

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Kent State vs Notre Dame

Friday, March 22, 2024

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Purcell Pavilion

## Notre Dame Fighting Irish Niele Ivey

Head Coach

Media Conference

MODERATOR: All right. We'll now open it up to questions to Head Coach Niele Ivey. Just a clarification from the last one, if you would like to record audio, you're welcome to do that, just don't record video recording on cell phones is not allowed, so thank you.

**Q. Kurt, Associated Press. I have a couple of questions. Doug Feinberg wanted me to ask, he's doing a feature on coaches who are coaching at their alma mater. Did you ever think you would be doing this when you were playing, or did you have another career path?**

NIELE IVEY: No, this is a dream. I didn't realize that coaching was going to be my next step after playing professionally, so when I got into coaching, I never would imagine my first head coaching job would be here at my alma mater, so I'm blessed.

**Q. What was it like when you got the job? Is it more rewarding or is there more pressure, more challenging being at your alma mater?**

NIELE IVEY: For sure taking over in COVID and the pandemic was really challenging and so that was an adjustment for me. My press conference was via Zoom so not the traditional first year head coach and then the year after, it was NIL and the transfer portal, so I came in the climate of athletics was changing the year that I had this opportunity, so I've adjusted to it. And then the expectation of this program and also following a legend, so I've adjusted to it, again, it's a blessing but it's definitely different from what a first-time head coach would have to experience.

**Q. Tyler Horka. I'm curious what you remember about the 2018 run to the national championship game.**



Similar roster numbers that you guys had then, so do you draw on how you guys managed that and kind of implement some of those things into this run and just whatever your overall thoughts of maybe only having six players that you can rely on?

NIELE IVEY: Right, well, we're at a time that it's just survive and advance, so no matter how many numbers we have, you have to come prepared, ready to play. For me, I do have the blueprint of what we did during that year as far as practice, performance, recovery, so I have an idea of those type of things that I implemented those things. Unfortunately we had a very similar situation last year, so understanding what this team needs. I've just pivoted from the Virginia Tech game, losing Kylee, just have had to pivot, change roles, you know, started a new starter, so when things happen this way, things you can't control, you just have to pivot, so that's what I've done. I try to lean on those experiences of what I've learned as an assistant in that year.

**Q. And speaking of last year, I asked Soni what it was like to kind of be the point guard and do-it-all player and she explicitly said I'm not a point guard.**

NIELE IVEY: (Laughter).

**Q. This year you have one, and one of the best ones in the country, so I'm curious what's that like going into the tournament knowing you have a player that's going to handle the ball every single possession and you have confidence in her to do that.**

NIELE IVEY: Yes, absolutely, I think it takes pressure off of our guards for sure. Last year was -- I had to manipulate the offense for KK and Soni to run the point. This year I have a true point guard who happens to be a great scorer, and a great defender, so it definitely takes a lot of pressure off of our guards. Hannah has led us the entire season, so she has that experience now. This is her first time in the NCAA so it's going to be a little bit different for her, but she has a lot of support around her and Soni and KK also help back up the point, so we managed it the past couple of weeks and months. I'm looking forward to going out there and seeing us play.



**Q. Coach, I -- with the limits numbers I imagine practice is even more challenging, but I know that you have a way of practicing even when you have a full roster. Can you talk about how you prepare for teams both with a full roster and with this limited roster?**

NIELE IVEY: Yes. Everything is purposeful for this limited roster. I still do the same concepts, you know, I'm really big on player development. I always find time within practice to work on individual skill work, guard, forward-type position work. You know, my practice is always energetic, so I'm always trying to cultivate energy within the drills I do. With a full roster, without a full roster, you just have to be smarter. Some things you have to do more half-court. I try to limit full-court activity when it's closer to the games. Luckily, before today, we've had opportunities, practice guys that can help us compete and takes a lot of reps off of our seven that are active, so I just try to implement things, concepts that's going to help us, but also be very intentional with the number that we have.

Now, early on, when I had a full roster, I can get up and down more, I can do a lot of things more, practices could have been a lot longer. Now practices are shortened just because once we get the reps, I move on.

**Q. How many practice guys do you have and how do you find the right people for that?**

NIELE IVEY: Right. We have a rotation of 10 or 12 guys that are committed to our program that help us now. They have different requirements as far as academics and classes and exams so sometimes we don't have the same guys, but we have like a rotation of 10 to 12 and they're awesome. They come to all the games. Sometimes they travel to our games. A lot of programs in the country have practice players that help, so I'm very fortunate that I have a group that's committed to help us.

**Q. Nat Marshall started her career here injured and then it seemed like it was a struggle to become a contributing player just through the injuries. What's the year been like for her and what makes you optimistic about her best basketball going forward?**

NIELE IVEY: Well, this has been her healthiest year. So even coming into this season, I'm so proud of her for going through a lot of adversity, like you mentioned. She came in, recovering from an ACL from her senior year in high school, and as you saw her early in the season, she was just playing her best basketball, very confident, but also just making an impact consistently. And so now, you know, I think her stepping into this role, she's prepared, she's ready. She's maximizing this opportunity and I

thought she was fantastic in the ACC championship game.

**Q. Anthony Anderson, South Bend Tribune. Niele, Soni said that she has to play conscious of the foul situation, especially with the limited depth. How well have your players done with that this year? Very limited qualifications in games and how mindful will they have to be, if it's even different in the tournament this week.**

NIELE IVEY: Right, let me knock on some wood on that, but, yeah, they're very conscious about defending without fouling. We've been working with that for a while. You know, we had a game at Pitt that we dealt with a lot of foul trouble back in January and we really adjusted from that. That was an example for us that we have to defend without fouling. It's definitely something you have to adjust to in the game. We talk about that a lot. I throw in a little bit of two-three zone to try to help us, but you have to see how the officials are calling the game and you have to adjust. I think my team is very, very smart, very experienced so they understand what's at stake as far as us having a lower roster number where we can't afford to be in foul trouble, so just praying that that continues.

**Q. And my second question, unrelated, Megan arrived here a couple of years -- a year or two after you were done but I'm curious how well do you know each other, and how meaningful or cool is it that there's two Notre Dame alums coaching here this weekend?**

NIELE IVEY: Right. Well, just knowing her from being alum and some of our alumni events, yeah, I think it's really cool to have another Notre Dame alum here and also their AD graduated from Notre Dame, so I think there's a lot of Notre Dame ties, which is also amazing. (Smiling).

**Q. Kurt, AP. Your players had a meeting they called among themselves after the NC State game. It wasn't looking that maybe you'd be here. What did you -- what did that say about your players as far as you were concerned and what did you see got you here to this point?**

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, I mean, just credit to our leaders. Maddy, Soni just stepped up and just talked about them getting together to try to figure out things that they can get better at as a unit. We were dealing with a lot of inconsistency in our play and that was obviously a really tough loss at home, and so they kind of put a mirror to their face, I put a mirror to their face right after as well, kind of talked about what we needed to do to fix this and to get better.

We had a road game at Duke, a big Monday game two or

three days later from that NC State game, and we had to bounce back, we had to find a way to find cohesiveness and I thought that meeting was great and sometimes you need that, you need redirection, refocus and I feel like they did that and everybody kind of stepped up and instead of being more one-on-one or just not even one-on-one but they did a great job of finding way to come together and I think that's where the progression of our season ended is in a positive direction because of them putting a mirror to their face and just recognizing things they need to fix and need to get better so I'm proud of our leaders for doing that.

MODERATOR: Any additional questions? All right. Thank you very much, coach Ivey.

NIELE IVEY: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Just as a note for everybody, the first 15 minutes of Notre Dame's practice will be open to the media beginning at 11:30. Hammond communications will post a recording of this press conference in the NCAA digital media hub at [ncaa.veritone.com](http://ncaa.veritone.com). Transcripts are provided by ASAP and will be posted shortly. Thank you for joining us.

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