

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Rhode Island vs Alabama

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Louisville, Kentucky, USA

KFC YUM! Center

## Rhode Island Rams

## Tammi Reiss

## Ines Debroise

## Palmire Mbu

### Media Conference



It doesn't take anything away from these great student-athletes, and I told them in the locker room after the game, I've never had a more satisfying season, not because of how we won, but because of who we are together. It was a season full of joy, full of just compete, full of chemistry and culture. And above all, from our practice guys to our managers to our coaching staff to our players, a season full of love. I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world.

**Q. Ines, in this era of college basketball with the transfer portal so prevalent, what does it mean to you to have spent four years all URI?**

INES DEBROISE: I think I truly believe that I was put in here for a reason. Like God really put me here for a reason. I'm just like really fall in love like to Rhode Island. For me just staying four years was just like a part of my journey and the process.

Like I believe that, when you start something, you need to finish it. I think that was the goal for me and with this coaching staff. So just staying four years for me was just like the goal to finish it and get where we were here today.

**Q. Ines, that moment when you fouled out with Tammi, it looked like she was saying something to you, you guys exchanged a hug. Just take us inside that.**

INES DEBROISE: I think it's just like about the journey we had, like remembering like she talked a couple days ago, the first time we talked, me without speaking English, it was like about two minutes but it felt like an hour for me.

Now to just be here at the March Madness first round, it's not the result we wanted because we're a very competitive team, but it's like coming out even if I didn't want to foul out and just like remembering every moment, every ups, downs we had, it was just meaning a lot for me and for Coach.

TAMMI REISS: You're not going to make us cry. You're not going to get us. I'm just telling you.

(Laughter).

Alabama - 68, Rhode Island - 55

TAMMI REISS: First, I'd love to give credit to Alabama, such a well-coached team, so many weapons. Great, great guard play. Great big. I thought Essence had a great game today. Really they dominated the paint. They really did. They dominated the paint points. Really physical defensively. So even though we got more shots than them, I thought they really bothered our shooting, whether it was layups -- we missed a lot of bunnies. Whether it was contest with their size and length.

Just I wish them the best of luck, and just really, really well-coached. Didn't expect anything other than from Kristy Curry.

Kudos to them, but I've never been prouder of a group of young women than I am of this team. Although we didn't get the result we wanted today, it doesn't take anything away from what they've accomplished all season long together. I thought we competed today. They left everything they had on the floor for each other.

We just didn't shoot the ball well. You've got to be able to put the ball in the hole and score a little bit more. I thought we got good shots. We just couldn't put it in the hole today.

Again, took care of the basketball for the most part. Offensive rebounded, which was really a big concern of mine, and we ended up having more offensive rebounds than an SEC team. Again, just really lacked the scoring that we needed to pull this game off.



**Q. Ines, the end of February, you said that all of your individual goals would be accomplished if you made it to March Madness. Palmire, you talked at the end of the regular season about your goal of making it. For both of you, what was it like to have competed on the March Madness stage and reach that goal?**

PALMIRE MBU: I feel it means everything. It was our final goal. So it's just great to be here and represent our university. We're very proud of being the first one to do that.

Of course we wanted to do better and get another game and another one, but we're still very proud. Looking back at this season, I think we did great things. It's just amazing to be here and very grateful to be here today.

INES DEBROISE: Same thing, very grateful, very proud of my team. I feel like we wanted more. I think we're a very, very, very competitive team, but very grateful to be with this team here on this big stage.

**Q. Palmire, you still have time left in your career obviously. I wonder what you learned from this weekend, this experience playing in this game today, and what can you take forward into next season?**

PALMIRE MBU: Into next season, I've learned -- I don't have time left here in Rhode Island.

**Q. In your career.**

PALMIRE MBU: Yes, of course. I think I've learned so much this season. I've learned what it takes to win as a team. I've learned, I think, to be a better teammate. I've grown my game, like there's just so many things I can think about.

Definitely like what it takes to win and the hard work I've put and we've put as a team, that's what I want to keep for what's coming next of course.

**Q. There's been a lot of talk from pretty much everyone on the team about how much fun and joy there's been this season. Is there a moment on or off the court that stands out as a favorite or a most joyful moment for both of you?**

INES DEBROISE: I would say we had a couple during the year, like big moments. You know, like upset NC State, winning the regular season at home. I think that was a privilege to celebrate that at home with all the fans because like we need to remember that there is a lot of people who always come, travel, take the time to come see

us play.

It's people like we could have seen two years before where we didn't have the best season we had. So just like having them, and I would say like winning the A-10 championship, that was a big one because that was the first time. Like we are the first, first, first, and like it's going to be the second next.

So, yeah, I would say we have a lot of great memories.

PALMIRE MBU: I would say the same. Also, I would say all the moments off the court too. I really enjoyed all the moments with all the girls getting to know each other from like the summer until now. Just the little things, like seeing each other at practice and out of the court. It was just a fun season. It was great.

**Q. Tammi, obviously the game plan focused on taking away their 3-point shooting. That's what they've done very well coming in. What was it like to watch them invert it a little bit and get downhill and be able to score at the rim like they did?**

TAMMI REISS: They do both well. The 3 ball sets, they're driving up. Their driving inside out sets their 3 ball up. When you look at their team makeup, it makes them very difficult to play. So if one's not going, they still have the ability to do the other one.

Then go figure, you take 23 out, you take 15 out, they don't shoot the ball, and here comes the big girl who's made four all season and just lights it up and hits three of them.

They just did a really, really good job at, if we took the 3 away, they attack the paint. That's the second best thing -- I think that's the first best thing they do, then they shoot the 3 ball. So you've got to pick your poison. I thought, if you give them nine or ten 3s, you're losing the game. If you can defend the 3 and make them take tough 2s, you had a shot at winning the game.

If we had scored, even had shot 40 percent and 32 percent from the 3, you still have a shot at winning the game if you defend the 3 well. Again, kudos to 'Bama. They can do both. I said it, the guard play is really, really good.

**Q. Essence drew her third foul there early in the third quarter, and you guys got it to within four, I think three times. What was it that kept you guys from just not being able to get over that hump and getting it to a one-possession game?**

TAMMI REISS: I think, when we cut it to four, I do believe Sophia Vital picked up that third foul. I said it all along, she

has to be on the floor for us. She has to. Came down, gave them an and one, a 3-point play, come back down, turn the ball over, they come back down and score. Next thing you know, you look up, call in a timeout, you're down 14. It goes that quick.

It just was not being able to get over the hump, not being able to get a good stop and then put pressure on them and score. And keep it for six points going into the fourth quarter. What you're hoping for is it's a game in the fourth quarter. You're not playing catch-up, it's a 14-point game, and it's imperative that you get stops.

Again, we couldn't score the ball. We got it down, and then we couldn't get stops, but we couldn't score. Then in the fourth quarter we made that run, it was going back and forth, but we were putting the ball in the hole. So it looked like a much more competitive game.

But the whole game it was, again, the inability to score, to put the ball in the hole. Layups, wide open shots, and you're going to have to score. On this stage you're going to have to score.

**Q. As the team was heading off the floor post-game, your fans there giving you one more standing ovation this season. How important -- I know they've been with you for years now. Just how important in that moment after this game for them to be there for you now?**

TAMMI REISS: First of all, I'd like to acknowledge all, all our student media that made this trip. Listen, to come here and do your job and support us -- and I know it was hard, and we had to find a way to get you guys here. But to each and every one of you, thank you so much.

I take a page out of Phil Martelli Jr.'s book, and we appreciate it so much. The next stage for all of you, bigger and better things, but thank you.

Again, our fans are the best, Rhody Nation. They've been there since day one. They believed, I can remember when I first got hired, they started coming. Then the next year, as we made the process, and we got better, and it grew. Rhody Nation grew. They're loyal. They're devout. They make the trip, whether it's away games, whether it's A-10 Tournament. Again, on this stage, these same fans we've seen for seven years, they don't miss anything. They don't miss our radio shows. They don't miss anything.

We are a family at Rhode Island. It's what makes the University of Rhode Island so special is everyone knows everybody and everyone cares about each other. We talk about love. That was our word today. It's through the whole department, whether it's administration, whether it's

support staff, whatever it is. It's our fans. We share that with everybody, and we are a family.

So we had to give them that one last love sign to end the year. Whether it's a high note or a low note, it was an incredible journey this year. They need to be acknowledged as well because you heard our student-athletes, they absolutely love them, and they play for them.

So it just was a fitting end, whether we won or lost, that you'd better acknowledge them because they've been fantastic.

**Q. Tammi, you have talked so much about the culture that has come from this team with a mix of contributors from last season as well as transfer portal, how have you been able to make this team feel like they've been playing together for ten-plus years?**

TAMMI REISS: The biggest thing, whether you've got to live in the portal or you're bringing freshmen in, it doesn't matter. Whether it was five years ago or the current state that we're in, you've got to recruit character. You've got to start with culture. Everyone throws that word around, but it's the truth. Morality, integrity, character.

When you get a group -- and you see, they're incredible student-athletes and young women. When you get 12, 13, 14 of them together, great things happen. Why? They have the highest character of any team I've ever coached. So they do things the right way.

Then all the intangible qualities -- unselfishness, coachability, cheering for the next woman up, the we over the me. Everything I could say about a team that a coach wishes for at night and you go, I pray I get this, we got.

It starts with learning them as young women and individuals. We will not sacrifice -- and I've done it. I've made that mistake, and I've learned from it. You don't sacrifice for wins. You don't sacrifice that, and we didn't this year. We went out and found the ones we wanted. They may have not been the most talented, but they were the best human beings we could possibly get, and this was the result.

That's probably going to be the formula for me -- I'm not making that mistake again -- moving forward. It's just high character and really doing great assessments of who they are as individuals.

**Q. Coach, when you look at the stage you just played on and how far you've really come since you took this job, what does it mean to you -- you just mentioned**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**your love of the Rhody fans. What does it mean to you to bring this level of competition and competency to this team that now they have a team that they can really travel and cheer for year in and year out?**

TAMMI REISS: The vision and the reason I came to Rhode Island was it was at the bottom of the league. I remember my press conference, and I had, with the backing of administration and with Thorr -- great AD, Bjorn, I took the job because him -- our vision was this. The process was get better every year, and what we wanted to bring to Rhode Island was a product that, again, was great off the court, culture, no problems, high academic standards -- how we do anything is how we do everything.

Then eventually win the A-10, bring championships to Kingston, and then get to March Madness. Looking at Rhode Island, when I was looking at the job, it was watching Danny Hurley do what he did at the school. I said it, why not? Why couldn't it be done on the women's side? Danny did it.

My goal was I was not leaving Rhode Island, I was not going anywhere. I was like this is going to happen. We promised Rhode Island this, and now we achieved it. Now can you sustain it? That's the question, and that's the next phase of Rhode Island basketball is you've got to sustain it because it's built.

With the help of administration and the support, and now it's come to fruition. So now sustain it, and now you become one of the top mid-major programs in the country. So I'm very, very proud. My coaching staff is very, very proud of that because we've worked seven long years, and it's been a process. A lot of ups, a lot of downs, but well worth the journey.

**Q. You mention your coaching staff. Coach A accepted the job at New Mexico State. What has that journey been like with him by your side and coaching one last game together before he goes off on his own?**

TAMMI REISS: Natalie, you may get me now. I may cry now. Listen, I've said it all along, that's my brother. We came here to build this together. Our lines, our beliefs, everything aligns strategically with him.

We were together at Syracuse for three years and now here seven. So he's been by my side for ten years of my life, good, bad. Just remembering, like Ines talked about, everything flashes back.

Those first practices when we were here and we threw the ball over the basket and couldn't make a layup, like the journey flashes, and you never want it to end. But with

him, he's one of a kind. I can't imagine looking to my left and not seeing him still. I've never been prouder of a human being, and he's going to go do great things. I'll miss him.

**Q. Sorry, this may not get any easier, but I have to ask about Ines. She was a part of that first regular season championship team for you and now continuing to build and grow that program. What has she meant to you and the team, having stayed all four years? I'm so sorry to make you cry.**

TAMMI REISS: I told this to the kids in the locker room, we're all crying, hugging, it shows you care. It's not a bad thing. It's just I can't speak when I cry, so it's a horrible thing giving a press conference.

Ines, it was imperative that we keep her. Only because that's our culture. From day one she understands how we do things. She can hold people accountable. She's a great leader. So when you are in the portaling and you're bringing in new pieces, it's so imperative that you hold your culture kids because they know how you do things.

Again, in this day and age, for four years to stay, but you heard her. It's so much more than just money or all that. The University of Rhode Island provided everything for her she was looking for, that she values, because she has a high value system. That means more than money.

I'm sure other places would have given her more money than I could afford, than we could afford, but education, her friendships, the support of the university, her commitment. Her parents committed. When you commit, you commit. That's their morality. That's who they are.

As a coach, you don't see it a lot. So you really, really value young women like that. It was imperative for us to be successful this year, and that was a huge reason was our culture. So when all the new pieces came in, pop, pop, pop, she had them right in a row, right aligned, this is how we do things from day one.

Off the court, on the court, and everyone fell in line like little soldiers, and it was incredible. I'm completely indebted to her. So when she calls and says you need to make a phone call and go get me that job, I'd better hop to it because her loyalty was incredible.

**Q. Tammi, you mentioned Dan Hurley. I asked him after his last NCAA game just what it was going to take for the men's program to continue to grow and maybe take further steps. I would ask you the same about the women's team. You've obviously taken it a long way in seven years, but going forward, how do you get back**

**here, and how do you potentially do more than what you've done this season?**

TAMMI REISS: I think the first piece was hiring an incredible AD in Pat Lyons and starting from the administration down because if you do not have the support of, number one, your president, Marc Parlange, we do, the board of trustees, you must be in alignment, your AD. Everyone must be on board, not just for football or men's basketball or women's basketball, but all our sports.

Our administration is committed, and they're committed to women's basketball. They really are. They resource us now to be able to compete for championships. And the one piece I can't say enough is our private donors. I would not be sitting here, we would not be in this situation in the beginning without our private donors. We would not be chartering. We would not have a wellness program. We would not have NIL.

So we owe a great, great -- I'm indebted to them for getting the ball rolling. Then this year our administration really stepped up and gave us the resources, the NIL to be able to get Brooklyn Gray and Vanessa Harris and retain our core players. It's really the commitment from the top down, and then having great leadership.

And you've got to get great players. You've got to be able to compete to get great players because they win the basketball games. So that alignment and that vision and that plan, that you can sustain, but you've got to have investment, and the University of Rhode Island has investment.

Thank you, everybody. And the last one, go Rhody!

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