

Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament: Washington State vs Illinois

Sunday, March 31, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

Illinois Fightin' Illini

Shauna Green

Kendall Bostic

Adalia Mckenzie

Semifinal Press Conference

SHAUNA GREEN: We're super excited to be playing in this tournament and making the Final Four, and like I told these guys, to be playing April 1st. Not many teams in the country are still playing in April.

So this is, as we are bidding this program and obviously this is year two for us and last year in our first year making the NCAA Tournament, and now being able to play in back-to-back postseasons for Illinois, the first time we've done that since 2007, 2008, it's a really big step for us in the broad picture of the program. But more importantly, for this team and for continuing to get the opportunity to play basketball and play the game we love.

And for this team, we kind of peaked, you know, in February and started playing really good basketball, really connected in our late games. We beat Indiana, Nebraska in some of those later games, and then obviously these three really good teams in the WBIT, and then having to go on the road and play a really good Tulsa team in the tournament.

For me as a coach, to see them gaining the confidence and playing at an elite level right now is just really fun, and I don't think we want it to stop. So we want to continue to play, and our goal is to go 1-0 every day, and we're super excited about this tournament.

I love how the WBIT now is ran and how it's treated like an event and how we're in Indy at Hinkle. What a great experience for our student athletes to be able to come and play against some of the top teams in the country at this historic basketball venue.



So can't wait to play tomorrow, and excited to be here.

Q. The opportunity to still be playing in April, what does this opportunity mean to you guys to still be playing this late in the year?

ADALIA MCKENZIE: Yeah, this opportunity means a lot. It means everything. Not every team is still playing. Just to have another day to say that we have another opportunity to win a game and play the game that we love it, means a lot.

KENDALL BOSTIC: I think it's pretty special, especially for a lot of our younger guys who don't have as much postseason experience. I think this will really help us in the later years because obviously we want to be in the NCAA Tournament like we were last year.

So I think being able to be here in the Final Four is really going to be helpful to get that postseason experience against these top-calibre teams for a lot of our younger guys and for us.

Q. We saw the injury against Tulsa, when you go down and got checked out and immediately checked back in, I guess. What was going through your head the whole sequence, and KB, what did it mean to see her bounce back?

ADALIA MCKENZIE: Yeah, I wanted to get cleaned up and patched up so I could get back to the game. I love playing with the team. And I was like, "I want to finish this off," you know. I was happy I was able to get it together and get back in the game.

KENDALL BOSTIC: Yeah, I was really hoping she would come back in the game. She was a crucial part of that game, holding one of their best players to pretty low points. Having her come back was huge. I did not think she would come back with as much blood as there was. So I was really happy to see her and see her continue to fight that whole game.

THE MODERATOR: What's it been like having this extra time together and know that you're building something for



the future? And how has that been, especially the fact that you're not playing teams from the Big Ten, maybe except in the Finals. What has this experience been like for you guys?

ADALIA MCKENZIE: Yeah, it's a blessing to still be able to be together and play together, and like I said, we are really grateful and we love each other. The Big Ten definitely prepared us for moments like these. We play the best teams every day.

It's an honor to be in the Big Ten and I just feel really prepared just being here, how far we've gotten in the tournament so far.

KENDALL BOSTIC: I think the Big Ten has really prepared us. You see a lot in the Big Ten. It's not a conference where a lot of the teams are similar.

So I think being able to play a Maryland one night, and then going to play, you know, Nebraska the next night. You know, just that really helping.

And then just playing a lot of these different teams, it also helps us just be able to see what we need to work on for next season, knowing where our strengths are, our weaknesses are, and I think that will help us make an even deeper run next year and just compete a little higher in the Big Ten.

Q. Obviously playing basketball in April is great. As a team, do you all talk about this being the inaugural WBIT and something that's so unique in terms of being potentially the first champion of a new event? Is that something that's discussed at all as a team?

ADALIA MCKENZIE: Yeah, we talk about making history. That's something we talk about, and just seeing it as an opportunity just to do something new.

Again, we just see it as an opportunity to play postseason. You know, whether it's NCAA or not, it's WBIT, and it's just a really good opportunity for us.

KENDALL BOSTIC: Yeah, I agree with Dal. Just being able to play in the postseason is pretty special, but also to have the possibility to be the first champion of this tournament, I think is pretty special for all of us. But you know, you can't get there without going 1-0 in this next game.

Q. Being from Kokomo, how big of a group do you expect to have here, and how special is it to have a pseudo-home game here down the stretch?

KENDALL BOSTIC: Yeah, my parents were pretty excited because they actually traveled to Tulsa, which was like nine hours. So they are still married; they drove. But yeah, they were pretty excited just to be able to have it be like 15 minutes away.

And a lot of my family is coming. I have some school friends, schoolteachers that are coming. So right now, I think it's at like 15 to 20. So I'm kind of excited to have everybody here.

Q. What allowed you to regroup after coming off of the Big Ten Tournament, knowing you maybe weren't going to go to the NCAA, but what allowed you to go regroup and go on a run here in the WBIT?

ADALIA MCKENZIE: Yeah, I would just say having a few days just to regroup and take time to recover and just think. You know, we didn't want our season to be done. Coach talked about whatever opportunity we get, you know, we're going to take it and thankfully we are here, and it's a really good thing.

KENDALL BOSTIC: Yeah, I think we were just able to kind of assess everything. And we had been playing really good basketball, you know, since like that Indiana game, and then we beat Nebraska.

So we were coming off a lot of strong basketball, and we were just excited for any postseason opportunity we could get, so yeah.

Q. Curious on two things here. First, how has this team -- where have you seen this team really develop, as opposed to last year with the short NCAA Tournament, the longer experience that you've had postseason this year? And what's it been like for you to be part of this explosion of women's college basketball in the national scene?

ADALIA MCKENZIE: I would say that we've done better with our mentality and giving our best every single game. In a tournament, you have to be your best, and we have a lot of vets on the team. So it's just all about being mature and taking every moment and taking it with grace and cherishing it.

KENDALL BOSTIC: Yeah, I mean, I think there's been a lot of development from last year. I just think the confidence as a group, and being able to handle like ebbs and flows of the game. I think we struggled with that at the beginning, kind of the middle of the season, but I really think we snapped out of it and picked it up. We learned from everything.

So I think even the one game we played last postseason, I think was crucial to us to put us in a tough situation in a postseason run. So being able to have that and take everything from that, and then also be here and win three games in another postseason tournament is pretty special.

But just, you know, being able to be a women's basketball player in today's day and age is pretty cool. Just to see the game grow as you're playing it and being a reason it's growing, having little kids look up to you and all that stuff, it's pretty special.

So all of us, we have a lot of kids that come to our games. We have a school day where all the schools come to. It's pretty special for us to see that develop and especially at Illinois, seeing women's basketball grow.

Q. You're the only team left that had to play a road game before getting to this point. How much does that prepare you or help you moving forward in this event?

SHAUNA GREEN: Obviously I think it was good for us. We played our two home games, and then we had to go to Tulsa and play there, which, again, Tulsa is a really, really good team against five-out. Like KB was talking about, we don't see a lot of that in the Big Ten. We see a lot, but we don't really see a five-out, all-guards system, and we play two bigs. So that was really -- and in a tough environment and they had a great crowd.

So I think that that in itself just prepares us to now come on the road here where everyone else was at home the whole time and now has to go play a road game in the first time in probably a while, dating back to their conference tournament.

Q. The Tulsa game, how much does it mean to have that fan support even when you're not playing at your home arena?

SHAUNA GREEN: I mean, it's huge, as we talk about the women's game growing, whether it's our home attendance at Illinois has exploded in our first two years there. And then in the Big Ten, especially, every road game, it's sold out; it's 10,000. It's just unbelievable for the game, and it's what it should be. The game has deserved this for a long time, and now the spotlight's on it, and the players are rising to the occasion. We have great basketball. We have great players. We have great coaches. It's just an awesome time to be involved in women's basketball.

I think coming here to Hinkle for us, it's nice, because it's only a couple hours away. So I think we'll have a really good following and good support system that will be traveling over here. So we're excited about that.

Q. You guys obviously played at Hinkle last year. How much do you think that serves as an advantage this time around, even against a different opponent?

SHAUNA GREEN: I'm going to use it as a coach, right. I told them right away: This is great. We're already used to this place. We've won here. We played here last year, and it's an easy trip for us. You know, I think it gives you a little bit more comfort, but it's still the game, and it's not going to be a deciding factor.

Q. To be able to match maybe your longest winning streak of the season, three games, what's it mean to put things together like you have and play your best basketball in this tournament?

SHAUNA GREEN: This group, obviously we returned a lot from last season, and you know, but expectations were different and our schedule for non-conference, we lost some tight games, had some adversity, injuries, all that stuff.

And then you go into Big Ten play, and we win some really great games and we lose some. But this team has stayed together. They have continued to stay the course, to believe, to be resilient.

I've tried to approach every game, win, lose, whatever, what can we learn from this, and then how do we get better the next day. It's just day-by-day, process-driven. You can't really worry too much about the past and you can't think about the future too much.

So we've tried to stay present, learn, and how can we go 1-0 that day. And this team has done that. Then as you start winning some games, and your confidence grows, confidence is a powerful thing. The same thing in this tournament.

It reminded me, actually, this tournament reminded me of what I was at Dayton as an assistant and we made the Elite 8. And I remember in a game a particular timeout, ^ looking at our players' faces and looking in their eyes, and like they just had such confidence about them. And I knew we were going to win that game that got us to the Sweet 16, and I see that in our players' eyes right now. I look at them and they have so much confidence and belief and poise.

So this tournament, no matter what happens tomorrow, this tournament has provided so much as we are building and going forward into next year. So many lessons, and I just really -- I think it's just going to propel us and springboard us into next season.

Q. You talked about Dal's injury, and I don't even know if she sat back down on the bench when she got back from being looked at by the trainers. What does it mean to have someone like that who, despite their injury, just doesn't want to sit?

SHAUNA GREEN: It's what I want this program to be built on: It's toughness; it's grit; it's kind of just that dirty work. I mean, she literally goes up for a layup, gets nailed. We have a picture of her shooting the layup, another hand going like this (indicating blocking face) and blood running down her face, and she made the layup. That's focus. That's great.

She made the layup, she ran down and she still -- blood is everywhere. Finally they get her out, and our trainer was MVP of that game because she got her all, whatever, butterfly, whatever they do, and she was ready in about two minutes. She came walking in. She didn't even sit down. She just walked right back up to me and she said, ^ "I'm ready."

I went, "Are you good?"

She went, "I'm good."

I went, "Can you guard No. 2 still?"

She went, "Yes, I got you, Coach." And she went right back in the game and continued to lock the best player up.

So that right there, that makes a coach really, really happy and proud because that's what I want our program to be about, just toughness and the love and the passion and nothing is going to stop us.

Q. From a statistical standpoint, it looks like it's two evenly matched teams, but what are should things about Washington State that stand out to you or points of emphasis for you tomorrow for the game?

SHAUNA GREEN: They got good guards. They got bigs. I think it's a better matchup for us in terms of just they play two bigs, and we do, as opposed to a couple of the other games, you know, we had to be really good in our ball screen coverage because they ball screened the heck out of you. We got to be really, really sharp in that.

Then we got to really defend the three-point line and get out on those players. Our defensive philosophy is we want to keep people front of us and force contested shots, and they live by getting in the paint and spraying it out for catch-and-shoot threes. I think Tulsa prepared us for that in terms of keeping people in front. Win those two-dribble

wars so they can't get spray-out threes. You can't give these guys just open looks or you will they will make you pay.

And then always for us, and especially for these guys, hold them to one-and-done. We've got to do a great job on the boards and not give them extra possessions.

THE MODERATOR: Last question, Coach. Could you talk about the surge in television coverage, national TV that has happened here with women's basketball over the past couple of years? And even the opportunity to play in this tournament, and have two games right before maybe some of the regionals, what do you think that that's done for your sport and what are your thoughts on this added coverage that you're seeing on a daily basis here?

SHAUNA GREEN: Like I said earlier, it's absolutely amazing, and these players, you know, they are fortunate. They are part of this, right. They are a part of this time where, you know, there's so many eyes and spotlights and coverage on our game. It's a great game. And I think once people watch the game, they understand, you know, the level of play that we have.

I mean, players just continue to get better and better and more athletic, and it's amazing. You know, we have all been doing this a long time. To see this now, is just -- I'm just so happy for our players that they get to live it and they get to experience it. A lot of us didn't have this coverage.

You know, for us in our conference, we get great exposure. We have Big Ten, obviously, Network, and now playing in this tournament to, get two more games on TV and to get our program and our culture out there to everyone, it's an amazing opportunity.

Again, I'm just so happy that all of our women right now are getting to experience this time.

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