

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

Thursday, March 20, 2025

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Purcell Pavilion

**Michigan Wolverines**

**Kim Barnes Arico**

**Jordan Hobbs**

**Olivia Olson**

**Syla Swords**

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We welcome you to the Michigan press conference. We welcome in our student-athletes.

We'll open the floor to questions.

**Q. What was the feeling to hear your name come across that screen Sunday night?**

SYLA SWORDS: Yeah, it was really special for me, coming from where I'm from, Canada, northern Ontario. I watched March Madness on TV, online, but never thought I would be playing in it.

Finally hearing our name called, different position than what Michigan was in last year. You still feel the butterflies in your stomach, nervous to see what your bracket is going to be.

But to know that, yeah, I'm going to be playing March Madness, Michigan is going to be playing March Madness, it's really exciting.

OLIVIA OLSON: Yeah, I'd say it's a little bit more familiar feeling for me, just as exciting. I feel like every time a six or seven seed was about to be called, which is kind of where we knew we would be called, my heart started racing, just excited to see where we would land.

It's so special seeing your name up there on the screen. Seeing the video of us getting excited, jump up and down. Very, very cool.



**Q. Syla and Olivia, your first March Madness tournament. Jordan, your last. What are your feelings now as you prepare to play?**

OLIVIA OLSON: I'm just really excited and kind of like Sy said when we saw our name up there, you dream of it as a kid. You never really know what to expect until you're in the position.

But I'm just really excited to be here. I love our team. I think we have a lot to prove to people. We're just going to take it kind of day by day.

SYLA SWORDS: Anything can happen in March. Ultimately that's what you prepare for through the whole year is to get to the March Madness tournament to see what you can do. It's exciting to be here.

JORDAN HOBBS: Yeah, it's crazy that it's my last go around. Definitely have felt the emotions a little bit. I feel like after the Big Ten tournament, it kind of hit me it was my last Big Ten tournament. Won't have a chance to compete for that anymore.

Now just going into this, I'm excited to see how far we can make it, excited to make a run.

I think we can be competitive with anyone in this tournament. We'll see how we come out tomorrow and just really excited.

**Q. Syla, obviously you played in some pretty big games last August. How do you think the Olympic experience prepared you for this?**

SYLA SWORDS: Yeah, if anything it's taught me that every game matters, whether you're playing a high school game, March Madness game, Olympic qualifying game. Any game, anyone can come out and do something big. You really just have to be appreciative for every opportunity you get.

At the same time just trusting that I put myself in so many situations where I failed and I've come back stronger than that. Knowing I put the time in to be able to come through



in big moments.

**Q. Jordan, what did you learn from last year's experience and that heartbreaking loss? What are you able to take away? What can you share with this young freshman group?**

JORDAN HOBS: Yeah, I feel like last year was the first time I realized it's like win or go home. I kind of took for granted the ability to win the first round game. It just came easy the first two years. We won by 15 points or so each time. Last year was just kind of a shock when we left USC. We left on a loss and had to fly home right away.

I think what I would tell them is just, like, it really is day by day and you have to approach each game with a fierceness and competitiveness because everybody is coming for you in March. It doesn't matter their seeding.

It really is win or go home. We could be on a bus tomorrow night back to Ann Arbor and I could never play another game of basketball. That's really the story at the end of the day.

**Q. The fact that this is in South Bend, you will have family and friends in attendance, how does that give you a little extra boost for the game?**

SYLA SWORDS: Yeah, the Michigan fan base has been amazing for us this whole year. We've had great turnouts for a lot of big games. That really helps us on the court, our support, knowing we have a community behind us, a great community of people that is Ann Arbor. Liv and I have come to know, but Jordan knows from her four years of being here.

But it's really special, it's a an advantage for sure. Me personally, my family is going to be here. They haven't been able to get to a lot of games. It's just something special that reminds you that I'm doing it for my family, we're doing it for our people back in Ann Arbor.

OLIVIA OLSON: It gives us a little bit of familiarity being able to go play and have a lot of our friends and family here. Some of our friends are driving up, too. Just being able to play in front of our friends and family just like we would at home means a lot, especially for our first experience in March Madness.

I know J's parents have been to almost every game, too. Our parents wouldn't miss it. We're just really excited to compete and get started.

JORDAN HOBS: Yeah, my parents would have flown anywhere in the country. Now my aunts and uncles get to

come. I know how many of our managers and friends get to come.

I think the best thing is we were able to take a bus and didn't have to get on a plane. It's great to be so close to home for me in Ohio and get to see a lot of familiar faces in the crowd.

**Q. Jordan, you're likely going to draw the Audi Crooks matchup tomorrow. How are you preparing for that?**

JORDAN HOBS: I think it just comes down to grits. Obviously she's bigger and stronger than a lot of the girls on our team. But she probably also hasn't had to go against a guard matchup. Offensively for us we have a mismatch as well just as they do down low.

I think it will be really interesting. But I'm excited for the challenge and I know Greta is excited, too. We'll see how it goes. But I think at the end of the day it's going to come down to who wants it more.

**Q. How do you approach this week of practice not knowing who you'd be playing until last night?**

OLIVIA OLSON: We kind of scouted for both teams, Princeton and Iowa State, just practicing and mixing it up so we got prepared for both situations, watched film for both. Then we were able to attend the game yesterday. Now we get to hone in on Iowa State and their personnel. But it was nice to already have a familiar, like, note to what they're going to do. We have a good grasp on it.

JORDAN HOBS: I'd say also earlier this season we played Virginia Tech and Florida with a one-day prep. For the Big Ten tournament, we didn't know who we were going to play Minnesota or Washington. I think just getting put in those positions helped us with this matchup.

SYLA SWORDS: Yeah, on top of that being able to build on ourselves and focus on ourselves and what we need to improve on. In this season you're playing so many games, you're so focused on scout. It's nice to have these one, two weeks just to do Michigan basketball and improve on what makes us good.

**Q. Do you have a preference, coming off the Big Ten tournament, having the downtime to rest and recover versus the adrenaline of getting right back into playing a game? Do you find that to be advantageous or would you have preferred to have a game in between to keep that energy up? Do you think it's going to take you a minute to get into it or have the practices been intense?**

JORDAN HOBS: I mean, I always want to be competing in games. But I think our practices emulate it just as well as games. I think coach has done a great job of making them super intense. We're ready to play.

I think we play our best basketball when our practices are really hard. I think coach has done a great job of that the last week and a half to get us prepared for this game tomorrow.

OLIVIA OLSON: I would agree (smiling).

**Q. Jordan, at the start of the year there was a feeling that we didn't know what Michigan was going to be. Tell me about how this season has gone from your perspective and what you've seen in this program, especially the young ladies to your right.**

JORDAN HOBS: Yeah, I mean, no one can really expect anything out of freshmen just because it's such a new game, and high school is so different from college. Coach says it all the time, we're not in high school anymore, we're not in high school anymore. In October she's saying that over and over.

I remember when those two came in, Mila, Te'Yala, A.D., I just saw something different in them. Syla came in late, not in the summer. We went to play at the IM, intermural building. I was like, Oh, my gosh, she's a born leader, already talking, so mature. Liv in open gyms was just so mature for her age and, like, making reads I haven't seen out of freshmen ever in my life, whether I'm playing against them or with them. Their ability to come in and just have confidence has been something that has been incredibly important for our team.

Then the beginning of this year, nobody thought we would get back here. The four of us who returned last year were like, We want to get back to March Madness. We want to get back to that stage. Last year we were a nine seed, this year we're coming back as a six seed, having a better year than last year. No one thought that would be the case.

I think about the South Carolina game all the time, how everyone thought we would get blown out by 20. The odds in Vegas were literally a 20-point game. We cut it to like three. Obviously we wanted to win that. That kind of set the tone for our season and gave us confidence we could really play against anybody.

I just think we're ready and poised to go out there and show what we're capable of.

**Q. One of the things that jumps off the tape to me is the chemistry this team has, especially for being so**

**young. Is there something you have done off the court that has helped enhance that or something maybe that's bonded you coming in together?**

OLIVIA OLSON: I just think our team kind of shows a representation of who coach recruits, the kind of people she brings in and who Michigan is. We are so young, but we're all so close. We had one weekend where we went to Macy Brown's cabin. That bonded us all off the court. It was in the summer.

I think it shows the kind of person coach is and who she wants to bring in and how competitive we all are. Also we all love each other, we're each other's best friends. I think that has shown throughout the season on court.

SYLA SWORDS: I think also everything that happened in the transition from last season to this one, Jordan touched on it, was us showing our trust in coach and the program she's made. That's something that we're all able to bond over immediately from getting here.

The freshmen, we had our talks with her. That's why we committed to the program. Jordan I remember once the transfer portal opened, she called us both immediately to tell us that Coach Arico is the real deal and someone you want to be around to learn for the next four years.

I think all of us just trusting in that, blocking the outside noise of people saying there's only four returners. Yeah, there's five freshmen. Buying into what coach has said, buying into what the Michigan women's basketball program is has allowed us to buy into anything and allowed us to bond really quickly.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thank you so much.

We're joined by Michigan head coach Kim Barnes Arico.

KIM BARNES ARICO: It's great to be in South Bend. It's great to be playing in the NCAA tournament. Obviously this is what we look forward to every single year. We're trying to flip this a little bit like the Big Ten tournament. It is the first time we've had to take a bus. We're close. Two weeks ago we did the same thing in Indianapolis.

We had to play an opponent that was playing the day before in Minnesota and Washington. We're trying to use this game as the same type of situation. We were able to get here yesterday, able to watch the game. Obviously both of those teams are exceptional, Princeton and Iowa State. It was a great basketball game.

We know our hands are going to be full. We're reading everything on social media. We know how good Audi



Crooks is. We know how good Brown is. We know how experienced their point guard is. They're just a great team. It will be a tremendous contest for us tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: We open up the floor to questions.

**Q. Coming into the season, it was unsure where Michigan was going to go, young team, transfer portal additions. Could you reflect back on the season, talk about your emotions.**

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, I mean, it was great to hear their perspective and what our student-athletes had to say. At the end of the day that's why we all coach and that's why you get into the business. It was really nice to be able to hear what they had to say and their perspective on the situation.

There were a lot of unknowns obviously coming into the season, a ton of unknowns. But our leadership from Jordan and Greta and Alyssa Crockett and Macy Brown kind of never wavered.

You guys have heard the story countless times probably at most press conferences. I think it starts with that group of four. We had four players returning. That's pretty incredible, one of which played more than 10 minutes a game. If anybody thought we would be here, I don't think that's the case.

When you add that kind of perseverance... We always say at Michigan those who stay will be champions. If you follow Jordan's career, she didn't play her first two years, then the impact she made last year, what she's been able to do this year, that speaks volumes to the type of players and people we have in our program.

Then you add what Greta has been able to achieve this year. She came to see me at the end of last year and said, Coach I'll do whatever, I don't care what it is, whatever Michigan needs to be successful, I'll do it.

This year she's had to guard the other team's five. I know tomorrow that's a big challenge. But she's also had to do it against Sienna Betts and Rayah Marshall. You can go down the line. That has hopefully given her some preparation for tomorrow.

Then you add the freshman class. Golly. We're the only team in the country that starts three freshmen. We're the only team in the country that plays three freshmen this many minutes per game.

I know we always talk about Liv and Sylva. As you heard from the press conference, they're mature beyond their

years. What they have given to our program has been absolutely incredible.

There's three others, and they've meant as much to this program as those two have. I know they would say the same thing. One is Mila Holloway. A point guard position is one of the most challenging in the game. It's something that your program needs to be successful.

Iowa State has Emily Ryan who is a great floor general. When you have those type of expectations for a freshman, you never know what that's going to be. That could result in a lot of ups and downs.

Mila Holloway has been extremely, extremely level and balanced and tremendous for us all year long. She's kind of steadied this ship and you need that from that position.

Today is A.D.'s birthday. I don't think there's anyone more excited than the two sitting next to us. Sylva comes in every day and reminds me that this is the greatest freshman class ever. I love my teammates, I love every one of them. Te'Yala has given us a great spark. I think she's going to be a phenomenal player moving forward. But that freshman class has really steadied the ship. For us to be in the position that we are is tremendous.

Like Jordan said, we're just not happy to be here. We were really disappointed last year in that first round loss. We know our hands are full.

I told them earlier this week before the seeding came out that our name has shown up on that board, every time I've been to the NCAA tournament, probably about 20, I've never gone, Oh, we got an easy first round game. I've always gone, Oh, my gosh, we have the hardest game in the whole entire bracket. I feel that way about tomorrow. That's kind of the coach in me.

We'll see what happens tomorrow. But excited about this team. Really feel fortunate to have had the season that we've had.

**Q. Your freshmen have been great in big games all year. There's also a bit of extra juice heading into the NCAA tournament. How have you worked to prepare your freshmen for tomorrow's game?**

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, I mean, I just think they are so competitive. For them it's another game. For them this is what they've prepared their whole life for.

At the end of last year when we had four returners, I remember the South Carolina game was scheduled. I called Sylva, We got to play South Carolina to open the

season. The coach in me. She's like, That's great, coach, that's what I want. I can't wait to play South Carolina.

I'm like, Oh, okay. Let's go.

I think for me, I'm like, Oh, gosh, this is South Carolina, this is the Big Ten tournament, this is the NCAA tournament. There's always, How are the kids going to respond?

For them, it's like, This is why we came here, we want to compete against the best, challenge ourselves against the best.

It doesn't mean they won't be nervous, have butterflies. They've prepared, like Syla alluded to, they've prepared their whole lives for moments like these.

**Q. When you heard them up here talking about how hard they worked to make sure they would have a bond, what does that say to you as a coach?**

KIM BARNES ARICO: No, I mean, there's so much obviously. I don't consider myself super emotional or to like sit in a press conference and bring tears to my eyes. But having the opportunity to hear them and listen to what they had to say was really impactful.

They work hard at everything they do. It's kind of the Michigan difference. That's what we say at Michigan: It's the Michigan difference. They're driven. They're driven at a high level. They're not driven on a high level just on the basketball court. They're driven on a high level in the classroom, as people.

They know that chemistry is important. They know that leadership is important. They know those things are difference makers in the game. Jordan has showed them that the whole entire season.

They're natural at what they do, but it's great when they have people ahead of them that are in the same positions to show them what it takes.

I think somebody asked the question about our chemistry. It's the way we share the basketball, it's the way that we play the game. We play it for each other, share it for each other. We have superstars on our team, but they play the right way and they play for each other.

I think that's what makes us tough to beat.

**Q. It seems like both the men's and women's programs came out a little bit of the same trajectory. A lot of the people counted both programs out early on, overlooked you guys. What conversations have you**

**had with Dusty May, how have you leaned on each other throughout the season and now where you're both in the tournament?**

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, I think dusty, it's his coaching staff, the players in his program. I mean, their team and our team are really close. I remember walking into the gym after a tough loss at our place against Michigan State. Nimari was at the door. He's like, That's all right, coach. You're going to learn from this. Tomorrow is the bounce-back.

That's a young man worried about his own team and career, he's at our games, following our games. You can go down the line. You look up, their team is there.

But just to watch their transformation, I'm so happy for those guys. There were a lot of them that wavered and thought about leaving. The ones that stayed, that watch them have the season they're having.

We shifted our practice time on Sunday to watch, don't tell our administrator, we're not supposed to do that, just a little bit, just shifted it a little bit so we could be able to watch their championship game. The next day Dusty came walking in. It was just our staff left in the gym at practice. We got up and just started clapping for him.

One of the things that he said, It was during that game no one cared about who got the shot or no one cared about how many points did I score. It was one of the times where the team just truly cared about winning the game.

I think when you get to this point in the year, that's what it's got to be about. For our team to watch them accomplish what they've been able to accomplish has really been special.

We share a building. It's just the two of us and our teams. I think we both support each other at a really high level.

**Q. Style has become part of the game narrative. Some coaches have amazing sneaker collections they're rocking. Do you mind sharing your thoughts, is it a matter of importance or fun? Does it allow you to bond with your players? What goes into the style?**

KIM BARNES ARICO: Style? The kids are all about style. I have three children. They're all about style. What is your fit? What are you wearing? They want to make sure that you look good. They try to tell me, Look good, coach. Play good.

We personally, it's not really I would say my GM. It's not something that I get too caught up in. But our players love

it. So I was able to break out. I got a gift a couple weeks ago. I was able to break out these shoes for the Big Ten tournament. Our team was going crazy.

I kind of prefer, like since COVID hit, I don't have to wear my heels anymore. I used to care in my younger day. Now I just care about the basketball. I used to care about my fit a lot more.

Yeah, I think for some people it kind of is what makes them. That's their thing. I respect Mulkey. She's one of the best in the game. I have the ultimate respect for her. We've had to play against each other a lot. I always wonder when we're playing against her, What's the wear going to be? I know it's something that people think about.

But for me, I try to do it a little bit for our players. Even in the locker room just now, C'mon, coach, put the hat on. They want to get a selfie. It's fun. I think it's good to have some fun with it. But I'm not Kim Mulkey. I'm the other Kim (smiling).

**Q. I think about the team you inherited your first year. It wasn't exactly the style you wanted to play. That team was a smart team. More deliberate pace. You always adapt to your personnel. What you got to this year and had to go five guards, what did it take to make that decision to full go, then sort of commit to that? How did you adapt to that?**

KIM BARNES ARICO: That's a great question. This is for all our recruits listening and for all the haters out there.

A lot of times in my coaching career, people said, She's a post coach. She had Hallie Thome who scored 2000 points, Naz Hillmon, who was an All-American. Some people say she's a guard coach. She had Katelynn Flaherty, the all-time leading scorer.

I think our program has always been to play to our strengths and figure out what our strengths are and to try to play to our strengths.

This year our strength is our guard play. I've heard a lot of people say guards win in March. So I like that. Now we play through our guards. If we get a dominant post player, I'm going to feed the dominant post player the ball, I promise you that.

I think we're always a team that tries to figure out how to play through our strengths. We've had mismatches all year long. The other team has always had a big post. Greta has been phenomenal and Jordan has been phenomenal saying, Hey, we're going to try to do this, we're going to try to match up, do the best we can against someone that has

a lot more size and post ability than we do. Then we want to make sure we're putting them in position to be successful on the other end.

It's fun playing with five guards. Two years ago you would have never convinced me that we would do that. But I think as a coach, and this is something we've learned in this landscape more than anything else in college athletics, is that we better evolve and we better be willing to change.

If you're not, the game is going to pass you by, the opportunities are going to pass you by. This year we've changed. We've changed what we've ever done. I've never done this.

Someone always said threes for twos. We're going with threes for twos. But I like it. It's fun. I just want to give our team the best chance to be successful. If that means those five are out there, then that's what we're going to roll with.

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