

**Penn State Women's Basketball  
Head Coach Caroline Kieger Postgame Press Conference  
vs. LIU – November 9, 2021**

***Opening Statement:***

I just want to start by thanking the fans, it was amazing to have some spirit back in the BJC. I know our players have missed this; we've missed it. It was great to see all of you. I'm glad we're back in the stands, and, obviously, we have to keep building up our attendance, but it's somewhere to start. It's great to have that noise back in the gym. It's the first game of the year, you're always going to have kinks to work out. I thought our team did a great job weathering that, playing through different lineups, playing through different offensive and defensive situations that we haven't had in the last couple of months. I would say the biggest thing I have to say is: 621 days without people in the stands other than our close ones, so it feels amazing to be back to normal college basketball.

***Q: You mentioned the kinks you have to work out. Do you approach a game like this primarily as trying to get down your combinations and rotations in your play? Or were there things you were looking for defensively, like in that two-three zone or offensively that you really wanted to hit this game?***

A: I think early on and in your first couple of games you're going to try and find your subbing patterns, you're going to find what lineups work well together. Obviously, we're playing a different zone than we've played in the past. So, it's going to be getting used to who are playing the guards, who are playing the forwards, who is playing center for us. I thought our team did a great job of stepping up in there and playing two or three hard minute stretches and having each other's backs. I think for us, this is the deepest team we've had in a while, so you're going to see a lot of subbing this year. The team knows their role is to go in there and play as hard as they possibly can. Then, when it's the next person's turn, they're going to do the same thing.

***Q: Ali Brigham came into her first game as a Penn Stater tonight. What did you see from her in terms of physicality and ability to alter shots especially on the defensive end, grabbing rebounds, too?***

A: The coach in me just told her that she should have had 30 and 15. But, no, she obviously had a great debut. She provides a different level of presence for us down low that we drastically needed. I thought our team did a great job of finding her tonight with some open looks, especially Makenna [Marisa] finding her down low. We've been really trying to get Ali to understand how good she can potentially be, and I think that's going to be a day-by-day process. She has the potential to dominate the paint any given night.

***Q: You talked about playing a little different zone tonight. What about this personnel led you to go back to that type of defense? Why do you think it plays to your strengths?***

A: We're obviously longer this year to get the passing lanes and we've got guards that create havoc up top. I think they like it. They like trying to create turnovers and steals. Our goal is going to be 12 steals a night. Tonight, we had 13 and caused 21 turnovers. I think it fits our personnel really well and it plays to our strengths. I think the team is really buying into it, enjoying it.

***Q: Were you pleased with how they played in general?***

A: As a coach, you're always going to have moments. But another goal that we have is keeping teams below a 39% field goal percentage and they shot 38% tonight. So, we got that goal, which is huge for the first time out for a new defense.

***Q: What did you think about the way Makenna Marisa was able to beat everybody despite not having the most efficient start to the game?***

A: We believe Makenna is one of the best guards in the country and I don't think she's getting the recognition she deserves. Makenna had a bad night, an off night as would you say, and she still had 19,

six, and six. So, when your guard and a leader on your team can have an off night and still produce those numbers that's saying something about her. She's going to have a phenomenal year. If that's her off night, we will take that stat, and I think the rest of the country is about to take notice of what she's becoming.

***Q: Can you talk about halftime and what conversations you had in the locker room and what you wanted to see change from the first half to the second half?***

A: We were talking strategy of our defense. I thought we had given up too many casual open looks. I thought Our fives and centers weren't stepping up early enough and contesting enough shots, we really wanted to focus on that and play quicker and transition and get more opportunities in the open floor, which I thought we did there in that fourth quarter. But for us it's always going to be X's and O's and strategizing and putting our team in the best position to win. I thought we came out a little sluggish there in the first three minutes of the second half, which we obviously have to work on and improve that because we have got to hit the gas running on that first three minutes after halftime.

***Q: How did you feel about Kelly [Jekot]'s performance tonight?***

A: She was great coming in there and hitting three threes. I told her I think she passed up about five as well. But it was great to get her minutes and obviously we're going to play it slow and safe with her. I saw her warming up on the bike and getting loose. I thought she looked phenomenal, and I thought our team did a great job of fighting her when she came in and really hitting that hot hand. You're going to continue to see Kelly blossom as she gets more confident and comfortable.