

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Stephen F. Austin vs Notre Dame

Thursday, March 20, 2025

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Purcell Pavilion

**Stephen F. Austin Ladyjacks**

**Coach Leonard Bishop**

**Faith Blackstone**

**Trinity Moore**

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We open the floor to questions for our student-athletes.

**Q. Faith, can you talk about your team's prolific three-point shooting and what it is you guys do to work together so well to thrive on the perimeter?**

FAITH BLACKSTONE: Yeah, um I think we just -- I'm sorry. I think we just do it every day in practice. We do a lot of shooting drills, five spot shooting, so I think we just drill in our heads that this shot is going in every time and we also implement it in our drills, getting up and down, looking for that three ball so I think it just translates over to the game.

**Q. Trinity, could you talk about that 15-game winning streak? What have you seen that this team is doing so well to get on this kind of a roll?**

TRINITY MOORE: We know where we wanted to be at the end of the year and winning is part of that. So just going into every game, doing what we know we should do and the ones that we drop, learning from those mistakes. We would rather learn from a win but when we don't, we're going to learn something.

**Q. And Trinity, can you talk about the challenge of playing an opponent on its home court in a tournament?**

TRINITY MOORE: Yeah, it won't be easy, but we've been preparing all week, just come out here and do what we do. We don't want to stray from what we do and also try to limit



other people from what they do, but, you know, come here to try to do what we know we can do. Yes, sir.

**Q. Just piggybacking off that, first and foremost, does it give you guys a boost? I know some athletes love it when other -- when fans cheer against them. It kind of drives them. Are you guys that same way?**

TRINITY MOORE: I am. (Laughter) I mean, I love it. We feel like we have kind of been underdogs all year so we kind of embrace things as they are. We're not going to shy away from a moment, no matter what the outside pressure may be. We embrace pressure.

FAITH BLACKSTONE: I would just say that we're the two that like to talk a lot on the floor, so, I mean, us just think that's the perfect thing for us when we can hear more talking and oh, it's kind of like we're at a disadvantage, but we're not worried about that.

**Q. You guys had to knock off the top two seeds in the conference tournament to get to this point. What did -- having to do that and being the underdog in those games, what did that do to help prepare you now to be the underdog in this game?**

TRINITY MOORE: Well, we knew pre-season just kind of where we were ranked and I'm not going to speak for anybody else but I felt some type of way about it as far as where we were ranked in our conference and our standings so it was motivation for me personally and I know our team took it on the chin. Just kind of come in there, do what we know we can do. We have been practicing with each other every day, all throughout the summer and whatnot so we knew where we were supposed to be at, so it was motivating. Our hard work was rewarded at the end of the conference tournament. Kind of what we had gone through we knew where we need to be at.

FAITH BLACKSTONE: Yeah, I want to speak on how we went through injuries and we kind of just... I don't know. We fought a lot of battles, I think, before the season even started. I think that type of stuff just motivated us to be there for one another and knowing that we're short in

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bodies, so we have to give it all.

**Q. I saw you guys had quite the sendoff before you made the trek to South Bend. What does it mean to have that kind of community support and people rallying behind this team as you guys embark on this NCAA journey? Faith, I'll start with you.**

FAITH BLACKSTONE: I think it just feels like a lot of love and support. It makes you want to go harder, honestly. I just never really had that experience considering everywhere I've been but I appreciate it and I always show love back, so, yeah.

TRINITY MOORE: Yeah, I'll piggyback off that. I feel the same way. It means the world. These people helped us get to where we are now, so we just go out here and play to make those people proud and show our appreciation.

**Q. There are going to be a lot of people that are going to be tuning in to ESPN tomorrow that will have never seen one of your games, so what would you hope that would take away when they're watching the Ladyjacks tomorrow for the first time?**

FAITH BLACKSTONE: That we're not afraid and that we're going to hoop and we're going to give them our best shot no matter what anybody says. I just think our resilience and just knowing who we are and going out there and showing them.

TRINITY MOORE: Yeah, I will go word for word with that, I agree. (Laughter)

**Q. And Olivia Miles, Hannah Hidalgo, those names get a lot of attention nationally. I'm sure you've heard of them as well. What is it going to be like to look across the court and see them and how do you even practice to go against a pair like those two?**

TRINITY MOORE: They're amazing players. We're looking forward to playing against them. We just follow the game plan. Our coach has done a great job putting together a game plan for us to follow so we're excited to go out there and execute what we have been working on all week.

FAITH BLACKSTONE: Yeah, I think it's going to be exciting, just the energy, like we talked about earlier. I think we thrive in energy so I think it's just going to be bouncing off one another.

**Q. You guys have had some amazing locker room celebrations and celebrations on courts and it just looks like this team has a lot of fun together. I'm**

**curious, is there anything you guys have done off the court to work on cementing that chemistry? Is there any fun traditions or anything else that you guys have that help you bond together or get hyped for the game?**

FAITH BLACKSTONE: I think we've had some spaces in the season where we've hung out and we've learned each other throughout the season. We always kind of try to talk to each other in the locker room to get each other's perspective on what needs to be better, but I think I don't know, just knowing ourselves and playing to the plan that our coaches provide for us. That's what we do.

TRINITY MOORE: I agree. My dad always says celebrate what you want to see more of. If you're on the court, if your teammate does something good, celebrate that with them and then also we know each other's hearts so you can celebrate and there's also a time for some other things to kick in, but we're a pretty close-knit unit so we're able to do both sides of that.

**Q. What has your weekend been like? It's always a rush when you're sitting there watching, wondering where you're going to end up. Was that process like when you finally hear your name called, know where you're going and the turnaround to get to here. Take me through the whirlwind of these last couple of days from your perspective. I will start with you, Trinity.**

TRINITY MOORE: After we found out who we were playing, I was excited just to kind of hear the game plan and what we're trying to do throughout the game. Then just working in practice on the things that were set out, focus on our main goals and whatnot and try to get better.

FAITH BLACKSTONE: Yeah, I would say once we found out it was kind of like... we already knew we were going to play again but it's just about doing your research and sticking to the game plan at that point, but I don't feel like we were rushed or anything. I don't feel like there was no pressure or nothing. It's just, like, it's another game and a another game to handle business.

**Q. What is going to be the key for you guys to get the win against the Irish tomorrow? What has to go right for sure for you guys?**

TRINITY MOORE: Just us executing and doing what we know we're supposed to do. We talked with our coaches, they talked with us. They put together a game plan for us and also us not straying away from what we typically do, what's helped us get to this point so just sticking to what we know, our blueprint.

FAITH BLACKSTONE: Yeah, I would piggyback off of her, just staying who we are and not getting outside of anything that's not SFA and just going out there and hooping, like, this is just another one of those days in the office.

**Q. Not to put you on the spot, but tell me, from your perspective, tell me about your coach. What kind of influence has he had and you guys look like he's a guy you want to play for and have a lot of fun with. I'm curious your perspective and what he's been able to do with your team this season.**

FAITH BLACKSTONE: Coach Bishop, I think he fires me up on the bench or just seeing him on the sideline, fighting for us, having energy for us, man, you just want to follow after that and you just want to give it your all like he does and I appreciate how hard he fights for us and he always has a game plan. No matter what happens in the game, we know that we're going to be led in the right direction, so all grace and props to him.

TRINITY MOORE: I agree with her. That's my guy, Coach Bishop. I feel like when we're out there on the court, I know he has our backs. It's never in question. On the court, we're able to get down to business and off the court, that's family. We can joke around. We can clown. I feel like it helped establish trust with us, off-the-court things like that to where we know that's a guy we want to go out there and fight for. We want to win for him and he's also the same way for us. We know he's fighting for us and he's trying to put a plan together that helps us to be successful so I appreciate that. All props to you, Coach Bishop.

FAITH BLACKSTONE: Yes, sir, Bishop. (Laughter)

TRINITY MOORE: All love, big dog. Come on, dog.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions for our student-athletes?

Stephen F. Austin Head Coach Leonard Bishop. Coach Bishop, do you want to get us started with an opening statement?

LEONARD BISHOP: Yeah, excited to be here. Excited to represent Stephen F. Austin State University. Computed to represent past, current, and future Ladyjacks and excited to just represent the city of Nacogdoches as a hole. Again, there's a lot of people... you talked about the support. You talked about the sendoff but there's a lot of people in Nacogdoches wearing purple on Friday that are really going to be cheering these young ladies on so we just want to continue to represent the school, the university, and the city in a first-class manner.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach. Start off with some questions.

**Q. Can you talk a little bit about that three-point shooting just shattering those records this year? What fuels that proficiency?**

LEONARD BISHOP: Yeah, I think we did a good job of recruiting some really good shooters, some people that already come in with that in their toolbox and then I think our team did a great job of working together as a unit to work to get those open opportunities and you heard the student-athletes talk about it earlier, they put a lot of time into it in practice. Whether I'm getting there at 8:00 in the morning or if I'm leaving late at night, there's always somebody in there getting extra shots up so we only get so many hours in a week but them putting the extra work in on their off time has allowed them to really shine at this level.

**Q. Coach Ivy says they have a pick your poison lineup so to speak. What's the challenge of playing a team that has a lot of scoring balance?**

LEONARD BISHOP: Yeah, they're definitely talented. They definitely have a lot of weapons, and it is definitely pick your poison over there. The challenges are just to try and limit them and keep them as uncomfortable as possible. They're a really good team. They have players that can do everything so you just try to find things they don't want to do and force them to do the things they don't want to do. Ultimately, we have to play well to give ourselves an opportunity to compete at this level and that's what we're looking forward to doing.

**Q. Can you talk about the challenge for a coach to get a team through adverse thank you early in the season -- injuries -- and finish so strong the way you have, got the 15-game win streak going.**

LEONARD BISHOP: Yeah, I think honestly, it's easy for me as a coach when you have the character of the kids we have in the locker room. They have a no-quit mentality to them, very resilient. All of them come from great families so it's easy to keep them locked in. Just motivate them a little bit. That's my job to do. Motivate them a little bit and let them see what their hard work will eventually pay off in. We talked about the long game and the short game. We put short-term goals and long-term goals in front of them, whether that's the next game or the next practice, we always have a goal in mind and so that allows them to stay focused on keeping the main thing the main thing.

**Q. Can you just talk a little bit about that Notre Dame back court, Hidalgo, Miles, just how your team neutralizes them or at least keeps them from just**



taking over.

LEONARD BISHOP: Yeah, those two are really talented and I would throw Citron in that mix as well. Three really talented kids that can play, can do a lot of different things on the offensive and defensive end. So, again, my job as a coach is to make sure they know they practice just like you do and to keep us focused. Obviously we have to adapt to kind of the speed and the pace of the game.

It will be a different environment, but as you heard them say, it's just another day in the office. Every game presents challenges. This one just presents different ones with names they probably have heard of all yearlong and seen on ESPN, so we're excited about the challenge. That's what I love about my group. They have been game all year. It doesn't matter if we're playing at Texas Tech, playing at San Diego State, or if we're playing here at Notre Dame. They're going to be excited to play and they're not scared of anybody. When you go into a locker room and you have that, as a coach, that's the a really good building block to start off of.

**Q. I'm curious, Coach, do you find it a little bit advantageous to be kind of overlooked? I know Trinity talked about the chip on her shoulder about being counted out even of your own conference. I'm curious if as a coach that helps you knowing people haven't paid as much attention and if you can use that to your advantage coming into a big game like this.**

LEONARD BISHOP: Yeah, I think people overlook the fact that Division I athletes are some of the more uber competitive people on the planet so if you give them any slight, whether we're looking at ESPN and they haven't seen their face or anything like that, they're going to put that chip on their shoulder and use it as motivation. So, again, my group was going to be ready to play regardless. Anything like that that we can use to sharpen the edge for us we'll definitely do.

**Q. I'm curious with Ashlyn Traylor-Walker, being an Indiana native, if there's a little bit of extra pep in her step, any more motivation that you have seen from her knowing that she gets to play back in the home state of Indiana.**

LEONARD BISHOP: For sure. All right? That kid was all smiles as soon as she saw Notre Dame come up there. Again, she's happy to be back close to home. We have been trying to schedule a game up here in the Indiana area so that she could be back home and then God planned it that way to where we play noter game in the first round and her family will be able to be here. So super excited for that kid to be back home in her home state and playing on the

biggest stage that she possibly can, so super excited for her.

**Q. I know obviously everyone can see there's a lot in front of you as far as things that have to go right and like everyone said, executing the game plan but I'm curious out of your perspective, what are some of the keys in order for you guys to come up with the upset tomorrow?**

LEONARD BISHOP: I think we have to be dialled in on the defensive end and ultimately, you don't win the game if you don't score more points so we got to put the ball in the bucket. You talked our three ball. I think no matter if it's a three, a layup, a free throw, we got to be hitting tomorrow. We've got to be dialled in and I think feeding off of our defense can allow us to create some offense as well.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions for Coach? Coach Bishop, thanks so much for your time and for joining us.

LEONARD BISHOP: Thank you. Axe 'em 'jacks.

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