

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Michigan vs Notre Dame

Sunday, March 23, 2025

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Purcell Pavilion

Notre Dame Fighting Irish

Niele Ivey

Sonia Citron

Hannah Hidalgo

Liatu King

Media Conference

Notre Dame 76, Michigan 55

NIELE IVEY: So grateful to have this opportunity to win this game with this incredible group, to go back to the Sweet 16. This is so big for the program. We had an incredible fan base today. Sold-out arena. Just exciting basketball. I couldn't be more proud of this group. Obviously everyone knows we went through a couple weeks of touch stretch and the way that they have fought back, got back on track, the way we have defended the last two games has been just phenomenal.

So I'm so proud of this group. Just an incredible performance for the whole team. The whole weekend was just outstanding, and again, excited to survive and advance and excited to keep dancing and get to the next round.

Q. What did you learn from yourselves and your teammates this weekend that maybe you didn't know on Thursday?

SONIA CITRON: I'll say that we're -- I mean, I kind of already knew this but we're a bunch of fighters, and we respond when we're challenged. Coach Ivey challenged us, and we responded. We got better, and I think we've shown that these past two games.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, I didn't learn anything, I would say new. But just like recognizing how dominant we are, especially when we are all playing well together. When we are all playing together as a team, how well we dominate and how well we take teams hard. I'm really proud of my



team of how we took the other team's heart from the jump.

LIATU KING: They said it all already. Just our versatility, and like Sonia said, we were challenged in our practices and past practices and how we were able to respond.

Q. You have a pretty great group of seniors, I would say.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah.

Q. Was there extra motivation to make sure that they can just keep playing, keep putting on that Notre Dame uniform?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Oh, yeah, absolutely. I think every game, especially now it's like win-or-go-home and I've said it a lot of times that it's a lot of the girls' last time putting on a Notre Dame jersey. A lot of fight for them so that we can make it all the way to the National Championship, not just the Final Four and win and be national champions in their last time in a Notre Dame jersey.

Q. Aside from an incredible effort, what allowed you to have that amazing day you had in points and rebounding?

LIATU KING: My teammates, first of all, they were able to find me. We saw mismatches. We saw how they were defending ball screens, and they were just able to find me on the slips on the rolls and things like that. I really give credit to the point guards, and Sonia, as well, for just finding me in open areas.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about that blistering start and the defense, season-low points for Michigan?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, I mean, I think it just a testament to what we've been working on all week. We've worked on ball screens. We worked on rotations, and so just to kind of see the carryover from us on the defensive end, it being something that's been so focussed on. It's exciting to see because we know kind of the work we've put in, and we are kind of seeing it displayed on the court.



Q. Obviously you guys like to push the pace and you did that today but it also felt like your offense was really clicking in the halfcourt. Can you talk about your team's ball movement and what allowed you guys to be so efficient in the halfcourt?

NIELE IVEY: Yes. We have been working on our spacing. We've been working on making reads versus the defense that we were going to see versus Michigan. I thought they did an excellent job of sticking to the game plan.

And like Hannah said, it was a lot of carryover from practice. We have really great versatile scorers on the court.

So I thought they did a great job of manipulating their defense and just stepping and shooting with confidence, and Liatu, 7 for 7. Everybody took efficient shots and took great shots. I thought our shot selection was a lot better today, and then we got out and got the stops and got a chance to run in transition. So I feel like we had both, in the transition and in the halfcourt.

Q. 21 points today, huge shots, especially in that fourth quarter. What do you think -- that first quarter. What was clicking for you?

HANNAH HIDALGO: In the first quarter?

Q. Yeah.

HANNAH HIDALGO: They were collapsing a lot. They were helping a lot of rotation and they would leave the corner and our guards did a great job, and even our posts did a great job of seeing that they were leaving or helping off, and were being patient.

So they were able to hit me in the corner for threes, and I think we just played well together. Then I saw my teammates; shots going in and so it just gives me the extra motivation to knock my shots down.

Q. With how the season ended, there was maybe some doubts about what Notre Dame would do in this tournament but back-to-back dominant wins, what statement do you think you guys have just set?

HANNAH HIDALGO: You know, having people doubt us really doesn't matter because we trust in ourselves and we trust in each other.

So it doesn't matter what everybody else or the media is saying about what we are going to do in the tournament. Because we know what goes on in the locker room and we know what goes on in practice.

So I think this just speaks to all the people who have doubted us and didn't think we were even going to make it past the second round to the talent that we have and what we are going to do next.

Q. Knowing that Michigan plays a five-guard lineup and their tallest place is only 6'3, how were you guys able to take advantage of that, especially having mobile forwards?

LIATU KING: Just exploiting whoever their guards were guarding. So like when they had a smaller guard on me, just having the point guards look at that. Yeah, I think that's really what it was, just exploiting their defense.

SONIA CITRON: Credit to our posts who were able to guard such versatile players. We can't do that if they can't switch one through five if they can't guard. So credit to them.

Q. A couple of your teammates are looking to be in the WNBA Draft in a few weeks, and obviously there are a lot of teams that are looking at them right now, and trying to figure out if they would be a good fit. What should they know about your teammates as they are trying to decide if they should draft them?

HANNAH HIDALGO: No, I'm not going to go one by one -- because we have so many seniors. But I think that they are dogs; that they are going to fight, and whatever position you put them in, there's not going to be any complaining or arguing. They are going to have to go and do what they have to do.

They are hard-nosed and put in the work and going to get better. The sky is the limit for them. They don't have a cap on their talent level. They can always improve and get better and they are so versatile and especially with the length they got, they can do so much. They are great draftees.

Q. Can you elaborate about the passion and purpose you guys played with? Was it the spark Liv gave you coming back?

HANNAH HIDALGO: I mean, of course having Liv on the floor just opens so much. You saw she was able to drive everyone and collapsed on her and she was able to find shooters or dish it down to the post to get a layup. So having her back is always crucial for us.

But I think it's just intrinsic. Like we don't really care about what the media is saying. We are not really looking for that. I know especially me, I don't read what the media is saying. So it really doesn't matter.



I think we have the fight because we want to win. We are competitors and we want to win and we want to get all the way to the National Championship, and that's really where our fight comes from.

Q. I want to ask you the same thing that I asked your players. What did you learn from this team and what do you know about your team that you didn't know on Thursday?

NIELE IVEY: Well, I knew that they were fighters, like they mentioned. I knew that they were resilient. We just went through a tough stretch. We did the same stretch back in November. This group wants to win. They are unselfish, and just came across a couple bad performances that we learned from.

So I knew that this team was going to respond. It's something that we've done in the past this season, and I'm just happy that it's happening right now.

Obviously mistakes are high, so I'm really encouraged and really proud of this group that we have turned the page, and the last two games, we've shown up and we've been really great.

Q. Obviously you are not going to know your opponent for a few hours, but either way, it's going to be a team you've already played.

NIELE IVEY: Mm-hmm.

Q. So do you have a preference? Is there anything that you would like -- since you did lose to TCU, whether it be revenge or anything like that?

NIELE IVEY: No. We are just focused on whoever the opponent. Is we are very familiar with Louisville, and like you said, with TCU.

But I'm just kind of focusing on us. Going to enjoy this win, embrace it, and get prepared when we know who our opponent is going to be.

Q. Can you talk about the impact the relentless defense had, especially at the start of the game?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, I thought it was incredible. It's a carryover from Friday into something we've stressed and emphasized, is our defense. They came out with the same mindset, same energy as kind of what I talked about, dominant. And again, it's a will; a will to win, understanding what it means to get to the next round and get to the Sweet 16.

They have been focused and locked in, and I'm really proud of them. Because again it has not been easy. Being their coach challenging them, and they responded so well. And they know that this is the way we need to be. This is our identity and to see it on a consistent basis in the last week and a half has been great.

Q. Can you talk about Liv and what she did today?

NIELE IVEY: I was going to say MVP is and Anne Marquez; I give her the credit. She came back to work. They have been working on Liv for the last 48 hours, 36 hours, however long it's been. But she is my MVP.

And Liv, she did exactly what she's supposed to do. Thank God she had the opportunity to come out here. I thought she was really good. I know she's playing through a lot of pain. But our training staff has been just phenomenal, so I'm really grateful for all the work, all the late-night treatments that they have put in for her.

Q. I believe you emphasized yesterday, they can shoot the ball. How much of an emphasis was three-point defense?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, that was a big emphasis. They average seven and they made 12 versus Iowa State. They only had one at the half and that was really great.

And then Silah (ph) made a couple towards the end in the fourth quarter but held them below their average. That was big, defending the three-point line, especially with them having five guards on the floor.

I was really proud of my posts. That was really hard to play on the perimeter. But I thought everybody did a great job and held them below their scoring average, which was exactly what we wanted.

Q. Can you talk about the boost the crowd gave you guys today?

NIELE IVEY: Oh, yeah, this is just a really tough place to play. I'm really grateful for the South Bend community. They have shown up for this program and for me all season long. We have had the most sold-out games. Today was a sold-out game.

I'm really, really grateful for all the support, and you feel the energy. And they really sparked us right from the beginning, knowing that there was not an empty seat there. Coach Freeman in the house. We had former players, Devereaux Peters and Skylar Diggins on Friday. A lot of support from our alum but also the fans. They mean



everything to us. So we are grateful that we had the opportunity to host.

Q. When your players are up by 20 points in the first quarter, do you have to keep motivating them to play defense?

NIELE IVEY: They know but I encourage them continuously throughout 40 minutes because I know it's a game of runs. So they know that I try to make sure that I keep my foot on the gas for them, and they are self-motivated. But also give them that extra boost.

Q. There's obviously no shortage of confidence with this team but kind of with the wake-up call that you guys experienced late in the season before this NCAA Tournament, how does the way that you guys have won the past two games, just so dominantly, kind of bolster the team's confidence moving forward?

NIELE IVEY: I think it's a tremendous confidence booster for us because we did it defensively. It was on the defensive end where you've seen a shift for this team. No matter when that wake-up call happens, I'm just happy that we responded and I know that defensively is where we need to bring our energy, especially at this point.

So I'm grateful. I always feel like there's always lessons and things that you go through. This is part of the journey and I'm grateful we responded and turned the page and playing great basketball defensively right now.

Q. The energy of the fans, do you see a world where you guys would be doing a home-and-home series?

NIELE IVEY: I'm working on that. I try to always stay regional with matchups. So hopefully we can get something going so we can have a home-and-home.

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