

2022 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Thursday, December 15, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center Arena

Texas Longhorns

Coach Jerritt Elliott

Saige Ka'aha'aina-Torres

Madisen Skinner

Molly Phillips

Press Conference

Texas d. San Diego

26-28, 25-16, 25-18, 25-20

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Texas head coach Jerritt Elliott and student-athletes Saige Ka'aha'aina-Torres, Molly Phillips and Madisen Skinner. Coach, an opening statement.

COACH ELLIOTT: What a battle. So much respect for San Diego. So well-disciplined in the way they play. Jen and her staff did a phenomenal job with that team. There was no easy out for us.

We were really challenged from a coaching staff of finding some good offensive weapons to try to get past it but also trying to get the ball to the floor.

And Game 1, we just made too many errors. This is a sport where you make too many errors you beat yourself and we did that in game one. Still had some opportunities, were fighting. And really proud of our kids for the way they looked at each other and believed in one another.

Different people stepped up tonight. I thought Logan struggled early on and had other players step up be able to do that. Like Logan, she can come back and finished real strong, gets the final kill for us.

But a complete team effort. I'm really proud of them. And being at this level, at this stage is not easy to get through. Just really happy that this team gets to stick together for another two days.



Q. Madisen, overall reaction for getting to the championship match and this team one win away from the title?

MADISEN SKINNER: It's so awesome. Every team is so different so you can't compare them. Just the drive and grit we have on this team is something that I've never been part of. To be able to play alongside these girls has been an absolute dream.

But it's good to be back. Have good mems and I think we can say we were comfortable just in practice and getting adjusted to the court. And kind of took a little bit for us to get our groove. Ended up turning it on, and that was that. But super excited to be back and love Omaha.

Q. Madisen, after you guys won over Ohio State, Asjia said you're deep enough that this isn't all on Logan Eggleston to do it alone. And tonight was proof of that. If you could talk about the depth on the team and the experience that helped you guys get through this one?

MADISEN SKINNER: We have so many weapons. And it takes a lot of pressure, I guess, off of us knowing that someone can step up in any given moment. Knowing that our teammates are going to step in and make a game-changing play if we need them to.

And I think of us getting stuck in a rotation and Melanie being able to come and gets a kill right off the bat, has been on the bench the whole time, cold shoulder, but gets us in the rotation and we end up signing out and got on the run.

Little things like that makes me think about -- and super nice to have a ton of people that can do a ton of amazing things. Just knowing we can lean on each other and you don't have to do it all by yourself.

Q. Coach, I think this was the fifth time this season you guys have lost the first set but you've won all five of those matches. You said you kind of beat yourself

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in that set. But can you talk about your team's resilience to even losing that first set then come back?

COACH ELLIOTT: I mean, the first set, we were just struggling putting the ball in play with service errors and hitting errors. We just couldn't find the court.

And sometimes that happens when teams start digging you early on, and we didn't attack the court enough. I thought game one our blocking was not as sharp as it could be. We were a little high getting and we were getting (indiscernible) a lot. They were just attacking the block and we talked to them about hand positioning being a little bit lower and tighter. And I think we really started getting transition kills from that.

Earlier on in game one they were just scoring all day long off our block. I thought our blockers got a little bit wider. We got in front of them and we were able to slow them down.

We also changed some things from the service line. Frohling was really hurting us, and changed some distance things. But I thought after game one, they responded. And they played extremely well. And they were steady the entire match the rest of the way.

We got stuck in a couple of rotations, but besides that it was pretty smooth volleyball for us.

Q. Saige, what was the mood on the court after that first set? What changed to regroup the team?

SAIGE KA'AHA'AINA-TORRES: Obviously everyone is disappointed when you lose a set, but at the same time we knew that tonight was going to be a grind. We knew we were going to have to fight for every single point, through every single set. And we knew we weren't going to be able to take our foot off the gas.

Them fighting as hard as they did the first said, second, third, fourth, they're a great team. But it was just more from our point of view of taking control and taking initiative of that game and being, like, okay, we're going to win this thing; how are we going to win this thing?

We're going to lean on each other. We're going to trust our training and do what we came here to do.

So I really commend San Diego for a great performance, but I think our team really came together between that first and second set and kind of just made the decision that we weren't going to let this game get away from us. And we performed really well for the rest of the game. So we did a great job.

Q. Saige or Madisen, at one point in the fourth set there was a four Longhorn pile-up. Saige, you were involved in that. And, Madisen, you finished off the kill. Talk about that play and what it says about your team.

SAIGE KA'AHA'AINA-TORRES: I don't know what happened. I saw someone else going for that ball. I think it was more about our attitude of not letting that ball drop. We were down by four to start the set. Not a great way to start. But we knew we had to be gritty. And we knew that we were going to have to go for every single ball.

I knew that I was going to possibly collide with someone. And for Madi to be ready to just get up there and swing fearlessly, that's what you need from your outside hitter. And so she did a great job of trusting her training. She's been working really hard. I don't know what happened, but I'm glad we got the point.

MADISEN SKINNER: I think I popped that one up with my hand and everything went downhill from there. But we got the point. That's all that matters. I remember everyone screaming, get up, get up, because we have to keep playing. But it was an awesome effort on our end.

Q. Molly, what are you able to do to kill time for the excitement coming into these games? Are you able to sleep well or what do you do to manage your time?

MOLLY PHILLIPS: I think I speak for a lot of people on our team, we have to get a nap in. We're good at that. That's one thing we're good at. We do a really good job of just treating -- we've been talking a lot about treating these games like any other game.

Yeah, they have a lot of importance, and there's a ton of excitement around it. But we really just want to treat it like every other game and go out there and play Texas volleyball. I think focusing on that getting our pregame nap is something we focus on.

Q. Molly, when you lose that first set but you look around that huddle and you see all this championship experience, people who have been through it and been in matches like this, was that kind of a calming effect for you guys, because there was a lot of volleyball left to be played?

MOLLY PHILLIPS: Oh, yeah, for sure. I think that everyone can say the first set was not our perfect set. And it was not good volleyball on our end and we lost by two points. I think that that's also something that we know we can turn on and just rely on our training.

It feels awesome to go out and play perfect volleyball and sweep a team, but it's an even better feeling to not play the perfect game, grind through the hard times and beat a team in four sets like that. That's an amazing team.

To be able to turn around and fall back on our training, like we've been saying, is an even better feeling than sweeping 3-0.

Q. What made you want to go to Melanie in that fourth set? And what kind of trust is there to bring her in when she's been on the bench the whole match?

COACH ELLIOTT: How about that swing to get a side out for us? It was awesome. Molly is a right side so she hits two times on the right side, one time on the left. We were struggling with ball control. We were struggling getting a good swing. We just tried to solidify the ball control a little bit more.

If we got an out of system we wanted Melanie to take that swing. No offense to Molly at all; she had done a great job all night. But we were just looking to get a quality swing from someone who is a little more experienced from hitting on the left when the ball is out of system. So we've done it a lot this year in certain times. And she responded.

Q. Madisen, how did training with the national team this spring help you to prepare you for this season and help you in this moment?

MADISEN SKINNER: I mean, it's always so fun to train with the best. And even if it's only for a week or two weeks, it's nice to be able to be surrounded by greatness. It inspires me to come back, bring some of the knowledge that I got from U.S.A. back to my team, and just motivates me to work even harder.

I would love to be able to represent U.S.A. at some point in my career. It's a great reminder of what I'm capable of accomplishing. And being surrounded by amazing people is a plus. So it's been awesome.

Q. I think this is Texas' eighth NCAA final, ninth including the AIW (phonetic). You've been there for most of them. What's the biggest key for that turnaround between the semifinal and championship match, knowing you don't know who you're going to play yet, but from your perspective, the key between winning the semifinal and going to the championship match, preparing for that title match?

COACH ELLIOTT: It's another game. It's about handling our emotions and handling our process in terms of

understanding that. And if we make it bigger than what it is, that's when things get in trouble. So I've got a lot of trust in this group in terms of our routines. Everything we do as a program is about routines. We will follow the same standard we did in the very first match of the season. They know what that is. They know what time that is.

We'll try to find some time right now, getting them home, back to the hotel, spend some time with their family, to enjoy this process a little bit.

But I've been really impressed with their resilience and the way they want to fight. They really want to earn this thing, and now they've got that chance. And we're going to go for it.

Q. What's next? Do you let them go back to the hotel? Do you all stay in the stands and watch this match? Where do you go next?

COACH ELLIOTT: The staff's going to watch. We were going to have them watch. But with a day and a half and so much time, tomorrow is really important to them to be able to breathe a little bit and see that. So I think the emotional side of this, and families want to see their daughters when they win a big match like that. We'll let them go back to the hotel, spend a little bit of quality time. We'll get the film organized for them and we'll get them organized.

Q. Molly, you've gone to Bella a lot here late in the season and she's delivered. Any conversations about her taking that one off the head. Or a dig? I don't know that you see that every day.

MOLLY PHILLIPS: Great cover. Zoe has been really stepping up. She works hard every single day in the gym and is ready for moments like that. That's just another thing that would happen to Bella. That's just not shocking.

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