

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Michigan vs Notre Dame

Saturday, March 22, 2025

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Purcell Pavilion

Michigan Wolverines

Kim Barnes Arico

Jordan Hobbs

Syla Swords

Olivia Olson

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right. Welcome into the Michigan press conference. We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Jordan, you did say yesterday after going against Audi that you were getting the ice bath and all of that. So how are you feeling?

JORDAN HOBBS: Yeah, I'm feeling pretty rejuvenated. Went in the ice bath yesterday. These two did somewhat today.

But, yeah, I mean, even if my body was feeling bad, I feel like once the adrenaline kicks in and you're playing the game, you don't really feel much. We have another 24 hours to recover, so we'll be really ready to go.

Q. Syla and Olivia, since you've been in your first March Madness game, what do you know now about playing in March Madness that you didn't know before?

SYLA SWORDS: Yeah, it was really real that you can go home. They went on their runs and we came out at halftime thinking that it's not just you can have another chance. It's if you don't win this game, you're going home, and that's not something we wanted to do, by any means. So just really that reality of win or go home, I think, is the mindset.

OLIVIA OLSON: Yeah, I agree. And at halftime we were, like, we're not going home. I was like, This is not going to



be my last game. We're going to keep playing. And so I think that's what the mentality is, that we want to keep going forward with that. We want to keep playing.

Q. Similar to your guys' Big Ten tournament matchup against USC, you come into this game as underdogs. Do you see any similarities, and if so, kind of what experiences can you draw on heading into the game?

JORDAN HOBBS: I think the biggest one that stands out to me is the pace that both of those teams play with. They score in the 80s, 90s every game. So I think we can take a lot of learning lessons from that. Also just the media attention that those teams are getting. Playing against JuJu gives us a really good idea of playing against Hannah an Olivia and just the skill set that those guards bring.

Also just playing in games like that gives us kind of some confidence for playing in big moments. That game against USC was, like, a week and a half, two weeks ago, and it was our biggest game up to that point and now we're heading into another huge game. So I think at the end of the day, we're ready and prepared.

Q. Notre Dame starts a lot of veterans in their lineup. You guys have a very young starting lineup. How do you think composure is going to play a role in today's game and then what is your approach to playing against players that have so much experience?

SYLA SWORDS: It's a tale of two different stories, really, them having so much experience and having the wins under their belt but also being young, not having that fear, really, coming into so many big matchups that we've had throughout the year. So really just seeing which team is going to come out ahead with different mindsets and different approaches to the game.

But also, again, we've played this schedule that we have so that we can come through for these moments so that we feel prepared for these moments.

OLIVIA OLSON: I think we've put ourselves in a good position. We've played a couple No. 1 teams at different points, and I think every day we just bring a competitive



energy. We're fearless and we don't really know what to not do. We just want to go work as hard as we can. And so I think that's the type of energy we'll bring into it.

JORDAN HOBBS: I don't really think composure is an issue for us at this point in the season. Like they mentioned, we've played so many good opponents and they showed yesterday, the freshmen, how composed they are in those big moments. Liv hit a really clutch shot, Mila hit some clutch shots, and Syla just played great all game. So I don't even think it's an issue at this point for us.

Q. Syla, can you talk a little bit about the challenge of playing Notre Dame's backcourt. What do you guys have to do to make sure they don't get comfortable and get that transition game going?

SYLA SWORDS: Obviously they have one of the best backcourts in the country. You see the Olivia Miles and Hannah Hildago duo everywhere, on Slam magazine, all that stuff. But that's really why we are here at Michigan, is to test ourselves against the best.

Us being such a guard-heavy team, I think that we can really match up well with them and see what we can do to be tested and show what Michigan women's basketball can do against the best of the best.

Q. Olivia, can you talk a little bit about how you feel comfortable, like, in an uncomfortable place because Notre Dame's on its home court and they will have the big crowd.

OLIVIA OLSON: Yeah, I think we live for these moments and we want to be tested. Playing here, it's a big test for us, but there's no reason we can't go out and prove everyone wrong. I think we talk about how everyone in our locker room, it's just us that believe that we can win this, and especially on their home court. So we're just going to go full effort and have no fear and, yeah, play to the best of our ability.

Q. Jordan, can you comment a little bit about your team's strengths, especially just handling these kind of pressure moments, the way you do and rising to the occasion.

JORDAN HOBBS: Yeah, I think our number one strength is just fearlessness, but also the ability to rely on a lot of our schedule and how competitive the Big Ten is, and I think we've put ourselves in a really good position this year with the top -- a top-20 strength of schedule and doing those games not on our home court, a lot of 'em.

So I just think we're really poised to come out tomorrow

and not let the crowd affect us and stick together really well and just really go back to what we value in our culture.

Q. Did you really like the Big Ten expansion, adding the West Coast teams? Were you really excited about it when they first announced it or are you like, Oh, wow, this worked out?

JORDAN HOBBS: I think at first I was, like, pretty excited. I think I was thinking about, like, traveling out there and getting a cool experience getting to play at Pauley Pavilion -- or not Pauley Pavilion, at UCLA.

But when season comes, it's tougher when you're traveling for a week straight, and I can't imagine those schools out there that have to travel even more than us. It makes our conference tougher, which I really appreciate. Every single game, you're going against a gauntlet. There's no game that you can take off in the Big Ten. That's why we got 12 teams into the tournament this year, which sets a record.

But at the end of the day, I think it's really good for women's basketball to have such a competitive conference.

Q. When you have a quick turnaround like this or like you did, obviously, in the Big Ten tournament, are there any traditions or routines or just anything you guys do to put one game behind you and move on to the next one, whether that's as attempt or individually?

SYLA SWORDS: We normally try to celebrate the wins for an hour or two at least to give ourselves a little mental break, especially on these longer trips away from home.

But what's really important is having a balance in the shootarounds like we just have of making sure you're both locked in and working hard but putting ourselves -- the version of ourselves forward for the next game too. So finding that balance.

OLIVIA OLSON: We've had some quick turnarounds too. Like, in the Big Ten, we played the next day. So we've worked on it all season, I think. When we were in Florida, we did that too. So just recovering as much as we can at night but being locked in on film and stuff.

Q. Can I ask what you do in that hour of celebration?

SYLA SWORDS: A lot of dances.

OLIVIA OLSON: Throw some water around, some dances.

JORDAN HOBBS: My freshman year we were expected to be in the Sweet 16 I feel like, so we didn't know how to



react, like, when we got there. And Coach came into the locker room and is like, Why is no one celebrating? And she was. Like, Beilein told her one time that you got to really appreciate the wins and celebrate the wins because at the end of the day, that's why you do this.

And so ever since that moment, I think she has not failed to celebrate the big wins. So definitely do some locker room shenanigans and some chanting. But once we leave the gym, I feel like we're all pretty focused on the next thing. We went to dinner last night as a team too, which was nice, and then when we returned, watched some film. So I think the dinner was our celebration.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the student-athletes and then take questions for Coach. We'll take an opening statement from Coach.

KIM BARNES ARICO: Well, it's great to be here. It's always nice. Towards the tail end of that game, I wasn't sure if we would be here. So I thought our team really rallied, and we were tremendous in the fourth quarter. I thought our young freshmen settled down and really made great plays down the stretch, and Jordan kind of led the charge the entire game.

So it's nice to still be in South Bend. We know we have our hands full. We're playing one of the best teams in the country, a team that's been ranked No. 1 throughout the course of this year, a team that has some incredible wins, and a team that is led by two All-American guards but surrounded by some really great, experienced players around her as well.

I know this environment and what it will be like tomorrow. I've coached at this place before. Our kids, they don't know, which is kind of cool because I don't think it bothers them as much because they don't know. But just happy to still be playing and have this opportunity to compete against another great team tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Kind of talking a bit about how Notre Dame has a lot of veterans and experience coming into this while you guys are a very young team, talk about the contrast between that.

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, they have a lot of history, they have a lot of tradition. Obviously Natalie Achonwa, who is now on our staff, has a banner hung up in the Arena for her.

So Notre Dame is program that has rich tradition and rich history and year-in and year-out they are a top program.

That's something that when I got to Michigan, we aspire to be one of those type of programs year-in and year-out.

With that comes veteran experience. Whether that's Olivia Miles, whether that's Maddy Westbeld, who I feel like has been here forever, Sonia Citron. King is new to their team, but an experienced, experienced player. It makes a difference. And Hannah Hidalgo, one of the best freshmen in the country last year and having a great sophomore season.

So, yeah, they definitely have a ton of experience. Our experience is this season, and I think it's been great for us. I think our freshmen have been tested and battle-tested. We've played No. 1 teams at a bunch of different times during the course of the year, and we talked a little bit about the Big Ten, but the conference has also prepared us to face some of the best programs in the country, and they're doing well right now in the NCAA Tournament as well, the Big Ten as a whole.

So they definitely have the experience over us, but that's something that most teams have had over us all season long.

Q. Wondering if you could talk about Syla Swords. She had a great game yesterday, but talk about her as a competitor.

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, you guys listened to her and sometimes I listen to her at these press conferences, and I'm like, is she a freshman student-athlete or is she an assistant coach that's been doing this for 20 years? Coach Nat always says she's an old soul. She's, like, mature beyond her years. That's how she probably grew up. She's a kid from a basketball family. Her mom and dad were both college players. Her dad was an Olympian as well and a college coach for a long period of time and is now in the NBA.

So she grew up in this environment. All she cares about is winning. I mean, you've heard her say it earlier this year, the media, Oh, you're in a slump. You got out of your slump. And she said, I'm not in a slump. I don't even look at the box score after the game. All I care about is the success of the team.

I mean, who says that? Like, really? Okay. But she's just different, she's built different, and she really genuinely means that. If that means I have to defend the other team's best player -- I mean, Brown for them had five total shots yesterday, and Syla and Olivia did a great job. Those are two freshmen doing a great job against one of the best players in the country.

So she doesn't really base her success off of the box score. She bases her success off of the success of our team, and that's what's really important to her. And she competes -- she's the ultimate competitor. Competes at a high level to win at everything she does.

Q. So the players talked a little bit about how they make sure they celebrate that win, and Jordan alluded to Beilein telling you to do that. So I was wondering, what was the story behind you making sure they celebrate the wins?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, Jordan said it, and Jordan and I were just talking a little bit about it in the locker room, just as a program the different phases that your program goes through. When you've always been the underdog, you always have a chip on your shoulder, you are excited for every successful thing that happens. Then all of a sudden it turns and the expectations change and you're supposed to win. What does that mean? I mean, you know, you're not supposed to win. Like, you have to show up and actually win the game. You put that type of pressure on yourself. That's not what it's supposed to be about. You're supposed to enjoy these moments and celebrate these moments.

And she was right. In the locker room a couple years ago, we hosted and I got in the locker room after our second-round win, and it was just, like, everybody was like this (indicating), and I'm like, What are we doing? Like, this is supposed to be a big deal. We got up and we started dancing and singing and all of that. And they want to have fun. At the end of the day, they're kids. They want to enjoy these moments, they want to celebrate these moments, they want to have fun in these moments.

It's not supposed to be a chore. It's not supposed to be something that they don't enjoy. And the more fun that they're having, really the more success that they're going to have. So we just try to really make any success that we have a celebration, and sometimes that success is wins and losses, but sometimes it's not, and I think that's an important thing.

Beilein did say that to me, and I mean, he still does. He called me after our regular season, he called me after our Big Ten run, just to check in. And, you know, he always says, My number one regret is that I didn't celebrate enough. I always turned the page and was trying to prepare for the next thing and the next game. And I never got to enjoy these moments with the kids. I think that's why we all get into coaching and that's kind of why y'all saw me get emotional last couple days is because these players -- and this is why we do it, to see what they're able to accomplish and to see the joy they have in these moments.

So, we try to have fun, we try to enjoy it before we turn the page.

Q. I appreciate you talking on Sylva so much, I have a little bit more to ask about her. No matter what happens tomorrow, she's still going to be a player you get to build the program around. So what does she bring that is going to make that job easier for you?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, I mean, she's like I said, she's just built different. She's an old soul. She cares about the team and cares about winning and she has this leadership ability and this leadership quality. I used to say about Naz Hillmon, our first All-American who is now in the W, and she will be at our game tomorrow but she used to have this crazy ability to connect to people. It was one of the greatest things that I've ever seen, and I would say, like, Naz for president, Naz for president. You don't find those type of kids all the time. Sylva is that type of kid. I just think she has this presence about her that calms everyone else down. Liv is such a competitor too and she's so incredibly hard on herself. And she, you know, and Mila is the same, and they both beat themselves up for every mistake that they make and every shot that they miss. They're just so tough on themselves. I think then Sylva comes in and is like, calms everyone down. It's like, Hey, it's okay, like, next play, let's move on. So she's really special, but the thing that's most special about them, that group and she comes and says it to me probably twice a week at least, Coach, this freshmen class, like they're the greatest people that I've ever been around, this is the greatest class, like we want to do something incredibly special at Michigan, we want to win a championship, we want to do something that's never been done, I thank you, Coach, for bringing me my best friends. And that's Sylva's mentality as a freshman. Yeah, so it's just different. She's different. But they're amazing, the group as a whole, for us to be sitting here and talking about last year I'm sure Notre Dame talked about Hannah, Hannah, Hannah, as one freshman. I mean, we have three. Three that went out yesterday and willed our team to victory at a high level. Two of which have scored over 500 points in their freshman year already. And then one who has to be the point guard on a pretty good team and is doing a tremendous job. So it's pretty incredible and the other two that aren't getting many minutes right now are really special as well and we think about that group every day.

Q. Notre Dame seems to play a very similar style, loves transition offense, loves shooting threes, loves to push the ball. How do you anticipate that challenge of playing a team similar to yourself?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, I think once again getting back to our conference and the different styles that we play

every day and the different preparation that we're going to have to get ready for every day. When we went to the Big Ten tournament we played against Washington in the first round. Holy cow, they have five, like kind of five guards, they play chin, they spread you out, they shoot the ball, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. The next day we got to prepare for Maryland. Holy cow, they're going to try to do this, like they might press us. The next day you got to prepare for USC. So I think our conference has allowed us the ability to go against different matchups every single day and, yeah, yesterday's game was, Okay, let's -- Iowa State, let's get Crooks the ball, let's get in our half court offense, let's set something up and run something for her or Brown. Tomorrow? It's going to be like this. They're one of the best transition teams in the country, they have the best guard play in the country, they're one of the best rebounding teams in the country, it's going to be a completely different style of game. So that's why our legs are important. Our preparation and a quick turnaround is going to be important, but we faced a lot of teams like this in our league and we're going to have to adjust to that pace quickly.

Q. Talking to Greta in the locker room, she mentioned that Michigan State, she thought was a similar team in the style of Notre Dame, you guys played them twice, had a chance to adjust to them the second time, what do you think was so key in that second matchup to lead you guys to win that?

KIM BARNES ARICO: I think the second time we handled their pressure a lot better than their first time. I think they really sped us up in the first game and we were able to handle that a lot better. That's the other thing about Notre Dame, they're going to try to speed you up. I don't know if anyone in the country has Hannah Hidalgo's quickness, her hands are just everywhere, her feet move faster than probably anyone I've seen. So we're going to have to handle somebody being up in us and that type of pressure as well. Michigan State did give us that, but the second time we were able to handle it a little bit better. We have to have people help Mila, we have to make sure different people are handling the ball, so it's not just 40 minutes of her facing that type of pressure.

Q. Notre Dame's had this theme of pick your poison. How do you pick, do you pick, can you neutralize all five?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, so I think kind of our philosophy all year has been we're five guards. So we're going to have a problem at some position and for most ever us, for most teams we faced this year it's been our post play and obviously you saw that yesterday. We're trying to match up a six foot guard against Audi Crooks and

it wasn't happening. But if we let them play one-on-one can we stop those other guys. And they still made a bunch of threes, but we were able to neutralize Brown. What makes a team a No. 1 team in the country or a top 5 team in the country is they have multiple people that can do that. That's what Notre Dame is. They have multiple people that can score and it is, it's pick your poison. We try to think and we're not obviously at their level yet, but we try to flip it. Okay, we have to play crook, like how is their five going to match up with Greta, how is their four going to match up with Jordan Hobbs and we try to do that. Now I think from a Notre Dame perspective like our matchups and their matchups are similar than probably yesterday's matchup for us. So it will be interesting to see how our similar like positions do against them and, you know, are they going to -- even when we played USC, USC has two bigs, giant bigs that are going to go inside. These guys, Westbeld's a decision maker she's a face up 4 she can shoot it, she's different than the USC post players. So I think it's more like our 4. So it will be interesting to see how from a defensive perspective can we matchup with their talent, and I think it will be a great test for us of we think we're pretty good, really where are we with a similar type team.

Q. Can the home court have an influence, is there a better way for the NCAA maybe to structure the tournament?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, you know, I almost wore my special shirt today that says, Everyone watches women's sports. Almost wore it. But I think the more that that becomes the truth, then we'll have a chance to make it change. I've been in this game for a long time now, so I've gone through a lot of different type of situations and it's incredibly hard to win on someone's home court. It definitely is an advantage. They're going to have a sellout crowd, whatever, you know, all the things. And it will be interesting to see when it's all said and done this year how many teams are able to advance that host. I do like the host thing, if you get to host, I mean, it's amazing. We got to host a number of years ago. I don't think there's anything greater than to be able to have your fan base there. If it did go neutral would people travel? I don't know. I think we're close. We're getting better and better every year. Eyes are on the game more and more. I think it would definitely help the game and definitely provide more upsets if it were neutral. But I think also for our players, even though we're going to be playing at Notre Dame, for them to be in an environment with a sellout crowd is really special too. So I can go either way. So we have to be a little extra tomorrow if we're going to try to beat 'em on their home court, a little extra.

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