

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

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Purcell Pavilion

Princeton Tigers

Coach Carla Berube

Media Conference

MODERATOR: Carla Berube who is the head coach in year six with the Princeton Tigers. The floor is yours for a little opening statement.

CARLA BERUBE: Yeah, computed to be here. Thrilled that we get to represent Princeton University in the Ivy League and playing here at the University of Notre Dame against a challenging opponent in Iowa state tomorrow night. As you heard, we're ready to go. It's been a quick turnaround but we're excited that we're playing. We're playing in the NCAA Tournament and that means we've had a tremendous season. I've got a great group of student-athletes that I get to coach every day and a wonderful staff and, yeah, we'll be ready to go.

MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Kaitlin Urka, ESPN. Amazingly, both you and your opponent tomorrow are two of only 15 teams who have made the last six NCAA Tournaments, which is incredibly impressive. I'm curious, what is the key to that longevity and consistency, especially in this new age of NIL and transfer portal and I know it hits a little differently in the Ivy League but still with everything going on, how do you maintain that level of excellence over that extended period of time?

CARLA BERUBE: I think that we get to coach tremendous student-athletes that care deeply about their academic experience as well as their basketball experience and they love playing for Princeton across their chest. I get to develop players for four years and we've got a tremendous senior class, great leaders, and then some young, talented underclassmen as well and I think that's a huge part of it. It's consistency, consistent in our players and our staff. They're very tight. They've got great chemistry on and off the court and I think that leads to success. We love playing in the Ivy League and representing our league



because we truly believe it's what this is all about, right? The student-athlete experience and our players they love Princeton and it shows, I think, when you watch us play.

Q. Your players said that they haven't asked you questions about your National Championship experience but I'm curious, what have you drawn from that journey that you're able to bring into coaching and help to navigate everything that goes along with an NCAA Tournament appearance?

CARLA BERUBE: Yeah, I've been very lucky as a player and during my time at Tufts too that I've been to a lot of NCAA Tournaments. I think what I talked to them about and we laying my information, I don't think they're thinking oh, that's Coach talking about being in the NCAA Tournament or winning NCAA games. It's just what I've learned, it's how I coach. It's how we get prepared, how we treat every practice, how we treat our teammates, all those things I think is how, you know, you become a successful team and program and how you respect each other and all those things, so I'm not relaying anything specifically, but here's what I know and this is how we're going to go about each and day, whether it's a non-conference game in November or it's an NCAA game in March. You can't get too high. You can't get too low. You treat every game the same way.

Q. Sorry, just want to make sure I'm not hogging the mic here. When you look across to Iowa State, what jumps out at you about them? Obviously there are probably a few things we can guess, but on those things that jump out at you, how do you tackle those and how do you game plan against that?

CARLA BERUBE: Yeah, we talked about it, it's a quick turnaround. Trying to get ready for the inside presence of Audi Crooks. It's not easy. It's challenging for sure. We do go pretty deep in our center position and just preparing for that but she's certainly not their only player. She's got some great players around her in Brown and Ryan and they spread the court really well with great three-point shooting to they get to the rim very well. They play tough defense. They're scrappy, and we've -- watching film, we talked about there's nobody like Audi or Iowa State in the



Ivy League but we played a lot outside of our conference, right? Other Big 12 opponents and other Power Four opponents. We understand the game in those conferences, how they play, and, yeah, they pound the ball inside. They're always looking to her. They share the ball very well. Their assist to turnover ratio is quite amazing. It's going to be quite a challenge. We've got to play our game, you can't focus too much on them. We've got to be able to score the basketball and how are we going to do that and, yeah, just play to our strengths.

Q. I'm curious for your players' sake, do you think it's better that they have a quick turnaround and can't sit and overthink or focus on something like that? Or maybe it would be better in this case if we had a week plus to prepare for a team and a player like Audi?

CARLA BERUBE: Yeah, sure. I'm sure more time would be helpful but we'll be okay. I think they are students of the game, right? They take their scouts very seriously so they, not only during our film sessions, they're doing it on their own as well. I think they'll be prepared. It doesn't necessarily mean that we're going to execute the game plan perfectly but I think they're going to understand it and do it the best they can. I think with a team like Iowa State, I don't think you can have just one game plan, either. I think you need to be flexibility and be ready to pivot based on how things are going.

Q. It's not very often that you have players on your team that have documentaries that have followed them through high school and into their decision-making process. I'm curious, what have you seen, now that Ashley's seen cuts of that, have you seen her transition or learn from that experience or kind of change as a player or a person as all?

CARLA BERUBE: Yeah, we all went to see it in New York City a couple weeks ago. It was playing at a film festival so we went as a team in there. I had seen it, she's seen the whole thing and, yeah, she's certainly grown up a lot. She says that when she watches it. She gets cringe, but they started when she was a freshman in high school and who she is as a sophomore in college is worlds apart. She's grown as a person, as a teammate, as a basketball player and in the best way possible. She's an incredible teammate. We love coaching her. We love having her a part of our program at the university and so, yeah, it's equity a journey, quite a story what she's been through, what her family has been through and we're just very grateful and lucky that she's a part of our team.

MODERATOR: We'll go back over to Zoom. I'm not sure if these hands have been re-raised but if they have been, we'll start with Jen Hatfield this time.

Q. Hey, Carla, thanks for doing this, just got a couple for you. First of all, you mentioned the quick turnaround but getting the first game in the entire tournament, what do you think of that, not necessarily from a tactics and planning point of view, what an eyeballs and spotlight on you guys point of view?

CARLA BERUBE: Awesome, it's great. Yeah. I hope that everyone's watching our game tomorrow night. We're very excited about that. Like I said yesterday, we're happy to be here. We're happy to be here because we deserve to be here and we're looking forward to a great game tomorrow night and glad that it's the first one of this March Madness.

Q. At the Ivy Tournament you talked about how Skye has stepped up as a leader this season but I also want to ask you about her scoring in particular 20 points on Friday against Harvard, averaging close to five more points a game than last season, how have you seen her improve as a scorer, offensive threat and as a shooter this season?

CARLA BERUBE: Yeah, she's had to step up in every way being our only starter from last year and she's... and, you know, with Maddie being out, too, she's had to do a little more on the offensive and scoring the basketball, shooting threes to talking it to the rim, her pullup jumper is really nice. I think she's just putting a little bit more on her shoulders. She's also that voice in the huddles. Yeah, she's really just grown and matured and we rely on her a lot. We put a lot on her shoulders but she's certainly carried that weight in a really great way.

Q. Just one more for you. You and Iowa State had a couple common opponents this season in the non-conference or I guess for them Utah is in-conference, but how much did watching Middle Tennessee, Utah play Iowa State, how much does that help you get a read on Iowa state or are the most recent games, like the Big 12 Tournament games more helpful there?

CARLA BERUBE: I think you got to watch them all or as many as you can. We certainly watched the Utah game because we're very familiar with Utah having played them in the last couple of years and, yeah, I think you also need to know what they have been doing lately and what their strengths have been so, yeah, that is really important.

Q. Awesome, thank you.

MODERATOR: And over to Steve Silverman.

Q. Thanks. Hi, Carla. Carla, I just wonder if there's

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any kind of difference this year in terms of the vibe for this year coming into the tournament as compared to a year ago and whether or not that might even be a good thing and let me just add some context to that question. Coming in last year, you guys had won a share of the Ivy League regular season, you had won the Ivy League Tournament. You had been nationally ranked at times during the season. You were coming off two straight first-round wins over higher seeded opponents in the previous two tournaments. You were a number nine seed, could have been a number eight. The expectations were really high. You had a lot of seniors that were outstanding players that people knew about. This year, didn't win the Ivy League, didn't win the Ivy League Tournament, weren't nationally ranked. You got a young team, mostly sophomores... does that give you maybe some, a feeling, a little more of a freewheeling feeling, maybe you're playing with a little bit of house money? Just kind of note that you're full of smiles today. I thought you were yesterday. Your players are too. Is there just a good vibe right now that maybe is a little different than last year?

CARLA BERUBE: I think I'm always smiling, Steve.

Q. You are, but I've noticed just a tiny difference.

CARLA BERUBE: Just kidding I'm not. (Laughter) Ask my players. I don't know, yeah, I think the vibes are really good. I think, yes, we did not win the Ivy League or the tournament, but I think it's been a successful season nonetheless. I don't know if you always rate your season based on those things. I think we have had a really fun journey. We've grown up a lot. There's been some really challenging times and we've moved through those and found, yeah, some really bright spots and some great play, so it's been a lot of fun and, but I had a lot of fun last year and the year before too. I think year is different. I'm not sure if last year I was feeling more pressure to win or was supposed to win. I think as a mid major and maybe as an Ivy League, I think we always have a chip on our shoulders and nobody thinks we're actually going to win. I think having a good time. The vibes are great and our players are really excited to compete tomorrow night and looking forward to it. I know my staff has been working really, really hard the last couple days here to get them as prepared as possible. So I'm not sure it's too different, but I think every year is its own journey.

Q. Fair enough. Let me ask sort of a follow-up, a little bit of a different question, but? What related and that's just to sort of compare the personality of this team, the players themselves, not so much yourself or your staff, but just the players you've got, again, of course

it's a young team, four sophomore starters, and even the senior starter wasn't a starter all the time last year. So, you know, is there a different personality to this team than there was a year ago?

CARLA BERUBE: Yeah, absolutely. I think Kaitlyn and Ellie and Chet, that was a very dominant class of personalities, so I think just new, yeah, new personalities, new people emerge. I think we've got a lot of personality in our senior class and you all see what happens on the court, but so much of who we are, what we do is in practice, off the court, on the bus and the meeting space. We've got a lot of different personalities that maybe don't get as much time on the court that are just so important to who we are, our energy and, yeah. That makes it fun. Every year is different and new. New people emerge. New leaders emerge. New voices and energy and Adaora Nwokeji being one of them is a senior. She's a lot of what our personality is but you don't get to see her a lot on the court but she's so important to who we are. Yeah, so every year is different.

Q. Last one for me. You've been talking about how you want to focus a lot on how you play and what you want to do and that makes a ton of sense to me and so if there was one item tomorrow, maybe it's turnovers, maybe it's rebounding, maybe it's something else, what's an item that's a red letter item for you going into tomorrow's game. You want to do what really well tomorrow?

CARLA BERUBE: What do we want to do well? Gosh, let me count the ways. It would be great if they don't get a lot of points in the paint, but also, you know me, I'm always thinking defense, what can we do defensively to be successful. Not allowing them to shoot well from beyond the three. I think also defensive rebounding is key. We cannot allow them to get those second-chance opportunities. Crocks gets a lot of her points off those second-chance opportunities too. Yeah, those are a couple of things. We need to shoot the ball well. That's really important when you get to this stage because everybody scores. Everybody's got great offense, so you've got to be able to make open shots, so, yeah, finding ways to get those good looks and in a few minutes we'll be at practice working on those ways.

Q. Thanks Coach. Good luck.

MODERATOR: On that note, that is all the time we have for today. Thank you so much for taking the time. We appreciate it. Princeton Tigers head coach Carla Berube. And one final reminder. Hammond Communications posts a recording of this press conference online to the NCAA media hub at ncaa.veritone.com. Transcripts are provided

by ASAP and will be posted shortly. Thank you,
everybody, for joining us.

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