Bentley is Perfect in Winning National Title

By: Tom Reisenweber

ERIE, Pa. — Bentley women’s basketball coach Barbara Stevens walked into the postgame news conference and asked if she was dreaming.

Stevens and the Falcons finally had their national championship.

Courtney Finn, Jacqui Bruglera, and Lauren Battista combined for 52 points as Bentley used a fast and furious full-court press in the final five minutes to rally for a 73-65 victory over West Texas A&M in the NCAA Division 2 women’s basketball championship Friday night in front of 2,151 at Erie Insurance Arena.

“I can’t tell you what a tremendous ride this has been for our coaching staff and the Bentley community,” said Stevens, who has 917 coaching wins. “What a ride for these young ladies and proud of them doesn’t begin to describe how I feel. We’ve gone through so much together and
they are truly champions.”

No. 1 Bentley (35-0) trailed, 58-49, with 4:40 left before putting on a full-court press to increase the pressure on the guards of West Texas (32-3).

The Falcons created turnover after turnover and turned a 60-54 deficit into a 60-60 game in 18 seconds. Bentley could have gone to the press earlier in the half, but Caleigh Crowell, Bugliera, and Christiana Bakolas all had four fouls.

“My assistant coaches talked about going to it earlier but I thought there was too much time left,” Stevens said. “I didn’t want to risk it with our foul trouble but we had no choice. The girls did a great job sealing the traps and Christiana anticipated the reversals well. The press did a great job getting us back into the game.”

Bentley kept the pressure up and finished the game 22 of 24 from the free throw line to secure the win.

“I think I blacked out during the run,” Battista joked. “With our careers on the line, the national championship at stake, we made big plays. Our press is a hidden gem and we know we can force some steals and make them take some bad shots. It gave us some confidence, and then the national title.”

Finn led all scorers with 21 points and Brugliera, the tournament MVP, had 17 points and four rebounds while battling the Lady Buffs’ talented forwards. Battista finished with 14 points and seven rebounds.

Devin Griffin scored 20 points and had eight rebounds for the Lady Buffs, who were without standout forward Chontiquah White most of the game because of foul trouble. White played just 13 minutes.

“With six minutes left and we were down 9, we looked at each other and knew we had to give it everything we had,” said Finn, who sank all 12 of her free throws. “We had our backs against the wall and nothing to lose at that point. We had six minutes left in our career and had to do something.”

The teams traded the lead several times as each team made runs. Battista started the game with an immediate jumper before West Texas went on an 11-1 run. The game was tied four times in the first half and several times in the second half before the Falcons’ pressure defense turned the game around.

“I thought the two best teams in the country went at it and for a majority of the game, I’ll be honest, I thought we were the better team,” West Texas first-year coach Mark Kellogg said. “It’s a 40-minute game and we turned the ball over in big situations and got a little rattled. We had a 9-point lead and they seemed to erase that lead so quick. I’m proud of our kids and this is as much fun as I’ve ever had as a coach.”
Bentley, which had hundreds of fans in attendance, will travel back to Waltham Saturday with a perfect season and a national title.

“I know we say this all year, but even when we aren’t playing our best, we never think we are going to lose,” Brugliera said. “We have confidence in ourselves to pull it together and win. It was a great season.”