

NCAA Women's Regional Semifinals and Finals: Stockton

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Stockton, California



Dawn Staley Tyasha Harris Kaela Davis South Carolina

SOUTH CAROLINA 71, Florida State 64

DAWN STALEY: Just really thankful. God has been good to our program. He's been good to me personally. And this wouldn't be possible without Him. And at the same time, I'd like to thank the Florida State Seminoles, who are coached well.

And although we see the victory side of it, the defeat side of it is, some seniors won't get to experience going to a Final Four and I do feel for them. But at the same time, I'm happy for our players. I'm happy that they put themselves in the position to go on and realize their dreams, as well.

Q. Can you just talk about your performance here in Stockton, your confidence, just in terms of what you wanted to accomplish in terms of bringing offense to the team, and do you think you succeeded doing that?

KAELA DAVIS: Sure. I think the biggest thing tonight was our defense, though. We found ways to get stops. You know, I think we started the game off really well.

But you know, obviously it's just being aggressive. I think my main point was just to come in and be aggressive and then our goal was obviously to get to the Final Four, and managed to accomplish that.

Q. When A'Ja got in foul trouble, did you feel like that you needed to step up at that point? It seemed like that's when you really started scoring a lot of points.

KAELA DAVIS: Sure. Obviously with A'Ja, she draws a lot of attention. So you know, with her being out, we had to start scoring and get buckets. We were getting stops, but they kind of went on runs here and there. We had to find a way to counter that and balance out a little bit.

Q. At one point, Florida State got it to within three points. Did you say anything? Did you, personally, say anything to the team to get South Carolina to settle down? In the end, Florida State ended up missing seven of its last eight shots. Was that part of the on-the court leadership?

KAELA DAVIS: Yeah, I think in that situation, I feel like it's a time-and-score situation. It was one of those things where we didn't necessarily need to get a shot unless we had a good one, and we just had to find ways to get stopped. They really started pushing the ball at us late in the second half.

We had to find a way to slow them down. But at the same time, like I said, we were trying to find a way just to work the clock and take good shots.

Q. You transferred here to get a shot at this. Does that make this incredibly satisfying for you?

KAELA DAVIS: Sure. Absolutely. It makes it ten times better to be able to say that you want to do something and accomplish it. You know, it's been a long year, a lot of ups and downs, but I think we're finding a way to end on a high note and to, you know, just put everything together.

We've had our fair share of adversity but this team has found ways to time and time again, just fight through it and find a way to be better because of it.

Q. Late in the game, I think they had cut the lead down to three, with about a minute and 40 seconds left when you made that drive to the basket to score. That essentially sealed it, in addition to the free throws. What did you see there, and what was working? You seemed like you were having your way as far as driving to the basket.

KAELA DAVIS: I think just attacking them. We weren't settling for jumpshots, which I think is the best thing we could have done. I think towards the fourth quarter, we were just kind of passing it and waiting for a good shot to come. But I think it was one of those things, we kind of had to create a good shot for ourselves.

They were doing a good job of keeping us outside the paint, and really making us, like I said, pass the ball around the three-point line. So I think it was one of those things where I kind of saw everybody was a little raised up and found a gap somehow.

Q. Florida State had some big three-point shooters but you didn't give them a lot of good looks. Can you talk about the message Coach gave to you, and also the last steal late in the game to seal things.

TYASHA HARRIS: We kind of just stuck with the game plan. We just focused on defense and trying to stop our man. And the last steal, I just saw it coming and just grabbed it, and, I don't know, that's what happened.

Q. Tell us a little bit about that dance that was spontaneous there, and did A'Ja start that?

KAELA DAVIS: Yeah, I think A'Ja started it. I don't know, it's just one of those in-the-moment things, having fun. We love our band. They are funny -- funny, funny people. They are just really good people to be around. So I think it was just a way to kind of show that we appreciate them.

Q. Sue looked at the stats and said if she just looked at those cold, she might have thought they were going to win that game, given the rebounding totals and some stuff going on. Do you feel like -- do you feel like you guys won, despite maybe some things you didn't go as well as you needed to do tonight?

DAWN STALEY: Well, we won despite turning the ball over. We won despite their runs. I thought them going to a zone and slowing us down and taking away some driving lanes really stalled our offense a little bit. But it also took possessions away.

We didn't want to take quick shots, so it almost played into our hands, minus the turnovers. So we ran the clock a little bit, and if that game is maybe five minutes longer, we could have a different result.

But I just thought we were timely with getting stops. We were timely with getting key rebounds. I thought Doniyah Cliney came in and gave us some great minutes, and got some rebounds when I didn't think we were in the play. We just made plays and we were very efficient on the offensive end.

Q. Can you talk about the way Kaela stepped up tonight? Seemed like she dictated the offense when you needed it the most.

DAWN STALEY: Since we've gone to a smaller lineup, it's created more scoring opportunities for Kaela, more driving lanes for her to get to the basket and more opportunity for her to pull up, as well. She's seeing it and she's hitting those holes like a running back. You know, for her to perform the way she does, she did this past weekend, it just goes to show the type of player she is.

You know, obviously we wanted this all year long. But it takes some adjusting to not having the ball in your hands. But not having Alaina Coates, puts the ball in her hands a lot more; had we had Alaina. So Alaina, you don't want anyone's career to end, but it's been a blessing in disguise for us. We got a little bit more balanced, and you know, Kaela has benefitted from it.

Q. Two offensive rebounds, only eight assists and obviously a lack of second-chance opportunities. How did you guys find a way to adjust despite not having that many second-chance opportunities?

DAWN STALEY: Well, we exploited -- we exploited putting the ball on the floor and challenging them to stop us one-on-one. That was the game plan, to attack their feet, put them back on their heels. When it's like that, you're not going to -- if you get all the way to the basket, you get all the way to the basket; and if you couldn't, then you kick it out.

So there weren't very many opportunities to assist the basket, because we found a way to get to the basket. And when it's working, you continue it.

Q. After watching what Florida State managed to do against Oregon State, did you get a sense even when your team was up by 15, this team is still going to make a run; they are still going to come back; there's no settling down?

DAWN STALEY: Yeah, I mean, they are a team that they never find themselves out of the game because they play so fast, they take quick shots, they get the ball up-and-down the floor and they turn you over, as well.

We wanted to make sure we got shots at the basket and unfortunately for us, we had 18 turnovers and that allowed them to get back in the game. So they had a lot to do with getting back in the game by turning us over. Obviously we have to clean that up before we take on a Stanford team.

Q. Now that the Final Four is set and you're going to have the opportunity to coach possibly against two of your USA Basketball mentors, starting first with Tara VanDerveer, what are your thoughts about being able to matchup against great basketball minds at that level?

DAWN STALEY: I think it's great. As a coach, you want to coach against the best. That's why I left Temple to come to South Carolina to coach in the SEC with what I think is some of the greatest coaches in the game. And then you get to this stage at the Final Four, and then it's another tier of coaches who have won national championships, have won Gold Medals, have won a thousand games.

I think it's just great. I think I'm going to be amongst greatness and hopefully with that, you know, it will be a great experience with South Carolina.

Q. How is this different? How is this feeling different than two years ago when it was the first time when you guys earned a trip to the Final Four?

DAWN STALEY: Probably 7,000 less Gamecock fans. It felt different because it there was no confetti, there was no screaming. There wasn't any passion behind it. And obviously we're 3,000 miles away from home, but when you're a little bit closer, your fans are right on top of you. It just seemed like everybody was kind of far away, and it almost, it took you back, because you're like, did this really happen? Are we going to the Final Four?

But it sank in. It sank in when we were standing out there and enjoying each other's company.

Q. Can you reflect on both your team and the men's team making it, and what that means to the university?

DAWN STALEY: It's incredible. I mean, it's something that Frank and I have both worked hard for. When we came to South Carolina, I'm quite sure he felt the same way, and I don't want to speak for him -- but Frank is a great coach. He's a great coach. He does some great things.

And as a coach, you feel like there are things that you can control; that you can get people to execute; you can get people to believe in your vision, even the talent, this group of players that you assemble. But you can't do it without talent, you can't do it without belief. You can't do it without a togetherness. You can't do it without the support of your administrators, your president on down, without it working; and we felt this for -- you know, I've been at South Carolina for nine years. This is Frank's fifth year.

For us to be able to experience three Final Fours in the short time that we've been here, there's a lot of love on our campus from everyone, and our fans. Our fans are so deserving of this because, you know, they have been there. You know, when we won two SEC games, they have been there. When we have been left out of the NCAA Tournament, they have been there. And now they get to share in the joys of us playing, being one of the last four teams to participate in this long basketball season. They deserve it.