

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - George Mason vs Florida State

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Pete Maravich Assembly Center

Florida State Seminoles

Brooke Wyckoff

Media Conference



much. Obviously you want talent and ability, but experience, having been there. So Ta'Niya, Makayla Timpson, and O'Mariah Gordon, our core three, have been here, have done this. Makayla and O'Mariah have played here in the NCAA Tournament their freshman year.

So having that experience, knowing what to expect, and being ready to take the next step, I think is huge, and I know that's their mindset.

Q. Congrats on a good season. Makayla and Ta'Niya mentioned the mantra One earlier in the press conference on jerseys and the walls. Where did that start, and what does that mean moving into tournament play, where one game really matters most?

BROOKE WYCKOFF: Yeah, the players actually came up with that. They talked amongst themselves, coaches weren't involved, and they were just tasked with figuring out what is the word that embodies what they want to be and what they want to do this season, and they came up with that.

One, as they explained it to me, One means so much. It's a simple word, and it just means one, but for example, what you just said, one game. We have one opportunity right now to take advantage of, so one team, one moment, one practice. We've said that a lot. We have one practice, let's do it. Let's have a great practice.

They came up with that. I love it, and it's been our theme all year. Really I think what it means most to them is the togetherness, one team.

Q. Brooke, obviously anyone who has seen a basketball game would say you have to try to stop Latson, and I'm sure it's difficult for people to do this year, but at the same time, it's the NCAA Tournament. You're going to face a heightened level of competition. What do you expect -- not to give away your game plan, of course, but how do you expect to counter that?

BROOKE WYCKOFF: Well, one of the things that Ta'Niya does so well and is really, really hard to guard is she plays

THE MODERATOR: Good morning once again. Welcome back to Baton Rouge as we continue talking with the Florida State Seminoles. I'm here with Head Coach Brooke Wyckoff. 23-8 on the season, Florida State the No. 6 seed. They'll face No. 11 George Mason at 6:45 p.m. central time.

Coach, welcome to Baton Rouge. Let me start by asking you what I asked your players that were here. 23-8 on the season, a nice seven-game win streak early in the season, another nice six-game win streak. Your players, for what it's worth, say they play best after two losses, and you're off two losses, so they're ready to make a run. But would you share with us the path to get to Baton Rouge.

BROOKE WYCKOFF: Yes, it's great to be here in Baton Rouge and part of another NCAA Tournament. Yes, we had a very successful season, but highlighted, as any season is, with some highs and lows.

That's what I've said about this team all season is that they respond well, they really do, and they never quit, whether that's during a game or after a two-game loss, losing streak, we respond. We're at this point, and we're ready to make a great run.

We've got some very experienced vets on our team too, which you guys talked to, who know what it feels like to be in this position and are really just motivated to make a run.

Q. How much do you lean on them? We all know tournament time, even conference tournament is not the NCAA. This is a completely different ballgame, new atmosphere. How much does that experience that they've been here before help you get the word out to other people about what you're about to experience?

BROOKE WYCKOFF: I think experience counts for so



with amazing pace. That comes with our team getting stops on the defensive end, and that's really what our focus has been.

In March you have to play defense, you have to finish with a rebound. You can't count on making shots. You don't know any given night if those will fall -- hopefully they will for us. But we have to get stops, and when we do get stops, that gives us an opportunity to get the ball into the hands of our fast guards like Ta'Niya, and it's really, really hard to have a game plan when she's going downhill at the speed she's able to go downhill.

So that's first and foremost, what we always have tried to do all season. But Ta'Niya's seen every imaginable coverage. She's an experienced player, and she knows what to expect, so she's ready to attack with her pace and ability.

Q. She was asked about that, and she kind of laughed it off. I've faced double-teams all year. It's nothing. Offensively, as we told the girls, the school hosting here is known for its big three. But you have a big three, the highest scoring big three. Have you as a coach talked to the other players about stepping up, and how have you seen them respond?

BROOKE WYCKOFF: Going into this season, we felt we got deeper from our team last year. We added some pieces and some pieces around that big three that are really capable. We've had different players step up throughout the season.

They understand that we need -- it's not just about those three. If we want to score at the rate we score in the 90s and be the team that scores the most points in the country, it can't just be three players. So we've had players like Sydney Bowles, Carla Viegas, Amaya Bonner, Malea Williams, they've all stepped at different times scoring-wise and do a great job of complementing those three top scorers.

Q. 12th straight NCAA Tournament, which is the seventh longest active streak in the country. Can you talk about what that's meant in terms of building the consistency and the expectations of your program to get here? It's a great journey. It's not always easy to get here, but you've done a very nice job. What has that meant to you in terms of what you've built for the program?

BROOKE WYCKOFF: It was built by coach Sue Semrau, who laid that foundation. She's the one who built that foundation of I played for her. I coached with her. She's the one that built that foundation of success at Florida

State.

When I was given this opportunity to take over the reins, the big task was to not mess that up basically (laughter), and to keep that going.

I learned everything from her about what it takes to get to this place, to get to this tournament, and what it means, and it isn't easy. I'm just so proud that we've been able to extend that legacy, and we're going to continue to do it.

Q. What's the journey been like personally, from learning so much and being given the reins, what's the ride been like?

BROOKE WYCKOFF: It's been a pure, just a dream to be playing at my alma mater -- to be coaching at my alma mater, to have played here, to coach here, to be a part of the journey of young women that made that same choice that I did to play at Florida State and to understand how special this place is and how special this women's basketball program is.

It's an unbelievable opportunity. It's hard. It's not easy, but that's what makes it so enjoyable as well.

Q. Have you had a chance to speak with the George Mason Coach Vanessa Blair-Lewis yet, and what's your impression of their team?

BROOKE WYCKOFF: She's a friend of mine. We've known each other for a while. I have so much respect for her as a person, as a mom, and as a coach. She's done a fantastic job.

I haven't spoken to her, but I'm looking forward to seeing her at the game before we tip off.

I love what she's done. She's built a really solid basketball team and program, and she's done that everywhere she's been. I'm excited to see her, compete against her, and it will be a great game.

Q. Speaking on your relationship with her, how did you guys meet, and how did you guys become friends?

BROOKE WYCKOFF: We met through an organization that I am a part of and actually was a co-founder of called Moms in Coaching. We had kids around the same time, and so we were kind of just starting out on that journey together of being moms in this business.

It's a great way to bond. I've met so many wonderful women through that organization. We've just kept in touch

over the years. We see each other on the road. We've coached against each other a few times. Yeah, it's been really fun to watch her progress and her journey as well.

Q. You can't drop that nugget and think you're going to walk away. Moms in Coaching do you all meet in the off-season? Is that something that supports one another throughout the season? How many coaching members do you have in the organization?

BROOKE WYCKOFF: Thanks for asking. I love talking about Moms in Coaching. Moms in Coaching was an organization we started. Really we meet every year at the Final Four. We are busy people, so I wish we could meet more. I wish we could do more with it.

We get together every year at the Final Four. It's women in the room that are moms or even women that may want to be a mom someday and are in the coaching profession, just to talk about what it means to be a mom in this business.

Coaching is a very demanding job, and being a mom is also very demanding, so how those two marry and how those things work together. It's an amazing thing to be a mom and a coach. But to gather in a room with women, and we've had up to 80 women in the room. There are so many mothers that do this, and you just don't know necessarily.

Even when we see each other, when we coach against each other, you don't see the kids there necessarily. You don't know. When we're out recruiting, you don't know until you really sit down and talk, and you realize, wow, there are a lot of women out there doing this, I can do it, during those hard moments.

That's been the best thing about it is to know, you know, Vanessa, she's going through the same thing as me, and I see her out there flourishing. If she can do it, I can do it.

That's really the best part of gathering together and understanding how many of us are out there.

Q. In covering the Sweet 16 in 1997, Charli Turner Thorne was there, and she was pregnant. How could she be coaching, she's pregnant? From a player to now as a coach, how do you feel women's basketball and the tournament has grown? It seems to have seen a lot of exponential growth in recent years, but it was only a couple years where you all got to start using the term March Madness with your tournament. How do you feel it's grown, and where do you think it needs to go?

BROOKE WYCKOFF: I'm so proud of how it's grown. The product that we have has also gotten better, but it's always been good. Women's basketball, if you stop and pay attention, you see how great of a game it is and how amazing the players that have played for so many years are.

But the attention that it's getting, I think can only grow. It's the storytelling. You mentioned Charli, but a few years ago at the Final Four in the bubble, Adia Barnes also gained national attention. She was a mom and was tending to her baby at halftime of the National Championship Game.

These are the stories, just like we tell the stories of these amazing players and how they got here and who they are, there's so many amazing coaches out there doing that same thing and battling to make this game as great as it can be.

I'm so happy to just be a part of this moment, just this exponential rise in attention and eyeballs on the game and really just having played in it and coaching it and seeing our young women be recognized for all the hard work and even our coaches being recognized for what they do and how they build up the lives of young women and inspire young women and boys to do great things.

Just so happy and proud to be a part of this moment. I know it can continue, and it will only continue to grow as the years go on.

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