

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

Sunday, April 4, 2021

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

Arizona Wildcats

Adia Barnes

Finals Postgame Media Conference



Stanford 54, Arizona 53

THE MODERATOR: We will take questions for Coach Barnes.

Q. You turned Stanford over so much, 21 times, but you could only turn that into 12 points. Do you think you were tight? Do you think you didn't take great shots? What was going on?

ADIA BARNES: I think we definitely didn't convert on the turnovers. I think we were just taking some quick shots. I think taking some forced shots. But those shots had been falling prior to this game.

They just didn't fall today. We shot 29% from the field. We were missing a lot around the rim the, a lot of chippies, a lot of floaters, pull-ups. Just taking the shots off balance. Those are things we don't convert on.

So if we had to turn them over 21 times, we have to be able to convert. If you would tell me we would lose down by 20 rebounds on the boards, shoot 28%, I would have told you we would have lost by 30.

Against great teams like Stanford, we have to be a little bit better at the small things. It doesn't ever come down to the last shot. It comes down to the missed free throws down the stretch, the foul on the three-point shot, getting the turnovers and not converting. It's those things. It's never the last play.

But it obviously just stings pretty bad.

Q. I know this was a tough loss, but if you can take a moment and think about not just this tournament run but your whole season and what this team has accomplished. What does that mean to you? How

special is this team?

ADIA BARNES: This team is so special. I am so proud. We fought. We weren't the best team in the tournament. No one thought we'd be here. We believed in each other. We didn't play a great game, but we battled. We played our hearts out. We came within one possession.

It doesn't come down to the last possession, it comes down to all the little things. The margin of error is so slim in a championship game. This is uncharted territory for the Wildcats. Our program hadn't been to the tournament in 15 years, 16 years. We've never played in the championship game.

Were we a little tight? Yeah. Were we not hitting shots? Yeah. We fought, played great defense. We did some good things.

But Stanford is such a good team with so much depth, so many weapons offensively, they isolated us inside, they did some things that were really tough for us to guard.

But I'm not ashamed. Like, we made it to the championship game. We came within a basket of winning a national championship. So I'm proud. It's hard. It does hurt. Like my heart's broken. But I can't ask for anything more of this team. To shoot 28% and come within one point, 27% from the three, lose by one point. We did some other things really well, so I'm proud. No one thought we would be playing a championship game.

They did everything I asked. It's just the shots didn't fall and the little things we weren't able to execute on.

Q. In the final play that you drew up, everybody knew it was going to go to Aari McDonald, but were there any other options explored at that point to dish it off or anything, or was it Aari or nothing?

ADIA BARNES: No, it was going to be Aari or nothing just because if you look at the game, really Aari was the one scoring. My decision as a coach, I knew she was going to be doubled, but running a screen, the screener type action was the best option. It wasn't like in this game we were

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hitting from the three, so there's an option for a three-pointer in that situation. We needed a two.

We knew she would catch it on the three-point line. That's what happened. But they did a really good job of denying us after the screen. They forced us to catch the ball really high. When Aari went to drive, we know she can go downhill, there's plenty of time, we work on that in practice with special situations, she was pretty much triple teamed and couldn't go downhill.

At that point we've been on Aari's back for the whole tournament. She's got to take that shot. Unfortunately it still had a chance of going in. But I have to put the ball in her hands in that situation because she's one of the reasons why we're here.

Q. You mentioned how proud you are of your team, nobody expected you to get here. What is this going to do for you going forward? You've upped the bar so much. What kind of dividends is this going to pay off in the coming years?

ADIA BARNES: I don't even have sight of that right now because I'm in the moment. I'm just a little bit devastated.

But, I mean, for our players, they've set the foundation. They are the reason why we're here. We didn't get to do this last year, so Dominique, Amari, TT, all those players from last year, we didn't get to go to the tournament. We're fortunate and blessed to be playing.

This year with Aari, with Shaina, with Bendu, Sam, Cate, Lauren, Trinity, everybody, the whole team from 1 to 14, we fought to get here. So the bar is high. The standard is high once you come this far. Once you've had success like this, you reach for the sky. So you fight a little bit more.

We have some players, some key players, returning next year. Now this is going to be where you want to go. This is going to be what we're trying to do. So proud because they've done this, they got us here. Now going to the tournament, like before the goal was going to the tournament, or winning a Pac-12 championship. Now we played for the national championship, which not a lot of teams can say they've done that. Not a lot of team versus gone this far.

The reality is with this season, one person is going to walk away happy with the season and they're national champions, everyone else is going to walk away disappointed. We got this close, so definitely disappointed. We all wanted to hoist the trophy and make history. It would have been almost next to a miracle for us to do that.

We had an opportunity to do that. That's all I could ask for. So the bar is high. We want to come back here. I'm trying to build a program like Tara has, build a program like Geno and Dawn, all the other trailblazers in this profession. I'm not satisfied with just being here, being in the tournament; I want to build a program where you're surprised when they don't win. Like when you look at Tara, Geno, Dawn, it's surprising if they don't win a championship; it's a disappointment. I don't want to come here once and be done. I want to be back here. I think in the future, Arizona will be back.

Q. Very tight game. What do you think it says about the Pac-12 conference? What does it mean for two Pac-12 teams to have had this close of a game?

ADIA BARNES: The Pac-12 conference is the best conference in the country. It was evident right now. Two very good teams competing on the biggest stage for women's basketball. We've always said it's the best conference. Tara has been saying this a long time.

I think it's time for people to respect the Pac-12 more, start paying attention, know who our players are, start watching us. I know on the East Coast when we play 7 or 8 at night, it's really late. Start paying attention, we have some of the best players in the country. We play some of the best basketball. It's a dominant conference.

To have the winner of the Pac-12 be the champion, national champion, it's pretty amazing. We finished second. We finished second nationally right now.

I think it says a lot about our conference. We continue to just have success in the tournament year in and year out.

Q. Shaina, how much she raised her game today, the entire tournament, what it says about next year when Aari is gone and you need her more?

ADIA BARNES: For sure. Shaina had her best game of the year. She came in today, gave us a spark and played her heart out defensively, offensively. Seven rebounds, I mean, three steals. Shaina was phenomenal. Without Shaina playing the way she did, we wouldn't have even come down to last possession.

Aari passing the baton to Shaina, Shaina is returning. We'll have some good players returning. Lauren is a freshman. Cate is returning. Bendu is returning. Aari is not going to be here, possibly Trinity and Sam.

We have a good nucleus, they have this experience. They've had a taste of this success. So now they can be the leaders next year for everybody else and show what

the standard is, what it takes to get here. It takes a little bit more. It takes another level in the pre-season, off-season, to be able to win championships.

We're not quite there yet, but we're going to be there. So very proud of Shaina, the way she played. Everybody, Bendu. Sam, it wasn't her best night offensively, but she played great defense. We just needed a little bit more from a couple more people to be able to win this game.

Q. I'm wondering what Stanford did early on with Aari to maybe get her a little bit off her rhythm? But what it said about her to find that rhythm late in the game and give you a chance to win?

ADIA BARNES: If you look at the game, the whole time I think they forced her -- they were allowing tough threes. They didn't ever give her space. She was just maneuvering and finding ways to go downhill. But a lot of bodies in the paint. Every time she went downhill, there were posts in the paint or weak side help. We kind of expected that. We knew that. We knew we had to be really good in transition. We knew we'd have to turn them over and score. We weren't able to turn them over and convert.

Playing in the quarter court against Stanford is not an advantage for Arizona. Going downhill, playing fast in transition, our defense creating our offense is an advantage for Arizona. We weren't able to convert on some of those things. So very hard. Very hard when we're in the halfcourt because a lot of attention is on Aari. A lot of people, they forced her into tough shots.

The reality is, the last couple games she was making those tough shots. We took a lot of quick shots that were hard, a lot of off-balance shots, but they just didn't fall. Very hard to shoot 29%, 27% from the three and win a national championship game. We had to have some more shots fall. That's all.

Sorry, that's my baby in the background (smiling).

Q. What will you remember about this team? Does this run cement Aari's legacy as the best player in program history?

ADIA BARNES: Yeah, for sure. Aari hands down, no doubt, is the best player in Arizona's history. She was a lot better than I ever was. The fact that I held those records for so long, doesn't mean a lot, because it means you weren't that good for a long time. Aari just shattered everything. Better player than I could have ever been. Led us to the national championship game when no one would have thought that.

Aari was phenomenal. Definitely the best player in Arizona history. I'm proud that I coached her. I'm proud she chose me twice. I'm proud she came to Arizona to do something special when we weren't good. We were probably 300-something RPI. For her to come here and come back when she could have gone pro, then to lead us to the national championship and be one shot away from winning it all, I mean, she's amazing.

Q. There were three or four times in the game that it looked like Stanford was going to get away from you. They went up by nine, one time by 11. What did you feel you had to do at that point? What did you say to your team?

ADIA BARNES: Had to make a couple defensive adjustments. We were getting lost a couple times on some specific scouts, specific actions. When we didn't execute it, they scored. So just had to be a little bit better with some actions.

Then I think that we did that, then we definitely put a little bit more pressure, tried to help from some different areas. Stanford usually does not shoot 4-for-14, 29% from the three. I think we forced them into taking some contested shots. But I think we guarded some things really well.

Yeah, just kind of some miscommunication on a couple things. But it's not really what we do. A little bit of mental lapse on some things. Nothing is perfect. When I look at why we lost the game, second-chance points, turning them over and not converting on the turnovers, just making free throws. That's the difference in the game. Down the stretch we missed some key free throws. If we would have done those things, we would have won, even shooting 28%, 6-for-22 from the three. We had a chance because we made some very good defense today.

Q. What will you remember most about this team and this season?

ADIA BARNES: Just the way that we fought, the way that we just approached things, the way they looked at me in my eyes and believed in the things I said, spoke my language, played their hearts out.

I think when you're a coach and your team plays their hearts out for you, there's a good connection. I think if you look around the country, there's a lot of teams that don't play hard for their coaches, don't listen. They will run through a wall for me, and they did that. They fought, they played their hearts out. They were tired a little bit, but they found a way to get back in the game.

As a coach, I am happy, I'm satisfied. This was a hard year. It was a hard year. It was a COVID year. It was a year we didn't get team bonding a lot. We were on lockdown in hotels most of the year. We've been here three weeks, pretty much on lockdown. It is hard mentally for players.

But they stuck together. They fought. They were resilient. They handled adversity. They didn't complain. They didn't second-guess things. We ask a lot. I ask a lot from them off the court, on the court. We do a lot at Arizona, whether it's community service, a little less this year because of COVID, but tons of skill work, a lot of little things, and they did it. They never complained. They never questioned the things I asked them to do.

I'll remember just their fight. They always say, We have that dog mentality, I'll remember that. I remember when everybody around the country didn't believe in us, counted us out, we believed in each other. We did that. We celebrated each other. We fought and we made it to the championship game. We're not the best team in the country. We're not the deepest team, not the tallest team. But we fought, we played some good defense. I think we played some of the best defense in the country.

So that's just one. That's heart. But that's something you can control. Just proud of this team, our resiliency, our mental toughness, our want to win. The way they fought for me. They never had a doubt. They looked me in the eyes and fought. I love them. I wouldn't ask for anything. I wouldn't change anybody. I wouldn't get bigger, change my players. Don't care if we can't shoot here, can't post, I don't care because we fight, and that's all I can ask.

Q. Obviously Arizona has made its mark on the court. You also made your mark as a coach. You were outspoken about very important issues. Did it take time for you to develop your voice in that way or have you always been like that?

ADIA BARNES: Just because I'm me. Sometimes I'm a little too transparent. I think we saw that the other day on the court. But I do what I feel for my team. That's all I care about. Don't care about the other stuff.

I don't know. If I'm passionate about something and I believe it, I'm going to talk about it. I don't know. It's just who I am. Sometimes your biggest strength is sometimes your biggest weakness. But there's some things. I represented a lot of things today. I look back at my journey with this team. I had a baby right when the season started. Took like a week off. It says I took a month off, but I did not. I was on Zoom calls four days after having a C-section. It was hard.

But my team loved on me. I missed a couple weeks. I got a little sick. They fought for me. I came back. They were patient. I'm happy.

I represented moms. I have a baby here, you can hear her crying, ready to feed. I represent moms. You can be coach, be at an elite level. You just have to have a village like I do. I represent black females who don't get her too often or don't get opportunities.

But I had an opportunity to be on the biggest stage and represent a lot and coached against one of the best coaches in the world, who unfortunately I have to coach against during the Pac-12 all the time. But also who mentors me and who I can call for advice, who cares about me and women's basketball, that's Tara VanDerveer.

There were two women coaching on the biggest stage today, myself and Tara. I think that's also meaningful for women's basketball. There was a lot of hats to fill.

But former players, getting into coaching, we need development for coaching at other levels. We need to develop future coaches in former players because it says a lot when a player has been where these players want to go. You can't teach that. That's like Dawn Staley has so much success. Who wouldn't want to play for the Olympic head coach and who was one of the best point guards ever? Who wouldn't want to go play there? Who doesn't want to go play for a pioneer, a trailblazer in women's basketball, Tara, the most winningest coach. Phenomenal women. They represent so much.

It's just the beginning for Arizona. I'm young. I have a lot of coaching ahead of me. Tara has won, like, 1,100 more games than me, so I have a long way to go. She's been here many times. Her team is more experienced in these settings.

Just proud of what we did, what I was able to represent. I can tell you all those things, representing mom, former players, a woman of color, these things made me coach a little harder, want it a little bit more just because I received so much love from everybody. So many texts, I think all of my former WNBA friends, everybody texted me. They were rooting for me. So I wanted it bad for so many reasons. I wasn't able to get it done and I'm sad.

But, you know...

Q. Let me ask you about Tara quick: 29 years between titles, the longest gap between titles in Division I collegiate sports history. What kind of perseverance, resilience does it take to run a program

**to a lot of Final Fours, conference championships,
then after almost three decades win another title?**

ADIA BARNES: I mean, it means so much. The fact that I think nowadays, if you look at coaching, to even have the opportunity to coach that long at warmup place means you're so successful. To be at the same school for so many years, have sustained success, shows what a phenomenal coach she is. So much time, that she's still coaching at this level, having so much success, speaks volumes to her and who she is, what she does.

I'm very happy for Tara. I think she's amazing. She's helped me since I became the coach at Arizona. She's believed in me. She's given me advice, constructive criticism. She's always cheering for me. She always says she cheers for me except for one time in the year, when we play each other.

Means a lot. She's one of the best there is. I think she's unfortunately for us going to be coaching a lot longer. I don't think she's going to hang it up yet because she has a phenomenal class coming in next year, along with Geno and Dawn. They have amazing classes coming in next year so they'll be back here, I'm sure.

It means a lot. So many years in between. For her to be so successful, it just shows what a great coach she is. Like I think for me as a young coach, to be able to coach against her in our conference, it makes me better. I think to be the best, you got to play against the best and coach against the best. I get to do that against a lot of great coaches in our conference.

I'm happy for Stanford. They're a phenomenal team. It was really hard for you was to do some things that we normally do. She's got a great team. They're going to be good for a lot longer.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

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