

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 9, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Iowa Hawkeyes

Lisa Bludder

Caitlyn Clark

Sydney Affolter

Postgame Press Conference



She's done exactly that. Obviously she has 12, 8, and 7, but she does so many things on top of that that aren't even in the box score all the time.

Across the board, Gabbie's been shooting it well. Kate has been playing great. Hannah's been great. Abbey been's great. That's what we need. When we have multiple people in double figures, we're really hard to stop.

Q. With the double bye and then having to play the extra game, I'm curious how much that extra day of rest versus them having to play the extra game played a factor for you guys.

CAITLIN CLARK: I think, when you get into these tournament settings, the double bye is really important. In my freshman year, we didn't have a double bye. We made it to the championship game, and by the time you play four games in a row, your legs are really, really shot.

Playing three games in three days isn't ideal either. At that point, you've just got to be mentally tougher. Sometimes it's good to string some wins together for those teams that don't have double byes.

At this point, we were lucky enough to get a little rest there in the fourth quarter because we built such a nice lead. Also this is our third game, and it's obviously going to be Nebraska's fourth, I believe. We need to use that to our advantage. We want to keep playing our pace. We want to play fast basketball.

We have hard practices. We stay in shape. These are the moments you make it count.

Q. You touched on it a little bit. How key was it to get out of the game there six, seven minutes to go and rest the legs a little bit more?

CAITLIN CLARK: You know I would have loved to have kept playing, but obviously Coach Abby was not letting me go back in the game. It was fun seeing some girls who don't usually get minutes, especially in this tournament environment, playing in front of our fans and I thought they

Iowa - 95, Michigan - 68

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. We'll start the Iowa press conference with an opening statement from head coach Lisa Bludder.

LISA BLUDER: Obviously I thought our second half was really good. Our defense was good. We finally got out on those three-point shooters. They were 2-for-10 from threes in the second half after shooting really, really well the first half.

Happy with the way that we took care of the boards. We valued the ball: 30 assists, set a Big Ten record for that. Caitlin has 15 on her own. I thought Syd, again, just was outstanding. She has the highest plus-minus of anybody. Eight assists and seven rebounds for Syd. She's doing a great job for us, playing so strong, so physically.

Man, I just thought we had some beautiful passing in the second half, just sharing the ball. It's so much fun when we play like that and when everybody is getting involved like that.

Q. Another total team effort this afternoon. How much confidence does that give everyone considering the depth going into NCAA Tournament?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think it's really important. Like Coach said, I think Syd is playing the best basketball she's played in her career. I couldn't be happier for her. She's one of those kids that works really hard and has always been in the gym. Obviously has played behind a lot of really good people we've had in our program. This has been her year to have her moment and step up, especially with Molly going down.



did a good job.

Taylor and Kylie having to run the 1, maybe something they're not always used to, especially with Molly going down. I thought they did a great job. And A.J. playing a bit out of position with Sharon in the game.

It's definitely nice to rest your legs a bit here and there. You're always going to take a minute or two when you can. That goes for whether it was Kate, whether it was Han, whether it was Syd, really nobody played over 30 minutes other than myself, and I'm just over 30.

That makes a big difference, especially when you're going into your third game.

Q. I know you watch a lot of basketball, so you know how hard it is to reach a championship game in a conference tournament. You've done it all four years. What does that accomplishment mean to you? I know you've got another one to go, but to do that all four years, what does that mean to you?

CAITLIN CLARK: It's special. I was walking back to the locker room with Gabbie and Jada. I don't know how to do this tournament any other way. I pack for three days, pack for four days. That's just what we do.

I think it's honestly been to my advantage that we've made it my freshman year and my sophomore and junior year, that's all we know. That's just what we do.

I feel like we always play great basketball when we're coming here. Obviously when it moved to Minneapolis last year, our fans have really showed out and supported us on a whole different level rather than when it was in Indianapolis, a little bit harder location to get to.

It's not easy. These tournaments are really, really tough. As you've seen, we were the only higher team to win yesterday's game. That's what makes it so fun. It also shows how good our conference is and how good it's been all year. It's never anything you take for granted. Obviously we're going to try to make it three in a row tomorrow.

Q. You guys had 54 points in the paint tonight compared to Michigan's 16. Can you talk about what was working so well to get the ball inside and be successful in the paint.

SYDNEY AFFOLTER: On the defensive end, we really talked about in the first quarter they shot lights out. So that was really important to push on offense, get stops on defense, and lead that to offense.

I think we moved the ball really well, and everyone was knocking down shots. So it was fun.

Q. Caitlin, I'm going to go a little off track here. Right now you're the most popular female on the planet. Taylor has the Swifties. You have the Clarkies. How hard is it becoming for you to take care of all the media requests first? You're being bombarded. Every person in the media wants to interview you. They want a selfie. They want your autograph. Most important, is it becoming difficult for you to take care of all your fans, all the screaming little girls that cry for you in signing autographs? Is that becoming difficult for you?

CAITLIN CLARK: First of all, I'm really lucky that I have a team around me that, to be honest, I don't even know what media requests I get. They just bring me the ones I'm going to do and who I'm going to talk to. They let me go about my daily life focusing on basketball, focusing on school. I'm about to get my degree, and I've got to pass some classes to do that.

Other than that, I can't make time for every single person in this arena. I wish I could. I would love to. I just try to take as much time as I can for every single young girl on my way out. I know a lot of them I can make their day, but it would take me forever to get through everybody.

Even if I can impact ten people, that goes a long way. That has an impact on me too.

Q. This goes for either one of you. Jaz Shelley has been phenomenal in this tournament. How do you plan on containing her and the rest of Nebraska?

CAITLIN CLARK: To be honest, we haven't even started our scout obviously. We just finished this game. We've played them twice this year. We know how good they are. They got us at their place.

Jaz in my eyes is one of the best players in the country. She's got range. She can shoot the ball. I know Nebraska shot the ball really well tonight.

Honestly, Michigan and the Penn State game, two of our main keys were to defend the three-point line, and that's going to be another key going into this game. We've got to be able to defend the three-point line, but Jaz is one of the best players in the country. The way she can pass, she can shoot, she can penetrate, she just makes everybody around her better. She's a lot of fun to go up against.

Q. Caitlin, forgive me for bringing up a couple more



record things, but you passed 1,000 points again today. That's two years in a row with 1,000 points. It hasn't been done before in Division I. I wonder if you could sort of address that. Second, you become the all-time leading scorer in the Big Ten tournament. Kelsey Mitchell had that record before. If you could kind of just address those two things.

CAITLIN CLARK: I didn't know I crossed 1,000 points tonight. Thank you for letting me know. Honestly like I know I say this a lot, but this offense is like perfectly suited for my game. Coach Bluder lets me be me.

We went into the locker room at halftime, and we were going for a two-for-one, but we had waited a little too long to take the ball out in the first half. She had turned around to the bench, we're like, we can't wait that long. At the same time, I had shot it down at the other end from about two steps across half-court, so I made it work out.

I think that just speaks to her. She lets me be me, and it's been the same way for four years. But I've had a lot of really good teammates that have allowed me to be me too, whether it was Gab and Kate, they've been my side for four years, but also Mon, Hannah, Addy. You can go down the list of people that have allowed me to thrive and have been really good in their role and thriving in their role.

Obviously breaking the Big Ten record is something that's really hard to do. These games are never guaranteed. You can come here and just play one game, and it can be over. Obviously I'm really grateful to play the maximum number of games every season I've had of this tournament that is probably the only reason I've had this record.

Obviously Kelsey is a tremendous player. What she's been able to do for this league, what she did for this league at Ohio State was pretty incredible. It's cool to be in the same realm as all those players.

Q. Caitlin, you mentioned yesterday sometimes a shooter just knows when their shot's off. How did your shot feel today, and how did that compare to yesterday?

CAITLIN CLARK: Felt pretty good. Felt like I got a couple tough rolls on a couple threes there in the second half, but I'll take my line any day of the week.

Q. Just wanted to talk about the second half defense. What were some of those halftime adjustments that allowed you guys to flip the script, especially in that first quarter and going into halftime?

SYDNEY AFFOLTER: Like we said, they were really

shooting the three ball well in the first quarter. Going into the second half, that was our main focus was to defend the three. When we put all of our energy into that, it all really came together well.

We pushed on offense like we always do.

Q. Caitlin, I know you haven't had time obviously, won't have much time for Nebraska, but if you look back to that game at Nebraska, you guys were a little frustrated at how you dealt with their defense, sort of box and one. What did you guys learn from that taking forward? We don't know what they'll do tomorrow, but that will help in terms if they sort of throw that at you guys again.

CAITLIN CLARK: I would expect them to box and one us tomorrow. That's something we worked on every single practice since that game. It was even something we worked on before that game was played. Put in new plays, put in new offenses.

Honestly more than anything, I think we're playing such good basketball. Who do you go off of? Gabbie shooting the ball well. Syd shooting the ball well.

Also the biggest thing versus the box and one, just get stops on defense and push in transition. It's hard to set up your defense, but I fully expect them to be in a box and one on us. We have the luxury of playing them twice. We know what to expect. I think we're really prepared for it.

Honestly there's been quite a few teams since that game who have played box and one on us. Maybe through few possessions here and there. Michigan tried it at our place. Penn State's done it. Quite a few teams have done it. I think they've responded well in those few games. So I think it will be something we're definitely ready for.

Q. After trailing after that first quarter, what were some of the things that you were telling your team about how to get back in the game and kind of combat Michigan's hot offense?

LISA BLUDER: We didn't like panic or anything at that end. It's like there's a lot more basketball to be played. So it was just like we got to get out and protect the threes. They were shooting the three ball really well the first half. We did a much better job of protecting the second half.

Also, we weren't boxing out very well. They got two threes off of offensive rebounds. We did a much better job of that in the second half as well.

Q. Obviously it's a total team effort, but when you

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think about Caitlin in the Big Ten tournament, she mentioned her freshman year, going from the 6 seed to the championship game. She hasn't lost since in this event. What is it about her game, do you see her even elevate it even more this time of year? What do you see behind the scenes that has your team, what is it now, 11-1 in the Big Ten tournament with Clark?

LISA BLUDER: With Caitlin, it's like the bigger the spotlight, the more she's going to show up. She just loves high-energy games, fans that are amazing. Can we just talk a second about the Iowa Hawkeye fans? It is amazing what they are doing for our team. We absolutely love them. We are so thankful for them.

But the bigger the show, the bigger she plays, there's no doubt.

Q. Like I asked the players, just how key was it to get their legs -- get them off their feet for the last six or seven minutes, the starters. Was that by design? Just tell me about that.

LISA BLUDER: Any time we can get -- when you're playing three games in three days, that's very -- it takes a lot of energy. So if we had the opportunity to get off -- get less minutes for our starters or our top seven players, we need to do it.

We were fortunate enough we had enough of a lead that we're playing people completely out of position. When we run an offense like ours, it's pretty positionless. So that helps.

Q. Coach, can you talk a little bit about Caitlin's ability to distribute early on. Less points in the first half and a lot of assists.

LISA BLUDER: Caitlin's going to do whatever she has to do. If she's open, she's going to shoot it. If she draws two defenders, she's going to dish it. We work on that all the time. Drive, draw, and dish. Make those reads.

She's exceptional, exceptional at it, especially in the full court.

Q. Lisa, I asked Caitlin about getting over 1,000 in back-to-back seasons. Forgive me because I know you've talked a lot about her scoring, but just the consistency to be able to put those numbers up with the type of defenses she's had to play.

LISA BLUDER: That is mind boggling when you think about it. I mean, everybody's defensive plan is to stop her, and nobody's been able to figure out really how to do it.

She's faced everything, every kind of defense, every kind of ball screen defense. She really knows how to pick them apart. So it's pretty amazing what she's been able to accomplish. Just so proud of her.

I don't think I really answered your question all the way, but there you go.

Q. A lot of scoring all over the place tonight. I think four players in double figures, Addison O'Grady almost in double figures as well. Seen a lot of points from all over the roster. Do you feel like you're getting deeper by the day, or is this something that we just haven't had the chance to see? And now as you get more and more deep into the season, it's kind of showing itself.

LISA BLUDER: I think people are just concentrating on Caitlin so much that it leaves other people open. We have good other players. They just don't get the spotlight. They don't get the notoriety that Caitlin does, but they are good players.

My top two centers went 11-for-11 tonight from the field. That's pretty good. I think a lot of people would like that. We have 54 paint points to their 16.

I just think it's because all the emphasis defensively is on Caitlin, it allows other people to really step up. I love that we had four people in double figures tonight.

Q. The last year for Caitlin, just how her star has sort of exploded nationally, internationally. How is it that she's been able to maintain a level of normalcy?

LISA BLUDER: I think us coaches and her teammates keep her head on straight. I think we like to tease her a little bit, and she can take it. But it's the type of person she is. It's the type of family she comes from. They're not all about her all the time.

It's hard. I think when you're 22 years old and you're getting this kind of attention, these kind of NIL deals, it is hard to keep your head on straight. So it takes a great amount of maturity. It takes a great amount of parental support.

But I think also it's her ability to laugh at herself, her ability to be humble and laugh at herself.

Q. (No microphone).

LISA BLUDER: Oh, gosh, anything. Anything we can. Honestly, there's a lot of things we can tease her about,

though.

Q. Hannah looked a little shaken up after that last basket she made. Do you expect her to be okay?

LISA BLUDER: I sure hope so. I haven't talked to our trainers to see how she is. She twisted her ankle a little bit. She seemed okay. Hopefully nothing swells up when we get back to the hotel or anything like that, but we've got great medical support here. They're going to do everything they can to make sure she can play tomorrow.

Q. You talked about the quick turnaround yesterday. I don't know if this is the quickest turnaround of your life. I know you've got to get going, but how much sleep do they need to get? What is the actual hour-by-hour plan in a nutshell?

LISA BLUDER: It's recovery right now. Recover, recover. We told them, encourage them to get into ice baths, have them drink cherry juice to work down the inflammation. Anything we can do to recover at this point is what we're trying to do.

This is the shortest turnaround that we've ever had, but truly at this point, it's all about adrenaline. It's about getting the job done, keeping in the moment. We've just been saying, this is a business trip. This is a business trip.

Limit your time on the phone. Limit your time with people outside of your immediate family because we need to really focus on scout, film, rest, eat, sleep. That is all that we are focusing on.

Q. Tonight you guys held Michigan to about 20 fewer points than last time you played them. What was the defensive game plan coming in, and what was successful?

LISA BLUDER: I think our zone defense was really good in the second half. We held them to 13 points each quarter. I really think, kept them off the free-throw line. I think they were 7-for-7 from the free-throw line in the first half. They went 1-for-1 -- I guess they actually shot five in the second half.

I just think it was really good. We were able to get out on their shooters a little bit better when we were in zone defense. And I'm sure their legs got a little bit tired as well, absolutely, playing that many games in that many days.

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Michigan Wolverines

Kim Barnes Arico

Laila Phelia

Jordan Hobbs

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Iowa - 95, Michigan - 68

THE MODERATOR: We'll start the Michigan press conference with an opening statement from Coach Barnes Arico.

KIM BARNES ARICO: Somehow I lost my voice in these last couple days. Well, I guess specifically today. So I probably won't say too much.

Iowa is a great team, and I thought we came out in the first quarter and were exceptional and were able to match their pace of play.

We weren't able to score with them later in the game, and they were able to pull away from us. But I think our team did a phenomenal job all week and potentially ran out of gas a little bit against a tremendous Iowa team.

So credit to them, and it should be a great championship tomorrow.

Q. It seemed like Iowa was really getting going in the paint and scored most of their points in the paint. Can you just talk about what was so hard to defend with them inside the paint?

LAILA PHELIA: I feel like the biggest thing was that we were worried about the shooters. So we just needed to do a bitter job of being able to gap in and get out to the shooters.

JORDAN HOBBS: I feel like we weren't really helping each other as much as we game planned and weren't really loading onto their big men. Even when Clark was driving downhill, we didn't really load. So we were



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definitely worried about their shooters.

Q. You guys lit it up in the first quarter, both you two and Lauren and Brett were all perfect from the three. What allowed you to get that success in the first quarter, and what happened after that and kind of slowed it down a little bit?

JORDAN HOBBS: I think getting some paint touches early, and we were just sharing the ball a little bit better than we did in the second half. We kind of just went one pass and shot in the second half, and that didn't work out for us very well.

So I think definitely moving the ball and getting those paint touches and getting the defense to sink in.

Q. When you came into this tournament, I feel like maybe your March Madness was -- you guys were pretty much on the bubble. But now I'd say, especially after one win and especially after yesterday, I'd say you guys have fully cemented yourselves in the tournament. Now obviously this part of the season is over, but what does this next week look like for you, and how excited are you to continue to play?

LAILA PHELIA: Definitely very excited to be able to have the chance to play in the tournament, but this next week, I feel like we're just going to be really locking in, working on ourselves and what we need to do and get better at, so we're ready for whatever other teams throw at us.

Q. It seemed like Iowa was changing up defense throughout the game, and when they went to zone, it really switched up how your offense seemed to be working. What did you see when they switched that zone defense?

JORDAN HOBBS: I just think we weren't really getting the ball inside as much as we wanted. The flash was wide open, but we didn't get it there as much. When it did, we got Laila on a few cuts.

So just trying to get back to that and reading what they give us. We faced zone the past couple days, so just going



back to what works.

Q. How hard is it to game plan for Clark, especially in that first quarter where she comes out and she's really looking to pass more than she is to shoot?

KIM BARNES ARICO: She's arguably the best player in the country. She can score the basketball better than anybody, but she can pass the basketball better than anybody. I think that's what makes her so special.

You try to keep the ball out of her hands because she's such a great decision-maker. But she's tough to guard. I don't know if anybody's figured it out.

Q. When people talk about Iowa, they talk about the perimeter shooting, but today they were really successful in the paint. Was that something that you expected coming into this game for them to have so many points inside the lane?

KIM BARNES ARICO: No. They were able to get downhill in the first half, and we talked about it at halftime, our ability to rotate over and take some charges, especially when Clark picked up a foul early. I thought we really could have rotated over early, and we didn't do that.

Then in the second half their two posts who were in foul trouble in the first half came back in the second half, and then they just isolated super high four shooters and just went in a one-on-one situation inside.

I think we totally could have done a better job of helping from the weak side, and it's something that we've practiced and something that we've emphasized through the course of the year. But I just think with the quick, I mean super quick turnaround -- and I'm not trying to make excuses for anyone, but we got back to the hotel last night at 11:00, and we had to turn around and be here today at 2:00.

So that was a super quick turnaround and not a lot of preparation. We did a walk-through at the hotel, but our kids, it's important to get prepared and get ready. Even in the NCAA Tournament, you get a day in between, which you can really prepare for.

I'm not making excuses. They beat us fair and square. But I think we got worn down and really weren't locked into the game plan as much as we were yesterday. And even yesterday when we struggled in the second quarter, we were able to call a timeout and kind of really regroup to what the game plan was.

I thought we did a phenomenal job yesterday loading and took away their paint touches, and today we really didn't

load and take away those touches.

Q. This is technically a neutral site game, but we all know the environment. How do you teach your kids? Is there any way to teach for that kind of environment?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, we were the lucky ones that got to be at Iowa when Caitlin broke the record, so we kind of were in the same environment, similar. It was a little bit crazier there, but very similar to today. Any time they made a run, the place erupted, or any time there was a big play, the place erupted.

A couple years ago we went to the Elite Eight, and we played in Wichita, and South Dakota brought all of South Dakota. So it was a neutral court, but it was their home court.

So you try to prepare for those environments in practice. We try to put fan noise in the background. You try to prepare as much as you can. But I think when you get in them, it's a little bit different.

I think that type of pressure led to our quick shots sometimes. When they were making their run and the place was going crazy, we got the ball back and wanted to make a fast play and wanted to match that, and then if we missed it, it was a quick shot and their transition down the other way. That's why they're so dangerous because they can push that pace.

But what an environment for women's basketball, what an environment for the Big Ten. The game has grown so much even over the last five years that there are going to be Caitlin Clark type players continuing to come up. You see a similar one potentially in JuJu Watkins, who's going to be in the Big Ten next year.

I just think it's a tremendous time for women's basketball. It's a tremendous time for the Big Ten. I mean, if you're a kid out there watching, what greater league to come to than a lead that's selling out their tournament, that's selling out all around the country, and that has elite, elite level players.

Q. What did you see when Iowa started switching up its defense in the zone? What adjustments do you try to make there?

KIM BARNES ARICO: It definitely slowed us down. You saw that it slowed us down. We were able to certainly push pace, and I think they had to go to zone because we were pushing pace and we were matching their pace.

We were able to do that last night too. We talked about

that in the second half last night. We kind of switched Laila to bringing the ball up, and we did that early in the first half. It really helped our pace of play. I think they had to go to zone because our pace was really good.

The switching -- and sometimes it does this. The other night -- I don't know if it was Minnesota went to zone, and we were 5 for 5. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, they had to get out of the zone. They were doing make/miss, and it was messing with our kids. We needed to handle that better. We shouldn't have allowed our pace to switch because they were switching on a make/miss, but it did. So they kept switching it make/miss depending on if they make, and it really made us stagnant a little bit.

We were open, so it made us also pass the ball and shoot it because we were open, and we made those shots early. But we weren't making them in the second half, and that kind of allowed them to get a ton of touches.

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