

Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament: Columbia vs Wisconsin

Monday, March 30, 2026

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Charles Koch Arena

Wisconsin Badgers

Robin Pingeton

Destiny Howell

Ronnie Porter

Semifinal Postgame Press Conference

Columbia 67, Wisconsin 50

ROBIN PINGETON: Just first and foremost want to thank the WBIT organization. I thought just a first-class event, from the start to the finish.

I know there was a lot of people that impact that. Really grateful for that. Wichita, great community, fun to see the support, and really just appreciate that.

Obviously, really disappointed, but hats off to Megan and Columbia University. I thought they played with a lot of grittiness, a lot of toughness, relentless. The fact that they were down a couple players -- they played hard. They're really good. Just a very talented group, and we knew it was going to be a dogfight.

For our players, really proud of them. I said before, there's not a lot of teams playing at this point, and for our senior class, the foundation that they've laid is going to be really, really impactful for our program moving forward.

Not only just -- they did it the right way. It's just unbelievable heart postures, high character young ladies, committed to something back in June and stayed true to it throughout the course of adversity and challenges and some big losses and big wins.

I think that speaks volumes about them.

Certainly disappointed. Don't feel like it was our best outing, but at the same time, I don't want to take away anything from Columbia, very talented team, very scrappy team, very tough team. They gave us fits on the boards.



We had a hard time keeping them off the boards. That was one of our points of emphasis for the game, and tonight was their night, so hats off to them and congratulations.

Q. What are the emotions like to be able to go on this postseason run and for it to end the way it did here?

DESTINY HOWELL: Obviously really blessed to be in the postseason in general. Like Coach said, there's not a lot of people playing right now, so we're all very grateful for the opportunity.

Definitely stings. We sat in here just yesterday and said how we didn't want this to be the end of our collegiate career and now we're having to come to terms with that. It's definitely a hard thing to face.

But at the same time, really just trying to remember those times that we've had and shared as a team and just the locker room in general, off-the-court stuff and remembering our times on the court when we've had some really big wins, some really fun moments, some really crazy games that I don't even know how we won, if I'm being honest.

Just really grateful to come to Madison and meet everybody that I've met and everyone has embraced me with open arms. It's hard to finally close that chapter, but met a ton of great people along the way, and I'm really grateful for that.

RONNIE PORTER: Yeah, I'd say the same. Very grateful that we had the opportunity to play in postseason. One of the goals was to play in March, and that's what we did. Grateful that we're one of the teams that's still playing. There's a lot of teams that aren't, that are watching, so having an opportunity to be out and competing with my sisters alongside of the staff was amazing.

Been here four years, so obviously it sucks to go out this way, but very, very grateful for the experience, very grateful for the opportunity I got to be here.

My experience is definitely different than a lot of other people, but I'm grateful for everybody I came across in the



last four years, everybody I met, everybody I played alongside.

It was just a great experience. It stings, it hurts, but just a lot to be grateful and happy about this year for sure.

Q. Destiny, you were mentioning some of those crazy games that you somehow won. Was there something that Columbia stopped you guys from doing as opposed to some of those other games even four days ago when you guys were able to pull off some comebacks?

DESTINY HOWELL: I think we started out shooting ourselves in the foot. Columbia is a great team, and they definitely -- they're stingy defensively and made really good offensive players as well as kicking our butt on the boards.

Yeah, I think when you add all that together, we get the result that we got today.

Q. How much of a blow is it when you lose Kyrah like that?

RONNIE PORTER: She's a really big part of this team on and off the court. Her personality, her style of play, her grittiness, we missed that on the court for sure. You can always look to Kyrah -- we call her KD, whenever we need a big stop, a big play, hustle play or somebody to make us laugh in those hard moments.

It was a big loss losing her, but grateful that she stood alongside of us in pain. She cheered us on. She put us first even though she was the one down.

Q. You guys go on that run there in the fourth quarter. What was starting to go right there and what kept you guys from finishing that off?

RONNIE PORTER: We just got back to doing what we do, moving the ball, letting our defense speak for us. Our defense, getting defensive stops is the reason why we got the buckets in transition, were able to get that second win on the offensive end.

Just playing together and just being gritty is exactly what we should have started with. Like Destiny said, we shot ourselves in the foot not rebounding, not making those hustle plays. They out-toughed us a lot in the game, but when we got to that point you see the brightness ahead of you.

But again, Columbia was a really good team and they were able to not be one of those teams that let us back in. To salute to them. We can't start the way we did if we want to

go to championship games and beat teams like Columbia.

Q. Ronnie, how do you hope to be remembered among badger fans?

RONNIE PORTER: Great question. Maybe just everybody say heart over height, that dawg, just that wanting to go win at all costs, doing the things that don't show up on the stat sheet, and just that great person off the court. I don't want my personality to go anywhere. I want it to be remembered when I'm 50, 60 years old.

Again, this place has taught me a lot, and I feel like I've met a lot of great people, and hopefully they remember my face and my name for years to come.

Q. What do you feel like you guys proved this year?

DESTINY HOWELL: I will say just don't count out the underdog. We've had a lot of games where I feel like people came out underestimating us, and we've proved a lot of people wrong.

Just even with some of our top-25 wins, games where we were able to come back the way that we've had so many accomplishments this season of just -- what was it, since 2007, first postseason since 2007, best home start since I don't even know.

Just a lot of different accomplishments that happened this year that I'm really proud of this group about.

Q. For Ronnie, having been with the program for four years and having Coach re-recruit you for your senior year, what was different this year compared to your previous years in the program?

RONNIE PORTER: Coach P is amazing. There's a lot of people I look up to, but she's that one. Like everything she says, I'm locked eyes. I want to hear. I go home and tell my mom every time she says something like, you know, Coach P said this, and write it down so I can stick with it.

I'm so happy that I spoke with her when I was in the portal and I came back and I made that decision to stay. I think I've become a way better woman than I was in previous years, and that's all because of her and the staff she brought along with her.

I couldn't thank her enough for pouring into me, fighting for me, and every time I was down she was there to talk to me and lift me up along with the coaching staff.

And she also brought in some great players alongside me that I'm going to forever be able to call my sister. Hopefully

down the road we all share wedding days or something. But Coach P is amazing, and I'm just very grateful I took my last year here for sure.

Q. Obviously Columbia was a very good defensive team going into this, but what was it in particular that they did that just was so difficult for you guys to really get any rhythm going?

ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, I just felt like they were really aggressive, really physical, and in a really good way. They play hard. They play with a lot of heart, grittiness, toughness. Most of them have been together. They've been a part of postseason runs. I think they've been a postseason team the last five years. So a lot of them have that experience.

It's like, a lot of players don't transfer out of those Ivy League schools, so you get to really build that culture and that chemistry. I just felt like they were really gritty, hard-nosed. I think we didn't play with great pace. We got sped up. A lot of times we would catch and put the ball on the floor right away versus trusting the screening action. Didn't do a very good job of playing inside out.

I think typically when we get paint points or paint touches, that helps us out quite a bit. I felt like we didn't get a lot in transition in that first half. They were pretty stingy. They do a great job of crashing offensively, so they're there immediately as you try to advance the ball.

I thought in the second half we got out and was a little bit more disruptive defensively that allowed us to get some more in transition.

Then we were one-and-done for a lot of possessions. They were relentless on their offensive boards, and I don't think we matched that aggressiveness on the boards.

Q. With Kyrah, have you gotten much of an update on her and how much do you think that loss hurt you guys?

ROBIN PINGETON: Well, she's a huge part of what we do, for sure. I'm not one to make excuses and it's next man up and you've got to find a way. I felt like our rotations were off. We looked pretty tired out there tonight. End of March, everyone is tired, so it's a mindset, it's a toughness.

Bottom line, do we miss KD? Absolutely. She's one of our leaders. Mentally, emotionally, physically, very good rebounder, competes. I think Ronnie had mentioned just her presence that she brings to huddles, her voice of reasoning. Huge loss for us, for sure.

Q. It seemed like Ronnie took kind of quite the hit there. What does it say about her to get back up and a couple minutes later be back in the game?

ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, I think there was a lot of people on the floor. Unfortunately they beat us to a lot of the 50/50 balls. I felt like they were a little bit more first to the floor than we were. Again, give them a lot of credit.

For that possession on the sideline, is that what you're talking about? She's a senior that doesn't want it to end. That's what you hope for out of your seniors. Will they're going to play with a lot of heart, a lot of toughness, a lot of grit.

It was hard; they came out and were the aggressors and it took us a while to get going, finally turned the page in that second half. But in March, in late March, it's a 40-minute and each possession really matters.

Q. I think they had 16 lay-ups. Obviously they had some transition opportunities, but what was the challenge defensively there with what they were doing?

ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, we just didn't execute the game plan real well. Again, credit to Columbia; they've got a big three, and then everybody else knows their roles and they execute it very, very well and don't stray from that.

To me, the second-shot opportunities where they just really were really the aggressor -- we talk about you're either the hammer or the nail, the prey or the predator, and they were a lot more aggressive than we were tonight.

The second-shot opportunities, what did they score on second-shot opportunities? 14 off 21 offensive rebounds. Then we got caught in no man's land a lot. There was a couple kids that we were going to make them prove it from the perimeter.

So I think sometimes when you don't have a job you get lost in the mix versus understanding finding a job. We got beat on a couple out of bounds plays that should have never happened, heads-up plays by them, lack of discipline and focus by us.

It's hard. At this point, obviously, really disappointed, and I could go through and I could say we didn't do this or we didn't do that. Really I want to give our flowers to our seniors and this group of young ladies. They've done it the right way. We set out in June, new staff, new players, new locker room, new system, and we talked about who we wanted to be.

I'm not satisfied. We want more. I can't wait to get back to work. But I am really proud of them, and I'm really proud of their resiliency, and this senior class has been really special.

I just want to make sure they understand the value and the impact that they've made in a program as we continue to move the needle.

Q. You're mentioning moving the needle. How much did specifically Destiny and Ronnie really help in terms of getting to this point where you are able to move the needle so much in year one?

ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, and I won't even stop there. A young lady like Leena that doesn't even get to play and Gifty who had big games for us and Lily. A lot of times we look at this and say, how did they statistically move the needle?

But the way they show up every day and their ability to lean into something that's bigger than themselves, how hard they compete every day in practice, how -- their interaction with the community and our fans after games. Just laying that foundation for the way that they want to move as a program is critical.

Not just those two, but all five of them in my opinion have really moved the needle and helped us lay a great foundation, and that's what we said a year ago. The most important thing when you build a house is that foundation. Nothing is going to be bigger than that culture and that environment that we create for our players and the behaviors that we want to lean into, and they've done exactly that, and I'm really proud of them.

Q. To win three games in postseason, have you seen that have an impact in terms of recruiting and other things that go into building a program?

ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, I just think the experience of what that feels like. It's just a different type of energy and survive and advance and one-and-done, and to see if your name is called or not called. All of that is part of building the program for sure.

Really grateful for that opportunity. Really blessed. I can't wait to get back to work.

Q. With all the ups and downs of the season, how do you hope badger fans remember this season?

ROBIN PINGETON: I hope they're fired up. We've done a lot of really good things this year. I think when you look at

our schedule, nine of the last ten games we played with all in the NCAA Tournament, I believe, and some of the big time wins and getting into postseason, I hope badger nation is fired up.

We're not satisfied for sure, but we're moving the needle and can't wait to have a great off-season and get back after it in the fall.

Q. Following up, you had mentioned it a little bit, but your first year in Madison. As you look back at this year and the resilience this group showed all season long, how did this group define the identity that you see for this program moving forward?

ROBIN PINGETON: You know, I think I haven't had a chance to really reflect yet on this season. But as I think about this team and just how we came together in June, our team retreat, the behaviors that we wanted to lean into, the standards, how we wanted to show up for ourselves and for this community and this university, the resiliency, the fight, the grittiness -- I think the biggest thing first you've got to learn to walk before you run, run before you sprint, and learning how to win.

Unfortunately they haven't won in a long time, and it is a game of inches. Will how you do anything is how you do everything, whether it's on the court, in the locker room, in the community. Like everything impacts everything.

I think we've laid a really good foundation for that. I would say the grittiness that we play with, blue-collar mentality. Did we get it right every game? No. We got out-worked tonight, point blank, period. But I think there's a lot of games we did get it right, and I think that's the team that we want to continue to recruit to and just want to do something really special that's bigger than any of us hereby.

It's a great community. They come out and support just badger athletics in a big-time way. Hopefully we've created a little bit of a buzz, created a home-court environment moving forward, and laid a really good foundation.

Q. To that last point, do you think there's an untapped market of women's basketball fans in Madison when you look at the way that women's sports are always supported on campus?

ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, I appreciate the question. I wouldn't be here if I didn't think that. I said at my press conference, I think we have a sleeping giant. The excitement and the buzz around our program from a recruiting standpoint has been really positive, and there is no reason that we can't compete with the best of the best.



It's going to take a lot of hard work. It's going to take a little bit of time. But we're going to continue to roll up our sleeves and work really hard to be a program that we can all be really proud of. Super blessed to be around so many great coaches at the University of Wisconsin, some great programs, administration.

And it's all right there. We've just got to put in the work, and looking forward to doing that.

Q. For the returning players on the team, what do you hope they take away from this postseason run as they head into the off-season, and how do you hope it motivates them for next year?

ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, great question. I think it's -- I want our players to understand that if they come here, the expectation is that we're going to be playing in March. Just the grittiness, the resiliency, the connectivity that it takes. I think it's -- they're learning how to win, like I said, and it is a game of inches.

It's okay to hurt a little bit right now. I think as a parent, you always want to bubble wrap your kids and you want to protect them and take care of them. There's a balance of that right now as a coach because it's such an incredible group of young ladies so you just want to hold them tight.

But at the same time you've got to let them hurt a little bit and you've got to let it be fuel to your fire to continue to -- the work that you have to put in in the off-season and the commitment to getting better.

So there's a balance there for sure. But like I said, to me, this year was about creating an environment, a culture, laying the foundation, the connectivity that we want to play with, and I think we did a really good job of that. I think our seniors were phenomenal from top to bottom on that roster, and I look forward to continuing to build this program.

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