

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Michigan State vs North Carolina

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Columbia, South Carolina, USA

Colonial Life Arena

**Michigan State Spartans**  
**Coach Robyn Fralick**

**Moira Joiner**

**Julia Ayrault**

Media Conference

ROBYN FRALICK: Yeah, we're thrilled to be here. What an opportunity to be playing in March Madness.

I know we're really looking forward to that. I'm proud of our group for the season. I think something that stood out about us was our consistency throughout the year and throughout a really Big10 conference play.

So looking forward to the opportunity in front of us tomorrow.

**Q. For both athletes, last time the team made the tournament it was kind of that weird COVID season where it wasn't really the full experience. For you both, to be able to make it back and have kind of the full experience this time around, how does it feel for you both?**

MOIRA JOINER: I mean, I think it's so cool for this being my last season. Like obviously big goal was to make it back here. I'm excited to already see the differences, because, again, the last time we were here was COVID year and that was a crazy tournament to be in.

Yeah, and I'm just hoping for a better result this year.

JULIA AYRAULT: Same thing. We're really excited to be here. Obviously it's been a couple years since we've been in the tournament, so definitely excited to be back in and kind of just have the season that we had. We're very excited about it and looking forward to tomorrow for sure.



**Q. For both of you, I guess you got a crash course in North Carolina the last couple days. What have you seen from them on tape and what gives you concerns and challenges for tomorrow's game?**

JULIA AYRAULT: We've kind of dove into them a little bit. Just kind of -- it's exciting to kind of focus on somebody else. We've had a couple weeks since we played and got a lot of time to kind of focus on us which has been great for us I think.

Just kind of spend some time working on stuff, ourselves, and then just diving into them, some excitement getting to play somebody else and focus on another team and their ability and things they're good at.

I think it's been good for us to look into them and focus on somebody else.

MOIRA JOINER: Yeah, I think in any game we're going to go into, especially in the tournament, we're going to be the smaller team, so we have to look what advantages we have. Yeah, I think North Carolina is a great team. They bring a lot to the table.

Like Julia said, just excited to play somebody new.

**Q. Diving into the game itself, matchup-wise, talk about the perimeter play you'll be facing with UNC and how you and your fellow guards match up.**

MOIRA JOINER: I think adjust out MO for the whole season about our team is like we're fast. Our transition is fast. We bring a lot of speed to the table.

So I think that's really what we're going to be focused on. But we need to get rebounds and stops first to do that.

Them being bigger, boxing out is a key to this game.

**Q. I know you guys aren't satisfied with where you -- satisfied with what you accomplished already, but to think about 22 wins in a Big10 conference that was absolutely loaded this year, that has to be quite an achievement that you guys have worked and gotten to**



**this point.**

JULIA AYRAULT: Yeah, kind of like you said, we are definitely not satisfied. Obviously really proud of the season we had. I think just kind of looking back on it, I mean, we had a lot of fun this season I would say. I think when you're having fun playing basketball and it's the game that you love it's really easy to do well.

So I think we've had a ton of fun this season. We really enjoyed our time. I know we're looking forward to continuing to play together and kind of not being done yet for sure.

MOIRA JOINER: Yeah, I think we're obviously happy to be here, but not necessarily satisfied yet, right? And people can still count us out, whatever they want to do. That's fine. It would be a chip on our shoulders and go into the game like we normally do.

**Q. For Julia, I know you already mentioned the size difference, especially in the post. Is there a Big10 team that you kind of compare North Carolina's personnel to that you can reflect back on to get you prepared for this game?**

JULIA AYRAULT: I mean, I don't know if there is necessarily a specific team. I think kind of we've always -- we are undersized for the most part this year. That's something we're used to. I think we've done a good job making adjustments and playing to our strengths.

Mo touched on speed being one of our top priorities and strengths, so I think it's something we're going to continue to focus on, and when we are undersized, knowing we have other advantages we can take advantage of and focus on those things.

**Q. I always like to put the players on the spot with the coach in the room. Talk about your coach and what she's been able to bring to the program here in her first year, being able to lead you guys back to the post season. What has she meant Football to you guys as veterans of the program to see this growth in year one?**

JULIA AYRAULT: I would say Coach Fralick means everything to us. She's done such a great job. I don't think there is whole lot words to describe everything she's done for us as humans and basketball players as well.

I would say -- I know I kind of talk on it a lot, but just like the relationship aspect and how important she places on the relationship she has with us and everybody in her program. I think it makes us all really close and trust each

other more.

I think it really shows on the floor with our connectedness and the things that stand out with our togetherness. I think the priority she puts on that just makes us better for sure.

MOIRA JOINER: Yeah, I think Coach Fralick has done a great job this year coming in and trusting us and also trusting the process of coaching changing and a new conference. There is a lot of things that were thrown at her this year and she took it with stride, just trusted our team, and she was consistent every day.

I think that was shown through like how we play as well. Like I feel like what your coach is is typically how the team is. She's really helped us grow this last year and I'm really thankful for her to be here. (Smiling.)

**Q. Mo and Julia talked about obviously you still have goals in front of you. Talked about the coaching change coming into this season. You lost two leading scorers. All this uncertainty. You two as captains made the goal to get back to this moment, to get back to the tournament. What was the belief then and now that you've actually gotten to this point get to go tip off and answers questions, what does it mean to see that vision fulfill itself?**

MOIRA JOINER: I just think it's -- you know, it's something we talked about for a while and that's just -- I've been motivated like the last two weeks. You know, we've had a lot of time off, and I think that's been great for our team, like Julia touched on before.

It's kind of surreal but extremely exciting, and I am just motivated for the game tomorrow and the run we can make as a team.

Yeah, I'm just so excited.

JULIA AYRAULT: Yeah, I would say obviously really proud of everything, and I think Coach Fralick made it pretty easy when we came to her with our goals and things we want to accomplish this season, she was like, let's do it. She was down for everything and down to help us in anyway we needed, extra workouts or just the belief that she had in us and our goals really helped too because we knew that we had a coaching staff that was really just willing to dive into it with us and give to her all.

I think that really helped, too.

**Q. Courtney told this morning that you and she are friendly and were texting each other. Did you come in knowing a little bit more about North Carolina because**



**maybe you paid some attention to them this year because you have a friend coaching them?**

ROBYN FRALICK: Not as well as I needed to know them, but they are a team that I pay attention to because she is a good friend in coaching. She's someone I reach out to when they have big wins and congratulate.

Clearly she has done really, really good job there. So, yeah, we kind of laughed. Of all the bracketology, I don't think one of them had us matched up. I talked to her last night. We were laughing last night, well, here we are.

Normally I would be cheering for you, but not this game. (Smiling.)

**Q. This is a true 8-9 game, obviously with the seeding being what it is, a tossup. What do you think is going to be the key to find success tomorrow and be able to impose your will against North Carolina?**

ROBYN FRALICK: Yeah, interesting matchup. Pretty contrasting styles of play for being a really tough even matchup in a lot of ways. I think what stood out about them is they've been really, really tough defensively.

I think they found their niche with changing up defenses and using their size and length. They have three players that they've really counted on a lot on the offensive end consistently. But I think a big thing is, as it is for most games for us, we got to keep them off the glass. In our Big10 tournament that really hurt us.

We've got to find ways to score. They've really grinded out some wins.

And then their big three, we have to find ways to slow them -- the whole team is good. There are three that they have really counted on on the offensive end. We have to find ways to try and slow them down.

**Q. Just a couple. I wanted to just know how you and Courtney got to become friendly. Then I wanted to ask something that I asked the players. In this season of the Big10 where you can go on and on about Iowa and Ohio State and Michigan, Nebraska.**

ROBYN FRALICK: Yeah.

**Q. And that you guys were able to achieve 22 wins and get back to the tournament, that must be quite an achievement.**

ROBYN FRALICK: Yeah, the Big10 is incredible basketball. And women's basketball is incredible

basketball. I think it's as good as it's ever been.

What was the first part the question.

**Q. You and Courtney?**

ROBYN FRALICK: Funny story. I was a Division II head coach at Ashland University and at that time she was at Princeton. I don't know if it was a coaching convention or just mutual respect. We became coaching buddies. Part of it at that time is we were coaching teams that were winning on a really high level and consistent basis. Okay, how do you maintain that? How do you keep your team sharp?

And then when I took over at Bowling Green is around the same time she took over at North Carolina. Then we were both entering new spots with new challenges and what that looked like, and once a month we would connect and talk through how would you handle this, how would you handle this, how would you handle this.

Now here we sit today. Now we're both trying to figure out how it beat each other. That's what makes the coaching world great, is as competitive as we are we need each other. I think she's one of the best coaches in the country and best leaders, and been a good friends. I think we've both learn a lot from each other.

**Q. Have you played each other before?**

ROBYN FRALICK: We've never played each other. Yeah.

**Q. I asked the players, but you as the coach, can you speak to what Julia and Moira have meant to the program to be able to have that veteran presence, in-state kids that have meant a lot to your team to help you as first-year coach kind of get the flow going faster?**

ROBYN FRALICK: Well, something I love to share with my opportunity to come in and when you coach a new team, there is just so many things that take time, right? Trust. Belief. Standards. Expectations. All of those. There is just left step, right step, left step, right step.

I give them a lot of the credit for stepping right along. It's easy in a world to pause or hesitate or -- and they've kept stepping forward with us.

I think what's been really fun is we've done it together and we've both had a lot of things to learn. But we've really been in it as a staff and as a team together.

But something I absolutely love. I was born and in raised

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

in Okemos, East Lansing. I grew up going to Breslin. I grew up playing at halftime at the Breslin games, and they grew up being Spartans. Something that I have just loved about this team is I coach a bunch of Spartans.

In a world where the athletic landscape is consistently changing, I coach kids who love Michigan State and who play like they love Michigan State.

These two are a perfect examples of that. Been through injuries, coaching changes, COVID, and still chose Michigan State every day.

They chose it at high level this year and gave us their best. It's easy to come back. I say it's easy just to come back to come back. Right now we have fifth year, sixth year, seventh year, eighth -- there are so many because of the nuances of this time.

They chose to come back and chose to get better. I think that really stands out.

**Q. Obviously considering the season you've had, being a first-year coach, getting to the NCAA tournament, that's not a usual accomplishment. No matter what happens tomorrow, do you feel like your program is ahead of schedule, and what can it mean simply that you're here for Michigan State going forward?**

ROBYN FRALICK: It's an interesting question, and I've been asked that a good number of times this year. I don't know if I've had a schedule. I think that I tell our team all the time, if we let somebody else write our story we wouldn't be sitting here.

A lot of people had a lot of opinions on probably where we would be. If they did a pre-set season vote on all the teams in the Big10, they just do it on the Top 5, you know, that's the power of writing your own story.

So do I think these kids thought they would sit here? I do, because they worked in a way to have that happen. I think you work in way to do things if you believe they can happen, if you believe it's true.

So schedule, I don't know. I mean, I always just coached in way of it sounds so simple and it's so hard to do of how do we consistently get better.

**Q. A little atypical to have two weeks between. Kind of reflecting back on the two weeks now as you get ready for tomorrow, what did you think is the most beneficial part of those two weeks for you guys as a program.**

ROBYN FRALICK: We play get a little time to rest. We play seven kids a lot of minutes but haven't played a huge bench this year. You get a little time to rest and refocus, and then time on Michigan State.

For a week you don't talk about anybody but you. I think it's a really important thing, especially this time of year when you come out of conference player and you're loaded with game after game.

And then a new opponent. You know, once you're in conference play it's the second time, third time you've played, so just to be able to focus on a new team and figure out what are the things we need to prepare this week, and I know we're all excited to play a game.

**Q. There are so many challenges in this era of college basketball that you guys are facing with I'm sure you've -- when you were at Bowling Green there was terrific players who then moved on elsewhere because Power 5s noticed them and things like that. How do you navigate that? Does it make the job any less fun between the portal and NIL and some of the things we face today?**

ROBYN FRALICK: I think we're in a world that is constantly adapting. I think it's important period. The game has changed, too, the actual game of basketball continues to evolve.

So I think if you chose this profession you chose the ability to adapt, right? You chose the ability -- I listened to a Podcast a while ago. Something I heard really stuck out to me was if you chose coaching you chose problem solving. Get into coaching if you love problem solving.

So I think that's part of it. I think it's also what makes invigorating is we're all trying to figure out the best ways to do things for our program.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports