

Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament: Washington State vs Illinois

Sunday, March 31, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

Washington State Cougars

Kamie Ethridge

Astera Tuhina

Tara Wallack

Semifinal Press Conference

MARY CAMILLE ETHRIDGE:

ASTERA TUHINA: We welcome Coach Kamie Ethridge and student athletes Tara Wallack and Astera Tuhina.

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Thanks, JD. You say her name better than I do. But I even love that. Like AT has now become AT to her parents and everybody and she signs her name AT. So if it's easier for you.

Really just want to say, thrilled to be here. Excited to be in this setting. It feels big. It feels important, and I think that's a credit to the WBIT and everybody involved in it and how professionally they have been running this program, this tournament, the first one ever. It seems like everybody is just putting so much pride into it and I know our team feels a lot of, like I said, validation and a little bit of the love that's going on as we watch TV and watch the NCAA Tournament, as well.

And again, just thrilled to be here and thrilled to be in an experience of a final four setting. It feels like it's a big event.

So clearly our team wants to come into this kind of event and this kind of moment and play well. Excited that we got to host three games but realize this is another step, and what happens next is on another court and in a big environment in a big arena with a lot of historical things from this university and from this arena.

But I think we're set for the moment, and excited that our players get to play another game and thrilled to be playing a great opponent in Illinois, and we'll just wait and see what



happens tomorrow.

Q. Obviously postseason basketball is always big, but can you talk about this being the first WBIT and how special it would be to be the first champion of a new event?

ASTERA TUHINA: Yeah, we've talked about it, as Coach said, it's an honor for us to be here because especially as you said, it's the first tournament ever. It's a great opportunity for us. We've come in here knowing that we can't think about anything else except playing our best and give everything we can and show how good we actually are and how much we can do.

So we came in here knowing this is a final four, it's a win-or lose game, so we have to actually give all the best and try to win those two games.

TARA WALLACK: She said it great. Another experience just to play with our team and showcase that we deserve to play in March and we want to play in March. So yeah, just another opportunity to show that.

Q. A lot of you, from the West Coast or all over the world, did you take time to soak in Hinkle Fieldhouse? Have you heard stories about Hinkle so far?

ASTERA TUHINA: We heard a little bit but not as much as this place actually has history behind it. So that would be good to know all of it, and we'll look forward to it.

TARA WALLACK: Yeah, I think we are going to learn a lot more while we're here.

THE MODERATOR: Talk about the extra time that you get to spend together as a team, and what's that been like, and obviously coming off conference play where you see the same teams over and over and go to the same places, what's this experience been like for both of you.

ASTERA TUHINA: It's a great experience to always travel to places we have never been. It has been a long season and especially like she said, playing in March, well, I guess, we're playing in April now. It's long. But I think we



know how to stay together and I think we are just going to keep doing what we've been doing all season and just do that.

TARA WALLACK: And it's just another chance to play with our seniors that, you know, we had our last home game in the Pac-12 Conference, and then we got to this tournament and we got to host three more games. That's just another exciting opportunity and just continue playing with them has been awesome.

Yeah, just looking forward to playing.

Q. Going from hosting three games in this tournament and then probably a pretty quick flight in terms of turnaround time but a long flight to get out here, is it tough to quickly reboot to get ready or is this just what you're used to throughout the season?

ASTERA TUHINA: Not really. We are used to it during the Pac-12. We have one week we play at home, one week we travel, so we are used to it.

But those three games, I think they have helped us to gain some more confidence, and especially knowing that it was the last -- it could be the last game any time. It was just motivating us to give our best in those games.

So I think it's a great opportunity now to travel and see what we can do here.

TARA WALLACK: Yeah, just the Pac-12 schedule is so hard itself. We are playing against Top-10 teams, top five teams, and I think that has helped us shape into the team we are right now, and how to go into the next games, too.

Q. End of January, you lose your leading scorer, but you kind of get back AT at that same time, and then there was -- obviously you've got tough opponents during that time. So it's tough to look at the results. How has your team gotten to the point today where you kind of figured out the roster a little bit and everybody defining their roles?

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Yeah, I agree. I mean, losing Charlisse, you know you're going to lose seniors for the next year, and you have time to replace them or try to get your team together. When you lose a player like that at that time of year, obviously people are thrown into different roles very quickly.

And it took a while. It honestly took a while. Especially AT. I think AT was out six weeks and then played the next game that Charlisse wasn't in. So imagine being thrown in a couple of practices and thrown into that setting.

So she's the one that we can really count on to communicate now that -- when Charlisse left the floor, she's high IQ. She's really smart. She understands what we want to run. She can make calls and plays and do everything without the coaches and without looking over; an experienced player for such a young one.

Getting her back, but it's been a process to get her confidence back, to get her legs back, to get her intensity back and her, I think, just consistency.

That's the one thing I think our team probably all year, but certainly after we lost Charlisse, really we just played a little bit inconsistent, and I guess everybody says that probably; a quarter where you only score 12 points. You know, just not scoring the ball enough. Just having moments where we just can't keep the intensity right and can't get the shots to go in at the same time as we're playing good D.

So it's taken a little bit of time but feel like the players have kind of found themselves a little bit earlier than they thought they had to. Again, replacing Charlisse, no one can do that, but it really has spread out among our team.

And again, this tournament has really given us an opportunity to add a little bit of experience for those players that need it right now, and it gives us a lot of home, I think, for what we are going to look like in the future.

Q. What are some things that stand out to you about Illinois, and what are some keys to tomorrow's game that you think are going to be a real big focus?

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Yeah, great program. I just think they have done a tremendous job. Coach Green has really kind of turned a sleeping giant, woken it back up. Just dynamic guard play. I don't know what else to say about that. I think we've seen some real athleticism in the Pac, but probably not the three in a row that can just get to the rim and shoot the ball so well, and you know, create so many easy baskets in transition. And obviously just in their mismatch, getting mismatches, and taking advantage of them. We talk about the guards and just their posts are so solid, too, that can shoot.

So they just present a lot of problems: Can we keep them from the rim; can we keep them front of us; and yet at the same time guard, the three-point line. In the games that we've lost, we really haven't guarded the three-point line very well, and so you have to do that.

I think the keys, more than anything at this time of the year, you've got to rebound the ball. We cannot let this team

have second and third chances. If they do, they are probably getting us in foul trouble. I think that goes in hand with paint points. I think if they are at their best when they are attacking the rim and getting some isos or mismatches, paint points I think have to be pretty similar, and I think rebounding has to be pretty similar.

THE MODERATOR: What has it meant to you personally with your history in this game to see the growth of the exposure and television coverage and people talking about women's college basketball like they have never talked before? Could you share your thoughts about that, and tell us how for someone who has been in this since the beginning of the NCAA Tournaments and things like that, what has this meant to you?

KAMIE ETHRIDGE: Yeah, I mean, I look around this room and see some legends in this room, as well, and certainly have got to experience the trailblazers, the people that just changed the game at that point. Got to play for a coach that did the same thing.

But it is totally different. I love the aspect of bringing this new tournament together with this historical arena that has high school kids coming in here dying to play state championships in this little place.

So the youth loves to come here, and now we're coming back, and you've got these Gen Z generation that probably doesn't realize basketball existed before they showed up. And so there's so much historical stuff that goes in, and it is, we're all into basketball. It's a full circle. All of us have connections to the past and obviously I'm getting to coach this new generation.

We just have to continue just to applaud the people that came before us and recognize the feats that they did to get us to this point and push this young generation into the spotlight, which they have handled it unbelievably well, and into the public's eye.

TV is making a big impact, and it's thrilling to be a part of the game right now where it's kind of exploding on the TV market and people are rising and validating women's basketball, women's sports.

You've got to give credit to, again, the people that came before us, and certainly this generation that just seems unbelievably built for these big moments and to take this game to new levels.

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