

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 8, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Iowa Hawkeyes

Lisa Bluder

Caitlin Clark

Gabbie Marshall

Postgame Press Conference

Iowa - 95, Penn State - 62

THE MODERATOR: The Iowa press conference will begin with opening statement from Coach Bluder.

LISA BLUDER: I'm just really proud of the energy we came out with tonight. There's so much good play out there tonight, and Kate's energy was great. I thought Gabbie defensively was amazing for us again. I thought Syd was incredible. We have five people in double figures, 21 assists on 12 turnovers, outrebound them by 12.

It's funny, Caitlin has an off night, and how many people would say you have an off night when you have 24 points, 10 rebounds, 7 assists, but it was an off night for Caitlin. And I'm just so glad that her teammates picked up the slack in that area. It just gives us so much more confidence moving forward. It makes us so much harder to guard when we play like we did tonight.

Q. Gabbie, I think this is your third game in a row with four three-pointers. It just seems like this is kind of the trajectory you were on last year too, just really got hot at the end of the season. What's cooking there for you?

GABBIE MARSHALL: Confidence. That's the biggest thing, being confident in myself and just playing free out there.

I think, when you miss some shots and kind of get into a little bit of a slump, you can become tense, and I feel like that's kind of what my problem was. Just told myself just play free, have fun, enjoy every little moment on the court, whether it's picking up my teammate or cheering for my teammate or getting an open shot for my teammate,



everything's about my teammates, and I think that kind of just switched my mentality.

Q. Caitlin, quick question for you. I know a while ago you had mentioned that growing up you had a lot of the Lynx players' jerseys. Does it kind of feel surreal being on the court and looking up in the rafters and seeing those jerseys and thinking, I'm playing where some of my idols played?

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I think so. I think I said that when I was here for Big Ten media day too. It's kind of cool we get to come back here and play. This was the place I went to my first WNBA game, a lot of players I grew up idolizing. That was a team that really was a dynasty and won multiple WNBA championships, so for sure.

Q. Caitlin, when your shot's off a little bit like tonight, what did you feel was off on it? You have a mock celebration after you got that one. What were you thinking when that one went down?

CAITLIN CLARK: Honestly, I think as a shooter, like sometimes you can feel it was off, and honestly a lot of my shots I felt were right there, and I think that's the most positive thing. A lot of them I thought were going in, sometimes a little short, sometimes a little long.

I thought I could have probably gotten to the basket a little bit more. Honestly, they were packing the paint really hard. They were gapping really, really well. I was trolling and messing around when I made that. You've got to have some fun.

I thought our team had a lot of fun tonight. I'm just proud of our girls. Sydney played tremendous, Gabbie did, Kate did. Hopefully if I shoot it even better, we'd probably be in the hundreds. That's the exciting part about this.

Q. How much did the crowd tonight kind of give you that extra spark when you weren't having it?

CAITLIN CLARK: Honestly I thought we played really, really well. Shooting is just one part of the game. I thought I did really, really good in this game of letting it go, like next



shot. Sometimes it's hard to get up there and shoot the next one, but honestly maybe that's my poison sometimes. I'm just going to launch it. That's just how it's going to be. I was going to make one before the buzzer hit zero, even if it took 20 of them.

I don't know, like I passed the ball well. Rebounded the ball well. I thought I played pretty good defense. Shot the ball well from the free-throw line, which is always good.

Yeah, I thought our crowd was tremendous. It gives us a lot of energy, especially on the defensive end. This is like five hours from Iowa City and four hours from Des Moines, and a lot of these people are coming from all over. We're just really thankful, and their energy definitely helps us.

Q. Caitlin or Gabbie or both, nobody likes to admit they're scoreboard watching at this stage, but did Ohio State's loss earlier today provide a reminder of the unpredictable nature of tournament basketball to you guys?

CAITLIN CLARK: To be honest, we weren't watching that game because we were in shootaround, but I think our group is veteran enough to understand how these tournaments go. We've been on the losing side of March Madness. I think we know not to take any game for granted.

Honestly, we have five seniors, and we're playing every single game like we're not given tomorrow. I think that's what allows us to come out here and have so much fun every single night. We just want to come back to practice every single day, have another game with each other.

You kind have to worry about what's in your circle, and to everybody else doesn't matter. You take it one game at a time. Obviously our focus has been on Penn State, and we'll move on to the next game that's about to start. But I think our group is old enough and wise enough to know that you'd better come ready to play because people are fighting for their lives right now.

Q. I just want to ask you guys, you guys have played in the Big Ten tournament, but the big fish is going to be the NCAA Tournament. How is this tournament, playing in this tournament helping you guys prepare for the big fish in the NCAA Tournament?

GABBIE MARSHALL: I would say when you get to the Big Ten tournament, you have back to back to back games, so it's kind of a battle of who's more mentally tougher. I feel like that's going to give us all the momentum and prepare us for the NCAA Tournament.

We have to get back, and we're going to go prepare for the next game and scout and watch film, and that's going to be what we have to do during the NCAA Tournament as well. So it will prepare us pretty well.

Q. Caitlin, you've been making an impact empowering young girls in the U.S., but not only, all the way over to Europe and to France. Do you realize how much reach and impact you have already all over the world? What does that mean to you?

CAITLIN CLARK: I've never been to France, but I would love to go. I think it's really cool. Even when we were on our foreign trip, there were a lot of people that would show up to our games, and find out where we were playing, whether it was Italy or Croatia.

Obviously it's hard to wrap my head around having an impact globally. That's my goal and my dream and what I want to do.

It's super cool. It's super cool to see who we have an impact on in our state and also in our country, but certainly around the world too.

Q. Welcome to Minneapolis. So happy to have you here. It is International Women's Day. I would love to hear your thoughts on the current state of women's sports and your hopes for the future. Lisa, especially you.

THE MODERATOR: We'll answer that question later with the coach.

CAITLIN CLARK: I feel like I could go on and on and talk about the state of women's sports. I think it's in a really great place. I think what we're doing for women's basketball is tremendous, and I said it in my post-game interview. I think you're seeing the parity across the sport be improved more and more, and that's what is attracting more people to our game, the talent level.

I think a lot of people on our team grew up playing a bunch of different sports, whether it was volleyball, soccer, gymnastics, tennis, you could go on and on and on. I think across the board at the NCAA level, it's growing. Whether you look at the women's college World Series, whether you look at whatever it is, whatever sport, you can list it, and it's growing.

People want to watch. When you're given an opportunity and put on this stage, people show up, and people want to pay attention. I think you're especially seeing that in women's basketball. You're seeing that with our team, and we never take that for granted.

Also, it's like we've been able to do this, and now's the time. I think it's really special. I don't think it's anything our team ever takes for granted, being able to be a role model for all those young girls, but also young boys too. I think there's a lot of young boys that look up to us. People young and old idolize our team, and that's one of the coolest things.

Q. You guys got out to a big lead, and then Penn State cut it to about nine, and there was a media timeout. You guys scored 7 of 8 possessions to kind of really take control of the game. What was going on there, and what did you talk about in it?

CAITLIN CLARK: I think, if I'm not mistaken, we didn't score for about five minutes to start the second quarter. I think it was just like slow down. We made a lot of threes. We made some shots early in the first quarter, and then we just kind of continued to launch in the second quarter when we needed to move the ball, get some drives, cut to the basket.

So I think that was kind of Coach Bluder's message, slow down, cut. Let's get some back to back drives. Let's get an easy bucket.

I think whenever Penn State went on a run, our group always had an answer, and I think that's super positive. That's what you're going to need during March basketball. That's kind of how the game of basketball goes. You've got to be able to respond.

Q. Iowa's obviously a team that has a lot of home grown midwestern talent. Was there a moment during your recruitment where you decided I definitely want to stay close to home, or was it more of a cumulative effect?

CAITLIN CLARK: For sure. I visited a lot of places during my recruiting process, whether it was the West Coast, whether it was Texas, and I think I just figured out like I really wanted to be in the Midwest, but more specifically, I wanted to play in my home state. I wanted to be close to my family, but also our fans have always supported women's basketball before I even stepped on campus.

Obviously it's a little different level now, but what Coach Bluder has built here, there's always been tremendous fan support, and that's what I wanted to play in front of. I want to play in front of people that support women's athletics. I want to play in front of people that understand what's going on when you're playing.

Obviously it was different in my freshman year, but just

seeing how it's grown to my senior year is super, super special. I think the people are what made me want to stay.

Q. Caitlin, you mentioned letting it go earlier, and I know that's probably not a skill you thought you'd get to the gym and have to practice today. Obviously a skill that's pivotal in this month. Just how would you say that element of your game and career has improved over time?

CAITLIN CLARK: That's not a skill I've always had, that's for sure. Both of these two would definitely agree with me on that one. I think it's something I developed over the course of this year and even last year. I think that's where I grew the most is being able to let things go.

Like this is one game. I take hundreds of thousands of shots, like it doesn't really matter. The best part about this is I don't have to sit on this long. I've got to come back and play basketball at 3:30 tomorrow. We won by 30 points. I didn't shoot the three ball that well, but I did so many other things that impacted my team.

More importantly, I had so much fun playing tonight. Our crowd was incredible. Like you said, I think that's the biggest way I've honestly grown throughout my career is mentally being able to put things to the side and move on and be able to enjoy it and stay confident in what I'm doing.

Q. Gabbie, when you woke up today, did you sort of feel like you were going to have a big day today? Like do these days feel different to you before you're about to have a good shooting day?

GABBIE MARSHALL: I think I just really like the month of March (laughter). No, I don't know. You always wake up wanting to shoot it well or play good for your team, but I think just the feels that this Big Ten tournament brings, I think it just brings a lot of energy and kind of nerves and anxiousness.

We're just so excited to get out there and play. I always want to make shots for my team. So I'm always going in thinking I'm going to make them.

Q. Coach, with Molly unavailable, I mean, whether Caitlin or Gabbie or somebody else has a huge game, how important going forward will it be for Sydney and Taylor to continue to step up and hit key shots and play as well as they did today?

LISA BLUDER: Absolutely. They have to. We're down over three games, it could be 75 minutes. So we've got to make up for that time.

I thought Taylor went in and played extremely well, whether she's playing point guard, off guard, small forward. She was doing anything for us. Syd, I thought, played tremendous. Kylie went in and did some great things, had some great takes at the basket, hit a three for us. So I'm please with what they did, but we're going to have to continue that, sure.

Q. Caitlin was saying obviously you guys are focused on yourselves, but those first two games today, they were both upsets. The teams that played yesterday won, and sometimes that can be a little advantage. I just wondered what you thought coming into this game in terms of not letting that happen to you guys?

LISA BLUDER: I think there is a little bit of an advantage, that you've been in the arena, you've had a shootaround, you've played here before. You're just more comfortable, right? Kind of got that tournament jitters over.

So we talked about it, and our team just feels so good about playing here and playing in the tournament. Like Caitlin said, I think the experience of this team really, really shines in these type of situations.

Q. Obviously a good start tonight with a bit of a wacky schedule. What do you do as a team to make sure you keep that momentum, to build the momentum from today?

LISA BLUDER: The schedule I'm concerned about is how consolidated it is. For us now to turn around and play at 3:30 and then play at 11:00 and it's daylight savings time, that's really 10:00 in the morning. That's tough. We've never played a game at 10:00 in the morning, especially after coming off another game the day before.

We went to Florida. We played three games in three days, and we really did that because of this. We wanted to help prepare ourselves for this by having to do that in November.

Hopefully that will pay off, but right now it's rest, recovery, eat, watch the film, sleep. That's all they're going to do.

Q. Molly Davis out obviously today. The way that your team responded to it, specifically the day that Syd had in the starting lineup, was that sort of helped out by Molly essentially missing the last game against Penn State too? Did that help you guys out?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I think that's a really good point. We talked about that. Molly wasn't available the last time we played Penn State, and she really wasn't available when we played Nebraska either.

It helped us. Sometimes those bad things can happen, and it makes you stronger. We certainly didn't like it at the time when she was out, but now having to be forced into that position, we're more prepared for it.

Q. You listed off all the good things you did, but I think there were stretches where didn't play very well, but you still won by 30. As a Coach, do you take that as a positive and say there's so much more we can do and yet we still won by 30?

LISA BLUDER: There's always more you can do, and that's what I love about this game. There's never been a perfect game. There never will be. There's just so many more things you can improve on, even in March. That's why I love it when players want to be coached in March, want to keep improving, want to keep watching film no matter what because this game is so hard, it is so difficult.

I thought that we withstood some of those runs.

Q. Two-parter. I'm curious if you've ever seen Caitlin miss 11 threes in a row. The second part is how do you sort of, four years ago, how might she have reacted differently on a stage like this versus what we saw tonight where she was able to smile?

LISA BLUDER: I don't think I've ever seen her miss 11 threes in a row, and that could probably include practice and everything else. I've never seen that. I'm really proud of her for the way she handled that.

You're right. Freshman year, she probably wouldn't have been so gracious about it and so like enlightening to her teammates about building them up. Now she understands, hey, when I'm not shooting, I've got to get my teammates involved.

I think that's the best thing for us is to have a game like this quite honestly because now these guys all have great confidence. They have more belief in themselves and each other. If Caitlin has a bad night, okay, we can still survive that. I think it's a good thing that happened tonight.

Q. I was just talking to Taylor McCabe. She says she played three different positions tonight. Your bench changes without Molly Davis. How much is Taylor McCabe kind of a formula to how you guys are going to succeed without Molly?

LISA BLUDER: Taylor is so important for us. First of all, she can shoot the ball like crazy, which is great. She has just worked so hard this year, kept her head up, even when she wasn't getting meaningful minutes. Then here it is, the

most important time of the year, and we need her, and she's showing up big. That takes a lot of perseverance for a kid to do that.

So I'm really proud of her. Yeah, she's played. She's had to do this for us in practice before too. Play the point guard, off guard, and small forward. When you run an offense, it's okay. When you run sets or out of bounds plays, it gets a little bit tough.

Q. Just bringing this one back again. You won tonight. There's so many young girls in the crowd. How do you feel about the current state of women's sports, women's basketball, and how far everything has come? And what's your hope for the future?

LISA BLUDER: I am thrilled with where we are right now. You have to remember I played in the '70s, and there was barely 50 people in the stands when I played. Now to this year we played in front of over 55,000 people in Kinnick.

I think people are understanding the value of sports. I think we're now seeing gender -- Title IX babies that are growing up and see the value of this sport and they're wanting their daughters to play. So I think it's in such a good spot.

Today we also have a circle, and we talked about what we are grateful for, and that is what I brought up. I'm grateful that I've been able to see the advancement of women's sports. I also said I'm very thankful that -- we have a female athletic director at the University of Iowa. There's only seven of those in the Power 5, and I think it's really meaningful that we have women in leadership positions like that. That's just going to help us continue to grow.

So very thankful for where we are. Can we keep growing? You bet. Why not?

Q. How would you compare Gabbie's confidence level now compared to maybe six weeks ago? And how much do you need her going forward?

LISA BLUDER: We need her. She's valuable. How about her defense tonight? Everybody gets enthralled with her offense because it's so much fun when she puts threes down, but, boy, she caused a lot of turnovers tonight. She was digging and recovering and playing great defense.

She's always valuable to us, but when she can hit those threes, I know she's having fun, and that makes it more fun for everybody. She's always going to work her tail off on the defensive end, but when you make baskets, it's a whole different game. It's just so much more fun for you. I'm glad she's getting rewarded for that. We need her moving forward, just like we did last year.

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Carolyn Kieger

Ashley Owusu

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CAROLYN KIEGER: Just wanted to give Iowa a lot of credit. Obviously a phenomenal team. They were clicking on all cylinders.

Awesome crowd. Great atmosphere. Great job by the Big Ten putting on this tournament. So lots of thanks to the conference.

We're excited to regroup here and get ready for postseason play coming up.

Q. Ashley, first of all, congratulations on a great career. It's been fun following you through it all. How do you summarize your emotions tonight after a long season like this? Obviously still got some postseason play to go, but what do you think in the big picture of how things have evolved for you as a basketball player?

ASHLEY OWUSU: I'd just say grateful, just excited to be in a space with people that support me and want the best for me.

Q. You talked about now it's postseason play. This is the first time in five years you've been able to say that, whether it's March Madness or the NIT. Obviously you're hoping that March Madness is the result. But to go back and know that Makenna has another game to play and Ashley and all those seniors, Chanaya, it's got to feel really good heading back to State College. Now you've got to wait a week. It's the in-between period before you find out your fate. It still feels good to know there's one more game to be played.

CAROLYN KIEGER: Absolutely. This is a great group. Phenomenal women in that locker room. They love each

other. They care about Penn State. They care about each other. They want to end on a better note than tonight.

Like I said, we'll regroup. We'll get back together. We'll get back to sharing the basketball, fixing some things, get back to being tough. It's going to be fun to play with this group one more time and to see Kenna and the other seniors go out on a better note than tonight.

Q. I thought you guys did a very good job of guarding Caitlin tonight. Leilani in particular, I haven't seen anybody do it better. What does it say about the depth of that Iowa team that on a night you were able to do that, that they were still able to win like this?

CAROLYN KIEGER: We were just talking about that in the locker room. Obviously I said this yesterday, but I think Leilani Kapinus is the best defender in the country. She proved it tonight, I thought, doing a really good job, making her work for her shots.

Give Iowa the credit, they're a very deep program. Obviously they were able to shoot 15 threes even in an off shooting night for Caitlin. So what our game plan was is going to be take Caitlin out of her rhythm and hope the role players stayed in check, and tonight they stepped up, and they stepped up in a big way. So kudos to them.

I'm really proud of our team's effort with Caitlin and finding her and picking her up in the full court. I'm glad you recognized that as well, and it's something for us to build upon.

Q. Kind of building off that, we just talked to Lisa, and that was the first time she said she's ever seen Caitlin miss 11 threes in a row. Also, Hannah scored 39 less points tonight. Basically, what was defending Caitlin, and we just talked about with Leilani, but also doubling -- it was a consistent double-team down low, Kylie and Grace and Allie. I think they did a really good job.

CAROLYN KIEGER: The frustrating part is I think our offense didn't show up tonight. The defense, for the most part, besides the 14 second-chance points and the 22 points off of turnovers, for the most part we were locked in,



paying attention to personnel. Obviously we had to make a couple of adjustments when's Taylor went hot there in the second half.

Our offense wasn't there. It wasn't clicking. We weren't sharing the basketball enough. We were playing on our toes -- on our heels, I should say, versus playing with pace and playing fearless, like we did the first round against them.

I thought our defense was much better tonight, offense not so much. Obviously, the result was 62 points and a negative assist-to-turnover ratio and shooting 34 percent, which is unlike us. We shoot around 50 percent better from the three-point line than we were tonight.

A lot of credit to what Iowa did there too zoning us up and junking us up a couple times.

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