

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

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Purcell Pavilion

## Princeton Tigers

## Fadima Tall

## Skye Belker

### Media Conference



**Q. Is there anything in particular - you mention that chemistry - that you guys have done? Any fun things, both maybe at practice or outside of basketball that has helped you guys really create and cement that chemistry?**

FADIMA TALL: Yeah, we hang around each other a lot. We are in the same class so we have that little... we're always together. We're eating meals together a lot. We're all in the same eating club we call them, like we're always in each other's company. I think that just translates to on the court because we can have those hard convos when someone's like not giving us 100% or we can have those compliments that not everyone else would understand.

**Q. Not many people can say they have an NCAA national champion as a coach, so to have that presence in the locker room all the time, at practice, what have you gained? Have you asked questions about that experience? Have you guys gotten into that at all and been able to tap into any of that as you guys start to make your run here in the tournament?**

SKYE BELKER: We actually haven't asked her about it a lot, but maybe we will. I think the biggest thing we learn from her is preparation. I think for every single game we prepare a lot and we're focused and I think she holds us accountable on how to stay focused for every single game, no matter how big... I mean, every game is big but treating every game the same. I think being under her and always coming prepared with a lot of intensity and a lot of focus on details is really important and something that she emphasizes a lot, that we definitely bring.

**Q. The great thing about NCAA Tournaments and March Madness is that it attracts a lot of new viewers and a lot of people who are excited about the tournament and will be watching you guys for the first time this season. For those viewers who have just tuning in and are late to the party because they should have been watching all season, what is it that you would like them to take away from the team? What do you want them to know about you guys, both as individuals and as a team that they can leave saying**

MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you, again, everybody, for coming out. It is time for the Princeton Tigers joined by Fadima Tall and Skye Belker. Before we get into some questions for the student-athletes, just a reminder, again, if you weren't here earlier, please silence your cell phones, please provide your name and media affiliation prior to asking any questions. Also if you're joining us via Zoom, please use the raise hand function for questions. We're going to address questions in-house before we get to the Zoom calls. Photographs are welcome but please no flash photography. And lastly, recording press conferences on cell phones or cameras is prohibited as well. So with that said, we can open up the floor to questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Hi, Kaitlin with ESPN. A lot has been talked about this sophomore class that you guys are a part of and obviously a crucial part to the success that you guys have had this season. So I'm curious, how much have you seen yourselves grow throughout the season and what do you think is the biggest thing that you've improved upon or learned over the course of the year?**

FADIMA TALL: Yeah, I feel like just becoming more mature and growing as placers has been our number one goal. I think we have been getting better at that as the season goes on. I think we're playing a little bit smarter than we did when we first started starting together so that's a big improvement that we worked on together.

SKYE BELKER: Yeah, I think taking care of the ball and making sure that we're playing at our pace in the games too. Early on we had to build our chemistry. I mean, we have a lot of chemistry off the court so building that on the court takes some time and now I feel like we finally have that clicking.



**yeah, this defines the Princeton Tigers?**

FADIMA TALL: Yeah, really want them to be able to say that they watched the game and that we played really hard, we were like after all these 50/50 balls. We were getting those rebounds, we were making the right passes. They can say we gave our all genuinely, I feel like that's a win for us.

SKYE BELKER: Yeah I think also, like, wow, that's some good basketball too, making great plays for coach other, not just going one-on-one but being a great team in general I think is super important to our team and something that, viewers, we want them to see.

**Q. Okay. Looking across the court now, when you guys started to watch your tape and break down Iowa State, what is it that jumps out to you? What do you think is going to be the most difficult part of their game to defend tomorrow?**

FADIMA TALL: I think they got some pretty good post players in there. I think it's definitely a different team than we've played in the Ivy League so far, so being able to adapt to what they have and perform the same scout and adapt to how they're playing the game will be, like, not the hardest thing for us but I think they're our main goal.

SKYE BELKER: Yeah, making sure we execute and stick with our plan and play with our pace is going to be a huge key for us.

**Q. You guys just coming off finishing up your tournament run, they've been sitting out for over a week now, do you feel like that's an advantage, that you have your game legs underneath you and will be coming right back into play?**

FADIMA TALL: Yeah, we just lost, so I think we're ready to win now.

SKYE BELKER: Yeah, what she said.

MODERATOR: Any questions for those in attendance in person before we go over to Zoom? Okay. With that, we'll turn things over first to Steve Silverman.

**Q. Thanks, can you hear me okay? Great. Just to follow up on that last question about your motivation for this game, you know, you guys had certainly a goal coming into this system to win the Ivy League and you weren't able quite to get over that hump. Then it was to win the Ivy League Tournament. That didn't quite happen either. Can you guys talk a little bit about the motivation you have to make a run in this tournament**

**as a way to still accomplish some extremely important goals for the season, for yourself and for the team?**

SKYE BELKER: Yeah, I think part of being in the Ivy League and coming into these tournaments, a lot of people see us as the underdogs and so we want to prove that we're competing at the highest level and that we play at the highest level and we obviously didn't get the outcome that we wanted this year in the Ivy League, but I think that even with that said, we're still prepared and still focused on making a run in this tournament.

FADIMA TALL: Yeah, our coach mentioned how this is a new start for us, this is like a new season and we want to keep on playing for our seniors like it has been our goal from day one.

**Q. You made a pretty pointed comment a minute ago about how you lost in that Ivy League Tournament and now you're ready to win and that's different than last year, right? Last year you guys cut down the nets twice, came into the NCAA Tournament with that kind of momentum. Is it a different kind of momentum when you're coming off a loss that you're hungry to immediately avenge that loss even if the opponent isn't the same?**

SKYE BELKER: I think so. I think both ways we always find a way to fuel ourselves before a game so coming off a win, playing with great confidence but I think even after this loss, we still have confidence in ourselves and we're now hungry to show that we are a winning team and get some dubs in this run.

**Q. And can I just ask you guys in all candor, were you surprised when you saw your name come up on Sunday? I think it's been widely reported that Princeton was the last team in the tournament. Uh know when we were all at the Ivy League Tournament together we were all hopeful that this would happen but three ivy teams making it into the tournament, that's never happened before and I know you guys were aware of that as well. In all candor, were you surprised or were you expecting to get this validation?**

FADIMA TALL: Yeah, I think having a three-bid ivy, that was the goal on almost everyone's heads. Surprised, I wouldn't say surprised. It was more excitement. You always get excited when you see your name pop up so like we're ready to play. I think we knew that we're lucky to be here but we also earned our spot here. Yes, our final games didn't go the way we wanted to but I think we did earn our spot so hearing that was some really good validation for us.

SKYE BELKER: Yeah, we kept refreshing that Bracketology. We saw our names were still there in the morning so we were kind of hopeful that it'd stay.

**Q. Then last thing for me, guys, just looking ahead a little bit here to Iowa State tomorrow, I know you mentioned one of you just a moment ago, that they're not necessarily similar to any team you've played in the Ivy League this year, but are they like anybody? Do they remind you in any way of a team that maybe you played in the non-conference and if so, is there any take away from any of those previous match-ups that you can bring to this match-up tomorrow?**

FADIMA TALL: Yeah, maybe Middle Tennessee-esque. Really good post players surrounded but some shooters. I think maybe just, like, that same intensity we gave that defense carried over to this game.

SKYE BELKER: Yeah, I think maybe also like last year somewhat Oklahoma-esque, in that they have a lot of great shooters around them. We're watching film, we're preparing for this team, so.

**Q. And then last... I promise, last item from me. A lot is being made already of a similarity in just the starting lineups. You guys typically start four sophomores and a senior, well, interestingly, they do too. Four sophomores and a senior. I'm just wondering do you see some of yourselves in this team or is that just coincidental and is this really going to be a match-up of contrast rather than similarities?**

FADIMA TALL: There's some similarities I think having that one, like, big leader on the court, their point guard but our post players, that similarity is very office and then having four hard workers surrounding them. They don't have the same maturity they might have but work the same amount as them.

**Q. Thank you, guys.**

**Q. Another one from me, sorry. How do you guys simulate an Audi Crooks in practice? How do you manage to find someone to performance that function so you can practice against that kind of a post player?**

SKYE BELKER: We have some great post players on our team so we have had a lot step up in that role and just be aggressive, taking the shots that Audi would take and so we have been playing each other, but all year long we have also had male practice players come in and play us so we have played, again, some bigger and stronger players as well.

FADIMA TALL: Shout out Paige.

MODERATOR: And then back to Zoom with Jen Hatfield.

**Q. Hey, Skye. Hey, Fadima, I just got a couple for you. Following up kind of on Steve's question about selection Sunday but zooming out a little bit, can you walk me through what the past few days have been like for you guys after the Harvard loss? First waiting to hear your name called and once your name was called, that quick turnaround to get here?**

FADIMA TALL: Yeah, I think we knew we were going to be playing this week in either tournament so we were ready to keep playing, it was just a matter of where we were going. We did find out really late, of course, and with the playing games always a quick turnaround so I think we're all like a little bit... stayed up maybe a little bit too late that night, but we got back on our feet.

SKYE BELKER: Yeah, we had to pack real quick and wake up and go but just, I think once you find out, just getting ready, already excited to watch film, excited to make sure our bodies are taken care of and getting ready to go.

**Q. And on that note, how does it feel to get to lead off the tournament here? You guys are the very first game.**

SKYE BELKER: Yeah, it's exciting. Obviously we we'd like the automatic qualifier in the future, but we're excited to play and get this opportunity and I think we're coming off a game so we're still prepared, still in that game mindset and we're ready to go and give this last stretch of the season a good run.

FADIMA TALL: Yep.

**Q. Carla talked to us yesterday about how you guys are all treating this as a new season and you mentioned that a little bit earlier too, but just for each of you, how did you guys personally reset yourselves or process that loss and move on in such a quick timeframe?**

FADIMA TALL: Yeah, I think just in basketball you can't hold on to a loss for too long, so I think after that, maybe the day after, we already had forgotten about it, so just like a new game coming up.

SKYE BELKER: Yeah, just like a mental reset.

**Q. And just one for from me. Fadima, for you, thinking about to your NCAA Tournament last year, how**

**different does it feel this time around coming in knowing you're going to play big minutes?**

FADIMA TALL: Yeah, it's really exciting. I think this entire year at the start I was still dealing with some nervous jitters but now I feel like I've gotten that confidence from my coaches and teammates and now it's in myself. It's just exciting to be able to play on a stage like this.

MODERATOR: Okay. I think that's it. Thank you to Fadima and thank you to Skye as well. We will be joined shortly by Coach.

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