

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

Friday, March 21, 2025
South Bend, Indiana, USA
Purcell Pavilion

Notre Dame Fighting Irish Coach Niele Ivey Hannah Hidalgo Sonia Citron Media Conference

Notre Dame 106, Stephen F. Austin 54

NIELE IVEY: Really grateful for today. It was a great performance from our team. Excited about this win. Excited about the fans. I thought they did a great job coming up and coming out to support us. Bunch of great basketball today in South Bend. Really pleased with our defensive effort the. I thought we came out on fire. I thought we were really locked in. Our preparation all week to me has really paid off.

Just tribute to this team. They came in focused and ready. We got back to work. This was the result of their effort and energy and preparation. I really enjoyed the entire team scoring. Got a chance to have the entire team on the floor. That gave us incredible energy. Great to see the walk-ons get a chance to play and score.

These two led us. A lot of great performances from everybody on the team. Both of them ending with 24 points, but their defensive intensity full court, their poise, efficiency, it was fantastic.

Just did a great job leading us. Again, really pleased with the win. Excited to be able to play again an Sunday.

Q. You guys got a break. Looked like you hadn't been on a break and really got off to a good start. When did you kind of feel like you were kind of back to the team that you had been earlier this year?

SONIA CITRON: I think honestly in the first quarter, but maybe not the first two minutes when they hit those threes.



Like a couple minutes after that. Once we started to get our rhythm and flow, honestly from the beginning of the game.

Q. Hannah, there were a lot of combinations coming in early in the game. Talk about how well your team was able to handle all the different personnel coming in.

HANNAH HIDALGO: From the opposite team?

Q. Your team.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, I think we have a lot of fire power. Honestly, everybody plays well together. Whoever is coming in we know we're able to adjust. We played with these girls all season, so it's easy to adjust to whoever is coming in.

We trust Coach Ivey's substitution. Like when Kate is coming in we know to feed her the ball. It's easy playing with the girls. We all know each other well.

Q. Hannah, you got a whole bunch of dishes today that were highlight worthy. Was there a pass or assist that stood out as your favorite?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Probably I think the crosscourt to Soni when she hit the three. I think towards the end our momentum was really -- the fans were really into it. The momentum was high. We had a couple daggers, but that was the exciting one.

Q. And then for both of you, Michigan-Notre Dame is about as storied a rivalry as you'll get. What does it mean you get to play in such a high stakes game?

SONIA CITRON: Yeah, I think obviously we're excited no matter who we're going to play on Sunday. We were going to be ready and going to be excited. But I didn't know it was that big of rivalry. For basketball. Yeah. For football it is, for basketball too I guess.

Yeah, we're just excited to play another day and just give it our all, so...



Q. Sonia, how much did Niele and the other coaches emphasize defense over the past two weeks and especially this week?

SONIA CITRON: Yeah, emphasized it a whole lot.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Whole a lot.

SONIA CITRON: Those practices were definitely hard, but it was exactly what we needed and it was fun to get after it and just get better defensively.

I mean, we fought in practice and it makes -- because practice was so hard it made the game easy, you know, and we just challenged each other. Coach Abby challenged us and I think we responded.

Definitely got challenged, but I think it made us better.

Q. Hannah, Coach Ivey already alluded to it, but watching you when Luci hit the three, there was nobody more excited in that arena than you. What does it mean when you see those players that rarely get to play be able to make that kind of contribution?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, it's truly a blessing that we have the talent that we have, even all the way down to the walk-ons. When we're able to do kind of what with do and dominate on the floor. In the beginning it gives the walk-ons an opportunity to go in and play and get the fans even more excited.

So it was honestly so fun to see them get in at all and for them to score. Luci hit a three in the girl's face. Sarah is scoring, Bella scoring, everybody scoring. Always a blessing and super exciting to see them get in at all.

Q. Hannah, you also had a chance to get home to New Jersey during the time off.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Right.

Q. How much did that help refresh you?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, it was big. Just having a reset like use an athlete. I feel like as athletes we all need a reset from social media or getting home to see our family, whether that was going home or relaxing. It was so important to be able to see my family and regroup and take a step back and appreciate all that the Lord has blessed me with and reflect and thank God for the opportunity I have to come and play in this tournament.

Q. Hannah, you waited two years to be able to share a back court with Olivia. I know she left the game early.

What did that mean to you having her impact out there, not necessarily as a scoring impact but all of the passes that she was assisting you guys on in your scoring efforts?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, just having Liv back at all, she just opens the floor up so much. She is so dangerous. Just her ability to not only score, but also to get all her teammates involved that's what makes her so dangerous. She can see so floor so well.

It's so easy playing with her because I know what's coming next being another point guard, but she's just able to drive, draw two defenders, and create for her teammates.

She had eight assists and that's great for a point guard anything. And-one turnover. Having her on the floor is so dangerous, so I'm proud of her.

Q. Coach, Olivia went down with 8:44 left. Looked like ankle. What can you he will us about her injury. What do you know at this point?

NIELE IVEY: Yes, ankle injury. Stepped on someone's foot. Going to be okay. But she got to get treatment.

Q. But you feel like she'll be ready?

NIELE IVEY: I haven't heard anything, but she walked off and verbally said she was okay.

Q. And then your bench was really good today. Went to it early. Was that intentional that you wanted to play a deeper rotation right from the getgo?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah. Usually it's what the game dictates. I felt like it was perfect timing for them to bring energy. Liza, which I didn't get a chance to say earlier, had a double-double, seven offensive rebounds. She was a big difference with the energy that came from the bench as far as Liza, Cass, and Kate.

I just go with what the game dictates. All of the were focused and ready. Again, very defensive minded today. Just wanted to change that energy right from the beginning.

I thought they came in and gave us a great spark. All three of them.

Q. Michigan had a game where they had to use their starters for almost the entire game; whereas you got to really play everyone. Do you think that gives you an advantage going in?

NIELE IVEY: Well, I mean, they play so well and so hard, so it's really -- I'm hoping that our depth can help us on Sunday. We got a scout. See what that looks like because I was back preparing for this game. I'm hoping that our depth can give us an advantage moving forward.

Q. And then as a long time Notre Dame person, you do know a little bit more than your players about that rivalry with Michigan. What does it mean to you to get to have this in this kind of game?

NIELE IVEY: It means everything. They're down the street. Two storied programs. Phenomenal coach in women's basketball tradition at Michigan. Had one of our former players on the bench.

So again, we're excited to play no matter who our matchup was. We'll be ready. Excited for women's basketball to see two great programs matched up together.

Q. What was your focus on defense? What were you trying to emphasize to your players over the past week or two?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, individual pride and rotations. Those were two big things. That can come with one-on-one, two-on-two, three-on-three. I was very focused on going back to the basics, challenging them with a lot of the practices. Made the practices extremely challenging so we can get better. Just staying on things long until I felt like we had moved forward in progression with whatever we were doing.

But that was my biggest focus. Individual pride and doing a great job with our team defense and communication.

Q. Rebounding part of that too?

NIELE IVEY: Absolutely. That's always attached. Rebounding so getting the stops. Forces them to make sure we were in situations that we had to get the stops. Sometimes rebounding is a big key of that. Credit to our practice squad. They came back and they really helped us really challenged us. Really prepared us for today.

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