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Women's Semifinal: Recap and Quotes

#3 STANFORD def. #2 NORTH CAROLINA, 5-2

ORLANDO, Fla. – The defending champion Cardinal are back in the NCAA final, thanks to a pair of three-set victories that officially finished exactly one second apart.

After a 3-0 Stanford lead shrunk to 3-2, sophomores Michaela Gordon (No. 1 singles) and Janice Shin (No. 5) held simultaneous match points, with a win at either spot sending the Cardinal through to Sunday's title match.

The 19-time NCAA team champions took both matches, with Shin's finalizing first, 3-6, 6-4, 6-2, on a Jessie Aney double fault. Under NCAA Championships rules, play is suspended once a team has clinched. But since Gordon's match-point ball was in play, her 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 victory over ITA No. 5 Makenna Jones counted on the final score.

After falling behind 3-0, the Tar Heels began to mount what was nearly an epic comeback. As Cameron Morra and Sara Daavettila closed in on victories at No. 4 and 3 singles, respectively, their teammates, Jones and Aney had an opportunity to close out their singles opponents in straight sets. Instead, Gordon and Shin each forced a pair of deciders.

When the scoreboard switched to 3-2, both Cardinal sophomores held a two-game leads in the final set. Neither player wavered, as the Tar Heel effort fell short.

North Carolina, which entered Orlando without having dropped a doubles point on the season, closes the season with two straight doubles losses, against UCLA in the quarters and Stanford in the semis.

QUOTES

Stanford sophomore Michaela Gordon

On her awareness of the simultaneous match points:

For me, I wasn't really aware of it. I was really just trying to focus on my own court. I could hear all of the cheering and I knew that Janice [Shin] was doing really well, but I didn't want to think about it, I just wanted to focus on my own match.

On how she found success on the deuce points:

I was really just being brave on the big points. I kind of amped up my aggression, and I think that's what really helped me out in those big points and helped me get the edge there.

On the advantage of coming in as defending champs:

Just based on our matches before, we always have the confidence, no matter what we're seeded. Also, the closeness of the team and the team atmosphere... we have so much belief in each other. No matter if we're seeded No. 3 or No. 13 or whatever it is, we always know we can do well if we do our games.

Stanford sophomore Janice Shin

On her awareness of the simultaneous match points:

We all hopefully want to clinch and that's something we all strive to do, but we all want to make sure we take care of our match and not let that chance away, so we try to focus on getting our point.

On figuring out her opponent Jessie Aney's slice- and-dice game:

Her game is very interesting. It's not a lot of pace, so I have to make it all on my own. It kind of got in my head that I had to set up the entire point to hopefully reach my goal of finishing off the point the way I wanted to. So that was my goal, to finish the point the way I wanted to.

Stanford Head Coach Lele Forood

On whether she felt the tide turning as North Carolina made their comeback:

It's really unusual in a semifinal match, to think you're going to get through it and not have some sort of counterattack from the other team. These are very good teams, of course they are going to come back and make their push. They did a really nice job. They forced the three matches to three sets; that was a big deal. Of course, these guys [Gordon and Chin] both lost their first sets. But they also dug back in for the second sets and did a really nice job to get to a position where they could finish for us.

UNC Head Coach Brian Kalbas

On losing the doubles point:

We were very hesitant and made some very questionable early decisions on some things, even on who to serve or where to serve. We were so passive and we didn't play the way we had been working on all year. We've been a really aggressive team, in singles and doubles, but especially in doubles.

We dug ourselves a hole, 4-0 in No. 1 doubles and then No. 3 doubles got down. We had so many opportunities early to establish momentum and we didn't do it. When doubles came back and had the chance to gain momentum, any time we felt like we could get a leg up in doubles it didn't happen.

There's a fine line in doubles, with no-ad and one set. You don't really have a lot of opportunities to work a lot and game planning in it, if you don't have the intensity and execution early, it kind of steamrolls for you. We didn't have that same go-get-it mentality and that aggressive mentality that we've had all year.

On the final two matches, at No. 1 and No. 5 singles:

At one point, it looked like we could actually win those two matches on the court, potentially in straight sets. But credit to Stanford, when big wins needed to be had, they stepped up. They hit some really good serves, they played aggressively, they played their strengths, and they broke us down a little bit in those situations.

We extended the match at least an hour and a half from when it was 3-0. You could tell the Stanford coaching and staff was getting nervous; they sensed we were coming on and that the momentum was turning, and that's credit to our team. We're 33-2, we've only two lost matches, but every single match we've played, even the ones we've lost, the fight and spirit has been there and I couldn't be prouder of our team.

On UNC's men's and women's teams competing in Final Four:

Obviously, the only school to have both teams here in the final eight and then both teams playing in the Final Four simultaneously. It's amazing. Carolina tennis is something that we pride ourselves on, we support each other. I'm so proud with Sam [men's head coach Sam Paul] and the team and what they've done. They had some injuries early on and some really tough, close losses. But they're really playing the best tennis right now, when it really matters. It reminds me of the team that got to the finals a few years ago. Both teams are really close-knit, they get along really well, they support each other. It's really a neat opportunity for us to cheer for each other and root for each other.