

2025 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Thursday, December 18, 2025

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach Craig Skinner

Brooklyn DeLeye

Eva Hudson

Molly Tuozzo

Semifinal Press Conference



Q. Molly and Brooklyn, at one point you looked over at each other, kind of like masks pulled down. What was that about?

MOLLY TUOZZO: Putting on our helmets. Helmet on, ready to dig.

BROOKLYN DeLEYE: Yeah. Usually when there's an open hole or the block is not there, we're stepping up into that seam. Whatever happens happens.

MOLLY TUOZZO: Body on the line.

BROOKLYN DeLEYE: Wow. I can't believe someone saw that.

Q. Eva, you had a slow start. With one set left, you erupted in sets four and five. Did anything change with your mindset?

EVA HUDSON: I just think we came out a little timid, not knowing what to do in the first set. Slowly found our rhythm in the second and third.

By the fourth and fifth, we found that rhythm. I don't know. Just swinging away. Knew my people behind me were covering.

Q. The word that Eva used yesterday to describe you guys was 'grit'. Talk about the grit of this team. The freshmen really stepped up in set five with Trinity's serving and Kassie's setting. Talk about those two things.

BROOKLYN DeLEYE: I think just the grit piece has just been there all along. I think that just comes from practice every day. We're just wanting to get better. We've just done a good job in not forgetting how we got here. I think that just really pulled through.

Talking about the freshmen, like, it's the biggest stage in college sport. I mean, we knew the nerves would be there. None of us have ever been there. I'm just super proud of the way that they came out because, I mean, as freshmen,

Kentucky 3

Wisconsin 2

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations to Kentucky on a great win.

We'll start with an opening statement by coach.

CRAIG SKINNER: Yeah, it's hard to know kind of what exactly to say after something like that. I have to give credit to Kelly and John, who I've known for years. Where they were and where they ended this season was a completely different place. I told Kelly and John afterwards the best coaching job those guys have done in terms of developing a team. That's our job as coaches.

I'm trying to find stats that we actually led in this match. I finally got to blocks. Well, no. We were close, (smiling).

But I think the cool thing about this team, I thought we'd done it all and I thought we found every possible way to win, and tonight was a different way.

I think the way they played, the heart that they show is immeasurable. I keep telling them they're transformational leaders in the way they go about it, what they've done for the sport, especially in Kentucky, but not only there, around the country. Proud of them.

But the job isn't finished.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

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coming into that, we've all had the experience. Obviously not here, but just in other ways.

I mean, they've had it all along. They just kind of need that spark.

MOLLY TUOZZO: I'll just add about Trinity. Craig always tells us in practice every single day to serve like you're serving in a national championship. Just trusting that, putting yourself in the game. I think she works really hard in practice about sticking serves on us and making us better. I think that just, like, made her ready for today.

Q. Brooklyn, not the greatest night on the stat sheet for you. Coming in clutch late, what was the process mentally of staying in it? Seemed like the block was the key to coming back in the last two sets. What was that process like of getting that together?

BROOKLYN DeLEYE: Yeah, it's true, we are a team sport. Whether I wasn't doing my best, I knew everybody else would have my back. I just was trying to do everything I could to contribute to the team the entire match. Whether that was just being positive the whole time, no matter how I was doing, because, I mean, if I was dwelling in my performance, I wouldn't have been able to be there for my teammates.

I think as a team, just the blocking, I mean, it takes a while to figure out those hitters. You're in a Final Four match. Props to Wisconsin. They had every hitter coming at us the entire match. They did not let down. I'm just super proud of the way that we just kept adjusting to their style of play.

It's really hard. Wisconsin is a great team. It was just battling both sides, so...

EVA HUDSON: She turned into a defensive machine.

Q. Molly, you all have had so much success in this tournament, especially with the serving. When you're playing a team like Wisconsin, you can't affect them from their serve, how do you not let that affect your defense?

MOLLY TUOZZO: I mean, it's definitely frustrating as servers. They were passing dimes, we were putting some hard serves on them. They were in system a lot. Like me and BK were doing, just put your helmet on, ready to dig. We've done so much preparation for this team, I think just trusting in that and ready to dig.

Q. Molly, you're kind of the architect of this defense in a way. Talk more about the challenges presented by

Carter Booth, things you said to this team to keep things going.

MOLLY TUOZZO: Yeah, I mean, they have so many great hitters on this team. Our mindset was just, like, they're here for a reason, they're going to get some amazing kills, they're going to bounce balls, stuff some balls. I think just moving on.

We have a saying called UFO. The point happens, forget bit, next ball. That's the great thing about volleyball. There's 25 points in a set.

They're an amazing team. Props to them. They made some plays. We just have to move on.

Q. Yesterday, Brooklyn and Eva, you talked about finding joy. Tonight's match was pretty non-stop. Where did you find those little pockets of joy tonight?

BROOKLYN DeLEYE: Yeah, I mean, for me, I was just looking around, taking the atmosphere in. I mean, like I said earlier, I've never been here. None of us have been here. I think all of us, we were just trying to soak in every bit of it and just kind of remember how we got here. The little girl that once believed they could be on this stage. I mean, we were kind of doing it for that person.

I mean, just like taking that in and just playing for those that came to support us tonight.

EVA HUDSON: Yeah, and something we do in between sets too is kind of look at one another in the eyes, which kind of seems like a dumb thing, but you don't really do that too often when it's such a fast-paced game. Taking the time to say, I got you, to each and every teammate, really kind of brings that unity back into the team aspect.

Q. Brooklyn, your hometown has been abuzz this week. What was it like playing so close to home, with so many fans to specifically see you play?

BROOKLYN DeLEYE: Yeah, I mean, it's nothing like it. I've had everybody texting me throughout the time. I just have felt so loved over this week. It's just so cool that I get to represent just a place like Topeka. I would not be anywhere, the person I am today, without each and every one of those people.

I'm just out here having fun with my teammates. I'm glad I get to do it almost in my home state. I know we're in Kansas City, Missouri, but who even looks at that (smiling)?

Q. Eva, you said earlier this week that you knew from

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the first practice this team was capable of coming to a Final Four. From that first practice to the practices here, where have you seen this team grow and change the most?

EVA HUDSON: Honestly, I don't think there's any growing needed. I know our team knows we're ready. It's just a matter of soaking in the environment. Obviously we did not do that the first set.

Really proud of them to rally and kind of trust in our abilities. Yeah, period.

THE MODERATOR: Eva, Brooklyn, Molly, you're good to go.

We'll continue with questions for coach.

Q. This is the first time the national championship has been between two SEC teams. Do you think it's a coincidence that this has happened the year they restarted the SEC postseason tournament? Do you think that tournament helps prepare teams for the NCAA tournament?

CRAIG SKINNER: I thought you were going a different direction (smiling).

I don't think it's a coincidence that two SEC teams are playing for the national championship. The coaches in our league have worked incredibly hard to put ourselves on the map and to make the SEC a volleyball powerhouse. I also need to give credit to all the coaches and the grassroots of the Southeastern Conference to make that happen.

Now, in the last couple weeks, did the SEC tournament prepare us for challenging, pressure-filled moments? Yes, it has.

But coincidence, in terms of being in the championship, it's been a lot of years of really hard work by a lot of people.

Q. In that fourth set, Eva gets the kill, you go up 24-21. Wisconsin rattles off three to tie it up. You take the fourth set. Watching those sequences of events happen, what was going through your head? What was your reaction after?

CRAIG SKINNER: It's one of the most difficult things to do in sports, is play one point at a time. There's just no other way to be elite if you're trying to play two or three points at a time. The focus and the intentionality of our players in each of those points was really impressive.

If you start thinking about the moment, you start thinking

about the crowd, you start thinking about the score, and what could happen if you don't do something, then you won't execute.

Our team has done an incredible job this year of not letting the score dictate their effort, their focus, and willingness to give it to their team.

Q. This is now your second time in the Final Four. Can you talk about the differences this year in a non-COVID season and having fans at this tournament?

CRAIG SKINNER: I'd say probably it's magnified with you guys. The media coverage that's in existence here today is 10 times what it was probably in Omaha. I may be off by that.

But then the number of fans in the stands, the attention to detail by the NCAA to put on an event like this, the nationwide media coverage online and print is amazing.

You just see it all over the place. Back then it was just we're just hoping to play. If we got to play, it will be the best thing ever. Now we know it's here, we know when the date is, we know what the possibilities are, so it just adds pressure.

Q. I asked the players about the freshmen. Can you talk about what Trinity and Kassie were able to do in the fifth set.

CRAIG SKINNER: Yeah, to have the guts to go back there like Trinity did at the beginning of that fifth set serve not just balls in the court, but tough serves, to impact the match, takes an incredible amount of confidence.

But she's prepared herself for this moment. That pressure is nothing compared to life pressure. She has overcome a lot to get herself in that moment. She showed how tough she was.

Kassie was on the run a lot tonight. She had to run down a lot of serve-receive balls. She was pretty tired throughout the match. For her to keep her composure and execute in the fifth set again says a lot about her resiliency. Nothing really fazes her. She's ready for the next point every single time.

Q. After the first set, it seems like the timeouts came timely. How do you get your team to reset? What kind of things do you do and instill in them that helped them keep their composure?

CRAIG SKINNER: I have to give an enormous amount of



credit to my staff. My staff does an incredible job of doing their job really well, giving the right information to our team. We don't get too emotional. You get too emotional, you lose sight of what's important.

But I felt like everyone was angry, mad, that we didn't perform well. We got to do this and that. You just have to flush it because that's our sport. It's over. That set is over. We have to be upset we didn't perform well, but we got to continue to fight for the next point.

If we don't do that, we get caught up in the emotions of losing that set, getting killed in that set, then we will not have a chance in the second set. It's just continuing to think about what's next.

Q. Up until the fifth set, you only won the sets that were not in front of the large contingency of Big Blue Nation. You took a huge lead in the fifth set, not in front of them. You switched sides, Wisconsin kind of caught back up. Did you feel they made a difference at all or is that just coincidence?

CRAIG SKINNER: I think that's coincidence, to be honest with you. The number of fans that we played in front of this year, home crowd, away crowd, SEC tournament same thing. I think it had to be coincidence.

But I'll ask. I don't think they hear a whole lot in terms of what was said. They hear volume, but I don't think they hear what is said particularly.

So must have been a coincidence, I think.

Q. What specifically did you tell them after that brutal first set?

CRAIG SKINNER: Just exactly what I just said. Everyone is angry, we're upset. It's unfortunate. I basically said, Congrats, guys, we couldn't have played any worse.

It was honest. And they played great. The only thing we can do is flush it and move on to the next set. Again, our staff does a really good job of just focusing on what specific things we can do with our fundamentals to be better, so we get better touches on the block, better positioning in defense, we execute a little bit better offensively.

If we focus on those things, then we let go of the emotional response of getting drummed in the first.

Q. I was talking to Brooklyn's high school coach this week. He said throughout her career, she's helped elevate her teammates. How have you seen Brooklyn

elevate the rest of your team and vice versa?

CRAIG SKINNER: I think it's evidence by watching her play. The thrill that she gets out of someone next to her doing something special is enormous. Brooklyn has gotten accolades her whole life in every sport that she's played. She's been MVPs, state champion, USA MVP and captain. Her accolades speak for themselves. She's earned every single one of those.

The thrill and joy that she sees in other people doing well is so inspirational to them because they know what type of player she is. She is always about the team.

Don't get me wrong, she wants to get hers and she wants to perform at the highest level. She'll let this thing go and she'll bank on the fact she led us in blocks and had 14 digs. It was an awesome night for her in those areas.

Q. For the whole match you all didn't get to 15 points first except for the final two sets. What is it about this team that they're able to not get down on themselves when things aren't looking right for them?

CRAIG SKINNER: I think they have accountability partners on their team. The people on the bench are not letting them get caught up in what they aren't doing. It's more in tune to what we are going to do next.

They just collectively as a group of 14 have an amazing ability to all we can do is control the next whistle. I wish I could tell you a magical thing and why.

Mentally tough kids, too, it takes to win a match like that.

Q. Brooklyn is known across the country for her kill numbers. It seemed like down the stretch tonight with Wisconsin unloading, she was especially great with digs. Talk about the effort that takes.

CRAIG SKINNER: I mean, when you play volleyball for a long period of time, you start to understand the angles of what people are doing. You can't really recreate the heat and velocity that they're going to do.

If you're in the right spot and you sacrifice your body to get the ball in the air. Some of those digs we had at the end of the fourth set, unbelievable. They had some unbelievable digs, too. We had a couple crushes they came up with to get it back to even.

I think both teams, you can tell both teams spend an enormous amount of time digging balls. If you don't do that, you can't be efficient at it and control it where you can get a swing. Both teams I thought we were really good at

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that tonight.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

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