

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Maryland vs Iowa State

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Maples Pavilion

Iowa State Cyclones Coach Bill Fennelly Audi Crooks Emily Ryan

Media Conference

Q. You guys had talked a lot about how the season prepped you for the NCAA Tournament. Is there a team that kind of resembles Maryland style-wise?

EMILY RYAN: I feel like it's kind of hard to pinpoint a specific team. I think it's just taking a lot of what we've learned in several different games throughout the Big 12 conference and then preseason, as well, and just kind of putting that all together because Maryland is a really good team. They do what they do really well. So just kind of taking bits and pieces from all the games and trying to use that for this one.

Q. Audi, does post play look like it could be something that you guys lean on heavily in this game as a possible advantage?

AUDI CROOKS: I think that's definitely a possibility. I mean, they're not super, super lengthy down low, but they do like to front and bring backside help. Maybe it'll be a little bit difficult to get it inside, but I think if we do manage to get the ball inside it'll be to our advantage, but also we'll be able to get that inside-outside game going and then they won't be able to bring that double?

Q. Audi, All-American honors, I think you found out yesterday -- before?

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah.

Q. What was that like? What's that accomplishment mean to you?

AUDI CROOKS: It means a lot. It's more than I ever could



have thought for myself, especially in this first year, but I'm just filled with gratitude, and I can't thank my teammates enough because they're the ones who give me the ball, and I can't score without them getting me the ball.

It's really an honor for our entire team and not just me, but I'm grateful and honored to have been chosen.

Q. Emily, you played with Iowa State when it was -- not saying you guys have gone away from the 4 guard shoot-the-ball philosophy, but seeing Maryland and looking back on your team in reflection and seeing what Audi has been able to do this year, how much does it excite you to go into March Madness with how your team is set up and how dominant she's been?

EMILY RYAN: Yeah, Audi obviously has been incredible this year. That's just a credit to the work she's put in and how she prepares. But having that inside presence is huge, especially it's just something that is so consistent down low and just an anchor on our offense and also defensively.

Just having that stability down low is huge, and knowing we can lean on her and she's going to do her part day in and day out is really special.

Q. Audi, everyone I've talked to has kind of -- you're kind of the vibes girl on the team from what I hear. Everyone has kind of said the vibes this week have felt different than in years past and everyone is really excited. What's it like to see that and be down here in Stanford?

AUDI CROOKS: Sure, yeah. This is my first run at this so I can't speak for what it's been like in previous years, but I think everybody is fired up, ready to go, excited for the possibilities. This year we've grown tremendously just in the things we've been able to accomplish, and nobody really thought that we could. I just think that we have two really solid feet to stand on, and we're going to give it our best shot.

Q. Emily, does it feel any different than in years past? Is there a uniqueness to this group?



EMILY RYAN: Yeah, every year is different, and this is just a completely different squad to be around than what we've had in the past. It's a fun group to be around, and we just make sure we take every step along the way and enjoy the moment we're in. I think that's what's special about this team is we're enjoying the journey more so than the destination, and that's something that makes showing up every day really fun.

Every day we show up to practice high energy and we just make sure it's a good time and we get work done when we need to, and then we enjoy our time with each other when we're not.

Q. You're coming off two top-20 wins in the Big 12 tournament. What can your team take away from that run into this tournament?

EMILY RYAN: Yeah, I think we had a lot of momentum going into the tournament and then we played well throughout the tournament. It didn't end exactly how we wanted, but I think we can still ride that momentum going forward and just keep that going. Like Coach always says, when you do something right you want to replicate that and duplicate that as much as possible and then when something doesn't go well you want to minimize the amount of times you do that.

I think for us it's just a matter of staying in the moment and trying to win each play.

Q. What's something your team has to do well to win tomorrow?

AUDI CROOKS: In order for us to do well tomorrow, I think we really have to focus on execution. There have been a couple games where it's been close and we've had lapses or slow starts, and we can't have that. This is March, and everybody is trying to win, and anything is possible. We have to be in our P's and Q's and really execute our game plan.

Q. Tell us about somebody who's not on the podium today who will have a really big impact in the game tomorrow.

EMILY RYAN: I think you can go down our roster and pinpoint pretty much everyone and say that they'll have a huge role in how tomorrow goes. I think that's kind of been the theme of our season is that it's been really fun that it's not always just one person or one or two people that carry the load. It's been a whole team effort, and any given night it can be anyone's night. People that aren't up here right now, there's going to be a lot of them that are game

changers and also some people that might not be on the floor but have prepared us really well going into the game, A-Willie, Shan, they always work really hard on scout team for us, and their work doesn't always get the glory that it deserves, but they're super well-appreciated by the team and the coaching staff. Even though they don't always get the glory on game days, they're the ones that prepare us so well, so we're lucky to have them, as well.

AUDI CROOKS: For sure. I think you could really shout out anybody, but somebody that I really want to highlight is Arianna Jackson. I think she's been a defensive menace, an absolute menace this year for other teams, and any assignment she's been given, she's taken that with grace and handled to the best of her abilities, and like Emily said we could shout out every one of our players, but I kind of want to give her her flowers.

Q. Have you gotten any special shout outs or well wishes from fans or anyone else heading into the tournament?

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah, I've heard a lot from Cyclone Nation. Our family and our friends are always behind us. Been in contact with just a lot of different people, a lot of different walks of life.

EMILY RYAN: Liz Cambage.

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah, that's my girl.

EMILY RYAN: Yeah, Cyclone Nation is always behind us. Even though we're a little ways from home, you can always feel their presence and their support, and that's what's so special about Cyclone Nation is that regardless of where we are, we know they're behind us and supporting us all the way.

Q. Is this your first time out in California? I don't think you've played a college game out here.

EMILY RYAN: Yeah, I've never been in California before, definitely never played in California. It's fun to see different place and experience different things.

AUDI CROOKS: Neither have I, so first time for both of us.

Q. Purpose 13-2 at home this year and 7-9 away from home. What makes it hard to win away from home, and have you made any adjustments that will help you -- that you've made throughout the season that will help you this weekend?

EMILY RYAN: Yeah, I think anytime you're playing on the road, it's definitely tougher, especially when we know we



have such a huge crowd for us when we're at home. It makes playing in Hilton really special and a huge advantage for us. But Big 12 is a really tough conference, and we say it all the time, it's hard to win in the Big 12 but especially hard to win on the road in the Big 12. I think that's something we've grown a lot in as the season has gone on. We got a huge road win down the stretch in Manhattan, Kansas, and that was huge for us going into the Big 12 tournament.

I think if we can just continue to ride that momentum, we'll be good going into this tournament.

AUDI CROOKS: I second that.

Q. Bill, when you look at the matchup, is Audi a possible mismatch that you can utilize in this game?

BILL FENNELLY: Well, we hope so, yeah. I think Audi has had obviously a phenomenal year and played a lot against a lot of great players. Maryland has got great perimeter length but maybe not as big inside as some of the other teams we've played.

That's what makes this tournament unique and special is the matchups that you don't see a lot during the year that we're going to see tomorrow.

Q. Prep-wise does this remind you of a team that you've had already this season?

BILL FENNELLY: What we tried to do was give our players comps from every team that we played to give them an idea.

The staff kind of looked at it as they play just like Baylor, just like Texas, they play fast like Oklahoma. We tried to do it as recent as we could.

I don't know that it's one team. I think we tried to identify, again, player comps to give them some insight because obviously we haven't played them.

I think our players understand that and embrace that idea.

Q. What were some of the other comps, that this was what Baylor did, this was what Oklahoma did --

BILL FENNELLY: I think the biggest thing for us was Maryland does such a really good job of really attacking the basket. They offensive rebound. They get to the free-throw line. Those are things that we've struggled with at times.

Defensively we play a style that really we have not seen,

some pressure, a lot of switching off the ball, on the ball. They're very hard to really get a grasp on where they're going to be at times. We have not seen that style in our league. So I think that's something that's a little different for us.

We've tried to manage that in practice.

But I think the biggest thing is for all of us, you get to this point, coaches especially, you overthink everything, and so you've just got to play the way you play and take care of yourself a little bit more and hopefully don't try and reinvent yourself just because you got to this point. Hopefully we've done a decent job of preparing that way.

Q. One person we haven't asked you about all year is Williams. What have you seen from her while she's been redshirting, and what do you envision for her?

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, Willie has done a good job. She took the redshirt year and she's been a really great teammate. She fit in really well. She can play a lot of different places. I think she'll give us some depth in certain spots.

But been a really good addition in a world where you never know what your roster construction is going to be about. I think the number one thing, she's a really good person and has fit in with our team immediately, and from a basketball standpoint, she's a little undersized for a 5, but she's left-handed, she's got some stuff around the basket. We've worked with her on her three-point shot again like when we recruited her out of high school. She's going to be a really good addition to our team on the court, but she's already been a huge addition as a teammate.

Q. You guys are going into this game -- obviously with how Audi has progressed this year, you've seen this in regular games, but I've covered your team for however many years now, and so many times we heard that Iowa State is disadvantageous in the post going into this one. What's it like going into an NCAA Tournament game knowing you've got the favored post position player of the two squads?

BILL FENNELLY: Well, obviously any spot you feel you have a slight advantage is a good thing, but then all you see or hear on TV is the NCAA Tournament is all about guards. So I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing.

Again, we've gotten here because of the way we've played as a group, and obviously Audi has been a huge part of that. But you've just got to go into the game and decide -- get a good read early on how they're going to guard her.



Some teams really go at it and double her in front and all that stuff, and other teams have done it differently.

That's the number one thing is when we go into the game is just make sure that we have an idea and have a couple different options depending on how they want to defend her.

Q. Obviously without revealing game plan stuff, how do you attack Maryland early and try to avoid them getting out to a big lead on the other end?

BILL FENNELLY: I think especially with the way they defend and the way they switch, you've just got to be really careful. The term that we use a lot is see the play before you make it, and so we've talked about that. We've talked about simplifying some things as far as how we run our offense, some of the stuff that we want to do.

But again, I keep going back to the same thing, but you've just got to play the way you play. We've gotten -- we played this way 31 times, and we're here because of the way we've played, and again, I don't want our kids to think, well, now that we got here, now we've got to play different or we have to do things that we're not normally doing. That makes no sense to me.

I've always told them, it's great to be picked to play for the NCAA Tournament. It's more fun to play in it, so let's go play in it, and you're playing in a facility and at a university that's on the Mount Rushmore of women's basketball at Stanford. Playing a great Big Ten team in Maryland.

Yeah, our kids had a really good time to -- they get here and they get to sit by the pool, and it's a cool thing. Like I told them, I just told them, thank you for getting me here because besides Christmas with my grandkids, it doesn't get better than this. I'm going to enjoy it, too.

Q. I asked you this at the start of the year at media day, but you've had the whole season to look at it. It sounded like coming into the year it was a pretty tight-knit group chemistry-wise. You've seen that grow and grow over the past 30 games, and it sounds like every day it grows a little bit more. What's it been like seeing this team come together coming into this last stretch?

BILL FENNELLY: No, I would tell you that it is -- every team changes, and when this season ends, one of the things I'll tell them is you can't replicate what this team is about.

I think they've handled themselves with amazing grace. They've done everything that we've asked them to do.

They've enjoyed each other.

Yeah, when you're together -- today's practice No. 131, I think, and you lift weights and you travel and -- think about your own family. You go on vacation with your family for a week, and you're like, man, I've got to go back to work, get away from these people. It's just been amazing.

I don't know that I ever thought this would happen again really in my career, based on the way the world is and the way the portal is and the way people view -- and again, it's not perfect. But it's been pretty close. That's a credit to them. It's a credit to their parents. It's a credit to -- and I would say this, again, and you guys have heard me say it, and I need to keep saying it. My staff has done a best job they've ever done, ever. It's been hard in a lot of ways.

But it's been a lot of fun, and I'm just glad they get to experience this because there's a lot of people -- there's a lot of people sitting at home that aren't in the NCAA Tournament, and they did that -- they earned that right, and it's been fun to see them get to this point.

Q. What do you know about your counterpart Coach Frese on the other bench?

BILL FENNELLY: What do I know about her? Brenda is part of my family. Obviously everyone knows she was on our staff when we first started at Iowa State. Her sister Stacey is one of the best players to ever play for us.

Brenda is going to be in the Basketball Hall of Fame. What she's done at Maryland is incredible. The unique combination of absolute hardworking grinder with a passion that goes with it. I'm so proud of her and what she's done.

Our program is one that I think is pretty good and has been good, but we're not where we are today without Brenda Frese, and that's a fact.

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