

# Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament: Villanova vs Illinois

Wednesday, April 3, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinckle Fieldhouse

**Illinois Fightin' Illini**

**Shauna Green**

**Makira Cook**

**Kendall Bostic**

**Genesis Bryant**

**Adalia Mckenzie**

Finals Press Conference



**back in the second half for your team?**

MAKIRA COOK: Continue cheering. It was the first half. It's just two fouls. So it sucks obviously but it's not going to be a pity party because we wanted to win a championship.

**Q. What was your mindset in the second half, how did that feel to get back in a rhythm?**

MAKIRA COOK: It felt pretty good. I just wanted to do whatever it took to win. We have the ultimate green light when we have a good shot. You take your open, let it fly. That's the confidence that she instills in us, so it just translates.

**Q. Big picture, what does this two-week stretch mean for you guys?**

KENDALL BOSTIC: I really think it just kind of sets us up for next season. You look at a lot of the teams playing in the Final Four now for the NCAA Tournament, they won the NIT or got close in the NIT. This is an important step for us and it put us in some adverse situations and some high-stress situations. Championship games, the nerves are rolling pretty much the whole game.

So just having some of our younger guys and even some of us that haven't had the opportunity to do that, I think it's really good setting us up for success next year.

GENESIS BRYANT: This is just a big doughnut block and a doughnut stall and I'm just so thankful and thank God for everything. We had a rough patch in the middle of season but to know they finished with a championship, you couldn't ask for nothing better.

**Q. Adalia, matching up with their best player, how much did you look forward that matchup and how much of a difference do you think that was for your team tonight?**

ADALIA MCKENZIE: First I want to give all the Glory to God and Jesus Christ and I'm just so thankful to be here. Honestly I take pride on defense. Coach, when she puts me on the best player I want to be at my best and lock their

Illinois 71, Villanova 57

SHAUNA GREEN: Obviously just a huge night for us and could not be more proud of this entire team, and these guys sitting to my right. It's been a season, really, to remember because of, I think, what we went through. There was a lot of tough times, a lot of ups and downs.

But I always say the journey, and when you're going through adversity it makes it so much more worth it when you get to what you want and you accomplish a goal. The last few weeks through this WBIT, I've had the most fun coaching these guys. I said, I've never silenced so much during games before, but just the confidence they were playing with, the togetherness, the trust that I think they had within themselves and what I had with them, I just let them play, and they made plays, and just again could not be more proud and just the overall effort tonight.

We hit a little bit of adversity and they made their run in the second quarter and I told them at halftime, we are right where we want to be, we are only down one possession. Come out and let's continue to defend and do what we do and they responded and did that.

It was a big step for our program as we continue to build into what we want this program to be.

**Q. Makira, after picking up those two fouls at the end of the second quarter, what was your mindset coming**



best player, and I just take a lot of pride on that and just focused and did the best I could.

**Q. The energy, the coaches talked to you about energy, rebounding, defense all year long. Do you feel like you put it all together today especially against one of best players in the country?**

ADALIA MCKENZIE: For sure, I think my mindset was just, you know, make it real tough for her and bring my energy and just be the best that I can be like I said. She's a really good player but just being able to just be in her space the whole time. I just wanted to just lock her up.

**Q. When you make a decision to come back for another year, just to be able to go on this run with this team at the end of the season, what's that mean and what can that do for this team?**

MAKIRA COOK: It's been super exciting. We've been able to play with this exact group in a longer amount of time than we thought. That's special because each year comes with different things and different people, and you never know what the next year is going to bring. This win right here is like accelerating us. I can already feel like the acceleration for next year. It's pretty exciting and it's fun.

**Q. For anybody, how exciting was it to celebrate with all the fans after seeing the confetti fly down?**

KENDALL BOSTIC: I thought it was pretty great. Just from someone who has been here, we were really, really happy just being able to see all the people hop on board with us. You know, the band, orange crush, the cheerleaders, everyone showing support, all little kids, it means a lot to see this program on the up and up and just we have not reached our full potential yet and just knowing that and we just won a championship, is really special.

GENESIS BRYANT: I want to say thank you to all our offense and defense, we love and you appreciate you so much.

MAKIRA COOK: Definitely was home-court advantage.

**Q. When I hear Shauna talk about the journey of the entire season, I think about you and the start of your season and the concussion and having to play your way back, how would you define the whole journey of the season?**

MAKIRA COOK: I'd say I would describe this as just like a season of when adversity hits, address it, learn from it, move on from it and get better, and that's what we had to do on multiple occasions, and we all stood up to the

challenge as women and we really handled our business and we really locked in and focused on what we had to do.

Like I know we have all been saying it but they say, it's not how you start, it's how you finish. So we really took pride in had a because we didn't get off to the start we wanted but we got the finish that we wanted.

**Q. When Makira is on a roll like that, what is that like to watch?**

ADALIA MCKENZIE: When she's doing what she's doing out there like that, it's so fun. It's fun to watch, and you know, it honestly takes the pressure off of a lot of us just because like when she shoots, most of the I'm not going to rebound. When these two shoot, I'm going to get back. It's probably going in. So just kind of her having that covered and seeing her have that drive is like, she's going to take over, it's fine.

GENESIS BRYANT: When you felt that, I became a cheerleader for a second. I had to get back on defense. Playing like that, it's like, girl, like, y'all crazy. I feel like we got that 11-point lead, they couldn't even hear a play call. The building got so loud. We felt that energy. Once we got that lead, we didn't give it up from there, so there was definitely some touch buckets.

Someone mentioned our pour touch in an interview yesterday. After something happens, we are like punching each other in the chest and slapping each other so hard. That's what fuels us and that's when we know we're our best, energized self.

**Q. There's not a lot of good ways to come back from an 11-0 run but a 16-0 run is pretty good. What did you say to the team during halftime?**

SHAUNA GREEN: I just came out and told them we were in a good spot. I mean, I wasn't really worked up about it. I knew that they are good. Like they are not in this game, they are not the team that they are this year without going on a run. So they went on their run when Makira went out and they went to zone and then we finished the first half pretty strong.

So we knew they were going to make a run and I went in and said, we have to tighten up our defense. So we talked about that, the majority of it and talked about how we need to do a better job on Lucy and just be -- I told 'Dal, I don't care if you score another point.

All I care about is you making her life hell for 20 minutes and she did that. She only scored one point and I'm fine with that. Her defense, essentially, she only gave up, Lucy

scored six, and I knew if we held her, I just knew she was under -- this sounds crazy, but that's how good she is. If we could hold her to not one OF those break out games where she scores 30 or 37, I really thought that we would have a chance to win the game. But our defense really responded in the second, and then we just -- we got in a groove offensively.

**Q. Just your second year at Illinois, you brought the first title in program history. What does this mean in terms of the program and the dynasty you're building here?**

SHAUNA GREEN: Any time you can win a championship and compete for a championship, it's special. Because of what we've been through -- just never gave up. Because it's bigger than basketball. It's about life and life's not perfect and you're going to have a lot of adversity in your life and how are they going to respond to it. How they have responded time and time again, how they have kept working and roll up your sleeves and get to work and stay together and believe, it makes this really, really special.

**Q. With all the nerves and everything going into this game, what did you do to try to --**

SHAUNA GREEN: I told them in our pregame -- you know, to win this championship, that was our mission, when we knew we were in it. I said, this is an unbelievable tournament and I love the WBIT. This is our only time being here. I'm going to use the PG version here but I said we're going and we're winning this thing.

This tournament has been an unbelievable experience. The WBIT has gone a great job. Everyone in this room that has been here has done an amazing job of making us feel like an big-time tournament. I don't mean any offense to that but I want this to propel us into making NCAA Tournaments, which is what I think this tournament really should be for. Hopefully, I want to come down nets at some point for a Big Ten Championship. You can call me crazy and that's okay, eventually, for a National Championship. That's our goals. That's our vision, and you've got to take a step like this to be able to get to your next step. So it was just an unbelievable tournament and so great. I said coming into this, no matter what happens tonight, win or lose, coming into next year and really for this year.

**Q. Why was this group in particular able to handle the adversity and build off it and why were you able to lock in for these five games the way they have and win?**

SHAUNA GREEN: This group, they are a little bit older, even though they have not been in a lot of these situations

before, they are older. A lot of them are seniors. And a lot of it, just a lot of those tougher times, you know, a lot of it was just open communication and us kind of talking it through and them hearing my side and me hearing them and kind of meeting in the middle. A lot of as a result in the adverse situations, and I had to change a little bit, too.

I had to look within myself because it was a hard time for me as a head coach but I had to be a leader and trying to find a way to continue to get these guys to keep believing and understand, you know, that this is all part of the process. So it was just a lot of communication, a lot of really self-evaluation, and with the goal of every day just trying to move this program forward and move this team forward.

But credit our players, because I could say whatever I want. They got at some point continue to believe and they have done that. Like I said, the last month of coaching this team has been really some of most fun I've ever had coaching a team but then earlier in the year is probably some of the toughest times I've had in my short eight-year career being a head coach. So it was a season of a lot of feelings and emotions and ups and downs, but can't end any better.

**Q. The end of that first half to have the trust in your team -- sitting Makira out with the two fouls and once she makes those first, to know that she was going to be right in the game right away?**

SHAUNA GREEN: Yeah, you know the last couple games she's had when she's had to two fouls in the tournament I've put her back in a few times. With this team, I thought she may pick up her third, she did that I think at Tulsa, with how they move and how they cut.

I said, you know what, I've got to trust these guys and let them do their thing, and they went on a little run. But I thought we closed the half on a high note. And then to be honest, when she hit a couple of those shots, I knew she was really pissed from sitting out and she get the look in her eye. I said the one shot, that's not a good shot. It goes in, that was a great shot. When he's like that, usually when I say pull it up, pull it out or don't shoot it, it always goes in. So I need to start saying that every time. Yeah, she gets in that mode and that look in her eye, she does what Makira does.

**Q. What allowed Makira these five games in this tournament to free herself up and play with as much confident, she was clearly different in these five games than December and early January.**

SHAUNA GREEN: I think all of us, Makira and all these

guys, I think they really have just played with supreme, and I don't know, like from after the Maryland game and in that locker room and even our morale the next day, they were really down.

And then I gave them that weekend off and they came back, so this is where I give them credit, I told them, we went through the whole thing, if we're blessed enough to be in a postseason tournament, I went through all the WNIT teams that had won or been in the Final Four and then propelled into next year. I had it all out and laid it all out there for them. I said, if we get that opportunity, we are going to win it. Like we are going there with one mission to win a championship.

They took their time. I don't know if they listened to me at all during that because they were really upset and then they came back and we had the best week of practice, almost all year and that's a hard week. That's a hard week even when you know you're in the NCAA Tournament because it's just a week of not knowing who you're playing and we just competed for a week. Everything was five-on-five. We went after each other, and it was like, their spirit, their energy, their vibes, I knew we were going to be okay.

Like I'm a big feel person and vibe person and I know this team by now, just like this run, we're loose in shootarounds. They are loose in practices. We are laughing but they are working really, really hard. They just had confidence and poise and just an ease to them the past three weeks.

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