

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Four - Princeton vs Iowa State

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Purcell Pavilion

Iowa State Cyclones Coach Bill Fennelly

Media Conference



MODERATOR: With that we welcome in Iowa State Cyclones' Head Coach Bill Fennelly. Your opening statement?

BILL FENNELLY: Obviously an honor to be here. This is, for us, for me the greatest sporting event there is and to be part of it is great and certainly want to thank all the great folks at Notre Dame for all their work and everyone else, can't wait to play tomorrow.

Q. Bill, what kind of stood out to you on film about Princeton?

BILL FENNELLY: I think the biggest thing for us is their balance, offense and defense. They don't have anything that jumps off the page. All their numbers are really good and they probably would be even better, they played a little slower pace but their numbers are, they can defend it a number of different ways so very impressed with what they do, how they do it and certainly presents a great challenge for our team.

Q. Is it the slowest pace you have seen this year compared to anybody?

BILL FENNELLY: Um, good question. It's one of the slower paces that we've faced. We don't see a lot of that in our league but the efficiency that they play with reminds me a lot of like a Utah kind of team and obviously we watched that and saw them play a really good Utah team really close, so it's a challenging thing for our team because we don't see that a lot, so you have to understand that going into it and hopefully... that's what's great about this tournament. You see a lot of different styles, different situations and hopefully we're ready for it.

Q. How you kind of combat it knowing it's not what you guys do?

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, you can't -- we're not a team that's going to force them. We're not going to press them and make them do different things I think sometimes when you get into these events, sometimes you get... you overthink it. There's a reason you got here. Just play our game and it comes down to who is going to make a shot. A lot of times the officiating is different. You see new people so how is the game officiated? A venue you haven't played in. My place is the place won't be packed tomorrow so you have to create your own energy in that regard. But I think the bottom line is you want your players to enjoy it. Sometimes you get... I have made that mistake many times where you get so crazy about everything that you don't get to enjoy all the stuff that goes with it, so let's just a reason you're here, play that way and hopefully it's good enough.

Q. Offensively do you feel like you guys are in a good rhythm maybe over the last five or six games whatever?

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, our offense has been okay. When we don't turn the ball over, we have some kids that can score. Obviously I think our balance has been better lately. You're right, the time off has been really hard to manage this is the first time we have really had to do it this length of time so we tried to balance practice and time off and not bore them to tears doing the same thing all the time, so our kids have handled it really, really well. Just so proud of the way they have managed themselves all year so hopefully we'll be ready to go.

Q. I was talking to Kenzie a little bit ago so random for you, how would you rate, like, toughness and also just what type of impact she could have had for you guys?

BILL FENNELLY: I think the two things I would say, she's one of the tougher kids I have been around. I didn't get to coach her long but when you hear the doctors talk about the severity of the surgery, I bet football players wouldn't have played through that. She's one tough you-know-what and it would have dramatically impacted our team. She's skilled, she's tough, she can score, she can defend. She's been in this situation before as an NCAA player, so, but it

was by far the best decision for her long-term, not just basketball. You don't want someone who is 30 to 35 years old can't get out of bed and can't pick up their kids and can't do the things you want to do. It had to be done and to our medical team's credit, our doctors, I think she's in a good spot and she'll be ready to go next year.

Q. Connor Ferguson. Coach, felt like some things kind of clicked for you guys in the final ten games or so and you really ramped up to this point in the season on a good note. Do you think your team is playing its best basketball right now?

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, I would say yes. You can look at things you didn't do or did do but I think overall we've played really well in February. Leading into March, I think we played a really good Big 12 tournament. Our only loss is to Baylor twice and they're very, very good. And I think our team probably kind of played through some things, you know, when you're in a collegiate basketball model that is everyone needs to get older and older, we got younger and I think that's my fault. I think our roster construction could have been a little bit better but I really liked what we had coming back and liked what we added and I didn't feel like we needed something else but I think when you're a the-end-of-the-year sophomore, you're a little bit better than the beginning-of-the-year-sophomore. It might not be that simple but I think for our team, and managing Emily Ryan's minutes have been a chore for everyone but, yes, I would say we're probably playing as well as we can play.

Q. Obviously you hope for that, too, to play as well as you can or the best you can go into this tournament, but I guess you had a lot of these. Is that typically the case for your teams? Is this different? Is this a big advantage this year? Where would you put that on the sliding scale? I know that's kind of a weird question.

BILL FENNELLY: No, I don't - there's no such thing as a weird question. I have had a lot of questions so don't worry about it. I have four grandkids, too, so don't worry about it. There have been times that we probably haven't been playing great. We played great and limped it in. This year I think we are playing as well as we can play. You know me, I'm a baseball guy. Momentum is as good as the next day's starting pitcher. If we don't play well tomorrow, it's not because we weren't playing well, it's probably because Princeton played better. But our kids are really excited and looking forward to it. I told them, this is the greatest sporting event there is and we are the very first game of the NCAA tournament and I think that's cool. We're looking forward to it and we had... I really want to thank the folks at St. Mary's they let us practice there yesterday. I was there a long, long time yesterday. My youngest son

was born in South Bend so that's kind of cool for us, so it's been fun. We're looking forward to playing. It's been a long time since we played a game. It's time to play. Time to play.

Q. And you talked about turnovers and trying to limit those at the same time having Kelsey Joens in the role she's in. How impactful is it in these types of units?

BILL FENNELLY: It can be real impactful. Of course when you get to this part of the season, everything is so magnified and there's a lot of games that can be changed, won, lost, by hustle play. It doesn't appear in the stat sheet. Starting in the tournament and there's a loss ball here and there and Kelsey does that, yeah, we get a little loose with the ball. Some of the decisions you make, I told my trainer can we test them to see if we're colorblind or something? I don't know what we're doing. It's like life. If you don't think it's a good decision, don't do it. All right? It's midnight, okay? You're going to a party. Maybe it's not a good idea to make that decision. Do something else. It's like, I don't know, they don't lose their phone, they don't lose anything but the ball doesn't seem to be as important -- sorry. (Laughter) No, when we take care of the ball, we can score. When we don't take care of the ball, we get a little bit crazy and defensively we're not one of those teams that's going to overpower you so we better value the ball a little more than we do at times.

Q. Hi, Caitlin, ESPN. Thanks, Coach, for your time. Curious, to be one of only 15 teams to make the last six NCAA tournaments and to have that kind of longevity, what's the secret? Especially with the transfer portal and NIL and all these various things, how do you maintain that level and standard of excellence?

BILL FENNELLY: Thank you for the question. I would say the simplest answer and the people who cover me know I'm pretty much to the point. I get in trouble a lot because I say what I think. At this point in my career, what are you going to do?

Q. It's midnight, you're going to the party? (Laughter).

BILL FENNELLY: It's real close. It's real close going to the part, yes. I think there's really three simple things and it's facts. I have phenomenal administration from my president down. They value women's basketball. They don't value it because they have to. They value it because they want to. I have had a staff with me and the last two years they could not have done a better job than what they've done. We have been very fortunate to have really good players but really good players that understand us and Iowa state. We want to embrace who we are and not apologize for

who we're not. We're not for everyone. With our fan base, that was the one thing I told my players. Think about that. 15 teams, six in a row, not 155, obviously you don't if you're going to be in... you can't assume it's going to happen. For some of our players it's the first time. For Emily Ryan it's her fifth time. On my calendar is Selection Sunday, March 15th. Besides Christmas, Selection Sunday, and St. Patrick's day is the best day for me. We love everything about it and we have fun doing it. We practice hard. Hilton Garden Inn was phenomenal. They were so gracious, blooms and treats. That was fantastic. Thank you to them.

Q. Coach, despite the fact that you have been in that elite company, Audi was up here and said the team often feels like they're overlooked or not talked about in the same conversation. For people it would be --

BILL FENNELLY: Audi said that? She gets talked about all the time. There isn't anybody who gets talked about more than Audi. Yeah. I get it.

Q. That being said. People who have tuned in for the first time for March madness, what do you hope they take away when they watch this Iowa State team. What do you want them to know about you guys and the program?

BILL FENNELLY: What I want them to see hopefully is a team that plays really hard, plays the game the right way and plays the game with a sense of joy and appreciation that... I don't want them all upset and fighting, especially now. Every coach in the country is going to say everyone is going to lose at some point except for the team that wins the whole thing. I told them this morning, I said this is a really special time in your life, a very special group of people, but it's going to end. Not just the season but people in our locker room may never talk to each other again, trainers, managers. I just don't want them to take that for granted. We talk about the Iowa State way in our place. I just want them to see it and enjoy it and play as hard as we can for the folks back home who will be watching and watch our guys on Friday.

MODERATOR: With that, we have a question on Zoom from Jen Hatfield.

Q. I just wanted to follow up with the questions about Princeton real quick. You mentioned their balance and pace and I'm just curious if it's one of those things or maybe something else that's tough to prepare for about them specifically on that quick turnaround.

BILL FENNELLY: I think the biggest challenge for us is to stay locked in defensively because they're going to run the

clock, they're going to run their stuff. If you break down, you're going to give up an open three, you're going to give up -- the thing that they do really well, because of their pace, they offensively rebound really well and the number doesn't show that, historically we have been a team that's very personnel driven and scatter report but I don't know that we have one person or two. I think they all have the ability to score so historically that's been a problem for us, so we've got to do a little bit better job of that and hopefully that'll be... and then when you get into this, it's a special situation, in bounds play, late shot clock stuff, all those things that coaches talk about all the time the players ignore become really big now and hopefully we'll be good there.

MODERATOR: Anybody else? We have time for one more question. Okay. Coach, thank you so much for your candor and levity.

BILL FENNELLY: Appreciate all your time, man. Enjoy yourself.

MODERATOR: Final reminder that Hammond Communications will post a recording of this press conference at ncaabaritone.com, and transcripts are provided by ASAP and will be posted shortly.

