

2024 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Sunday, December 22, 2024

Louisville, Kentucky, USA

KFC Yum! Center

Louisville Cardinals

Dani Busboom Kelly

Sofia Maldonado Diaz

Nayelis Cabello

Championship Press Conference



Penn State - 3, Louisville - 1

DANI BUSBOOM KELLY: I think being up here in this moment is always tough. You just have so many emotions from the loss but also the end of some amazing careers. Then you're also very thankful for what this team did and that we were here.

Hat's off to Penn State. They played great today. I think they gave us -- we couldn't stop them, and they played really well. I felt like we could never catch up.

But a historic day for volleyball. We're very happy for Katie. It's a big deal for this sport. I'm very thankful that that monkey is off its back and we can move on and that more women will be in this position in the future.

Q. Congratulations on your season, Coach. Can you just talk about that second set, just how much that took. It was one of the best sets I've ever seen. You fought off 10 set points. Did that just take a lot out of your team in terms of the rest of the match?

DANI BUSBOOM KELLY: I really didn't feel like it took a lot out of our team. I felt like, when we went in the locker room, we have hope now that we can do this, and we feel like we can.

I thought we fought the whole game. Looking back, it's like the players, we needed Charitie and Sofia to have huge nights, and they did. Again, we couldn't slow them down either. We did a lot of things that we felt like we needed to do to win that, but I thought they matched it and were better in some of those areas.

It was an incredible Game 2. Again, I thought it gave us

momentum. Unfortunately, that didn't show on the scoreboard.

Q. Other than the obvious that she's really good, what makes Mruzik so hard to stop? 73 attacks, so you kind of know where the ball is going a lot.

DANI BUSBOOM KELLY: She's just so smart. She sees the block so well. She's a fifth-year senior who's played in a ton of matches. She's played on Team USA. Not only is she physically extremely gifted, but she's got a great volleyball IQ.

I think that's what makes her so great is you can be in a great spot, and she knows how to score against anything that she sees. Then she's a well-rounded player -- great server, great passer, great defender. She showed all that today.

Q. Obviously we'll never know, had Anna played, if the outcome would have been different, but what does it say about your team that it played this well without her? Also, while you're talking about that, Elena Scott, wow.

DANI BUSBOOM KELLY: Yeah, I agree. I thought our team was really impressive. I think it's emotional when you have a player like Anna out, who you know that -- everybody in this building knows that that outcome, it might not be different, but it would have been a different match.

She sacrificed a lot, and to see this game taken away from her was really tough. Like I said, it was an incredible performance by Charitie and Sofia. We have Nay running a five-one this week for the first time as a freshman, she really stepped up. We had a lot of players step up. It was really impressive to see.

Elena is like a rock. It's like, when she plays amazing, it's like, well, we're used to that. She was very emotional in this match. You could just tell how much she wanted it and how much it meant to her and literally did every possible human thing to give us a chance.

Q. I wondered if both the players could answer this. I

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guess emotionally coming into this match knowing you weren't going to have one of your standout players, what were you saying to each other before just to be able to deal with that emotionally?

SOFIA MALDONADO DIAZ: Well, basically the whole week we've been saying we don't have anything to lose. Literally we just give it all, enjoy it, do it for the seniors, for the coaches, for us.

It was just like the mentality of giving it all, and we didn't have anything to lose.

NAYELIS CABELLO: To piggy-back off of that, just that mentality of going out there and playing for each other and our fans or whatever, but especially for Debo, her being such a big part on this team, just going out there and playing for her.

Q. Sofia, just on a personal end, I assume the reason you came to Louisville was to be able to experience this. Then the last few weeks has been you've just gotten better and better. Can you just talk about yourself and what it meant and how you improved?

SOFIA MALDONADO DIAZ: Coming here was going to be totally different for me, what I did in the past. I knew I wanted to win and be in this position. I knew this team had the potential to get to a Final Four or go like deeper in the tournament because I never played one.

Also, I kind of changed my role a lot, but I accept it. I knew this team was going to make me better, and they did. Now I see myself in (indiscernible), how I was playing, like I'm a totally different player now. So I'm really grateful for that.

Q. Coach, you talked about this being such a big day for women's volleyball. I wonder if you could expand on that a little bit for the second year on ABC, the record crowd here at Louisville. I know as hard as this is right now from a big-picture standpoint, it just seems like the sport just continues to explode.

DANI BUSBOOM KELLY: For sure, and you just named all the reasons why. The record crowd, the nationally televised game. We had insane viewership on Thursday night. It just shows that people want to watch volleyball. They want to watch women's sports.

These athletes, when you watch, it's not like they're just athletes. You can see the joy and the personalities in the way they play, and that's what makes this sport so fun.

Then to have two women in the finals, again, it meant a lot to be a part of that. It's big to trailblaze a path for future

women.

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