

Penn State Basketball
Carolyn Kieger Postgame Press Conference
vs. Minnesota - February 27, 2022

Q: Opening Statement

A: Obviously, I thought Minnesota played a great game today. Hats off to them. They played like they were refusing to lose. We just talked to the program. We're sorry we couldn't get it done for our seniors tonight, but a phenomenal day to celebrate them, Kelly [Jekot] and Niya [Beverley], and what they've meant to helping change this culture and getting us to a point where we can get momentum moving into next year to take a bigger step and to put Penn State back on the map. I just want to thank them for everything they've done for the jersey and for really helping the locker room shape into what work habits we're going to need in order to take this program to another level.

Q: Carolyn, what's the biggest concern now moving into the tournament?

A: Toughness. We have to be tough. Obviously, Minnesota out-toughed us. They beat us to every 50/50 loose ball. Obviously, we gave up 22 offensive rebounds. offensive rebounds. We'll be talking about toughness. Hopefully they'll be thinking about it even in their sleep.

Q: Looking back on this season, what were some things you thought you guys did well, and what are some things you want to work on for next year?

A: I thought our offense improved in some categories. Makenna Marisa, her individual development, I think she's one of the most improved players in the conference, if not the most improved player. Just individual strides, like Leilani [Kapinus] made throughout the season. I thought each player just kind of took a step and now we have to take one as a program. Some things we need to fix are obviously our defensive execution, in our heart and our toughness and our physicality.

Q: Could you talk about the problems that you faced, or the things that you had to try to deal with, with [Kadiatou] Sissoko and [Sara] Scalia and the way that they went off today? Where did they present issues for you?

A: Obviously on the offensive rebounds, high post, they were getting a lot of down pull. Obviously, Scalia was getting open and press issues getting opened staggered. She's getting open in every way. When you have a player like that you can't give her 13 threes when she shoots about 50%. She's going to hit majority of them. I thought they did a great job getting her open, but I thought we had a lot of lack of focus moments where we lost her, and we didn't have a hand up in her face. I'll have to watch the film and know how in the world she got out 13 threes. Offensive rebounds, put backs and just the physicality on that really hurt us.

Q: They maintained a pretty good lead throughout the game. What were they doing that made it so hard to come back?

A: The simple answer is they wanted it more. I think sometimes when you want it so bad for your seniors, you can get stuck in the mud a little bit at times, and I thought that's how it was for us in that first quarter. I didn't think we were locked in. I don't know if it has to do with the fear of wanting to play so hard for them and wanting to win so bad for your seniors. I thought we did a great job fighting back there and we cut that lead. Big credit to our team for not giving up. We just need to battle for 40 minutes. You can't

play in this conference without being consistent and having that same amount of fight from the tip to the buzzer.

Q: Are you disappointed or frustrated with the way this played out today?

A: I think I never accept anything but the best for myself and my players. We have to get better, and we talked about competitive greatness which is giving your very best when your very best is needed, and we didn't do that. We have to learn that and that's going to be a big thing that we got to harp on this offseason, playing big in the moments when it's needed and getting a stop when you need it, offensive execution when you need it, whatever it might be. We really have to learn that, and we have to mature is the best way to say it. We have to mature as a program, and we have to lock in, and we're never frustrated. We're always motivated. But you know it's hard. You always want to send the seniors out with a win. So yeah, very disappointing, especially for Niya Beverley and Kelly Jekot. We wanted it, I wanted it, the whole team wanted it for them.

Q: You said they just wanted the offensive rebounds more. Do you think that's what it came down to or was it a certain way they were rebounding against the zone?

A: I believe rebounding is toughness, heart, and there's a skill to it in terms of timing and discipline. We have to fix all of it. I would say you know 90% of the time whoever wants the rebound more is going to get it and if you're in the right position, it doesn't matter how tall you are, how strong you are, you have to box out, you have to get lower, and you have check it, hold, and pursue and we didn't do that tonight.