

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship Final Four: Arizona vs Stanford

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San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

Arizona Wildcats

Aari McDonald

Finals Postgame Media Conference



Stanford 54, Arizona 53

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by senior guard Aari McDonald of the University of Arizona. We'll go straight to questions.

Q. As you look back through not only the season but your Arizona career, what are you going to remember most about this team and your teammates?

AARI McDONALD: What I'll remember most is just how strong they are. No matter what situation, adversity, myself, my teammates, we always fought, the coaches. Man, just a good group of ladies that I played with, yeah. I'll remember most this ride. I mean, we had a great run in the NCAA tournament. We accomplished a lot that many didn't think we could do. It was tough.

But I'm very proud of my teammates.

Q. In the last second when you took that shot, can you walk us through what was going on, what you saw.

AARI McDONALD: I mean, it was about 6.1 seconds left maybe. I got denied hard. I tried to turn the corner, they sent three at me. I took a tough, contested shot. Didn't fall, so...

That's what I remember.

Q. This game was back and forth. They would make a run, get a little distance, then you would push back. Where were you finding that energy to keep coming back every time it looked like they might really push away from you guys?

AARI McDONALD: Yeah, it started with Shaina and Bendu. They came up big for us second half. Pressuring

the ball, getting key steals. I mean, probably their best defensive efforts all season. I'm really proud of them.

Shaina gave us a lot of energy. That was probably one of her best games. She had us afloat in the second half.

Q. As you look back on this entire season, what are some of the things you learned about yourself and your teammates in a year that was not normal compared to most circumstances?

AARI McDONALD: What I learned about myself and my teammates is that, you know, we had thick skin, we have mental toughness. It showed throughout this tournament. Before we got in from the start, Coach Barnes said the two teams that play for the championship, those are the teams that are mentally tough. I think we showed that.

I think that we showed we had a lot of growth over these last couple years. Coach Barnes bringing in the players that are willing to work, that are competitive. That helped our culture change tremendously. I mean, I'm just really proud of these ladies. I'm very thankful for them and the coaches.

Q. Many want to know how you did it but I want to know what you did it for or who you did this for?

AARI McDONALD: Every time I put on my shoes and step on the court, I do it for my grandfather. I know despite the outcome today, he'd be practically proud (tearing up). Yeah, that's pretty much who I do it for. Just for my parents, the rest of my family, the sacrifices. When I lace my shoes up, I just go hard for them.

Q. I know it's still in the moment for you, but obviously you know the impact you have had on this Arizona program, the way in which it will largely be defined by what you've done going forward. What does that mean to you? How do you plan to help reinforce the kind of culture you have helped to build?

AARI McDONALD: My time at Arizona means a lot to me. What I've accomplished, what my teammates accomplished. Just the legacy I want to leave once I'm



gone is that work hard, don't listen to the naysayers, focus on your course. Your journey is different from your peers. Keep working on you, stay grounded, stay humble, keep God first. Just continue to work hard and you'll be successful.

Q. Through this whole journey, it's been you and Coach Barnes. You've done this together. You moved to Arizona with her. What does it mean for you to make history for this Arizona program with her trusting your leadership and also for you to trust in her?

AARI McDONALD: It means a lot. Our relationship was built on trust. We both value being relational. That means a lot. She's helped me grow. I think I've helped her grow in many ways, as well.

I'm just thankful for her. She gave me the key. She really trusted me. Coming in, she told me what my role would be on the team. Yeah, I'm just really thankful for her. She's put me in great positions. Helped contribute to my success.

Q. You lost this game, but the mark you leave on this program going forward, what are your thoughts about what you left, your legacy with Arizona?

AARI McDONALD: I'm sorry. Can you repeat that? I'm so sorry (tearing up).

Q. The game is lost today, but going forward, the mark you left on this program will pay dividends for Adia. What are your thoughts about that?

AARI McDONALD: I'm just really proud of my teammates. It's not about how you start, it's how you finish. Although we didn't get the outcome we wanted, I'm just proud of my teammates. I mean, this should motivate them coming in next year, just momentum, just looking back on what we did. The sky's the limit. Just to stay together. I mean, this will make them hungry. This will make me hungry in our basketball journeys. I'm excited for what we accomplished this year in just so little time, especially in this weird year. But I'm very thankful.

Q. The theme that developed in this tournament, then going into this Final Four, was sort of people not believing, people not talking about you, even to the exclusion of you all from the video. What level of pride is there as you exit, even with the loss, knowing everyone is talking about you individually, talking about your program, your coach, that everybody will remember this Arizona team?

AARI McDONALD: Yeah, we're walking out of here, we're

leaving San Antonio with a lot of pride. We're going to walk out of here and leave with our heads up just knowing how far we came, how far we've come as a program and as individuals.

We have nothing to hang our heads for. We competed. We battled. We just lost to a very great team, an experienced team with talented players in all positions. They're led by a pioneer to the game. I mean, just got to look back and we just look at the positives, look how far we've come.

Q. Looks like Coach came up to you and put her arm around you after that last possession. What did she say to you?

AARI McDONALD: Just to pick my head up, you know, and that she trusts me to put the team on my back, ride or die. Just saying how proud she was of us, how far we came.

Q. You talked about how close you are with your family, we know they were all there representing Fresno Strong. What is it going to mean for you after all this time in the bubble now being able to leave after this press conference, be able to give your family a big hug, embrace them? What type of emotions will you have?

AARI McDONALD: I'll probably cry. Tears of happiness, but also sad, especially after this loss.

Although we lost, we still got work to do. We still got to keep working on our games. I mean, but it will be definitely exciting to actually see my family and actually, like, hug them.

Q. The way Stanford played you defensively tonight, was it much different from the first two times that you all played or was it similar?

AARI McDONALD: I think it was similar. Having Anna Wilson on me, them jumping at everything, just making it kind of difficult for me. I would pretty much say it was the same. Just more physical this time.

Q. How will you use this moment to motivate you for your next chapter?

AARI McDONALD: Just to keep working on my game, sharpen my game some more. Just keep my head up and always remind myself the sky's the limit. Just keep working hard and just making people alongside of you better.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.



