

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Holy Cross vs Iowa

Friday, March 22, 2024

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Carver-Hawkeye Arena

**Iowa Hawkeyes**

**Coach Lisa Bluder**

**Caitlin Clark**

**Gabbie Marshall**

Media Conference

**Q. Caitlin, who is the one player that maybe had the most influence in the way you play basketball and why?**

CAITLIN CLARK: Hmm. That's a good question. Honestly, I grew up watching a lot of different players. I always had basketball on, no matter what level it was. Honestly, the two biggest people that I looked up to were two of my cousins. My cousin ended up playing at Creighton for a while. Her name Audrey Faber. She played at Dowling. Like I always idolized her and she could score the ball well, she could shoot the ball.

So I would say like closest person to me was probably her, but other than that, Maya Moore, I loved the way she played basketball. You know, Sabrina when I was in high school. That was always who I had on. I always watched Oregon, always watched Sabrina and the way she played the game.

But I was just somebody that loved basketball no matter who it was. Like I always had the TV on, whether it was men's, whether it was women's, whether it was the WNBA, NBA. I always loved watching the games.

I feel like it was a lot of different players, honestly.

**Q. Going off of that, when you got older when maybe you were in high school or a freshman or maybe in Team USA, were there any players you ever stepped on the floor with where you're like, oh, wow, I'm playing with this person, you had gotten used to watching them and then it became real?**



CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah. I feel like it was that way when I was playing USA Basketball. Like all those players are really talented. I would say especially when I was in high school still and I was on the U-19 team at the time and Coach Walz was our coach, Coach Close was our coach, and like Rhyne Howard was on the team, Naz Hillmon was on the team, Aaliyah Boston was on the team.

Like it was just like I came off the bench. It was just a loaded roster of players. Paige was on the team. Hailey Van Lith was on the team. All these players you look around and are having so much success, whether now in the WNBA, Rhyne was obviously Rookie of the Year, same with Aaliyah.

I think that -- like I always loved being surrounded by really great players, and I always knew how great they were when I got to play with them, but at the same time I knew I could hold my own, but also it showed me a lot of ways I could get better.

Whenever I had those experiences, they were really special.

**Q. Just your perceptions of Holy Cross from watching them last night.**

GABBIE MARSHALL: Yeah, I think they've got a couple pretty good shooters from the outside and they're just a good solid team. We know they're going to give it their all and give us their best shot, so I think it's important for us to guard that three-point line and play good, solid defense, and honestly don't do anything we haven't done all year and just play Iowa basketball and get better.

**Q. For both players, Caitlin, how have you managed all this, just the entire thing? I'd like that perspective from Gabbie, too, because in a lot of ways you guys are playing in the shadow, I guess, if nothing else.**

CAITLIN CLARK: Yeah, I think it's been a journey, and it's honestly gone really fast, and obviously this last year has been really crazy. My life has been really crazy, all of our lives have been crazy. My main goal and my main focus is basketball and school and getting my degree, and that's

where I spend all of my time, doing that.

It's been nice. Like I'm close to finishing my degree, so a lot of my stuff is online this semester and just getting to enjoy these last few months of basketball with my best friends has been really fun for myself.

I guess that's the thing where I find kind of peace in, is like I don't feel like this is a job. I don't feel like I have to go out there and score 40 points a night. I just go out there and have fun.

At the same time, I know this is a team sport. I have four other people on the court with me at the same time, and I can rely on them.

I'm going to need them if we want to reach our goals in March. It can't just be me. And they've been playing amazing basketball, too. I don't know, I feel like we still act the same way. We still -- I don't know, are the same team. We have the same culture that we've always had since I stepped on the court when I was a freshman.

I think that just speaks to who we are, and that's the reason we've had success is because that's how we approach every single day.

GABBIE MARSHALL: Yeah, I would just say obviously she has a lot of attention on her all the time and that can bring a lot of pressure, but I think she handles it better than anyone I've ever met. I know if it was me, it would be a lot on me.

I give her props for that, and I think she just comes in every day, every practice and just -- you can just tell how much she loves her teammates and how much she loves her coaches and how much she just loves the game.

So I think that just radiates throughout everything she does. There's no one more deserving than her of everything that she's accomplished.

**Q. This is the last time for you guys that you get to go through an NCAA Tournament. You're both moving on from Iowa after this year. What's the mood like knowing it's different this year, this is the last time you get to try to make a run in the NCAA Tournament?**

CAITLIN CLARK: Honestly, I would say for myself, and I don't know if it's the same for Gab, it doesn't really feel like this is the end for us. I feel like that's not really how we're approaching it.

I feel like we're approaching it like this is very businesslike. We are here to win, get back to the Final Four. I feel like if

you approach it in a way of this is the end, this is our last time playing on our home court, this is our last time hosting, you could get too caught up in the emotions of it.

And sure, you're going to feel the emotions at some point. That's just going it's going to go. I think just approaching it like a businesslike manner and going 1-0 every single day is always what Coach Bluder says.

I think that's the biggest thing, at least for myself, is I understand we're really only guaranteed one more game from here on out, but I think just going out there and having fun and approaching it like you always do, that's what's going to bring you success, and that's what brought us success last year.

You can't be too worried about when it's going to end or how it's going to end. You've just got to enjoy the moments and live in the moments and enjoy the moments and don't let them pass you by.

GABBIE MARSHALL: Obviously I agree with everything she said, but at the same time, we know this is our last tournament, as well, and I think that just brings an extra motivation for the three of us.

I think just knowing that this is the last time we'll go through this together as a team, just make the most of it, give it our all every night we're out there.

**Q. You enter this tournament as a No. 1 seed. Does that create any higher expectations or any additional pressure for you?**

CAITLIN CLARK: No, I would say whether we're a 1 seed, whether we're a 10 seed, it doesn't matter. I feel like this team would have the same expectations of ourselves and what we're capable of. I feel like everybody in our locker room knows what we're capable of.

To be honest, I don't think seeding really matters. It is what it is. That's your draw. It doesn't matter if you have a 1 by your name, doesn't matter if you have a 9 by your name. It doesn't matter. You've got to come and show up and play every single night.

I think our group has great perspective on that. Obviously my sophomore year and a lot of the girls on the team experienced this, too, we got upset by a 10 seed on our home court. Anybody can be beat on any given day. That's just how this tournament works. That's why this tournament is so fun. But also you can beat anybody, too, and that's where you can find a lot of success, and that's what we did last year.

I think our team having that experience is the biggest thing and understanding how this tournament works is good, and more than anything I think just the experience is something we need to lean on. Not everything is going to be perfect. It's how you respond to those moments that's going to lead you to a win.

GABBIE MARSHALL: I think she said it perfectly.

**Q. You don't always get to see the team that you're going to play in person a couple days before. What were your thoughts on Holy Cross last night, and what do you see as a challenge in facing them?**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I think that's exactly right. You usually don't get to see somebody live, especially on your home court, before you're going to play them in the NCAA Tournament.

I think we use that to our advantage. Our team was there before we went and started our scouting report.

Obviously their three-point shooting is really good. In the last five games they're shooting over 38 percent from three. Last night they shot the 3-ball really well, especially Cara McCormack, so we really have to have very good three-point defense.

**Q. You didn't know who you were going to play until last night, so how were you preparing prior to last night earlier in the week?**

LISA BLUDER: We prepared for both. We had scouting reports done on both. We had films done on both. So we were ready for either team. So that was not really an issue.

**Q. You're used to this, but your team has a break between the conference tournament and the NCAA. How has that break been for your team this year?**

LISA BLUDER: It's been really welcomed as far as -- we were exhausted after playing in the Big Ten Tournament and playing three games in less than 48 hours. It took us a while to get our feet back underneath us, mentally and physically.

But now it seems like it's been forever. This week has really been dragging on a little bit. We were hoping we were going to play today, but now with the snowstorm maybe it's good we didn't play today.

It's a situation where we're ready to play. It's been a long time. It'll be almost two weeks since we've played, and we are ready to go.

**Q. I know you mentioned the other day that Molly Davis wasn't necessarily as far along as you had hoped for. Curious on your update on her. Then if she isn't able to go, how important was being able to play with Syd Affolter in the lineup last week and have three games without Molly Davis in the lineup?**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, you're right. I don't know, I haven't seen Molly today. I don't anticipate her playing on Saturday, but if we can get to Monday, we can get some time from her.

But I think having Syd play three games, that helped the team have confidence in her in that position and her -- Syd actually really having a lot of confidence in herself, knowing that she can do it. I have always said I think Syd was the Sixth Player of the Year in this Big Ten, and I think she proved it getting on the all-tournament team in the Big Ten Tournament.

I have no doubt that Syd can do a great job for us, and it was really good to have her play in those three and a half, three and three quarters games that were successful for us beforehand.

**Q. A lot of folks have talked about how your team got a pretty hard draw in the bracket this year. Do you want to comment on that at all, or are you just looking at one game at a time at this point?**

LISA BLUDER: That's absolutely what we're doing. We're looking at one game at a time. To me, this is a two-game tournament this week, and then next week is a two-game tournament. That's how we look at it. We break it into segments.

I'm not even looking at next week. I'm not even concerned about that. I'm concerned about Holy Cross right now, and then if we can get by them that next game. It's not of concern to me.

**Q. Holy Cross was in the NCAA Tournament last year. They've been through the routine, and they're a senior-led team. Does that throw more concern as opposed to playing a young team?**

LISA BLUDER: I mean, anytime a team has experience I think you can draw upon, it's good. I think Maureen has done a great job. I am really impressed with her. I'm impressed with her team. It doesn't surprise me because having somebody that played at Marist under Red Fox there, he was a great coach, so she learned from a really good person.

They're very fundamentally sound. They don't turn the ball over. They shoot the three really well. They really stick to their system. So again, I'm very impressed with her and what she's done with Holy Cross in four years.

**Q. Do they remind you a little bit of your team and the things they want to do, the transition, the threes?**

LISA BLUDER: I hadn't really thought about that. I feel like their offensive style is a little bit different than us as far as what they like to do out of their sets and out of their offense. I feel like that's a little bit different.

But I hope that we're as disciplined as they are because I think they're a very disciplined team.

**Q. What do you expect them to do defensively? It looked like they were in mostly a man yesterday.**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, they don't play much zone at all. We haven't really seen any, so we have seen them only play player to player defense. According to Synergy, they play player-to-player defense 98.9 percent of the time.

**Q. Can you tell us a little bit about the big showdown with the great team last Thursday, how that went down?**

LISA BLUDER: Oh, gosh, you're testing my memory.

**Q. It was a two-point win.**

LISA BLUDER: Okay, there you go. Easy come, easy go. To me, it was really just about executing, about staying sharp with officials, timing, the scoreboard, everything like that going as gamelike as possible. When you have a two-week break, you just don't want to get rusty. That's why we brought the officials in and kind of had a scrimmage. But yeah, I had kind of even forgotten about that.

**Q. When you have possible games every other day during this weekend, does that change the way you rotate your players in at all? In other words, are you going to try to make sure you get enough rest, or is the day off in between enough to not worry about that?**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I'm not going to worry about that too much because the ultimate goal is to win the game, and whatever we have to do to win the game is what we're going to do.

**Q. Any update on Molly?**

LISA BLUDER: I haven't seen her today, and doubtful for

Saturday. I keep trying to remember what day of the week it is. Hoping we'll get something Monday, if we get there.

**Q. In terms of rust, what other things -- you have a scrimmage. First you let them rest, then you have a scrimmage. How else have you spent this time? Do you have rigorous practices? Is there anything you can do to sort of keep them sharp?**

LISA BLUDER: We did a lot of, like, review basically, reviewing all of our sets, our out of bounds plays, our press break. Just did a lot of trying to brush up on everything, all of our fundamentals, working on ball screen defense, those type of things.

Was it hard? I would say we had a hard practice on Wednesday for this time of year. Now it's kind of coasting a little bit for us.

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