

Penn State Women's Basketball
Penn State Head Coach Carolyn Kieger Postgame Press Conference
vs. Illinois – January 16, 2022

Opening Statement

A: First, I just want to say how proud I am of our team for that bounce back performance. I thought that was one of the best first halves of basketball we have played in a really long time. The second thing I want to say is welcome back Maddie Burke! That was awesome to see her come out and go 4-for-5 and her teammates looking forward and finding her and then hitting that last one to get McKenna Marisa her tenth assist. I thought the team did a great job sharing the ball today. Our first half energy on defense, we were flying around and a lot of tips and deflections, a lot of stuff to build upon. I thought that was a really unselfish performance from us, and I'm excited to build upon it.

Q: What goes into Shay Hagans' offensive success against Illinois?

A: I think her defense led to offense tonight. She got in the passing lanes and got some terrific steals and pick sixes and got to the rim here to set our defense. We call her our defensive captain. She sets the tone for us and I think that led to our offense and then getting confident with ripping to the basket and being an attacker. I think she was 7-for-7 from the field at one point. Shay was definitely the person who set the tone for us early in the game and continued to do so throughout.

Q: How would you evaluate Lelani Kapinus' debut so far?

A: Hopefully, everyone is seeing how quickly she's developing. From the beginning of the year to where she is now, it's light years. She's putting in the time, she's getting film sessions, she's been working out with Makenna Marisa a lot. The two of them have been spending a ton of time together in the film room and individual workouts. Her three-ball looks so much better. But, the defensive end is where she she wrecks the biggest havoc and gets her hands up and really sets the tone for us. When Lelani and Shay are playing off each other like that, it's pretty to watch. It sets the tone for everybody and hopefully fires up the crowd because it fires me up when they get their hands up and get tons of deflections. I'm really proud of her offensive development and the only way to get better is to put work in the gym and she's done that.

Q: Other than Hagans and Marisa, who else do you think played well tonight?

A: I thought it was a pretty well balanced performance by everyone. Anna Camden had eight and eight, which was huge for us. Tova Sabel hit a big three there in the corner in the first half and, we talked about Maddie Burke already, but we've all known that it's coming and this is going to be a springboard for her and her confidence moving forward. Leilani Kapinus, we just talked about her, but really well balanced. We had 19 assists tonight and our goal is always 18 so anytime we can share the ball and get everybody involved we're a much better basketball team that way. I also thought Kelly Jekot played one of her best games coming back yet, probably the strongest. She looked to attack more. She had some rebounds. She had six boards. So, that sticks out to me as well. She hit that three, but I think defensively this was probably one of her better performances of the year.

Q: What went into the dominant start of this game?

A: I think since our last game against Michigan, we've been talking about focusing on the start. We've practiced the start against our practice guys. We had an offensive script coming into the game but we wanted to run the first three possessions and I just think our team really bought into the intent of starting better than we have the last two conference games. I think the awareness and maturity of our team to get in there and know that the start was going to be the difference in this game was great.

Q: Defensively, you guys dominated them, especially in that first half. Did you guys try to come out more aggressive in this team because it seemed like they got really rattled early on?

A: Yeah, we've been working on it probably the last couple weeks. When you come into a conference game and play a Big Ten team, you have to show something different and I think we have length on our team. I think it's a big strength of ours to get the passing lanes, disrupt, and try to get traps. The last couple of days, we've been working on closing our traps. I think against Michigan, we were doing it, but they were splitting us and we weren't really being very intentional about making sure that we corral them. I thought this game we really showed some growth and some maturity in that area tonight, which allowed us to obviously have 12 steals.

Q: How do you think the full court press helped out with the success on the offensive side today?

A: Yeah, we call them our primary points, but I think we had 45 points in primary which is kind of equivalent to what people would say transition, but that defensive energy in the press lead to that and the more you can have your defense lead to your offense, the more confident you're going to be, and it gets everybody involved. So, I think, obviously, the players love to play that way: When they're feeding off each other's energy, getting a steal, setting the press back up, getting another one, and setting it back up. It's a fun way to play and they're very exciting. I told them in the first half that they were incredible to watch. I think that was the best half we have played in about two and a half years.

Q: You said this is one of the best first halves you've played? How do you take this momentum and keep going and keep building upon that because, as you said at the beginning of the year, year three is when you want to see your team take big strides and take that next step?

A: Well, I think maturity and confidence is everything. We knew we started this conference with the gauntlet with top 25 teams and the best teams in the conference to start with. I think for us, it was keeping our composure, keeping our head staying together, and making sure we weathered the storm and stayed confident through it. I think we obviously did that, came out tonight, and got a win against a team that we needed to. Now, we have put ourselves in a situation to go on a good road trip and have success against Northwestern and Wisconsin.