

# NCAA 2022 Women's Basketball Championship

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## Nina King

### News Conference

NINA KING: Great. Thanks so much, Rick. Great to see everybody. Happy Selection Sunday. Really excited to be able to say it on Sunday this year, although it did add a little bit of extra anxiety in the committee room as we worked furiously today to be ready for tonight.

It's been a terrific five days. We've got 12 awesome committee members that have really worked hard all day and all night since Wednesday, and we're really proud of the bracket that we put out today. With that, I am happy to entertain any questions you all have.

**Q. Nina, first question. Sorry to put you on the spot right away, but last year there were a lot of equity issues with the weight rooms and facilities and other things. What has the committee done or what has the tournament done to insure that those won't happen again this year?**

NINA KING: Sure. I think some of the big picture broad enhancements, 68 teams, obviously. As we unveiled the bracket, we are using the March madness logo. You'll see a lot of enhanced signage in and around venues, both first and second round, regionals, and then of course at the Final Four.

In terms of student athlete experience, that was our critical priority and focus to insure that the student athlete experience was equitable. Things like mementos and gifts will be the exact same. They'll be packaged the exact same as the men student athletes in the men's tournament, so there's been great care taken to make sure that, once again, first and foremost, we are creating an equitable experience.

Then I think it's really important to note that the work is not done. We will continue to make sure that we enhance the women's championship and make sure that it is the very best women's sporting event in our country.

**Q. I've got two for you. First off, nice job on the bracket. My first one is, the men have teams sort of in waiting in case COVID hits, unfortunately. Do you**



**guys have the same thing with that, and who would that be?**

The second part is, obviously, I'm guessing it's great for you to be back to normal and have games in the first sites and such was last year's bubble and the year before there wasn't a tournament.

NINA KING: Yes. So your first question, we do have a kind of first four out that is the first four teams waiting in line per the team replacement policy. That was Boston College, Missouri, South Dakota State, and UCLA.

Then tell me your second question. I'm sorry.

**Q. My second question, just how great is it to be able to sort of be back to normal and have fans and sort of what it was in 2019, so to speak, with an expanded bracket?**

NINA KING: Sure. Really exciting. Being back to normal and then with the kind of all the new firsts, right? First four. First time we're having 68 teams. We're really excited. I think just kind of a great buzz and energy around this year's bracket to be doing it in a more normal way.

**Q. On TV just a little while ago you explained the decision to put UConn in Bridgeport as a competitive balance, but how do you balance that with the advantage that a two seed is going to have at home against a one seed, especially right in the middle of its fan base?**

NINA KING: A lot of factors we take into account. First and foremost, we start with the S-curve, and then we've got bracketing principles that we follow, so make sure that any conflicts are avoided, same conference match-ups, for example, in the first or second rounds, or games that have already happened between teams this year. A variety of conflicts we're trying to avoid.

Then we take into account fan experience, student athlete welfare, modes of transportation, whether it's a drive or a fly. There's a variety of things that we certainly take into account and have a lot of discussion around, and certainly

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UConn and Bridgeport was one of those that we spent a lot of time on insuring that we got it right.

**Q. I wanted to ask about Kentucky just because they're such a unique team given the up and down nature of their season, winning ten straight, winning the SEC tournament to end things. Just what was the process like of evaluating them and eventually reaching the six seed that you gave them or the committee gave them in Bloomington pod?**

NINA KING: Yeah, you touched on it, right? Their run through the SEC tournament, an extremely strong conference. They have been playing really well. Seeding is -- we really focus on how a team is playing now, and Kentucky just vaulted themselves right up onto that six line. We, obviously, looked at the entire body of work, but couldn't discount what they've done in the last couple of weeks.

**Q. We talked about the Baylor-Louisville decision, and it seems to me that -- you had said on the TV that Louisville hadn't done anything to play themselves out, but they lost in the quarterfinals of a tournament they were supposed to win. How does that give them still the advantage over a team that lost in a close final?**

NINA KING: Yes, we certainly noted that and that it was a competitive game for Louisville. I think we had a lot of discussion around their total body of work and what they had done throughout the whole year. Felt like they were a really consistent team. Their overall record is extremely strong. They have a net of five and a strength of schedule of 32 overall. They've got five wins against top 25 net teams, and so we just, again, didn't feel like looking at not only what they have done, but also teams around them and so we're not taking these, obviously, in a vacuum looking at teams in a vacuum, but just what they have done as well as the teams above and below them just didn't feel like it warranted moving Louisville.

**Q. My question is just since the expansion of the First Four in 2011 with the men's game and then me studying the Title IX rules and the things that go in place with that, why did it just take so long to try to have the First Four for the women's game and why not sooner?**

NINA KING: I don't know that I want to focus on why it took so long. I think we're just really excited at this moment now finally. We do have an equal number of participation opportunities. There's the same number of Division I men and women's teams, so having the number of same participation opportunities was really a critical

priority, and I think we're all just really grateful that we have arrived at this moment and hosting a First Four this year.

**Q. How much did it matter for Arizona that Cate Reece was coming back to keep them in that four seed spot?**

NINA KING: Certainly, we talk about availability of players, and so whether this year, again, still it's been COVID impacts or injuries, we talk about teams and kind of results. Whether they had all of their players they were, healthy or not, or when players are anticipated to come back, and we rely on the information that teams provide us through their conferences and when players are expected back and available, and it's one of the 14 criteria that we talk about. Yes, that did come up when we discussed Arizona.

**Q. This might be a little -- not like a loaded question, but just a few different parts to it.**

For the last four teams to make it in with the at-large bids of Villanova and Missouri State, Dayton, and DePaul, what was it about those four teams that made you want to put those in versus the ones that you just listed that were kind of on the outside looking in? And especially because, like you said, with the previous question that some of those teams had injuries that factored into their seasons?

NINA KING: I don't know that I have a ton of time to talk about each of the teams, but I will say that the last four in and the first four out was probably where we spent the most amount of time debating teams into the tournament. Just really understanding what that meant for teams to be in or out.

A few things. Dayton finished really strong in their conference in the regular season. Obviously, unfortunately, lost in the 8-10 final, but they were 8-2 in their last ten games and had some really good quality wins in a competitive conference. Florida State in the ACC, a really strong conference, and what they had done and trending up. 7-3 in their last ten games and what they had done in the ACC tournament, just something that we had focused on for them.

Missouri State, another one from a mid-major. Excited to put them into the tournament even though they did not win their conference tournament. Their complete body of work really earned them a spot in. 24-7. They had a net of 44 and a pretty good strength of schedule. Good wins. Significant 3-1 in the top 50.

Each of the teams we kind of hit on various criteria. Again, we've got a list of 14 criteria, but really spent a lot of time making sure we had those right last four teams in.

**Q. I wanted to ask about two parts, I guess, about the Big Ten as a whole. How did you kind of sort out between at the top Indiana and -- the four between Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, and Maryland? For Indiana specifically, I guess how much did Mackenzie Holmes' injury and the ripple effects of it factor into the discussion and then how you got them at a three seed?**

NINA KING: The Big Ten was spaghetti, and it was another one we spent a lot of time on just determining the right order of the teams as we entered them into the tournament. That one was pretty difficult.

So Indiana, yeah, that one we talked a lot about. We factored in the Holmes injury and what they looked like when they got her back. Something interesting about Indiana that we talked about was how they recovered after a lot of games in a short period of time. They had six games in 13 days there in a stretch, including Iowa twice in three days, so really noted kind of the difficulty of the end of their season there, but they're a team that was on the upswing. Obviously, playing in the Big Ten Championship and really had been doing well to finish the season.

For the Big Ten I would say kind of in general to kind of help us sort out the teams we looked at a lot of the head-to-heads and what the results were among mainly those top teams in the Big Ten. That really helped us kind of figure out order. I'm not saying it was to the T, but it was something that we really discussed when we were trying to figure out order.

**Q. Nina, you've done this a few times now. Just talk about the difference in having that extra day you normally have with Monday's reveal as opposed to tonight. I'm guessing that Texas and Baylor were probably locked in roughly where they are. Maybe one goes to one or whatever, but was it more of a rush for you guys knowing you had one less day to get this thing figured out than normal for the last 15 years, 17 years, whatever it is?**

NINA KING: Yeah, it felt personally to me more of a rush because none of us had ever done it on Selection Sunday. All of us in the room, various levels of experience with the committee, but we had all been accustomed to having Monday.

It was fine. We did it. We knew what the end goal was. We had to be done by X time on Sunday, and we did. I mean, we took a lot of time today just scrubbing and making sure we had things right. There were several conference tournaments that were finishing today that were close. We were watching them all. We would take pauses

every now and then to kind of watch a game finish out or see what was happening, so it got tense at times, but exciting.

**Q. Of those games that you were watching, looking at the Summit League and South Dakota and South Dakota State, was that one of those tough choices that you had to make? I mean, South Dakota State is a really good team as well.**

NINA KING: They are a really good team, and they were one of our First Four out. A lot of discussion around them. That one, obviously, we watched their tournament final earlier in the week. Days are mixed up, but I know that one was before we actually got to Indy.

Yeah, I mean, a lot of discussion on South Dakota State and whether they, without getting the AQ, could get into the tournament and a strong team, but just when comparing to other teams didn't quite cut it this year.

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