

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Notre Dame Fighting Irish

Coach Niele Ivey

Hannah Hidalgo

Cassandre Prosper

Women's Press Conference



I'm implementing right now, just getting some great flow within our offense, spacing the floor out a little bit.

Again, just trying to highlight the strengths of this group and developing what that's going to look like is something that I'm excited about.

THE MODERATOR: Does that include the 6'3" guard?

NIELE IVEY: Yes, exactly. She's 6'3". She looks like she's 6'4" now. She's had a tremendous summer. She came back this summer for the first time. She's always been with Canada National Team, so it's been exciting to see the work that she's put in, and I'm excited for everybody to see it.

THE MODERATOR: Every time I sit down with you, I'm just in awe because it is crazy to think this is going to be your sixth, but you've accomplished so much as a young head coach.

What's been the nonnegotiable for you in maintaining in Notre Dame standard?

NIELE IVEY: I think just having the right players. I think that's the biggest thing for coaches. Making sure you have the right fit, players that fit your system, and I feel like I've hit that home run, especially with these two up here.

Just continuing that tradition, bringing in excellent players that are also great off the court. High-character players. Again just having, like you said -- this is my alma mater. It means more. So carrying that passion, wanting them to have the same experiences that I've had as a student-athlete, that's the number one drive for me, and just making them better and grow.

Q. This is for the players. Is there a certain player or team that you are looking forward to playing this year on your schedule?

CASSANDRE PROSPER: Yeah, I think for me it's UConn. When we played them I was injured my sophomore year, so I'm really excited to play there and go there. Play UConn at UConn.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2025 ACC Tipoff Q&A. I am happy to welcome Notre Dame to the stage with me. Head coach Niele Ivey, going into her sixth season. You're not aging, Coach. That's the nice thing. Junior guard Hannah Hidalgo, and then Cass Prosper on the stage with us.

Welcome, ladies. You're coming off your fourth straight Sweet 16 appearance. You earned a share of the ACC regular season title. Fighting Irish are returning five players and welcoming seven newcomers.

Niele, how did the first couple of practices go, and what should we expect from this team?

NIELE IVEY: They've been great the first couple of practices. A lot of energy. This group has done a great job of being very intentional with building their chemistry off the court. We had a couple of players that were playing overseas this summer, so the first couple of practices and also the preseason, they've done a great job of just really connecting. They work really hard.

Again, we just brought in the right pieces that fit our culture. But just their work ethic, their experience, and everyone has gotten better. I think that's something I'm really excited about. Everybody has come in working on a different skill that's going to help us succeed this season.

THE MODERATOR: Niele, death, taxes, and high expectations for Notre Dame women's basketball. Any style changes with the influx of new players, with the development of these players?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, actually, yes. A little bit more five out. We might play a little bit of four guard look. That's going to require a lot of pace, a lot of space. Those are things that



HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, I didn't want to copy, but I guess say UConn too. It's always a great game. You know the rivalry is so big, and it runs so deep. It's bigger than just us this year. I think UConn is always an exciting game.

THE MODERATOR: Cass, Coach kind of hit on this in terms of your continued progress each year. Last year saw some mixing up of how they used you from the three, a lot of flex screens, posting up a little bit. What have we added to the arsenal now going into this year?

CASSANDRE PROSPER: I think a lot of consistency with my shot, consistency finishing. I think this year has been a big step up just in terms of being more assertive on the court.

As a leader, I have to lead by example on and off the court, and I've really stepped into that role. So that's where I'm at.

THE MODERATOR: Hannah, you're the most recent of point guards that are truly some of the top in the country under Coach's eye. What makes her development of point guards and guards in general just so special and unique?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, I think the great thing about Coach Ivey is she's been where I want to go, and she's done it. She's won. Just kind of being under her and kind of following her lead is something that is different from a lot of point guards.

On top of that, just her ability to connect with us players. More than just basketball, just that connection as a family just makes you want to run through a wall for her and just play so much harder.

THE MODERATOR: Niele, you had three players drafted this past season. You've got three players in the Finals right now. As you watch them, can you speak to, one, just the thought process that goes and how you feel that sense of pride?

NIELE IVEY: Yes, definitely pride, and I talked a little bit about the joy that I feel for them, because especially this past class, you know, Soni being a third pick of the draft, watching her development through the course of her four years.

And Liatu and Maddy Westbeld, I was just so proud of them and proud that they got a chance to experience something that is really unique. It's hard to be drafted, but also to make a team. Sonia could have been rookie of the year. She had a rookie of the year type season.

Just so proud of them.

Then the playoffs, like you mentioned, we had seven in the playoffs in general and three in the Finals. You know, being a part of their journey, watching them grow, and not just being elite, but excel and thrive in the league has been a tremendous amount of joy and pride for our alum.

We're still supporting them and just really excited for them and what they're accomplishing right now.

THE MODERATOR: I could put you on the spot and say, who are you picking, but it's a win-win, right?

NIELE IVEY: It's a win-win in this scenario. I'm excited for all three.

THE MODERATOR: Hannah, I noticed a social media post from this past weekend, and you were in your uniform. Looked good, by the way.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: And it said walking in what I prayed for.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Again, I wish everyone could see this, because it was a very moving post I felt like. Could you explain what you meant by that?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, I think in this position that I'm in, I don't take it for granted. Every day is just a blessing to be able to wake up and go and play for such a prestigious university.

Being at Notre Dame, it's just something so many people dreamed of being, and I'm able to do it every single day.

You know, I'm always grateful. Of course, I keep Christ first, so I am just always grateful to not only just play the game of basketball -- it's just a blessing -- but just doing it with people that I love is something I've prayed for and that I'm just so grateful to be a part of.

Q. Talk to us about the importance of nonconference schedule, and specifically road game.

NIELE IVEY: Yes. I think net rating is huge, especially in Selection Show era. Nonconference is something that I've always learned that you have to really challenge yourself to see where you're at as a team, and it's going to help you down the road.



And also the ACC prepares you for that. There's so much parity in our league. But scheduling nonconference, scheduling a tough schedule, like you mentioned, on the road only builds your résumé, but also prepares you and shows you what you need as you step into ACC conference play and what you need to work on and where you're at as a team.

THE MODERATOR: Cass, I want you to talk us through The Bend uniforms and when we might see them for the first time. For those that haven't seen them in the audience, can you describe what they look like?

CASSANDRE PROSPER: The Bend uniform is a black uniform saying "The Bend" in gold. I think the main purpose is really to get closer to the South Bend community and really get closer to our fans and just recognize that South Bend has had a great impact on Notre Dame.

The first time we'll be wearing it is November 9th against Chicago State, so watch out for that.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, I'll ask you, is there going to be a plan of when you wear these uniforms, or is it random? I thought they looked really good.

NIELE IVEY: They looked really good. Like Cass said, it's an honor to our community. They pour into our program and the University of Notre Dame, so it's kind of our way of recognizing them.

We will select pre-select games, but like she said, November 9th, Chicago State. Might be a couple of more appearances, but they looked great on them, and we had an incredible rally. We had over 3,000 or 5,000 fans that came out to support us, and so that was really awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Might be rolled out?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, might be rolled out.

THE MODERATOR: Hannah, talk about what makes the Joy Center such a home court advantage for you guys, especially in ACC play.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, the fans, of course. We talk so much about the fans, but they really come and rally around us. And even now, a lot of the students now are coming out to support us. It's so big how they come.

They come with big heads, like big heads of us on the sidelines. They got -- one fan has Coach Ivey's face all over their shirts. The way they come and support us

through ups and downs when we're going -- like, if we were in a losing streak, they were still around us, they were coming around saying, we support you, we're here for you.

It just means so much to us. Fans just make all the difference just to encourage us and give us that fire, energy. Especially I know for me, just rallying the fans up after an and-one, after a three, a steal, anything, really helps get us going.

THE MODERATOR: Niele, this conference is loaded, and I really believe the coaches are just so good in this conference. Can you talk about what makes them so special?

NIELE IVEY: I mean, yeah. I think, like you mentioned, there's so much parity in this league. The makeup of every team is different now also, so it's going to be really interesting to see that.

Yeah, these coaches are amazing. A lot of them are either former players, have a lot of wisdom, and have had a lot of years and a lot of success within their coaching tenure. It's been awesome.

Again, it's a challenge, but it's awesome to see all the successful coaches doing great within their programs, and the programs continue growing and thriving in the ACC.

THE MODERATOR: This is for both players. Seven newcomers. Who is the one player that maybe we don't know about right now that after a couple of weeks everyone is going to be talking about?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yikes. I really don't want to give our secrets.

THE MODERATOR: Player X, why?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Player X, this player, I think she's really going to surprise a lot of people. She really went under the radar in her last program. She's going to come out, and a lot of people aren't going to expect her to do what she does, and she's going to come down the floor and hit her first three, and she's going to shock everybody. I'm sure y'all know who we're talking about, but we're not going to say it to the fans.

CASSANDRE PROSPER: Yeah, I think definitely player X, and I also think --

THE MODERATOR: Just so you know, this is chemistry that you guys know who X is without saying the name.

CASSANDRE PROSPER: Everyone is going to shock the



world I think. We're really, really talented. We're deep. I'm excited for the season. I'm excited to see it, to feel it, but I already know how great it's going to be.

THE MODERATOR: So this is going to be all three of you. Cass, we'll start with you. It's just a one-word answer. When I say "ACC women's basketball," what's the one word that comes to mind?

CASSANDRE PROSPER: Grit.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Talented.

NIELE IVEY: Powerful.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Notre Dame, thank you so much. Good luck this season.

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