

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Virginia vs Iowa

Sunday, March 22, 2026

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Carver-Hawkeye Arena

Virginia Cavaliers

Kymora Johnson

Sa'Myah Smith

Romi Levy

Coach Amaka

Agugua-Hamilton

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the student from the University of Virginia. If you have a question, please raise your hand.

Q. This will be game three for you here. How comfortable are you guys here now and how much momentum do you feel like you have right now?

KYMORA JOHNSON: I wouldn't say comfortable. I think you can't really get comfortable in the NCAA Tournament. We're playing really good right now, clicking at the right time, but it's really important to stay high -- sorry, not stay high. To stay even keeled and not get too high or too low and I think we're doing that, so, yeah.

Q. Sa' Myah, just the challenges that Ava Heiden and Hannah Stuelke provide inside for you guys.

SA'MYAH SMITH: She's a good player. You can't take any player or any team lightly coming into the tournament. But it will be a great match-up. She's real physical. Yeah. It will be a great match-up.

Q. Question for Romi. Is part of your role on that team to be aggressive early and to get this team off to a good start?

ROMI LEVY: I'm just out there because I'm playing hard because I love them. It's my last year. I came here for a reason. I love my teammates, so I'm playing out there for



them. I know I'm there for the energy. I'm there to do the little things and I love my role. I think I play into this role, so, yeah. Love you guys.

Q. Question for Mo. Just taking a look at the scope of this weekend, did you feel more freedom playing yesterday compared to, I guess, the grind of that first game and is there a possibility you might even be more free as a team and as a group tomorrow?

KYMORA JOHNSON: I think the intensity defensively was still pretty much the same for me. They're sending two and three people at me. I think my teammates really stepped up. Sa'Myah came out starting really aggressive from the jump. Romi hit big shots down the stretch.

I think, yes, it was a little bit more free but nothing's going to be easy. We know that. Everybody gives us their best shot, so, yeah.

Q. Also, just the comradery of the week this week. I know you had the long California trip but this one is just as long, going to end up being longer. Does that build as far as comradery since you're doing the same thing... hotel, food, every single day?

KYMORA JOHNSON: Yeah, for sure. I think it's great. It's a great experience. We're all having a really good time out here. We have been doing team bonding activities, things like that. Recovering together. We're having a really good time, so, yeah.

Q. You say that about team bonding activities. What are some of the things you guys have done?

KYMORA JOHNSON: Well, I think it was the second day we were here before we played Arizona State, we had a little team bonding act where we had tables set up in the team room. We had coloring books out for the people who just wanted to be quiet and color. We had a Skittles game where you had to separate all the Skittles by color. It was getting really intense. She lost, I think, every game.

Then we also had Uno. Just being together. We see each other every meal, walkthroughs, everything. But, yeah, it's



been fun.

Q. How comfortable, and you don't want to saw comfortable, but how confident are you that if this is a close game tomorrow that you guys are going to come out on top? You won a two-pointer against Arizona State. You won in overtime yesterday.

SA'MYAH SMITH: I think it's just all about winning. I think we all are here to win. That's what we came here to do. Like you said, we can't get comfortable. Anything can happen in the tournament, but we're excited to be here. We're having fun doing it together so we do it for each other. At the end of the day, we're just looking to win.

Q. This is going to be the largest crowd you have ever played in front of most likely. Just tell me the excitement to do that and the possibility to shush them.

KYMORA JOHNSON: Yeah, I've been in front of some crazy crowds. I think my freshman year, first year was like 12,000. Obviously it's 15 or something here. We experienced it yesterday. It was really loud, really hot in there but that's great for women's basketball. That's what we came here to do. We're on this stage and we wouldn't want it any other way, so.

ROMI LEVY: Back home it's like that. Europe is very much the same atmosphere, so I feel like I'm back home for a little bit, but I love it.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thank you so much. Good luck tomorrow.

The floor is open for Coach.

Q. Coach, can you compare and contrast this weekend this March Madness compared to some of your other stops along the way when you were in the round of 32, even the Sweet 16 back at Missouri State. Can you compare and contrast these two or three journeys I could say?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Every team is different. Even if you're at the same school and go multiple times, I think team is different. Every experience is unique. This one has been amazing for me just to watch our players and just see how happy everybody is and exuding joy and how present we are and how we're just enjoying each other and creating these lasting memories.

I'm just really focused on that, for this group of young women to leave a legacy. They all came here to be part of something special, something that's bigger than

themselves and help get Virginia women's basketball back to the glory days that we all know and love. I'm just happy that they're living their dreams and they're living a legacy. That's what I'm focused on. Just staying present.

Q. You talked about the chemistry of this team. How important is that this time of year and how important is it in the situation you're in where you are now playing your third game in five days?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Yeah, somebody asked me that earlier, and you do have to be together. That's the way that you make a run in March. That's how you win in March. You have to be together and it's not just in the game. Outside of the playing, like outside of game time, outside of practice, outside of all that, you have to be together. You have to have good comradery. Good synergy. Good vibes within the group. I think that's very important.

Playing three games, you want to be playing in March, so it doesn't matter. If we had to play every day, we would. They're not tired. I tell them that all the time. I say that in the summertime or even in preseason. Come in, your not tired. Nobody's tired in March, that's for sure.

Also I think momentum and adrenaline and all that stuff carries you forward and gives you more energy. Our players are hungry and eager to get out there again. This is a great opportunity, amazing fan base. It was electric in there the other night and we expect to see the same thing. It's just a great environment for women's basketball. It's just a blessing to have the opportunity to compete in that.

Q. Has your lineup flexibility, as far as length and different abilities to guard helped you in all of these quick turnarounds? For example, Tabby and Cait are never going to be outsized. And Romi is always going to be able to have that length to guard a variety of different type of players. Has that helped at all, your lineup versatility?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Yeah. I think versatility is one of our biggest strengths. It's a big part of my philosophy. I don't really like one-dimensional players. I love players who can do multiple things. You can move around different positions and also pick apart the defense.

Also on the other end, defending people and being able to mix up different defensive schemes with versatile defenders is important, too. I think this year we have bigs that can really impact the game in the paint on both sides of the ball and we have a lot of them. That's an advantage.

I think things are starting to click at the right time. We also

have Romi and Bre and some other big guards that can do some things, too. Play three and four and some athletic guards. I think we have the pieces and that's why we are where we are and we've been successful.

The difference right now is that we're just clicking at the right time. Everything is starting to come together. We're really bought in, understanding everybody's roles, understanding what the game plan is, understanding how urgent you need to be to win in March. I think that's been the difference.

Q. Coach, what do you see in your scouting report about Iowa?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Well, there's a lot of things in the scouting report about Iowa. Iowa's a great team, well-coached. They play together, they have great chemistry. Very rhythm-based team. They run their stuff, their reads, they're on point with all that. Great environment here.

You got to be extremely disciplined in understanding the game plan in going to execute it, but I have a lot of respect for what they do and what she does and obviously Jan's been here forever. Now that she's been a head coach, they haven't missed a beat. I just have a lot of respect for her, this program, and just even the community, how they always show up and show out.

Q. Your two wins have been close games and you have been able to make the plays down the stretch. What do you attribute that to? Is it just the leadership of this team and the things that you do?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Yeah, every game in March is going to be close. Even in our conference, our conference was a dog fight every night. We were in quite a few overtime games this year. I don't even know the number. I would say probably five or six maybe. You learn through that. We closed out a lot of those games, too. I think we have been in those situations before, but we work quite a bit on urgency.

Obviously it's no secret we didn't finish the season we wanted to, the regular season. Through those close games and those tight losses that we had in our last three games before Selection Sunday, we used that week to get better. We had to get better. We had to get more urgent, more urgent defending. Understanding offensive looks and execution. Understanding everybody's roles.

I challenged them quite a bit during that week but we also did some team bonding so we could come together and understand that when we hit adversity, we can't go our

separate ways. We got to persevere through it together.

So I think there was a lot of growth we had really after the ACC Tournament before the NCAA Tournament. All of that kind of contributes into why we're doing what we're doing now.

Q. After reviewing the film, the three-point shooting was at a really high level with Mo and Romi and Bre even hit one. Got contagious, which can happen in March. How do you produce that again, tomorrow?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Confidence, you know? Tomorrow's not promised. We just got to keep fighting for tomorrow. That's what we're talking about. One more. Fight for one more day. One more opportunity. One more opportunity to create memories together. One more opportunity to practice. One more opportunity to play. One more opportunity for our seniors. Just one more.

You can't leave anything up for chance. You can't second-guess yourself. You can't think about oh, should I shoot this shot? No, you got to be all-in, believe, trust in the work. Just go out there and help each other out, too. If somebody is struggling shooting, give them confidence that we believe in them. That's basically what it is.

We have had games where we have shot it pretty well but right now we can't have bad shooting nights and if we do, we better be creating some offense from our defense. It's just about leaving it all out there for 40 minutes.

Q. You have had the message all year long to play with joy. Where are they in that threshold right now?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: I think we are playing with joy. We have multiple times this year, but you see it even when we're just walking around and they're hanging out and doing things like that. We've been doing some things together. They've been playing some games and stuff like that in the hotel.

Even when they do recovery and seeing them laugh and joke, which they always do pretty much off the court, but it's translating on to the court now, too. I think we're playing with that energy. Even when the other team is punching back, we stop the bleeding and we're celebrating each other. Bench is into it. All of that. That's a big part of it.

March Madness, that's what you see. It's about joy. It's about passion. It's about the will to win. It's about togetherness. All of that. I love that our team is embodying that.

THE MODERATOR: Anything else for Coach? Coach.
Thank you so much. Good luck tomorrow.

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