

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 1, 2023

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Penn State Nittany Lions

Carolyn Kieger

Leilani Kapinus

Makenna Marisa

Postgame Press Conference

Penn State - 72, Minnesota - 67

CAROLYN KIEGER: First and foremost, I just want to say how proud I am of this week. They've been fighting, battling all year. To win a close one at the end like that when obviously we lost Shay and Leilani fouled out. Can't say enough about our toughness. How we've been working on end-game scenarios for the last three weeks because we knew March comes down to ATOs and down the stretch, and I think they handled it really well.

Ali comes in the game, not playing a minute and knocks down two free throws. So I'm just really happy for them to get a win in March and play a really good Michigan team tomorrow.

Q. Either of the players, can you talk about the press and how you came out and how ready you guys appeared when this game started.

LEILANI KAPINUS: Yeah, we've been talking about good starts, and we've really been practicing that because we need that in March. Yeah, we've been practicing our press and getting into it. We know that gets us going, so that was really important for us and that was a key factor today in the win.

MAKENNA MARISA: That's how we like to play too. That's our strength. One of our huge strengths is getting up in people, pressing, creating havoc, creating turnovers.

That was something we haven't been doing before, but brand new start, new mindset today, and we did it, and we fed off each other's energy.

Q. Players again: You lost to these guys twice. They



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were both close games. The first one was a crazy game. Were you determined not to lose to this team a third time?

MAKENNA MARISA: Yeah. I mean, completely. Like you said, lost the first two times. We were extra amped up to get this win.

Q. This is for the coach: Again, the press was consistent for a majority of the game. Fourth quarter it seemed like you pulled back from it. Was there a reason for that? Just curious question for you.

CAROLYN KIEGER: Just the last five minutes, we didn't want to give up any open threes or any easy buckets. So we tried to contain them, keep in front.

We knew the only way we could allow them to come back in is if they got threes or got some and-ones.

Unfortunately, we gave up threes in the half-court as well, but we wanted to take it off and play half-court basketball.

And we were in foul trouble as well. She starts at the press for us, so when she goes out, it's a little harder to press for us. Leilani that is.

Q. You have another chance tomorrow to avenge a loss against Michigan. Any plans to do something different than the first time?

CAROLYN KIEGER: I think Michigan is a really physical team, and I think the first time we played them really well in the first half, and I think their physicality kind of wore us down. We've got to match that. We have to be tough. We have to hit first. And we've got to make sure for 40 minutes we're bringing it, because that's what Michigan style of basketball is.

I think we weathered the storm the first half, but we need to play a full 40 minutes of toughness. So we'll go back, they'll have some rest, and we'll go right back to the game film and try to figure out a game plan.

Q. Coach, can you talk about your defense and how proud you are of them. Rose Micheaux came in this



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game averaging close to 15 points per contest, and you held her to four field goals. Was that important coming into this game, limiting their inside touches?

CAROLYN KIEGER: Absolutely. Last game we played them at our home arena, she had 31 on us. She's a great low-post player. She's obviously really physical. Does a great job down low. So that was a big key to us, to make sure we pushed her off the block and use our physicality.

I can't say enough about our post players. It was a solid effort, not just by one. Even our guards got down there and mixed it up a little bit with her. That was a total effort down there on the block.

Q. Obviously when you go into a game, you're confident in your game plan. Even having said that, were you surprised at how effective that press was in that first seven minutes of that game?

CAROLYN KIEGER: Honestly, it was kind of a mirror of the first game that we played them. They turned it over in the first half and then they kind of calmed down. For us, we knew we could get after them and pressure them and kind of expose their experience a little bit here in March.

I thought our team did a really good job staying on their feet and corralling them into traps and honestly not falling. A lot of good job from the back row of our press coming up to get the steals. Credit total team defense for that, no doubt.

Q. I was wondering if you or Makenna could talk about the inbounds play on the three-pointer. That ended up being the biggest basket of the game. Was that what you were aiming for there?

CAROLYN KIEGER: Honestly, I thought she got fouled before. So on the layup I thought we were going to have two shots. So I guess it was good for us because we ended up getting the three-point shot.

That's a play these two work on a lot. Leilani was out of the game, and Chanaya threw a great pass. That was a great read by her. Makenna made a phenomenal read and bumped it and came right back to the ball. So that's all her.

Q. Is your point guard okay?

CAROLYN KIEGER: She'll be okay, yes. Thank you.

Q. My question for you is, given the way the season, the regular season ended, what were your talking points to the team coming into this one on that losing streak?

CAROLYN KIEGER: Well, first of all, we just wanted to lay it all out there. No regrets. Leave everything on the court and play with passion, have some fun, play together.

When we did that today, we shared the basketball, we did great things. For us, we kind of wanted to hit the reset button. 0-0, new season, new mentality. For us, this is a group that has a lot of potential, and we need to learn how to win, and we need to learn how to win close games.

This win is going to be huge for us as we move forward in the years to come. That's their first postseason win. Once you get that monkey off your back, now we can keep going and keep building upon it.

Q. Congrats on the win. This is for Makenna and Leilani: At the beginning of the fourth quarter, Chanaya had some of the biggest plays of the game, where she had that steal and then the fast-break layup, and then she got the offensive rebound and then the second-chance opportunity. It just seemed like that whole fourth quarter throughout the whole game, she was one of the most important players of the game, but she's also been one of the most important players this whole season. Can you just talk about the importance she has had for this whole team in the locker room and on the court all season long?

MAKENNA MARISA: Like you said, she had huge plays at the end, and she deserves so much credit for that and was just working her butt off in there. She's been doing that, too, in practices. In the games, she's really kind of defensive-minded in that area and she really likes to get up and pressure. You saw that at the end.

She did a really good job, and we're super proud of her.

LEILANI KAPINUS: Yeah, she's one of our biggest juice leaders. We know what she can do in that press. When she's being physical and bringing it on defense, it gives her energy. She got offensive rebounds too because of it. She just showed out today, and we needed her to do that.

Q. For Coach, you mentioned that full-court press, it was reminiscent of the one that you pulled out in the first game a couple minutes ago. When coming into this game, how important did you think that -- how much of a key did you think that was going to be in order to come out on top today?

CAROLYN KIEGER: We knew that if we made it a half-court game, they were going to force it inside. That's what happened the second time we played them, they scored tons of points in the paint. We wanted to alleviate

that and make it a full-court game, so they wouldn't come down and bury the ball inside.

For us it was a huge key to our game plan. They executed phenomenally. Like I said, until we got in some foul trouble. Beyond that I thought our team did great. Made some great adjustments, we've been working on in practice the last week, and we carried a lot of that over. So really proud of them.

Q. Coach, you mentioned Shay was going to be okay. Do you anticipate her being available tomorrow?

CAROLYN KIEGER: I'm not sure yet. Sorry, don't know.

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