

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Liberty vs Kentucky

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Memorial Coliseum

**Liberty Flames**

**Bella Smuda**

**Emma Hess**

**Jordan Hodges**

Media Conference



footage as you've prepped the last few days, what are the challenges that they pose that you are prepping for? The name Georgia Amoore I'm sure is on the top of your list.

EMMA HESS: We're definitely going to have to contain her if we're going to win the game tomorrow. They're a talented team, but I think we also have some talent too. So I'm looking forward to a good game.

**Q. This is a year where it feels like there's more parity than ever in college basketball. How exciting is it for you guys to be here and have this opportunity in a year where it feels like it's so open?**

JORDAN HODGES: What do you mean by parity?

**Q. Like to a point where it's kind of wide open this year, there are so many teams who could win at any point.**

JORDAN HODGES: Yeah, well, I think it means a lot that with us being here and that any team could win, but we were chosen to win, and we have been favored by God this whole season. So I think it was in due time. Like Bella said, we've been working for four years. I'm really proud that we're here, and I think it's really nice to see a bunch of different teams on the other side of the bracket as well who don't usually make it and they have made it into the tournament.

So I think it will be a really fun and exciting tournament for all teams.

**Q. We talked to Coach on Selection Sunday, asked him about some of the winning pedigree of some of the high school players. I know you're from Richmond, Monacan High. What was that experience like and how it's preparing you for what you're getting ready to run into?**

JORDAN HODGES: Like, my upbringing from high school? Yeah, it definitely prepared me a lot. Put me in a competitive mindset, I would say. And playing under such an intense coach who is -- they're one and the same, the

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to Lexington. Thank you for joining us for the press conference for the Liberty women's basketball team. We're joined at the podium by student-athletes Bella Smuda, Emma Hess, and Jordan Hodges.

**Q. What's this experience been like? You guys are the senior leaders on this team. You've been wanting to be here for as many years as you've been in Lynchburg. So what's the experience like now that you're actually finally in the NCAA Tournament?**

BELLA SMUDA: It's just really an awesome experience. I was just talking to these girls, we were walking by, I was like we really, like, went through a lot to get here. I think we've -- this is our first time winning a championship together, and it's just such a cool opportunity to finally get here and see how hard our hard work has really been paying off.

**Q. Bella, you have a lot of experience. Can you talk about this matchup between you and Clara Strack coming up, what you're excited for?**

BELLA SMUDA: Yeah, I'm really excited. I love playing against other talented post players. It's always just a fun -- it's a fun challenge just to -- I love to be playing physical and just fighting for the boards and all that.

I'm looking forward to just playing against her, and I think it will be a really fun battle.

**Q. Not just Clara, but this Kentucky team in general, with what you know about them, what you've seen on**



only difference is Coach Green is not as loud as my high school coach.

But it definitely prepared me to just enjoy the little things and work hard in the little things, and it leads you to big things like these big stages that we're at now.

**Q. Coach Brooks has talked about matching up with your coach plenty of times. Can you all just talk about the experience that he shared -- or talk about the experience he's had, has he shared any of that with you going into this match?**

BELLA SMUDA: When Coach Brooks was at Virginia Tech, we met like my first, I think, two years, we played them. And he has a ton of basketball history, a bunch of success.

So it's cool to be able to play against him again. I know that we got to play against Georgia at least my sophomore year. I think she was a freshman. So just having a little bit of Virginia -- like, you know, that Virginia rivalry a bit is still kind of there.

And it's just fun. This is what March is all about, those matchups. And it's exciting. I'm looking forward to it.

**Q. Carrying this momentum from the Conference USA tournament into this, what have you talked about to keep that rolling?**

EMMA HESS: Really just keep playing how we're playing. I mean, we're playing our best basketball right now. We can put up a lot of points, and our defense has really improved over the season. So to just keep playing how we're playing.

I know I was talking to one guy who calls our games back when we lost to Duke in November, and I was like, You don't want to see this team in March. And I don't think you want to see us right now. We're playing our best basketball, and we're a really good team.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much. Good luck.

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