

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Villanova vs Texas Tech

Friday, March 20, 2026

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Pete Maravich Assembly Center

Texas Tech Red Raiders

Coach Krista Gerlich

Denae Fritz

Bailey Maupin

Media Conference

Tech Texas 57, Villanova 52

KRISTA GERLICH: Thank you. What a great game. Everything that we knew about Villanova was so true. They're such a good basketball team, so well-coached. Fighters until the end. Really hard to defend. We knew it was going to be a dogfight from the tip.

Really proud of our kids for staying together, for stepping up, and making really big plays when we needed them.

I thought that the whole first half it was just both teams trying to figure out what the other team was doing to them and how to fight through the physicality, how to fight through just people, the scout, you know, defending each other.

And then I thought that in the second half we got our footing under us a little bit in the fourth quarter and the kids really stepped up to the challenge and had some really big plays. We hit some big shots. We got on the floor first after several loose balls and rebounded it well.

So super proud of these kids, and first win in the NCAA tournament in 21 years for the Lady Raider basketball program, and we're super thrilled to have accomplished that.

Q. Denae, you had the task of guarding Bascoe for a majority of the game. What was it like guarding her and how does she compare to some of the other top players you've guarded this season?

DENAE FRITZ: Yeah, she's definitely one of the better



guards I've guarded all season. So she's a great player. You know, I think that everybody bought in when it came to guarding her. We knew that was their best player, the engine that made them go.

I think that everyone did an amazing job.

Q. Bailey, you had I guess a bit of a struggle shooting-wise. How did you stay with it and eventually found your scores?

BAILEY MAUPIN: I think the most important thing is just keep shooting the ball. Shooters have to have a short memory. I try not to think about the last shot. Just move on, continue to play, do what the coaches and my teammates need me to do. If I'm open, I have to be the one to shoot and just have that confidence that it's going to go in.

Q. Denae, you talked a lot this season that you can get to the basket. You can be aggressive. Tonight all game just seemed like when you needed a bucket, you were willing to go do it. Where did that come from, senior mindset?

DENAE FRITZ: Honestly, that was the task they gave me for this game. We knew the matchup that we want, and she just happened to be guarding me. So when I had that, you know, I knew my job was to get downhill, so...

Q. Bailey, you talked about it just the other day, that you'll be being open about the fourth quarter thing. Earlier in the season it was a strength. What was the discussion to get back to your biggest wins this year that have been comebacks in the fourth quarter and did that again today?

BAILEY MAUPIN: Right. What we've been talking about for the last 15 days is finishing games. That's something we struggled with the last five or six games before the tournament.

So going in when we had those 15 days of us practices, we really focused on finishing games, executing late, in the fourth quarter, and just making shots, executing, getting to



the free-throw line and doing the things we normally do.

Q. I don't know if it you think about it this way, but how much does it help you when you get that charge late in the game to lock you in?

BAILEY MAUPIN: Huge. We're a defensive-minded team. Everybody buys into defense. Everybody knows that's what you have to play to win. So getting that call right before halftime and at the end of the game, I mean, it's huge.

Q. Denae, can you take me through the play late? There as of loose ball that you got on. What did you see, and just what was going through your mind?

DENAE FRITZ: I mean, I just saw the ball bounce on the floor, and I just know that our thing is first one to the floor, like Coach said. I knew I needed to do any job and get to the floor before they did.

So that's exactly what happened.

Q. Bailey, is there something that comes over you, a feeling, just when it's crunch time and you know that team needs a play from you?

BAILEY MAUPIN: I wouldn't say it's a feeling or that I feel like I have to do that by myself. I feel like we're all put in positions where we need to execute and where we need to get to the basket or hit open shots.

I'm super grateful that everyone on this team knows if it's their time, it's their time, and they get to the basket. Just happened to be me tonight, so...

Q. For both of y'all, we talked about leading up to this point getting into the tournament. Bailey, you said getting into the tournament wasn't enough. You wanted to get a first round win. We heard Coach's emotions. Talk about y'all's emotions getting that gritty first round win and now y'all are into the second round?

BAILEY MAUPIN: It's an unreal experience. Really hard to put into words. This is something I've been working towards my whole career. Just be at the end of the game and get to celebrate and get to wake up tomorrow and know that it was real and that we get to play again, I mean, I couldn't be happier.

DENAE FRITZ: Yeah, I would say exactly the same thing. I'm just so happy to be a part of this program and be a part of coming back to the tournament and getting a win. So, yeah.

Q. For both you guys, I know still very fresh; going to play LSU on Sunday. What's the mentality and thought process for that?

BAILEY MAUPIN: I don't think the mentality changes. 1-0. Every single game. Doesn't matter who we're playing against, what the circumstances are. It's going to be 1-0. That's been our theme, and that will continue to be our theme.

Q. That last tournament win came, you were an assistant coach, head coach is standing back here, I believe, with Marsha Sharp. What's it's been like for both of you to have Marsha traveling and be here for these games?

BAILEY MAUPIN: For me, it's a huge honor. I watched a lot of her coaching growing up. I watched a lot of Coach Gerlich growing up. Just to be in this position where we're bringing the program back to where it should be and where it will continue to be for a long time, to know she's sitting there watching us makes me want to play harder.

DENAE FRITZ: Yeah, I just love how she's here supporting one of her old players and watching how Coach Gerlich has got this program back to what it used to be.

Yeah.

Q. Coach, you have got nine seniors on your team, 11 upperclassmen. Talk about how much of an advantage that is kind of coming into the tournament, also in this game, and just how you're kind of relying on that as the tournament kind of unfolds?

KRISTA GERLICH: Yeah, it's definitely been a strengths of ours all year. It's because of the "last one, best one" mentality I think. You know, I think they all chose Texas Tech, those that came in just for this year. They chose Texas Tech to come in and leave a legacy and to help a program get back to where it was.

But I think right now and particularly in the tournament, having a senior-laden team, just is -- they don't want it to end. They don't want it to end. They want to keep playing together.

So they have a little bit more of a desperation I think when they play, a little bit more fortitude when it comes to making big plays and leaving it all out on the floor.

Q. Are there any changes that you're looking to make for Sunday against LSU?

KRISTA GERLICH: Changes as in?

Q. Just in your game in general.

KRISTA GERLICH: Well, you know, I'm going to be super honest with you. I've only watched LSU when I'm watching on a Sunday afternoon and they play on Sundays and we don't.

So I have not watched much LSU at all. Or my assistants have. So I do know this: Anytime this season that we have tried to change something that we do, it has not bode well for us.

So I think that just going blind into the scout for myself, we got to play Lady Raider basketball. We may need to tweak it, but we got to be who we are.

Q. Late in the game there was a timeout about six and a half minutes to go. Just what was the message in that huddle to maintain that lead? I think that was the first time you had a two-possession lead all game, and to make sure you maintained.

KRISTA GERLICH: Yeah, we just talked about having composure and playing to win, continuing to get stops and rebounds.

I think once you get that separation, you to continue to get stops. Then we have to take really good shots. I thought that our kids did that. We had a couple kids make some big ones, but we were really good at the free-throw line, and that's what you have to be when you're trying to protect a lead.

Q. So like you said yesterday, it's been a minute since you have been on this stage. But you're back now. What does this win and what do you need to do to like make this a staying tradition for you guys, for lack of a better word?

KRISTA GERLICH: For sure. Well, it means the world to me. I mean, that's one of the reasons -- obviously I've wanted to be the head coach at Texas Tech since I played there and knew that at some point Coach Sharp would retire. I was really blessed to be able to go coach with her.

I had to take a big circle to get back around to here, but like I really wanted to honor her legacy because she is the pioneer of Lady Raider basketball. She's the one that built it up and got us into the tournament for 21 -- this was our 21st time to be in the tournament.

With the two -- well, with a 13-year gap. So she is the one that obviously started the legacy, and I just -- it just means

the world to me to be able to come back in here and do everything that I can, surround myself with great people, get the right players in here that believe in Texas Tech, believe in the Lady Raiders, to be able to get this program back there.

And then it's one of those things where those nine seniors that we're talking about, they're going to have a huge part in helping us sustain it because they're Lady Raiders for life.

I know we had a lot of former Lady Raiders in the stands tonight as well. That's what it's all about, is continuing to bring pride to this program, and they're going to help us sell that. They're going to help us relay that message and pass that tradition down.

We have signed six freshmen for next year's team. All six of those kids are in love with our nine seniors. I mean, they absolutely adore them and just are looking up to them and watching what they're doing, and they want to carry on that torch.

That's what it is all about whenever you have a tradition-rich program.

Q. Going back to yesterday, you said that the key -- one of the keys to winning this game was not relying on one person. When you look at that box score, everyone had their hand in this offensively, but also defensively. Just talk about how key that is and also how special that is as a coach to see that you're not having to rely on one or two people, but everyone on that bench is going to get in and make a difference?

KRISTA GERLICH: ^ Jr start well, that's been the -- our story, right, this year. We share the basketball. We're very deep. We have multiple people that can contribute.

I've said the whole time that we have 11 players on our team and nine of them could start. Nine of them would start in another program. So they're extremely unselfish. They all have a role and know what that role is.

We don't have any All-Americans on our team. You know, we don't have -- we have one first-team all-conference and a 6 player of the year.

But we have really good kids. We have really good character kids. We have really talented kids that just aren't upper echelon, but they play really well together and they understand the team concept.

I don't know, I've said it to them all year long, but like this is a team sport. It's meant to be a team sport. So when we

have -- we have one player step up, we have another player that will have their back if they get in foul trouble. We have somebody that can come in and defend if somebody is not doing a great job.

They have each other's back and the depth and the way they are so unselfish is a strength and superpower to be honest in this day and age.

Q. You guys had a little bit better fourth quarter than you've had in recent games?

KRISTA GERLICH: A little bit.

Q. What did you feel like changed?

KRISTA GERLICH: It was a lot better. Desperation. I think these 15 days off or kids were super upset. Let's be real. The K State game at the beginning of the tournament, the Big 12 tournament, I mean, we did not do a great job finishing that out at all.

Our kids had to sit on that for 15 days. We definitely addressed it, talked about it. We've always been transparent with these kids and coached them hard and been truthful with them.

They wanted to close out a game. I think it was just their mentality. I think it was, again, their desperation because they're seniors. We just pulled out of them what we already knew was inside of them and they got it done.

Q. Asked Bailey about the mindset. How will you prepare for the team mentally for a tough contest against LSU?

KRISTA GERLICH: Well, No. 1, this is March Madness. That's what you do. You step up, and who is the next opponent. The thing about our kids is that we have some really big wins in or conference. We beat TCU; Baylor twice; West Virginia at their place.

All those teams are really good basketball teams and they're playing in this tournament and at really high level.

So I don't think we're going to be intimidated by any means. We've played on the road before in really great environments. This is what it's all about. We want that tall task and we understand it is one. We have the utmost respect for LSU and what they've done. We want to be where they are. We want to win a national championship.

Obviously Coach Mulkey has done that multiple times. You know, we faced her when she was Baylor and we just are ready for the challenge and we'll go get ready tonight

when we get back to the hotel.

Q. Coach, kind of the same question I asked the players. I know Coach Sharp is around the program a lot. You don't see a lot of coach come back and travel with the team and be here with you in the postseason. How special is it to have her here to get that win for the first time since 2005?

KRISTA GERLICH: Obviously ya'll know that I think the world of her. And I wouldn't be where I am today without her.

You know, she believed in a girl from Spearman, Texas. Population 3500 way back in the day. She brought a group of people together, group of girls together, and we did the impossible. We literally did the impossible.

I owe so much to her and just her mentorship, her friendship, you know, her belief in me. And now that I'm back at my alma mater, back lead thing program, it's just an honor that she is here. It's an honor she's around us. I love when she speaks to our team because they just -- you could hear a pin drop when she speaks to them because they soak it all in.

They have high respect for her. That's one of the -- I think that's one of our goals when we were rebuilding this program, was for the players that we brought manage here to understand the tradition of Lady Raider basketball. Because it is special.

That is all because of Marsha Sharp and what she did and how she sacrificed and how she built this program up. So for the past, you know, however many years that we've been in the cellar, the program has been in the cellar. That has broken my heart and every lady Raider's heart.

Just for her to be able to see it, getting back there, for her to be so proud of the girls that are wearing the Lady Raider uniform and to watch them go through the process, because it is no easy task of rebuilding a program.

And to have her support means the world to me. She sent me the most incredible text today before the game that was like, head coach to head coach. Head coach that's been there, and head coach that hasn't.

I'm going to get super emotional and trying not to look at her while I'm talking. It was just super special to be able to rely and to depend and to have somebody encourage you like that.

Q. Coach, just I know it was a defensive battle tonight, but just from what you've seen from LSU, how crucial

will it be to take care of the ball on Sunday, especially seeing how their defense fuels that offense?

KRISTA GERLICH: Yeah, I think clearly I think we can defend. But we can't defend turnovers. When we turn the basketball over, that leads to easy buckets. We turned the basketball over a lot tonight.

We're going to have to do a much better job taking care of it. We're going to have to be super gritty and tough and rebound the basketball and not give them second-chance opportunities.

But I do think that defense is what's gotten us here. There is this doubt. That's what we'll have to rely on to stay in the game.

Q. You've had March Madness wins as a player and assistant coach and head coach. Does this one feel any different for you?

KRISTA GERLICH: Wow, that's a really good question. I will say that it's been a long time, and so just the feeling is fantastic because it's been gone for a long time.

I think that is the thing. It's like once you -- this is what we tell our kids. Once you experienced it, it might be worse when you can't get back to it because you know what you're missing; whereas if you never get there, you don't really know.

And so this one is pretty special just because it's been a long time coming and there was a lot of doubt. There was probably a lot of doubt from myself at times, and just the fact that we were able to accomplish it, that we were able to find a group of girls that believed in it and a staff that believed in it and that Lady Raider Nation is revived. The excitement has been second to none.

It's the fun part. Yeah, this one is pretty special.

Q. So not just the win itself but how ya'll did it, what does that do for like you said those six freshman coming in and whatever else may happen in the offseason?

KRISTA GERLICH: Well, we have to be gritty and we have to be tough. That's what I want my teams to be known for. They're toughness, grittiness, competitiveness. That's what first to the floor. I love that our kids won that ballgame because they were first to the floor. I wouldn't say they wanted it more because I know Villanova wanted it just as badly.

But our kids sacrificed to get it done. So I just think it sets

the tone, the standard for where we want our program to be, and our incoming kids that we know are coming in now understand what that is. From day one they'll be upholding that.

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