

# 2022 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

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Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center Arena

**Louisville Cardinals**

**Coach Dani Busboom Kelly**

**Amaya Tillman**

**Anna DeBeer**

Press Conference



near win in a way, even though we lost in the semis. But I think just that feeling of losing and being so close kind of has driven us this season.

I mean, even with veterans like Anna and Aiko and all the upperclassmen, having that near win has driven us to compete even higher and push ourselves to the limits. We now know what being in the Final Four takes and what we have to do every day to go on to the next round.

**Q. Amaya and Dani, along the lines for you individually, how are you different as a player, even though you've had past high decorations? How are you different as a player this year? And Dani, from your perspective, how is Amaya different this year?**

AMAYA TILLMAN: I just really tried to work on my attacking. I've always just naturally been a good blocker. So just kind of trying to be consistent. I've really focused on that this season being consistent and working my attacking.

And just even from a leadership standpoint, we lost a lot of key players last year and just seniors in general. So working on my leadership has been a very big factor in the role I've had this year.

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: I would agree with Amaya on the leadership. I think she's really stepped up. And we really needed her to step up. And on the court it's not like she's a different player; she's just in a different role, switching from M2 to M1. So we get her a lot more balls which allows her to be more productive.

But Amaya probably changed the most in the offseason from her leadership, and it's just been really cool to see her grow in that way. And she's a heck of a competitor.

And we say sometimes before matches, Amaya is not going to let us lose this. And sometimes I really feel that way. When she goes to the front row, it's like, ah, we're going to win here.

**Q. Anna, Claire is not here, but could I get you to talk about her? She was really good and this year she's**

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by head coach Dani Busboom Kelly and student-athletes Anna DeBeer and Amaya Tillman. Coach, if you would begin with an opening statement.

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: It's an honor to be back in the Final Four and exciting to be in Omaha. We know that they're always great hosts here in Omaha.

We're just proud of this group. I think we went through a lot of adversity to get here and had to play with a lot of fight and grit. And really stayed consistent, and they've really done everything that we've asked of them and more. So I'm excited that they get to show off for another match.

**Q. Anna, it's obvious from the way your team plays in matches that your practices must be most intense. Can you describe what practices are like for Louisville?**

ANNA DEBEER: One of our mottos is goofy, focus, fun this year. So I think while it is very intense and we want to make sure we're getting in a lot of work, we also want to make it fun and kind of have that laughing factor and just make sure that everyone's enjoying it.

So I think we do a good job of having a mix between both and in season especially. We have a lot of people who hold each other accountable. We're making sure we're taking care of the business but also in the right way.

**Q. Amaya, how does this year feel different? You made the Final Four last year. What's different this year and how are you approaching it?**

AMAYA TILLMAN: I feel with last year it kind of felt like a

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**been great. What have you seen in her that's made her improve so much? And is it fair to say we all get fooled you look at her she's so slight, and you think she's little out there but she's 6 feet tall. Anything you can offer about her?**

ANNA DEBEER: Claire is one of the most hardworking people I know. I mean, just seeing her growth when I came in as a freshman and how much she's improved over the years it's been really cool to see.

She's been someone who I've looked up to as being the same position as her. She's taught me a lot. And she's always coming in early to get extra reps and staying late to get even more. And that just goes to show the type of player she is.

And over these past few years, she hasn't always gotten all the press and all the recognition, I think. And she deserves it completely. And this year it has been so cool to see everything that she's achieved and accomplished and whatever else she's going to achieve in this weekend. I mean, she's awesome.

**Q. Amaya, coaches like to say "one match at a time," but you knew that Omaha, with its proximity to the Topeka area, is pretty convenient for your roots. How much was Omaha secretly on your mind throughout this season?**

AMAYA TILLMAN: I would say definitely on and off. Like you said, it's very close to home. I mean, it's like a two and a half, three-hour drive from my hometown. It's going to be nice to see my friends and family.

But definitely one game at a time. But now that we're in this position, I'm just really thankful to be here, especially just kind of the nostalgia of having my COVID season here.

And just being in this arena again, I'm getting a lot of memories and reminiscing on the COVID year here, when Kentucky won, it's going to be cool to see what we can do here as a Kentucky team as well.

**Q. Amaya said that last year's Final Four loss motivated the team. What does that look like, how often does that come up and how does it manifest itself throughout the course of the past year?**

ANNA DEBEER: I think it's always in the back of our minds, but at the very beginning of this year we wanted to make sure we're not comparing this year's team to last year's team because we're a lot different this year. We've lost a few key players and working our way through all those things.

So I think it's been in the back of our head this whole season. And we know what it takes to be here, like she said. And just to know that we've had the experience we have, the people, we know what it's like.

And a big huge environment like it was, I mean, we said we won't flinch this year. That was our little thing. Like, once we're here, we made it this far, we're not going to flinch this year.

**Q. Going from the back of your head, is it topic of conversation at all? Is it a common understanding amongst the team?**

ANNA DEBEER: I would say it's a common understanding. We don't always talk about it a lot but we know what it takes to get there. And we can't take days off, plays off.

It's a common understanding, like, if we want to get to where we want to be at the end of the season, that's the kind of work we have to put in each day.

**Q. I might ask you about the match. Can both of you players talk about both of the matches you played against them previously and what you expect tomorrow?**

ANNA DEBEER: Baylor and Oregon matches?

**Q. Your matches against Pitt. That's who you're playing --**

ANNA DEBEER: I thought you were saying the two previous ones.

Pitt is obviously an awesome team. And the first go around this season we obviously didn't play our best. And we worked through a few things. And the second time it was senior night, and I think our team did a better job of playing how Louisville volleyball is and taking care of business.

It's 1-and-1. It's split. It's going to be an awesome match. And I know they're going to want some revenge. We want to make sure we're not going to lose to an ACC team to get to the finals. It's going to be a battle, and I'm really excited.

AMAYA TILLMAN: Yeah, if I'm correct, I think this may be the first ACC matchup in semifinals. So just that in general is really cool to be in that position.

And I really respect Pitt but also, like Anna said, we're ready for them to come at us full force. They're going to

want revenge, but we have to show them what Louisville volleyball is at the end of the day.

**Q. Anna, your coach talked about the leadership growth of Amaya. As a player peer, do you have any examples off the top of your head from a match this season that comes to mind as an example of her leadership role this year?**

ANNA DEBEER: I don't think I have one in particular. But just from when I was off the court and I wasn't able to play, with my injury, I was able to observe a lot more. And seeing players like Amaya step up and really take charge out there, she has been so urgent.

And the team always makes fun of me when I say we need to have urgency, but seeing her take charge out there and really having that aggressive mentality, like Dani said, you know she's going to win and you're not going to let us lose this.

You can see it in her eyes. You can see it in her actions. And I think that's special. She's just really brought that out this year in her leadership.

**Q. We talked last week about the possibility of being back here. But now that it is a reality, what does it mean to you to be back here in a building you've won twice in, in your home state, probably in front of a lot of friends and family members, I would assume?**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: It's pretty surreal to be back in a different role for the third time. And when you start a season, you always want to get to the Final Four; that's your hope.

But as it gets closer and close I think the pressure builds and when you have the hometown factor it's even more pressure. So it means a lot.

We're going to have tons of family, friends and people that have become die-hard Louisville fans in the building. To be able to share that with them and them to be able to see us in person means a lot.

I'm really proud of this team and our players and the way they play. And I'm excited for people that know me to witness that live.

**Q. What have your interactions been like with your friends and family who will be here tomorrow?**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: Just really they're excited. And I think Nebraska not making it, they have somebody else to root for and to cheer for. And I just think they're

excited and very supportive.

**Q. What did you take from last year's trip to the Final Four that you can apply or change and kind of learn from to -- just whether it be intensity or game management or logistics? What can you learn from last year to apply to this trip?**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: A huge thing is probably logistics. And last year we were really just excited to be in Columbus. And it was the school's first Final Four. ACC hasn't been to the Final Four in a long time. It felt like a lot of breaking barriers.

And this year we understand what it's like -- today, the hoopla, the open practice, everything we have to do. The players are in a better mental space because they know what's coming and they're not going to get overwhelmed by it. Mainly the logistics.

But I do think just having experience is huge, that we return a huge core that was here last year and got to feel it.

I also think playing at the Yum! was huge, a huge crowd, a huge arena, the big scoreboard, a different feeling. Very similar to this arena.

**Q. With you and your coaches, what is their specific breakdowns of who does? What does Todd do, what does Dan do, what do you do? The whole big picture and then match prep as well, if you don't mind.**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: Well, I train the setters and run the offense. And Dan trains the middles, and he runs the defense. And Todd trains the outside, and then he calls the serving zones and breaks down their servers and our servers and where we want to serve.

And our volunteer, Parker Mikesch, he spends time with the liberos. That's really how we break it down from a staff standpoint. And game prep, the same things. I'll prep, what do we want to do offensively. Dan will prep defense and Todd will prep serving.

**Q. Same question I asked Anna about Claire, the way she's exploded this year from becoming a really good player to a great player. And what you saw along the way in the last year.**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: I feel like I've been asked that a lot this year. And there's always -- like, there's not enough to say. Or there's not enough words to express what she's done because it really is unbelievable.

At one point, as a freshman, she wanted to quit volleyball.

And so you look back at that and you're like, I can't believe we were from there to the ACC Player of the Year and a First-Team All-American.

And she's just improved so much. She's just really allowed the love of the game to show in her play. She cares a lot about her team and the University of Louisville. And it makes me emotional just because it's really special what she's done this year and it's pretty awesome.

**Q. 2006, you're a senior here, playing for a national championship. Can you talk about your personal journey over the last 16 years as a coach --**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: 16, wow.

**Q. Doesn't seem that long.**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: That's a lot to think about.

**Q. The way you've grown as a coach, but also the way the sport's grown and the fact, like you said, two years now, two ACC teams here, if you could -- those two tracks, if you could talk about those.**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: Wow. I think -- I don't even know where to start. I guess as a coach, I got into coaching -- I thought I had to give it a try, otherwise I'd always regret it. But in the back of my mind I knew once I got a coaching job I'd probably never get out of it.

But when I got offered the job at the University of Tennessee, I told my boyfriend at the time -- he's now my husband -- hey, I took the job. He said, were you even going to talk to me about. I said, well, I guess if we're serious you can come along. And so I was pretty excited to get started.

And then just being able to go to Tennessee, then to the University of Louisville. And then come back to Nebraska as an assistant, I worked for three very different head coaches, but I learned so much at each stop.

And then being the head coach, offered the job here, I knew I had a lot of weaknesses, but I knew what it took to run a great program.

And so I just feel like just being very authentic and true to who I was and making sure that I made great hires and surrounded myself with great people was really important.

And now just to see the sport where it is. My first year in the ACC, we didn't have any teams ranked in the top 25. And I remember we kept winning. We could not break into the top 25, but we weren't beating any ranked opponents.

So I really was starting -- we need to push the ACC forward. And I've talked to Dan Fisher a few times. We need each other to be great and we need the conference to continue to be great because it is a great conference. And a lot of young talented coaches.

And I'm pretty excited we both made it back to the Final Four, because I think last year, there was a lot of noise, like, oh, this is a one-time thing.

For us to both do it again under completely different circumstances with completely different teams just says a lot about the growth of the sport.

I also think the parity in the athletes -- it's not necessarily about recruiting the best players it's about recruiting the best team. That's why I think you're seeing so much parity in our sport because volleyball is the ultimate team sport.

**Q. You touched on it a little bit with your friends and family obviously going to be cheering for you tomorrow. But what would it mean to you for the Nebraska fans, local Nebraskans to rally behind you and your team tomorrow?**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: We need it. I think Pitt is extremely tough to play. They always find ways to win. Obviously they're here. I don't think anybody saw them beating Wisconsin at Wisconsin, except teams that play them every single year multiple times.

So not only would it mean a lot to me, it means a lot to our team. And we'll need some extra momentum and everyone knows that crowds can certainly help that. Hopefully they'll be cheering for us. And they want to see a fellow Nebraskan in the finals.

**Q. You are well-schooled in the culture at Nebraska on assistant coaches who go on to become head coaches. How would you characterize the culture you're creating at Louisville? And when some of your players get to their upper classman status, do you think to yourself she might make a good coach eventually?**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: I think we have a lot of great coaches on our roster. I hope we see some of them get into it.

Now, I think a big thing is just -- we talk a lot about authenticity and love for the game and making sure that we're doing what we need to be great. But we're also really -- we're not taking ourselves too seriously. We like to have fun. At the end of the day we're playing a game.

This isn't life or death.

And I don't know, I think with Mike Leach passing away, I talked to our players about that, I always felt he was a great coach, emulating that, not taking yourself too seriously and loving what you're doing. But it is a game.

And I think that makes our players play really hard and have fun while they're doing it. And we talk about being goofy, focused, fun. That's been a great motto for our team the last few years.

**Q. Is it a blessing or is it a curse to play a team at this stage that you're so familiar with?**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: I've been thinking about that. I don't know. I think it goes both ways. I think it's really hard to play a team three times. And you almost -- like, you know too much and then you might overthink some things. But it's also really nice for preparation. And, okay, we've seen them do this; we kind of know what they like to do.

So I don't know if it's a blessing or a curse. I guess we'll find out tomorrow.

But again it was funny when they beat Wisconsin. I was like oh, my gosh, Pitt beat -- what an amazing win. And then I was, like, oh, crap, we have to play them now. I think it goes both ways.

**Q. The players also mentioned this, the word "goofy," you mentioned it too. How does that come across? Where do you see that goofiness from your team?**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: For example, we have a history of starting slow this year. So we had to tell the team, if we're not first to 10, like, no more TikToks. And of course they're like, no, we can't lose our TikToks.

And I think Claire's always cracking jokes. If somebody is late, running late because of treatment, it's always like who's got a joke. And Dan loves his dad jokes. He puts those on the scouting reports.

I just think it's a lot of different people of kind of bring that out in each other.

**Q. Just a little bit more about the Pitt match. These are three really different matches. The first one, I think I'm correct, Anna did not play. And the second one being at home and she did play.**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: She played back row.

**Q. Just she alone the factor of her, the thought they're three different matches and so different even though it's the same opponent.**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: I definitely think we played pretty poorly for a long part of the match and I think Pitt played pretty poorly at Louisville. So you almost have to throw those out because I don't think either of us are going to play that poorly here.

And having Anna back is definitely a factor. But it's not like Pitt hasn't seen her play or played against her multiple times.

So I'm sure they're breaking her down, but this isn't someone totally new. And I think they're doing some different things in their lineup and their rotations have gotten so much better, and they're using depth that we haven't seen before.

They're also changing and evolving still. And I've seen their press clippings and they don't feel like they've peaked yet. I don't think we have either. I think it's pretty exciting to go into Thursday's match with both teams feeling that way.

**Q. I know you don't want to put too much emphasis on this, but this is only the second time there have been two women at the Final Four. I wonder how well -- I know Jennifer's out on the West Coast, but I wonder how well you know her and what do you feel about your position as a role model for women coaches in the head coach realm?**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: I don't know Jennifer too well. But I know her well enough to know that she's a great person and a great coach. And when you follow her career, it's pretty amazing. You know, she took a sabbatical. This year when we played Boston College, she walked in. I said, what is a San Diego coach doing here? Well, her daughter plays for Boston College. It was parents weekend. She said I just really needed to make sure I saw my daughter play at least once. And I thought that was a pretty amazing statement.

But last year, when I think I was the only female here in the Final Four. I was like I don't want to talk about that. I just want to be known as a coach.

I do think having a child, and the more I've thought about it, I think it does need to talk about, it's like why are we talking about that 2022, being the second time it's happened. And it is amazing to be a mom and have a great career and be able to do what you love.

So it means a lot to show our players that they can do that, whether it's coaching or anything else, that if that's what they want, they can do it. But I do think there's a lot of lessons. Like how do you do it and how can you be successful and hopefully I'm showing them that every day.

**Q. For the people who haven't followed along with you and your team all season long, how would you describe to them your team and what makes you proud of them?**

COACH BUSBOOM KELLY: So many things. I would probably describe our team as just I think they love the sport and they play with so much pride. I think they all came to Louisville to -- they're on a mission, and they came here to be on a mission. And I think that's what makes us so easy to cheer for, is you see that in their play, but then they're just so great at celebrating each other. But sometimes I think great culture and great teams, it's hard to like really say what you see. You just know that you love watching them. I think we're one of those teams.

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