

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

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Alamodome

UConn Huskies Geno Auriemma Postgame Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by head coach Geno Auriemma. Coach, if you would get us started with an opening statement.

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, sure. First I want to congratulate Arizona. They played amazing. That first half, it was incredibly difficult for us to get anything done. And I thought the intensity level that they played with and the aggressiveness on the defensive end, we just didn't respond as I hoped we would.

That's two games in a row now that we faced that kind of pressure. I think it took its toll. All the credit goes to Arizona. Aari McDonald, I said going into the game, I don't think we've had to play against a guard as good as she is, and she proved it tonight. She just dominated the entire game start to finish.

We pride ourselves on being pretty good at certain things. We had no answer for her.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. 44 fouls in the game, over 10 fouls per quarter. Specifically what impact do you think that had on the pace, how the game was played? Not looking for anything specifically on calls, but in general how the game was called.

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, I mean, what are you going to do? You got to play the game the way that it's called. Usually the team that's most aggressive ends up benefitting from the way the game is called. I think Arizona put the officials in a situation where they had to decide almost every possession, Should I blow the whistle or not?

But, yeah, there were a lot. That certainly didn't impact winning and losing. It might have impacted what the game

looked like, how it was played, but it didn't impact winning and losing at all.

Q. When Christyn was just on here, she admitted the team probably thought it was going to be easier than it was. Did you see that going into the game? Did you think the team underestimated Arizona? Once they came out so strong, you were dropped back on your heels and couldn't overcome it.

GENO AURIEMMA: Well, you never know what's in a player's mind or what is in a team's mind. You hope you do.

I've said all along this year to those that have followed us all year long, we have a very immature group, not just young. We have a young group, but a very immature group. When we're high and when we're on top of the world, we think everything's great. When things don't go our way, there's a poutiness about us, there's a feeling sorry for ourselves about us that you don't win championships when you're like that unless you get lucky, if that indeed is what the mindset was because, believe me, the scouting report on Arizona and the game plan on Arizona was way more thorough and way more involved than the Baylor one was, to be honest with you. We spent more time on the Arizona game than we did on the Baylor game it seemed like.

So if that's the case, then it's bad coaching by us. It's a sign of immaturity on our team. We need to grow up if we expect to be back here in the future.

Q. Is this the kind of thing, you've been through these things many times, is this the kind of thing it takes for a young team to grow up, maybe launch into the next season, or will this stay with the team through the season, be the impetus for next year?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, I think so. I've been down this road before, like you said. We've lost 10 games in the Final Four over the years. Each of them obviously were impactful in some way or another. But the ones that we have lost where we just were not up for the moment, we weren't up to the moment because for whatever reason



weren't mature enough, weren't experienced enough, didn't have enough time together, one year together. Whatever the case may be.

Everybody told me, Hey, listen, this year is just a setup. This is the building block for the next couple of years. It's great to say that, not so great today when you're sitting here talking to you guys when you're this far away from playing in the championship game.

I do think that these games do tend to stay with you a little bit longer. I would say, at least on my end, I'm going to be coaching in the Final Four next year on April 2nd, whatever that date is. What my team is going to look like, I don't know because we got a whole bunch of new guys coming in, how that goes.

But I believe that what we learned this year through all the ups and downs is going to really benefit us for the next couple years, for sure.

I remember saying that in 2008. We played and we lost to Stanford in the semifinal. It was Maya Moore's freshman year. I said, We'll be back. We went back and we were undefeated the next two seasons.

I don't think that's going to happen. But we'll be back here sooner rather than later.

Q. You've mentioned time and team again you have been to the Final Four and you've been through situations like this. How much time do you normally take to yourself to get yourself prepared for the upcoming season? You have a pretty young team, new people coming in.

GENO AURIEMMA: Well, this is an unusual year. When we got back, the kids are all leaving April 10th. They have to be off campus by the 10th or 11th. They'll be gone April 11th till June 1st when they come for summer school. You're not going to have any time to spend around them anyway. So you're not going to be involved with any of the new players. You're not going to see them or interact with them until June.

Then June is kind of like mini-camp, like in football they have these mini-camps. In June you'll start to maybe put some pieces together and see what it might look like, what works, what doesn't work, who adapts to what.

This coming June, July, August, there will be a lot of time spent on evaluating this past season and all the great things that we did, and preparing for next season and all the things that we have to do better. That's kind of how it goes most years. This is an unusual year. Last year was

an unusual year because we didn't get a chance to do anything all summer.

We're trying to get back to whatever normal is now. But next year's team, if all stays the same, we'll have 10 freshmen and sophomores. I might not spend a lot of time thinking about that, now that you mention it (smiling).

Q. Could you discuss the freshmen, how you think they grew this tournament. There's a lot of eyes on them, especially Paige, Aaliyah, with the work they got. What did you think of their growth?

GENO AURIEMMA: Well, obviously without our freshmen, we wouldn't be here, right? Each and every game, each and every time that we were together, they learned a lot, they contributed a lot.

You could see their inexperience show. I thought this was not one of Aaliyah's better games. But she got better as the game went on. Nika hasn't played in a while. Paige is another example that you're only as good as your teammates. It's the bottom line. You're only as good as the team around you.

Aari McDonald was amazing tonight. She got a lot of support from every kid on their team. Everybody on their team did their part, made shots when they were open, made plays when they had to make them.

As good as Paige was this year, and she carried our team through most of the season; that's not how you win championships, with one player having to do everything.

She needs to get a lot better. As good as you all think she is, and she's really good, if we're going to be here the next couple years with her at Connecticut, she needs to get a lot better. I don't mean just on the court either.

Q. For years you've said the Elite 8 game was the most difficult to play. Has this game become the most difficult because of the bigness of the moment, the need for mature players once you get there?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, people think you go to the Final Four and that somehow the culture of your team, because it says "Connecticut" on your jersey or because you're the coach that's been there 20 times, that is what is going to get you over the hump. That's not what it is. Every year I've come here, that's not what it is.

I'll bet you that if I were to count the 11 championships that we have, two of them maybe came out of the group, who we are. The other nine come from because you have outstanding individuals who have amazing performances.

Kind of like Aari McDonald had tonight.

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When you get to this level, you need to have a couple mature players that are capable of doing that because the other team is really good, too. They're going to take you out of a lot of things you want to do. You're going to have to have players who are that good, who rise above it.

Arizona proved that tonight, for sure.

Q. Since you've won a number of times, been here a number of times, how difficult is it to get to the national championship let alone win it? Iowa was a very hyped game. You played a national championship-level game against Baylor, then tonight against Arizona. How difficult is it? What exactly maybe tonight was missing?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, when we were making it look so easy, I try to tell people this is really hard, and nobody believed me. When you're winning all the time, you're winning four years in a row, X number of years out of X number of years, people start to believe this is real easy.

It's not. This is really, really difficult. If it wasn't difficult, more people would win that many times. This is very, very difficult. Arizona is in their first one. If Stanford wins Sunday, it will be their first title in 30 years. These are not easy. And they're not getting any easier, as you mentioned with the games you have to play to get there. Not easy at all.

What we've talked about, what was missing tonight, their defense took us out of our offense. We were in a scramble mode a lot offensively. We got it back I think, then we just missed shots that you got to make at this level at this point in time.

You got to make those shots. You got to make those free throws. You got to make those layups that you get. You have to make those open threes that you get. They're not easy to come by.

I think the growth of our team is going to be in those areas. You got to be able to play a bunch of high-level games in a row, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, in order to win the whole thing. And you got to get a little bit of luck. Look at that first game tonight. It could have gone either way. A bounce of the ball there, a bounce on the rim either way... You need to be really good and you need to get a little bit of luck.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time.

GENO AURIEMMA: Thank you.

