

Penn State Basketball
Carolyn Kieger Postgame Press Conference
vs. Rutgers - December 9, 2021

Opening Statement

First of all, I want to welcome President-elect Bendapudi to the family. What an awesome day for Penn State, huge hire. I believe I heard she was at our game tonight, which is awesome. So, I want to thank her and obviously, what a home-run hire. I can't wait to get to know her more. For our team tonight, I thought we showed a lot of toughness, we battled. It wasn't pretty. But I think the sign of a team that's getting more mature is being able to win different ways. Tonight, our offense wasn't there, but our defense was. As we continue to play Big Ten play, we're going to have to find unique and different ways to win every night. So, a lot of credit to our team. I thought we had some big plays there in the second half. We don't win that game without Tova Sable coming off the bench the way that she did so super proud of her and Shay Hagan's coming off the bench, I thought they were the spark. I thought they were the reason for the W and we just got to keep getting better, keep teaching, keep learning and keep figuring out a way.

Q: Earlier in the game you put out a quicker lineup. Was there anything to that or was it just something that you have been working on?

A: I think for us, our depth is going to be a strength of ours. So next woman up, we just keep saying if it's your turn, step up, do what you got to do. I think our team is kind of buying into that concept. I think you'll see a different person stepping up every night. And tonight, we were just trying different things. And then Ali Brigham came off the bench and they didn't have an answer for her. I thought she did a great job coming in and being confident. For us, we're just going to keep trying synergy and what fits chemistry-wise for us in that moment.

Q: Following up on that, with Ali Brigham coming off the bench do you feel like they had been worn down physically at that point? And when you throw her in there, she's just being able to go out there and overpower people?

A: We had 29 points coming off the bench tonight, which was huge. I think when you can have different subbing rotations at different points of different games, in different quarters, and be able to take you know Makenna Marisa out at certain stretches before a media timeout, I think is really helping us. We have to make sure we're doing that more for her, but just really proud of our bench for stepping up. I thought they did phenomenal. They weathered the challenge and they stepped up in the moments that they needed to.

Q: It's been almost a month since your team has played at the Bryce Jordan Center, how big is it to have that boost?

A: It's huge. We missed the BJC. We missed our fans, we missed our routines, we missed everything about being home. We wanted to challenge them early in the year, taking them on a road trip that was going to be like that, that kind of simulates March a little bit. I think we still have some learning to do. But being back home with an environment that we call home and our fans, the band, the cheerleaders, everything about being here in the BJC is what we needed. I credit being back home to this win, to the fans, and to the Legion of Blue, you name it to this one as much as our players.

Q: Third quarters have been an issue in the last few games. Was there anything you said in the huddle that sparked that big run during the third?

A: I think we were just trying to talk about pace of play tonight. Rutgers wants to slow it down, they want a low possession game, we want a high possession game. We were just trying to play to our strengths a little bit more, we hit some threes, we got some deflections and some traps. I think our defense led to a lot of that energy and made us more confident on

the offensive end. In a game like that, I thought it was great for us to force 22 turnovers, when your offense is struggling, because that gives you a little bit more confidence and allows your defense to lead to offense. I think is what happened in that stretch.

Q: What prompted you to put Tova Sabel in. What did you think she was going to add?

A: She's been working really hard for us. After that Indiana game, she didn't play that much, and she and I had a conversation. She looked me in the eye and said, 'I'm ready when you need me.' She said it again in the locker room, which is awesome to have a kid that's just going to do that, or a young woman I should say at this point. She was ready, and I think our staff did a good job of recommending Tova coming in to be a spark. We needed someone to attack the rim. We needed someone to go aggressively downhill. We were settling for jumpers, we were settling for contested threes, and she went in there and she attacked the rim and did exactly what we told her to.

Q: When it becomes a close game what are some of the conversations that are had in the huddle during timeouts?

A: We're mostly talking strategy, who do we want the ball's hands in, and what's the foul count. We put them in the bonus early in the fourth quarter and we didn't want to get another foul there. So, for us, we were just trying to contain and make sure we were disciplined on the other end. They had a foul to give for us at that timeout, so we were trying to get a quick easy bucket for Ali Brigham which we didn't get. However, we knew they would probably foul us, and we were just talking strategy at those late game moments.

Q: How big was it to pick up a win in a tight defensive battle tonight?

A: That's big, you know, but we must fix our offensive woes right now and our assist-to-turnover ratio, but I'm really pleased that the defensive effort and the rebounding. I know they outrebounded us, but we got on when it mattered there at the end. They are a great offensive rebounding team, so to close that fourth quarter the way that we did the last five minutes I thought was tough.

Q: How did you come in contact (with Tova Sabel)? Is there a story there?

A: Well usually international kids you meet through your relations that you already have. She played in a league of one of my professional players that I've coached, Natisha Hiedeman, so we knew about her from there. There were a couple of other connections here and there. I've had three different Swedish players before so just kind of keep that pipeline as recruiting goes.

Q: Can you just take me through how Ali Brigham how she got here, what she's brought to the program so far and how much she can give in the future?

A: Well, first, her potential is through the roof. I don't think she understands how good she could be yet. We're pushing her every day to get there. We're talking about what it takes to be an elite power-five player and in the Big Ten at the post position. I think this is one of the best leagues in America when it comes to fives and pushing her, and I think she can be up there right with him. I know she's got a phenomenal work ethic and she wants to learn. She's always looking for ways to improve her IQ, looking for ways to get into the gym. In terms of getting her I think it was awesome fit for us. She's a phenomenal teammate and she's exactly the type of player you want on your team. She's going to be a great leader for us too in the future.

Q: Makenna [Marisa], she's broken out this season, what's so different about her this season versus in the past?

A: For Makenna the game is slowing down for now. She's using her change of speed better than she ever has. The last two years she was obviously very skilled, but she played at one speed. I think she's learned how to slow the game down in her mind. Yes, she can score but her vision, passing ability and rebounding ability is special from a guard perspective. She has ability to get a triple-double any night and her team is figuring out how to play with her now that she's getting into that scoring mentality. However, she's so unselfish, so it's hard for her. She overpassed and that led to some of those turnovers, so we got to keep making sure that she's attacking the hoop and looking for hers to start with instead of going to pass.