

# Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament: Washington State vs Illinois

Monday, April 1, 2024  
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA  
Hinckle Fieldhouse

## Illinois Fightin' Illini

**Shauna Green**

**Makira Cook**

**Camille Hobby**

**Genesis Bryant**

Semifinal Press Conference

Illinois - 81, Washington State - 58

SHAUNA GREEN: I just thought it was an overall great effort by our team from start to finish against a really good Washington State team that we knew presented a lot of problems for us.

We always talk about our start and coming out, our first battle, our first five minutes of winning that and I could not have been more pleased with our start, really our first quarter and I thought that was really critical coming out against a team like this, especially on the road, neutral site, our start was going to be important. And this whole tournament, we have outscored our opponents in that first quarter and I wanted to continue that trend and just -- I thought our defense was on point. You know, did a really good job of handling their ball screen coverage.

The only thing that really we didn't do a great job of is defend three-point line, but I thought our pull-ins and taking away the paint was some of the best we've done all year, and they got some pass back for some open threes.

But just overall, great team effort. We won the battle of the boards by one which is always key for us, and then we won the battle of paint, which is critical, 34-12. So I thought that was a really big piece that played into this but just really proud of these guys.

You know, this past couple weeks, how they have taken on this tournament, their approach, their our mindset, our togetherness, how connected we are it's really just been



fun to watch as a coach and to see all the stuff we've been through this year, the ups and the downs and the really hard times. It shows what you can do when you continue to believe and you continue to stay together as a team and just keep your head down and keep working, keep doing the right thing.

So this team deserves it. These guys deserve it. We are not satisfied though yet. We had one goal when we were fortunate enough to be invited into this tournament. We said we wanted to go 1-0 five times, and we have one more, but you know, it's going to be a really tough team in Villanova.

Brings me back, I know it's not the same coach, but I have nightmares of when I was at Providence as an assistant, and listening to Harry call out every play, and it was always my scout, and I know Denise does such a great job running the same kind of system.

I know we have a tall task against a really, really well-coached team in Villanova. But we're here and we're going to come ready to play.

### **Q. What was it like getting on the court and being able to play your own style of basketball?**

MAKIRA COOK: It was really fun. Like Coach Green said, we had been preparing really hard. So I think it was just kind of a translation from how practices have been for, honestly, the last three weeks, basically everything she said.

But it was exciting to be out there with everybody, and we all were just clicking tonight with each other. We knew what each other is going to be, so it was fun.

### **Q. How much has it meant to finish the season and play in a competition like the WBIT?**

CAMILLE HOBBY: It's one thing to say we have but not a lot of teams get to make it to April and that itself is really exciting for all of us and it's a great opportunity. So it definitely means a lot to me, myself, my teammates and definitely for our coaches.



GENESIS BRYANT: I would say the same thing. It's not how you start but it how you finish, and I feel like we have a great opportunity to finish well on Wednesday.

**Q. Coach talked about just the intensity, especially early on on the defensive end. Just I guess how much of a point of emphasis is that coming in today, and how much do you think that was a factor in the eventual outcome of the game?**

MAKIRA COOK: I think that we did our scout pretty well. Like Coach Green said, we could have been better with guarding the three, but I think that we executed what we wanted to do, which one of them was give a little bit of pressure.

So we bought into it. I feel like we bought into our pressure defense a while ago. So once we were all on the same page, we just kind of go with it.

GENESIS BRYANT: Just to add, like she said, we are just buying in. We know the coaching staff, they are watching a ton of film and know what we need to do. It's like just agree with them and it works out good when we do it right.

**Q. Given the highs and lows of the season, to have the opportunity to play for a championship on Wednesday, what does that mean to all three of you guys?**

CAMILLE HOBBY: I mean, I'm speaking for being a grad student, so having the opportunity to play for a championship is amazing, especially to do it with my teammates.

We obviously had a lot of ups and downs this season, but it's not really how you start. It's how you finish and we have a great opportunity to take on Villanova. So hopefully we'll be able to finish it there.

GENESIS BRYANT: It just makes everything worth it. Like we had some tough times. I think that's a common thing everyone was saying but just to know that we compete for a championship and cut down some nets still, even after we started, I feel like it's a blessing.

**Q. You played in a lot of different buildings, but what about this place, maybe the nets here, you really like shooting here and what allowed you to get in an offensive rhythm?**

MAKIRA COOK: I would say that, well, we played here last year. So we were all very familiar with the atmosphere and the environment.

So yesterday when we had practice, we just focused and got our shots up and you just come and when you come for the game, you just get your mind right and visualize and do all that stuff.

**Q. Indianapolis isn't a far drive from Champaign, but how much did you feed off the energy of the fans tonight?**

CAMILLE HOBBY: It was definitely a sea of orange out there. There's so many of our fans that drove over from the university area and other parts of Illinois. It was really exciting to see everyone. They were loud. It was exciting. It definitely was a boost to us.

**Q. You mentioned going 1-0 five times is your goal for the tournament. This is the first time this season you've won four games in a row. How have you made that happen?**

SHAUNA GREEN: This is a team, also, that most of us were together last year, and we put some of these kind of streaks together and wins together.

But the biggest thing is just, I think, you know, when you get into this where you win a couple games, I spoke about it yesterday. Just the confidence and their belief right now, and like they said, the buy-in.

It's really fun as a coach because, you know, I just -- I watch them play and they are playing so hard and they are playing the right way, and they are doing all the things that really we have tried to set in place and our core values from day one when we took this job.

I have been talking to them a lot the last month or so about what Illinois basketball is, and what it needs to look like. And in the last week or so, this is exactly my vision of what I want it to look like.

You know, the toughness and the grit and the defensive intensity and mindset, the togetherness, the aggressiveness, getting downhill, just all of those things is what you need in order to be a sustained, elite program, which is something we're striving to be.

**Q. Speaking of building the program, you are the first or second coach in program history to start off in .500 consecutive seasons, but now you're one of the first coaches to reach a championship game. What does that mean to you, and what does that speak about the program and legacy you're building here?**

SHAUNA GREEN: When I took the job, a lot of people, I think, maybe thought I was crazy. Because they had not

had success in a while. But I saw the great things about it and I saw the possibilities about it, and I saw the people and the belief in it.

I mean, from day one, we just brought in a winning mindset, and this is what's going to happen, and this is how we're going to go about it.

And you know, we've done that for two years, and this year, again, like maybe it didn't start the way that we wanted it to, and there's some ups and downs, but like I've said all along, when you're building a program, you can't just get there right away.

Everyone nowadays wants just instant gratification, and it means more. Right now this year the wins mean more because of what we've been through and we have to go through this. At times it was hard. It was hard for me.

But it makes it all so much more worth it, and it makes me -- I know what we've all -- the worst of worst days, I know what we've been through together and we continue to stick together, stay together, believe and that's what it's about.

**Q. Genesis scored her 1,000th career point today. What has she meant and where would you be without her, really in, this tournament?**

SHAUNA GREEN: Gen has been an unbelievable player since we got her here. And what a great discovery of someone, we had recruited her when we were at Dayton, she told us no, went to N.C. State and didn't play for two years, really, at all.

When we got the job, we are like, come on over, and she worked herself into the player that she is, and went from not playing to now helping us get to this point, and has been an All Big Ten performer for two years.

So the credit goes to her in terms of her work ethic, her belief and the confidence. But she's just playing with, again, I keep saying confidence. She's playing with such confidence right now. She's just so smooth and doesn't get too high. Doesn't get too low. I feel like all of our team is playing with that right now.

We just have some maturity about us that we did not have even a month and a half, two months ago, in terms of being and handling some adverse situations and our responses within the game, which we always talk about are ours. They are quick and they are good and they are positive, and that's able to get us to never allow, really, big runs, and so credit to our players.

**Q. A team like Washington State, you've struggled**

**against teams that were taller and longer, like Maryland and Michigan. What made it easy to get started on the offensive side of the ball today?**

SHAUNA GREEN: I just thought we were really aggressive. We got downhill early and we were really attacking, and when we do that, it kind of opens everything up. We hit some outside shots early. Hit some threes early. When we do that, that gives us more confidence.

But with this team, it starts with defense. When we defend and when we rebound, we're a hell of a lot better team. And again, that's the order. It's defend -- and then we want to run.

So that's our identity, and to be completely honest, that's why we have been winning the last few games is because we are defending at a high level with a great deal of intensity.

**Q. Just to get 22 points off 18 turnovers today, speaking about the defense, what was a factor for that, being able to do that tonight?**

SHAUNA GREEN: You know, we have certain games where I think we can pressure a little bit more. And this is -- you know, they are they are talking about buy-in, a couple months ago -- I call, this, we call it a certain name, our defense, and I call it and then we don't to it. You know, we're sitting back, and I'm like, you guys, I tried spelling it out. I tried everything. And they just -- they didn't want to really do it.

Now they really like it, and now in practice, they are the ones calling it out. I'm telling them we're in regular, and they are saying they are in this defense where we're up and pressuring and trying to get into them a little bit more.

And when we do that, we started with that, and you saw we got some steals, Adalia got an easy layup. We got into them a little bit more. We don't do it to every team but it was something that it's worked for us and I thought that was really big tonight.

Also, I think it gets us going and gets us playing really, really hard. But we can't have success unless they want to do it, and they have been wanting to do it the past month.

**Q. How big was tempo tonight in just trying to get this game into your phoenix and getting into the 70s and 80s against a team that likes to plays in 50s and 60s and likes to create a halfcourt tempo?**

SHAUNA GREEN: Yeah, that was something really important. We always want to play fast, as you know, but it



was something really big against these guys because I know that they only average 66 possessions. All of the teams we've been playing in tournament have been in the 70s.

So we knew that they wanted to play a little bit slower and that could be an advantage to us, but again, we can't run. We can't get into phoenix if we are not getting stops and clean rebounds.

So that was the biggest thing. We have really been able in this tournament to play at the pace we've wanted to play at, and I really think that's why we are winning the way we're winning right now is that we're playing with a tempo that we prefer to play with.

THE MODERATOR: Want to congratulate you and thank you, and we'll see you back here this Wednesday.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

