

**Penn State Women's Basketball
Student-Athlete Postgame Press Conference
vs. Nebraska - February 17, 2022**

Carolyn Kieger | Head Coach

Opening Statement: I just want to say I'm really, really proud of our team. Obviously, we've been battling a lot the last three weeks. And our pregame video today was about not how many times you fall down but how many you get back up and they weathered it, they competed, they showed toughness that we've been preaching for the last three weeks that we needed. They showed composure, we went down, came back. I'm just really, really proud of them, every single one of them and we needed this, we needed this in a big way. And I thought the crowd was awesome, really fed off their energy today, but I'm really proud of their toughness and we've been preaching toughness now all year and they showed it and now we know we can do it and now we have to build upon it.

Q: You mentioned how tough the last three weeks have been for the team. How hard is it really to keep showing up and practice every day and focusing and making sure they're putting in the work when the team's not getting the results that they want?

A: That's part of the process of growth, right? When you're trying to take a program to the next level, you know it's not going to happen overnight. Successes happen only after failures. We all know that, and for them these are life lessons that they're learning. Things aren't always gonna go your way, you're not always going to perform the way you want, but you have to keep fighting, you have to keep battling. You have to keep crawling, grinding, whatever it takes, one step at a time. And I'll say this, this team hasn't given up and they show up every day with a good attitude. And every day we're looking for solutions. We're looking for who can step up in different ways and no one's blaming, no one's complaining and no one's getting defensive. We're all just looking for solutions and it worked night.

Q: After Niya [Beverley] missed that transition layup in the fourth quarter there, she seemed kind of frustrated and you gave her a little tap and what seemed like some encouragement. After that, she made quite a few big plays. What did you say to her and what kind of impact does she have when she's out on the court consistently?

A: It's so nice to have her back. Obviously she was out a couple of weeks there and now she's getting her full steam back and we just said not only to Niya, but to everybody. We need five people on the floor at any given time that are confident scorers. We can't play five on three, we can't play five and four. We need five confident women out there ready to hit the shot at any given time and I said the same thing to Kelly (Jekot). Yeah, I want you guys shooting 10 threes tonight, [if] you miss your first one, [if] you miss your second one, keep shooting and you have to have that approach. Shooters [are] going to shoot. And that's what they did tonight when Niya was just like, "hey, keep shooting, keep your head up, get a big play, get a big stop and it turned into huge and-ones for her and Shay [Hagans] too, I think they had three of them between the two of them in transition there and [off] passes. And it was the energy, they fed off each other and they played unselfish. So it was exactly what we need to be here at Penn State, and it was gritty, it was tough, and it was together.

Q: Hey coach Makenna has had a pretty impressive year as far as offensively, throughout the whole year, having four games over 30 points. Can you just talk about how important she has been to your squad and what makes her such a special basketball player?

A: Well, first and foremost, Makenna is all about Penn State. She's all about her team. She's willing to do whatever it takes to win. I think, obviously, she's improved in every statistical category you can think of in her game. But what I would say I'm probably most proud of her right now is she's learning how to be an enforcer and she's learning to get on her teammates in the moments that they need her to be an accountability partner and she wants to win, and she wants to take this program and put them back on the map. And I really admire her relentlessness and her fight to bring up her teammates with her. She's not in the gym alone, she's bringing Leilani [Kapinus] with her. She's asking other people to come to film sessions with her. She's really just trying to do everything she can to make everybody else around her better. And that's obviously a sign of an amazing player to me.

Q: Coach, just going off with that question about Makenna, she did shoot under 40% tonight, so a relatively "off night." But she still put up 22, still led the team in rebounds, still led the team in assists and everything. So what does it say about her as a player and her game? The fact that she does have a relatively off night but is still able to put up 22 and able to get her teammates involves.

A: Yeah, I love that question, because it's true. We knew tonight that they were going to hard hedge our ball screens and we talked a lot about getting the ball out of Makenna's hands and having people that [can] come up and be the run behind and really be the safety to those hedges. And so we talked about different people in different positions tonight, I think Makenna did a great job of when to attack yourself and when to get yourself off the ball and who to hit and when to hit them. So the fact that she has the awareness to get her teammates involved and obviously Niya and Kelly hit some huge threes for us, but she just continues to develop. The fact that she led us in rebounding and assist and that's an off-shooting night, we'll take that any day of the week. Composure down the stretch too, I can't say enough about how they talk through that. And that's been obviously our Achilles heel in the fourth quarter, not talking through game situations and not having battlefield communication and they just seem like a different group tonight. They were composed, they were poised, and they were really talking to each other.

Q: Going into the locker room down at the half, what did you focus on to get ready for the second half and rally?

A: Just keep teaching one stop one score at a time. We talked about it in a timeout in the fourth quarter, the same situation happened in Rutgers. You know, we were up nine and they came back on us, so why couldn't we do it? They were locked in they were confident, and they didn't have a "woe-was-me" mentality tonight, "oh, here we go again." They stopped it they weathered the storm, and I just can't say enough about our defense that really pressured them, rattled them and caused so many turnovers there down the stretch.

Q: What do you think, specifically, led to the energy increase in the second half, and then the fourth quarter?

A: Honestly, I think it was our defense. We turned it up- our press created a lot of offensive opportunities for us and then we got some good rebounds and some run outs. Our team loves to run, and we love to play fast and when we're able to do that, I think it gets our juice and our energy flowing and then we feed off each other. Shay Hagans had huge plays. Up on the baseline, I think Niya Beverley saved her from a technical there on the celebration, but I just think that it was a defensive energy tonight. It was awesome.

Q: Can you describe the role Kelly [Jekot] plays for the team?

A: We've been having lots of conversations, with Kelly specifically, just taking over timeouts, taking over huddles, taking over in the game situations because she does have the

experience. She does have the IQ and once she shares it, everybody listens and everybody really respects Kelly, they respect what she's been through. They respect the fight and adversity that she's pushed through, how she's changed her game because of injuries and how she's battled back and came back. I just think everybody sees Kelly as that mother figure that big sister figure and I think everybody wants to go on a high note for her and Niya down the stretch here and really bring them out with a great ending to their senior careers. But you really can't put into words what she's meant to changing our culture and it's, it's going to last a long time, she's helped us really get this culture back to where it needs to be and then propel us forward.