

2021 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Friday, December 17, 2021

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Nationwide Arena

Nebraska Cornhuskers

Coach John Cook

Lauren Stivrins

Nicklin Hames

Madi Kubik

Press Conference



Nebraska 16-25, 25-17, 25-20, 25-22

Pitt

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the University of Nebraska.

COACH COOK: I thought Pittsburgh came out and just was unbelievable the first game. Their tempo, the way, everything they were doing, just it was perfect volleyball for several points. So I was a little worried that it could be a fast night.

But our team hung in there. We started making some adjustments and made adjustments to Pittsburgh's tempo. And I thought as the match went on, we just got stronger and stronger. And the team did a great job of staying with it, playing the big points, making adjustments.

And, again, congratulations to Pittsburgh. They have a heck of a team. And they had a great season. And this is a big win for Nebraska. And, again, these players and this team did a great job today of finding a way to win that.

Q. Lauren, take us to the end of the third set, the score is tied when you stepped to the service line. What's going through your mind at that point, and how did that turn the tide and kind of get the momentum back on your side?

LAUREN STIVRINS: I don't really know. It was one of those -- I think at that point everyone on our team was kind of flowing. When you're in that kind of state of mind you just don't really have much going on up here. It just kind of

happens.

I just looked over and got the serving zone and then just hit it. And there wasn't much thought going into it. I knew that my team was going to figure it out once I got it over. So all I had to do was get it over.

Q. Does "being in the flow" mean getting back row kills?

LAUREN STIVRINS: Sure, yeah. It means trusting my teammates and know they're going to do what needs to be done.

Q. What for you changed after that first set? What defensively did changed for you to adjust to Pitt's tempo and speed?

LAUREN STIVRINS: I think we did a good job of just -- we knew what they were going to do. We just weren't necessarily executing. It was a lot faster than we thought it was going to be. So, we were guessing a little bit earlier, not going when we should have. So we just calmed down and stuck to our game plan and that worked out for us.

NICKLIN HAMES: I feel Pitt has a good offense when they're in system and it's really fast and it's hard to stop. I thought we started dumping our servers a little more, getting them out of system, and then we could kind of know where the ball was going, whereas when they were in system they were setting those middles and it's really hard to stop that type of offense.

Q. Nicklin, you guys are the No. 10 seed and you've reached the national championship match. How does that feel? What's satisfying about where your season has reached and how you guys did it?

NICKLIN HAMES: Yeah, it feels great. We talked all week that no one expected us or believed that we could be at this point right now, that we would be playing for a national championship.

But I feel like we've really hit our stride at the right time and



we just have this belief and we're out there playing, as we say, with one heart, which I think is really special. And you can tell how much fun we are having.

And in those moments, too, we've had a tough season. It's been up and down. And I think it's prepared us for those big moments. And we're playing great in those big moments.

And it's not always pretty, but it's our way and we get it done and we have each other's backs. And I just love playing with this team so much. I think that's the most special part about it.

Q. Madi, after you dropped that first set, what were the conversations like in that huddle before you took the floor for the second time?

MADI KUBIK: I think Lauren touched on it a little bit. I think we knew what we wanted to do and we had our game plan. We just needed to settle in a little bit and stay with that. We talk about war of attrition and doing it over time for a long time, not adjusting immediately when they do something different than what we scouted. I think we were focusing on that, leaning on each other and picking up our serve-and-pass game.

Q. Lauren, you won a national championship in 2017. You get that opportunity again on Saturday. What are your thoughts on just getting back into the final match of the entire season?

LAUREN STIVRINS: We're very excited to be back here. And this is pretty much everyone else's first time in this situation and in this game. And I'm just really excited, because, as Nicklin said, we have kind of figured it out now and we're competing harder than we have in the past few weeks. And we just love each other so much. So another day to play with this team is just everything. And we're all really looking forward to it.

Q. Coach, you mentioned your players have mentioned, it's been an up and down season. What's it been like to see these freshmen come and grow over the course of the year to the opportunity that sits in front of them on Saturday?

COACH COOK: I told them the other day, before we started the tournament, I said you guys aren't freshmen anymore. I had a big talk with them. They've been through the wars. The Big Ten really prepared them for what we are seeing in this tournament.

And those guys compete. And they've stepped up and made some really big plays. And I think they have a deep

belief. Like Lauren said, they really -- I don't know, tight-knit group. They like playing as one team.

Q. Nicklin, you were a freshman in 2018 in that final, what's it like for you to be back at this stage now three years later?

NICKLIN HAMES: It's exciting. I think we kind of missed the mark the past couple of years and we were so close. And so to finally get over the hump and play really great in that game, it's just really exciting. And I'm excited for all the freshmen and the people who haven't been here before because it's a really cool experience.

And just playing in front of that many fans and playing for a national championship it's something really special that you only get to do once or twice in a lifetime. I'm really excited for a whole team that they get to experience this.

Q. Madi, both yourself and other hitters seemed to use the block more as the match went on. Was that something that was emphasized or something you saw as the match went on?

MADI KUBIK: I think we were emphasizing it from the beginning of the match. As we talked about a little bit, we kind of settled in a little more and talked about breaking fingers. So that was the goal. Not actually breaking them, but kind of.

But, yeah, we just we were just trusting Nicklin to put up great balls and using our vision to find the hands and get swings and kills.

Q. Obviously this is going to be another showcase for the Big Ten. People can sometimes take for granted how great the conference is, how great your program is, but can you speak to that? Like what you have to do to stay at this level, have another chance now at a sixth national championship?

COACH COOK: Well, I said at the beginning of the tournament, I said how tough -- I thought this was the most competitive Big ten Conference since I've been coaching in the Big Ten.

And I knew, we prepare all the Big Ten teams to do really well. Unfortunately some -- we have to eliminate each other along the way. But you're seeing the results of that.

And it was a really, really challenging 10 weeks to play in this conference. But if you can survive it -- and again, I've got to give a lot of credit to Lauren and Nicklin and Madi are leaders on this team, that they kept this team with it.

We could have packed it in -- we lost three out of four matches I think at one point in the Big Ten. I think we lost, it was six or seven deuce games, that we lost those matches. And so they've stayed with it and they kept believing and kept getting better. And that's really hard to do for 10 weeks. And it's one of the reasons I think we've made it this far and the same for Wisconsin.

Q. Nicklin, it's one thing to watch Pitt's speed and power on tape. What was it like to experience it that first set? And what kind of adjustments did you, especially with the block, make to counter that?

NICKLIN HAMES: It was kind of like a shock at first, feel like it was almost super late. But I thought I kind of started going early, and I think the (indiscernible) did just to get on time with the tempo. When it's that fast, they tend to hit a little bit more risk away and across. And we were kind of setting up a little bit more inside, taking that away from them. I thought everyone made great adjustments throughout the match, because they were on fire in that first set. But overall I thought we adjusted really well.

Q. Nicklin, I know the match just got over, have you seen a screen shot of your reaction on Lauren's back row kill, or do you have any idea what happened as you celebrated?

NICKLIN HAMES: I have no idea. I can't wait, though. I'm sure it's entertaining.

Q. How big was the turnaround from the first set? How bad was it in the first set?

COACH COOK: I was thinking we were in trouble because Pittsburgh, they almost played a perfect game that first game. But one thing we talked about, just gotta stay with it, wear them down and hang in there. And they did a great job of that, because we could have got discouraged pretty easily. They were doing some really high-level stuff.

Q. It's the third time with Wisconsin, Lauren. Are you looking forward to playing Wisconsin the third time this year?

LAUREN STIVRINS: Definitely, this team that just competed tonight is completely different to the team that played them a couple of weeks ago and light years different to the one that played them earlier on in the season. And, so, I think we're more prepared and more ready than we've ever been. And we're definitely excited for the challenge. And we're ready to step up.

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