

Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament: Belmont vs Villanova

Monday, March 31, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinckle Fieldhouse

Belmont Bruins

Bart Brooks

Jailyn Banks

Kendall Holmes

Semifinal Postgame Press Conference

Belmont 66, Villanova 57

BART BROOKS: First of all, a lot of credit to Villanova. They have got an unbelievable program. I have so much respect for Denise and their whole staff and how they handle their business, how they coach their team, how hard they were to prepare for and how tough they were.

I can't say enough good things about that program, and have admired them from afar since the days when Coach Peralta had that thing rolling, and the misery of my nights trying to prepare for that team in the BIG EAST as an assistant at DePaul.

I have so much respect for them, and to beat them on a quick turnaround, I think it speaks volumes to the toughness of our group.

I think we just made a couple more plays than they did down the stretch, and all the credit in the world to the young lady sitting next to me. I thought we created a little separation when we started to finish and make some plays offensively, and that got us more rhythm, and then we got our rhythm defensively from how we played offensively there in the third quarter.

So credit to Villanova. They made it tough, and we're just thrilled that we could keep playing.

Q. No matter what the situation, it would be exciting to be playing in the championship game. But when you are representing a school that has never won a championship, what does that mean? What does that opportunity mean to you?



JAILYN BANKS: Yeah, it means a lot. Just to be in this position, especially with this group, we're really taking every moment to extend our season so we can play together. But it means a lot to make history together as well.

KENDALL HOLMES: I just think it's an incredible opportunity that we have for our team. We have put in so much work over the season, and the adversity that we faced and the challenges we faced, I think we've really stuck together as a team. Now we're pushing forward and we want to get that championship.

Q. What do you think led to you having your best scoring night tonight of the postseason?

JAILYN BANKS: Just my teammates finding me. We love sharing the ball. So if any time anybody is hot or they have had a streak, we just find them the ball. We space, and they do that really well, and they did that really well tonight. So that opened me up a lot.

Q. First off, can you talk about how important it was to be aggressive and to be the tougher team today? Because you guys seemed to win a lot of the 50/50 balls. And can you share your mindset in that 8-0 run you had personally in the third quarter when you took control of the game?

JAILYN BANKS: Yeah, we focused a lot on being aggressive and just winning those 50/50 possessions. Bart talks a lot about it's one possession at a time. We don't have to win the game with one possession, but the small possessions and just winning those 50/50 balls and hustle plays, that's what helps down the stretch.

KENDALL HOLMES: I think just in the third quarter, we knew that we had to come out really tough and really physical and really strong.

Villanova is a really good team, and you know, we were making big plays, and credit to everybody on the team for being a part of making those big plays, and finding the open person and whoever is hot, getting them the ball.



Q. This place has been around nearly a hundred years, and there's a lot of history in it. From a player's perspective, first time out, what did you think of it?

JAILYN BANKS: It's really cool. Personally I've never been here. It's cool to play here and practice here, and just be here.

KENDALL HOLMES: I think it's a really cool place to play. I've played here a couple times in the past, and just the atmosphere being here. We had a bunch of fans come and support us today. So it just made the atmosphere that much better.

THE MODERATOR: Talk about the fan support. We see a lot of Belmont folks looking like they are enjoying and getting behind you. Talk about what that means to you as a team and how hopefully Wednesday that will give you some motivation to come out and play, really, your best game of the year.

JAILYN BANKS: Yeah, our fans, they mean a lot to us. They travel everywhere with us and they support us through and through. So it's really great to have that and to be able to feed off their energy no matter what.

KENDALL HOLMES: I agree with J. Just the fan support whenever we get those fans, and the fan base that we have, it's great. It makes the energy of our games so much higher, and we feed off of it like J said.

Q. Most teams when they get to this point, they have a survive-and-advance moment. When you had it coming from 21 down and winning in the last second to do it, is there a carryover into a game like this where things are tough and you have to turn it around.

BART BROOKS: I think the mindset is definitely -- I don't think we've used the term "survive and advance" this year with our team, ever. We hear it. I mean, it's what's said this time of year.

But I think for us, we're more, let's just make this thing last as long as we can because we love what we're doing. I think that showed itself when we were down 14 with 2:52 to go, or down 20 at halftime and not playing well.

I think it showed itself when things are hard, and I think the test of a team isn't when things are going -- when the shots are going in and everything feels great. It's when everything is going wrong what does your team do. Do they point fingers, do they go in different directions, or do they stay connected? I think this group, probably more than any group I've coached since I've been here, has

earned the right to play for a championship because of that, because of that connectivity.

Q. I'd love to know what was the difference going into this game. Obviously you've played Villanova in 2022. What was the difference in game planning today?

BART BROOKS: Well, that was a lot different team for us and for them. I think they have got a lot of new faces, and similarities and styles in what both programs do still.

I thought today we had some advantages and matchups that we needed to exploit, and we had a hard time getting that done in the first half.

And then the second half we figured out some things. But I wish it was -- I wish it was something I did. It was so much our players; they made the plays. They made some tough plays.

Villanova is tough. They battled. They competed. So I've got so much respect for that program. I'm not sure if it was any X's and O's or planning. It was just a tough group of kids wanting to keep playing.

Q. You talked a little bit about Villanova but you started the season -- let's talk about your season. You had Duke, Kentucky, Big Ten, BIG EAST, SEC teams, all that to get you prepared and then you run into Missouri and Drake. How much did that get you prepared to make a run in the WBIT to where you are?

BART BROOKS: No doubt about it. We've been tested. We've played anyone and everyone, and rarely at home in a nonconference. And then once we got into conference play, I think just the strength of our league. We take unbelievable pride in our league and the tough -- there's not an easy game in our league.

For our teams to be able to play on this stage and represent how got Missouri Valley Conference is, I think this is a great blessing for us. I think we're good enough to have teams, multiple teams in the NCAA Tournament. I think we're hopefully moving in that direction.

Q. Talk a little bit about how the second half of this game turned around for you. And had you ever been in Hinkle before today?

BART BROOKS: Yeah. So I was an assistant at DePaul for 11 years, and I think the last three years that I was there, Butler was in the league with us. So I was able to come.

We had a couple of great shooting nights and a couple of

not-so-great shooting nights. It's a mixed feeling coming in. But it's an unbelievable facility, great venue.

Someone as old as me that knows the history; I'm not sure many of our players know the history. They just think it's a nice building; has nice backgrounds for a shooter. But for me, it's pretty cool. It's the heartland of basketball.

And to be in this arena is really cool, and especially in this environment playing for a championship with the four teams that are here in the Women's NIT, it's just a really cool environment. Everyone here has been so gracious and so supportive and so welcoming. And our players, they feel it. It's a special thing.

And I'm sorry, I might have missed your first question but -- okay.

Q. I was impressed with your defensive philosophy, how you played Webber and Bascoe. Can speak about that a little bit?

BART BROOKS: Yeah, those guys are so good. You watch them on film, and you just try to figure out, how can you just make what they do hard.

We talked all the last couple of days that we have to stay in front of the ball, stay in front of them. We have to be between them in the basket. We wanted to give them some different looks.

I think they are too good, and Denise is too good; that if you give them the same look and same coverage, they are going to pick you apart. I thought our players did a really good job.

Coach Amy Malo on our staff did a great job scouting. We changed matchups some. We gave them different looks. Had a smaller guy that can get under Webber a little bit. But they are really good.

We were fortunate that they missed a couple of open ones, but man, I thought our kids did a good job of staying in front of them and making them make tough shots.

Q. Can you talk a little bit more about Kendall's statement of the aggressiveness you guys had in the third quarter and how you took control of the game that way? And then also, this will now be the first time Belmont has played for a trophy in the Division I era in the postseason, and also the first time the program has ever played in April. What is the significance of that to you?

BART BROOKS: I have no idea what day it is. Is it

March? Tomorrow's April.

Thank you, first of all.

Yeah, I thought coming out of the locker room, they did a really good job of taking us out of some of our actions offensively with their switching, and we knew that was going to be the case going in; that it wasn't going to be easy to get the easy looks that some of the actions that we run can get, and we were going to have to get to the second, third and fourth action.

I thought our players did a really good job of taking a couple of coaching points as the game -- it wasn't like we did anything magic at halftime. We had been telling them that the whole game. But for whatever reason, it clicked at halftime that we had to attack the rim. We had to be more aggressive to get to the basket and put pressure on them to have to guard us and put a little bit more discipline at the end of our dribble to get to the free throw line or to finish. And I thought our players did a great job of that.

To be able to play in a tournament championship, it's a magical thing. As a coach who has done this for a few years, I don't take any of this for granted. I'm enjoying every second of it, and love that we get to do it with this group.

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