

# 2023 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Thursday, December 14, 2023

Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

**Pitt Panthers**

**Coach Dan Fisher**

**Chiamaka Nwokolo**

Semifinal Press Conference



too much and it wasn't effective, so just to give us three really different hitters.

**Q. Coach, three out of four teams are going to go home unhappy, but that doesn't diminish on your season, does it?**

DAN FISHER: No. I appreciate you saying that, and I totally agree.

**Q. Coach, it seemed like Rachel was limping around a little bit, especially in the last two sets. Was she battling a little bit of an injury? And if so, how did that impact you guys?**

DAN FISHER: No, I saw it, too. I think she must have just rolled an ankle. But I only noticed it for one or two plays, and then I think it loosened up.

**Q. Nebraska was in here a few moments ago talking about how they felt good about winning what they would call the emotional points, and on the other side of the coin, did you get a sense of those ugly points that they won leaving your team a bit frustrated?**

DAN FISHER: In the first set for sure. Like I said, we looked frantic in transition. We gave them easy points. Then I thought we were flipping it in the second set, and we were the ones winning the emotional points. It would have been nice to get that second set.

**Q. Olivia, obviously not the way you want your freshman season to end, but it was a successful season in the grand scheme of things. What are you going to take away from this as you get ready for the rest of your career?**

OLIVIA BABCOCK: I can definitely no longer say I'm a newcomer to this high level of competition. And something this important, yeah, it's unfortunate that we didn't make it to the next round, but I think just being here overall was a good experience, and I know that next year, because I really do believe we're going to come back, I think next year we're going to be able to handle it better emotionally.

Nebraska 3, Pitt 0.

DAN FISHER: I'd like to congratulate Nebraska on a great season and a great performance tonight. I would like to just publicly, again, thank my team for being so great this year. It was a really enjoyable team just to be with every day. I'm sad that it's over and the girls are hurting, but the team all year long had the warrior spirit. We kept battling tonight to play our best. We didn't quite do it I thought.

I thought the first set both teams were really nervous, and it wasn't great volleyball on either side, and for us, that manifested into a lot of errors.

I thought in the second set, we started to look a little bit more like ourselves. We were battling. The volleyball was better on both sides. Then in the fourth set, we just served way too many balls at Lexi and that really helped their offense going out and they got really comfortable.

**Q. They out-blocked you 15-8. Why do you think their block was so effective tonight?**

DAN FISHER: I think I want to say most of those were in the first set, at least eight of them.

I don't think we were -- I thought we were frantic in transition and not setting as good as we could have initially. I thought we had some tentative swings, truthfully. They weren't our best swings that they were blocking, a lot of them.

**Q. Coach, in the second set you made the decision to put Lexis Akeo in to run a little bit of a 6-2. What went into that decision in the second set?**

DAN FISHER: We were just stuck in that rotation. In the first set I thought we were setting the back row a little bit



I feel like I was so caught up with everything because it was just so new, there is so much media, so many fans. Yeah, we've seen all this before, but it was just very overwhelming.

But I think next year we're going to know how to handle it, and I think it's just going to be a lot stronger emotionally.

**Q. How do you reflect on your career and the growth of the program since you joined in 2019?**

CHIAMAKA NWOKOLO: I mean, I can't be anything but proud to have worn this jersey for the past five years and have gotten to know the people that I've gotten to know, learned the lessons that I've gotten to work, and I wouldn't be the woman that I am today without this program, and this program just means the world to me.

**Q. Both teams made offensive improvements from set 1 to set 2 to set 3. Can you talk about some of the adjustments that you saw Pitt making and some of the adjustments you saw Nebraska making as the match went on offensively?**

DAN FISHER: I don't know if it was -- I'd have to look at video. I don't know how much of it was adjustments versus what I talked about the start, just both teams seemed nervous.

But I definitely think their offensive performance in the last set had a lot to do with Lexi passing every ball well. Before that both teams were kind of struggling in servicing. We had us as kind of winning the serve-pass until that third set.

Without having watched film, it looked like both teams just settled in a little bit.

**Q. Olivia, Coach talked about how he thought both teams were a little bit nervous at the outset of the match. Since this is your first Final Four and this is all new, how would you characterize the way you felt in the opening minutes of the match?**

OLIVIA BABCOCK: I mean, I wasn't exactly nervous I would say. Yeah, I had a few nerves when warming up, but I think after the warmup I was like, this is just volleyball. You've done this before. There's nothing different you have to change about the sport, of course, so just going out and just playing my game.

Yeah, I was definitely nervous leading up to this, but I think once I started I was like, we're just playing volleyball; nothing different than we've done for the past six months.

**Q. Olivia, after Pitt switched back to a 5-1, you had**

**multiple kills from the back row. What changed with you getting kills from the back row?**

OLIVIA BABCOCK: I mean, I got really pissed off. I know that's always my answer to that question, but I really got pissed off.

I was kind of -- I felt kind of selfish in the first set. I felt like I was really playing for myself, and I really hate that I have to say that in a match this important.

But I felt like I was letting the team down emotionally and I wasn't really giving what needed to be given. I feel like in the second set I was pissed off overall, but I was really pissed at myself the first set that I didn't help to the degree I would have liked to.

So in the second set I was just like, this isn't about you. You have to play for everyone else. I think that's why I started hitting it better.

**Q. What do you guys want this season to be remembered by?**

DAN FISHER: Well, from us, we have so many great memories on and off the court. I think internally they'll take away a ton.

I think in terms of a program, it's really hard to keep getting better every year, especially when you've already been to two Final Fours, but I think we have. I think we're as good as we've ever been. I think we have the best fan support we've ever had. I think it was another step forward as a program.

CHIAMAKA NWOKOLO: I just want us to remember that it was still a special year regardless of the outcome. I think the relationships that we built this year were really special, and I think the way that we grew since August is really special.

This is like a completely different team than we've brought to the Final Four again, so I think it's just like another very special year. Like 2021, 2022, 2023, three completely different teams that have made it to the Final Four, so I think that's super special in itself.

OLIVIA BABCOCK: I mean, I think this was an extremely special year. Obviously it's my freshman year, so I didn't get to experience the previous teams, but this is definitely a team I'll think about all the time.

And just because we didn't go out the way we wanted to, it doesn't take away from all the memories like Fish said. We had a lot of grit this season, a lot of games that we just

pushed through.

I don't know, I feel like we really proved ourselves this season, and just because we didn't go out the way we like doesn't mean that our season wasn't making history for us because we really did some things that a lot of people doubted we could. We even kept ourselves on our toes. I mean, two times we went down 2-0 to and managed to just push through and get those wins.

I don't know, I feel like this season has a lot of grit and heart to it, and it'll definitely be remembered.

**Q. Coach, I asked Chia about what impact she's made on this program. What can you say about her and Lexis since they've been here the past five seasons?**

DAN FISHER: I think we're a team that talks a lot about how much we value culture, and I think obviously a lot of that starts with the coaches, but it's really the job of Chia and Lexis and Valeria, the girls that have -- that know what we value, to live it.

They've just given so much to this program. They've kept the ship sailing in the right direction, and then also you just have to look at how successful that group has been. It's pretty impressive.

**Q. Chia, I know this is not a good time to ask, but what are you going to miss the most?**

CHIAMAKA NWOKOLO: Just how special of a group this is. I forget -- just being around good people all the time is just very rare, and like I can genuinely say that everybody in our staff and on our team at Pitt in general are just like genuinely good people to be around.

Obviously in these five years you go through a lot of ups and downs and having like a good support system and like good people is just unmatched, so I'm just going to -- I hope I continue to keep having good people around me, but yeah, I'm just going to miss something such a solid thing -- like solid people to fall back on all the time.

**Q. Olivia, you originally weren't supposed to play with Chia, but you ended up playing with her this year. What has it meant to have a teammate like Chia?**

OLIVIA BABCOCK: I mean, it's been a best experience. She knows how much I love her. Me and Torrey are her little followers, minions, call it as you will, but we really do love Chia. We go to her for advice, just anything. We think of her as a big sister.

Obviously we're going to support her. Hopefully we talk as

often as I want to.

I mean, it just means a lot. I met her on my visit and I knew she was a special person, and I was kind of sad on my visit, I only knew her for a few hours and I was like, dang, I'm not going to be able to play with this person?

But then I heard that she was playing, and I knew that she was a special person, but I didn't know she would have such a positive impact on my life, and I really do have a piece of my heart to her.

**Q. Coach, I know you only had her for one season, but can you talk about the impact Emma Monks and Logan Mosley have had on this squad?**

DAN FISHER: Yeah, I mean, huge. I think both of them are -- like they're great teammates. They're really good players, and they brought this -- they just love being on this team, and they loved winning a lot, and they just brought this perspective all year of hey, guys, this is pretty great, which is really important on a team when you're grinding it out every day to have players like that.

**Q. Olivia, heading into this match, you had 50 aces this season, and going back to the first set, right after you have a kill, you had a service error. Do you remember that moment, and is that an example of what you remember about being upset about yourself in the first set?**

OLIVIA BABCOCK: I don't remember that specific moment, but yes, now I do. I'm sorry, can you repeat the question?

**Q. Was that kind of an example, that moment --**

OLIVIA BABCOCK: Yeah, it definitely was. I feel like recently my serving game has been off and it's been taking me a lot of pep talks, a lot of like just looking to other people to really get me into it.

So I feel like I really was coming into this thing and I was going to have a great serving match and I was kind of disappointed in myself because I felt like I kept letting my team down, but it also motivated me to try to do better in other aspects of the game and realize that yeah, I'm missing serves, really suck and it definitely hurts the team, but it doesn't have to define the game itself.

Yeah, so thank you.

**Q. Earlier you mentioned lots of good memories. What's the first one or best one that comes to mind for all three of you from the season?**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

OLIVIA BABCOCK: I thought Louisville in The Pete? Was really fun.

CHIAMAKA NWOKOLO: I was going to say Louisville in The Pete also, but obviously Louisville in the Fieldhouse was also like a really good time, too, just because knocking them out was really good for us, especially like me in my fifth year just always battling with them back and forth for ACC titles, and then they ended our season last season. So both of those times were really fun.

DAN FISHER: River rafting preseason. It just became clear really early on that -- not that things can't happen in groups that hurt that, but this team really enjoyed being around each other and enjoyed being around the coaches, too. It wasn't like a -- we just liked being together.

**Q. Speaking of the Pete, do you think you guys have earned to play more in the Peterson Events Center next season?**

OLIVIA BABCOCK: Yes.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports