect. I make mistakes but I'm working at my trade. I am trying to be the best I could be. I aspire to be like Dawn, to be like Tara, to be like Geno. It's easy to come here once. It's difficult to come here multiple times. That's what I'm trying to do.

I'm so blessed that it's me that's made history. It's very meaningful. Honestly, it makes me coach a little harder. It was stressing me out for a couple days because I was like, Whoa, I got a lot of shoes to fill, being the only WNBA player, the second one, being the only black female, being this, being that, being the only mom. I was getting stressed out for a second.

But I'm going to do my best, do it with my heart. Hopefully if I can inspire one person, then I'm happy. I'm never going to win enough games. I'm never going to win everything because you're never going to win enough as a coach. But if I can inspire someone else to be the next head coach or bring someone else along, then I'm happy and I'm satisfied, and I can leave this profession knowing that I left my mark, just like Vivian Stringer, like these other legends have done, Carolyn Peck. But to receive messages from those two, it means the world from those two. To receive messages from Dawn, and people that cared, want me to be successful, it makes me work harder and motivates me more.

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