

# Big East Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 8, 2026

Uncasville, Connecticut, USA

Mohegan Sun Arena

**Creighton Bluejays**

**Jim Flanery**

**Ava Zediker**

Postgame Media Conference



UConn - 100, Creighton - 51

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions.

JIM FLANERY: Yeah, they're really good. I mean, we played 'em three times, and the radio guy asked me before the game what we learned the first two times, and I struggled to answer because, you know, the pace at which they play, they stress you in so many ways and make you uncomfortable. Six steals, I think in the first five minutes. And yeah, I feel bad.

I'll just be honest, I voted for KK Arnold for Defensive Player of the Year instead it's Sarah. (Laughing). And I think must have saw my vote because she had four steals in the first five minutes. But to me, they're 1A and 1B defensively in the league, you know, what they can do defensively.

In talking to Geno before the game, I said, You guys are just so deep and so disruptive. So, yeah, we were never in the game. They made threes. And so, yeah, I mean, I don't know -- you know, it's easy to say we didn't have a prep, but I don't know that it would have made a difference.

There's a big gap between where they are and where we are at this point.

But I'm also still proud of our team. I mean, we're playing a lot of young kids. We have an eight-player rotation and we play four freshmen and two sophomores within that. So I just talked to 'em today about trying to grow because you're getting stressed in a way that you don't get stressed any other time.

So, congrats. They're really, really good.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Congrats on your All Freshman Team honors and your season overall. Can you talk about how you found yourself growing over the season and what you're most proud of from this season.**

AVA ZEDIKER: I think it all starts with my teammates and my coaches. We've worked so hard over this season. As a team, we've grown so much and we work hard every day in practice, and I think that has been shown in games lately. But one thing we say is we stay connected during hard times, and when we do stay connected, good things happen out of that.

**Q. Talk a little bit about what that defensive pressure is like, specifically for one who is handling the ball against UConn. Yeah.**

AVA ZEDIKER: Yeah, it's hard. They're press is really good. They've got people flying at you at all different angles, so it's keeping your head up, finding the open person, just get the ball moving.

**Q. Watching you out here and your team these last couple of days, the confidence you're playing with, the joy that you're bringing on the court, the toughness, the fight that you're showing, it's very inspiring to fans of the sport and to a lot of people watching. Can you talk a little bit about how much joy you have competing in the moment and being out there with your team?**

AVA ZEDIKER: Yeah, every game one thing I think about is just, like, playing hard every single game, and then every single moment playing hard, doing the little things, going after steals, going after rebounds. I think doing the little things on defense as a team or just getting that extra rebound, steal, or extra possession really gets us going on offense, and I think that sets the tone for us.

**Q. Despite the score, your team fought the whole game. One example was Grace. She made the turnover and still sprinted back to block the layup instead of just letting UConn score. Talk a little bit**



**about the character of your team and how that helps build.**

JIM FLANERY: Yeah, thanks for that. Yeah, we have really good young people in our program, and I think they're about the right things. Grace has been an incredible addition to our team. I just told her in the locker room that I don't know what we were shooting for when we went in the portal, because you kind of -- it's so quick and it's -- you're trying to grab what you can. But I think we hit a Bulls-eye with her. I feel like she -- from a culture standpoint, from a work ethic standpoint, and a rebounding standpoint, I said you changed our rebounding culture (laughing).

As good a team as we've had the last few years, I had to yell at them a lot to rebound. I never had to yell -- well, a couple times, and that's what you want. But to your point, I felt like that's who we've been all year. I was a little frustrated late third quarter. I felt like we felt sorry for ourselves. I think that's easy to do when you play UConn, is to have stretches where you feel sorry for yourself and you -- or that 2 doesn't matter or that basket doesn't matter because it's a whatever.

But big-picture, I feel like this team has been really fun to coach. It's state tournament time in high schools, right? The Nebraska state tournament ended yesterday, and these guys were playing in high school state tournaments, you know, 52 weeks ago. Today, they're guarding Sarah Strong and Azzi Fudd and KK Arnold and, you know, that's a big leap.

And to your observation, I feel like we didn't meet the moment in some ways, but in terms of just the competitiveness part, I felt like we didn't back down, and that's what you want and that's the optimism that we'll carry hopefully into the post-season, but into next year.

**Q. You mentioned before just the depth of UConn. Is that sort of the difference this year? You've coached against them for a couple years this year now. This year they have something they didn't have in depth. Obviously, they lost Paige who was a really good player, but they have more bodies that can throw at you in many different ways. Is that what separates them from any other team this year?**

JIM FLANERY: Yeah, but I don't want to disagree with Geno because he told me in the pre-game that people say we're better without Paige. What the hell? (Laughing). But in watching them early, all the way through the year, I kept going, God, they're better than last year. You know, they won the National Championship last year, and I feel like they're better this year, whether -- offensively they

were really good today, but I just feel like they're even more disruptive defensively because of the depth and experience and just their -- you know, yeah, I mean, I think Heckel's a great addition that way, Quinonez is -- you know, she's really good defensively too.

So they have got so many good defensive pieces, and they just play -- you know, they play hard. I mean, I don't want to disagree with Geno, but I feel like they're maybe better (laughing).

**Q. A lot is made about their defense, and rightfully so because they're so good, but can you talk a little bit about their offense and how effortless it looks like. It really isn't easy to do what they're doing, but they make it look easy, don't they?**

JIM FLANERY: Yeah, they shot it really well today. But they start -- and that's the tough thing is when they get -- they have strong-minded players, but when you get easy baskets off turnovers and layups, it does make the basket look bigger when you take a shot in the half court. You ask Steph Curry that. If he can get two layups before his first three, he probably even thinks he's even better, and I think that's a little bit of what happened.

But, yeah, they run their stuff really hard, really well. And we talked in the pre-game, I said, they don't -- the game has changed to such a dribble-heavy game. If you go watch a club basketball game, it's dribble, drive, it's -- you know, everybody's working on finishes. But they don't shoot that many free throws. They're not just trying to spread you out and dribble it down your throat. They're super -- they're a great passing team, they're a great catch and shoot team, they can score in the post. And then they have some kids who can score in the mid-range. Azzi and Ashlon are a little more that way.

But yeah, they're super efficient and they run -- we said -- some of the stuff they run is -- 7 -- probably 7 of the other 10 teams in the league are running. They're just not running it, one, with as good a players, but they're not running it at the same pace. It's such a pace thing, and efficiency. And we said, Hey, we have seen this before. They are requiring you to be in the right spot with your knees bent, ready to react out of a screen, etc., and we just aren't there. We weren't there. But again, it's the pace at which they play. You saw it last year, and you see it again this year.

**Q. We spoke preseason about your roster turnover this year and the amount of freshmen you brought in. Can you just assess how you think the year -- obviously, you might have some post-season ahead of you -- how the year went and how it set the foundation**

**for the future.**

JIM FLANERY: Yeah, I mean, we had five seniors who had been with us for -- four of 'em had been with us for five years and then Lauren Jensen came after her freshman year. So we knew we were going to have to kind of flip our roster, and we had kind of under-recruited just because we felt like it was hard to convince kids to come and sit for a year or two. That's a way harder ask today.

So we knew that this class needed to be big from a numbers standpoint and quality, and I think we hit on it. I mean, you know, you watch Ava, Neleigh, Norah, Kendall, the four who play quite a bit for us, and there were times when I wanted to look at the bench and have somebody who was older, maybe, because, again, they were nine months out of high school -- eight months out of high school basketball in November, so their habits are still forming at this level.

So the competitor in you wants to maybe look at the bench and bring in a junior or a senior. But on the other hand, I think it was great for them to have to get to play through mistakes on a little bit greater level. I still had to take 'em out, but it wasn't -- I didn't have a choice whether to put 'em back in or to keep 'em out for a longer period of time.

I think the neat thing will be is that these guys will connect. I saw it with our last group. When you connect and you love -- and Ava has spoken really, really well about that, I think. When you connect with your teammates and you love your teammates, like, you build together, and that's what my vision is for these guys is to have that same commitment to each other because they all love the game. So have that same commitment to each other that that last group had. And I really believe that we'll have that. So, yeah.

**Q. You've obviously dealt with your fair share of elite UConn players, but what makes Sarah Strong so difficult or perhaps even impossible to truly prepare for?**

JIM FLANERY: (Laughing.) I think last year when we played here, one of our assistants was talking to one of their assistants, and there was a comment about, She might be -- this was from Connecticut. She might be the best player we have ever had -- we will have ever had. And I was like, whoa. I mean, I had only seen her on film and it just blew me away. But then the more you play against her, the more film you see of her, like, there's just -- you know, and some of the stuff she does is effortless. Like, it looks like she's 4 or 5 feet off of you -- like, she's not up into you like KK is, but her steals numbers are just ridiculous because she's just this way, this way, and then

she shoots the three so effortlessly and can get downhill, great hands.

And they pass the ball really well. But, yeah, she's -- you know, her numbers would be way better if they weren't winning the games the way they were. You look at -- I don't know what her minutes are, but her efficiency is through the roof, and she's really good, and I just like the way she competes.

**Q. Last year you-all were playing high school ball and now to be here in the Big East tournament playing against the No. 1 team in the country, what's that experience like for you?**

AVA ZEDIKER: It's a really cool experience to play UConn. They're a very good team. They very physical, but they're also very experienced. They're really good at running their plays. They run 'em at a very fast pace compared to some other teams. But they can really pressure you on the offense and defensive side of the ball. So, yeah, for sure they make it tough to score.

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