

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - NC State vs Michigan

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Crisler Center

Michigan Wolverines Coach Kim Barnes Arico Syla Swords Olivia Olson

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Michigan student-athletes. We are ready for questions for Olivia and Syla.

Q. Tell me the difference between being at home in the NCAA tournament last night and what it was like playing last year?

OLIVIA OLSON: I think it's special for us to have the home-crowd advantage. Maize Rage really showed out. Our season ticketholders, all Michigan fans. It's like our sixth man.

We're excited to continue that tomorrow.

Q. I think it was Mila last night talked about a meeting that y'all had. Were you involved with the Maize Rage to increase the attendance? What was the conversation like?

SYLA SWORDS: Yeah, it was about a month ago. It wasn't even an argument standpoint. Everybody who was in the room had been to a women's game before. There were probably about 20 or 25 members.

It was kind of to connect with them, tell them we appreciate them for coming. I think that's the biggest impact we can have to have people more, is you connect with them, tell them your favorite spots to eat on campus, just talk like a regular human, talk about your major, what classes you're in, just connect.

We came on the bus. There was like a line of 10 people waiting to get in two hours before the game. That seems



like a small thing, but we were all staring outside the bus, Oh, my gosh, there's a lineup to get in. Just special like that to make us feel like we're connected with the student body and make us feel like we have their support.

Q. Was that the first time you saw that? I know Michigan State, that's an atmosphere probably a little bit similar to yesterday.

SYLA SWORDS: Yeah, it was a similar atmosphere. I want to say out of the thousand student tickets available for claim, all of them were claimed. As soon as the doors opened 45 minutes before, they were piling in, piling in, filling that lower bowl of bleachers.

Even Michigan State, Ohio State last year, we've never seen anything like that. It's just a testament to what we've been able to build, what we've been able to connect with the student body. We're just appreciative of Maize Rage and the way they've showed up for us.

Q. I asked your coach when Mila plays like she did last night, her pace, her calm, what does that feel like when you're out there. What does that mean to the club?

OLIVIA OLSON: Yeah, she's like the extra coach on the court for us. We look to her for the play calls. We look to her to lead the huddles. Whatever she sees, we go with.

I just love how steady she is at all times of the game, high or low. She's always doing great a job. I'm really glad she had a great night yesterday.

SYLA SWORDS: It's been really fun to see her growth and confidence as well. She was doing that last year, but she just has a different type of presence on the court this year.

Even though she's been on triple-double watch early in the season, you can tell she's comfortable in her role. She knows we go as she goes. We're here to listen to her. It's been fun to watch her grow into that point guard position.

Q. When we're watching, you don't sense that or feel that. Sitting courtside, even she calls for a ball screen, waiting the extra beat. Made me think that must be



comforting in some way.

SYLA SWORDS: For sure. Obviously Liv and I carry a lot of the bulk of the offense. To have Mila, other people like Brooke, who has a high IQ, Te'Yala, provide great offensive minutes. Even our bigs, giving us good offensive looks.

It's a big group effort, our offensive contribution. To have somebody like Mila who understands the game not only from the scoring standpoint but a passing standpoint just brings the rest of the four people on the court a lot of comfort in playing.

Q. Coach yesterday talked a little bit about the competition between you two, for who can be the hardest worker. Who is diving on the floor most, in a friendly way. I would like to ask both of you, do you compete against each other? Is there this idea that by doing that you're making each other better? What's the stakes, if there are any?

OLIVIA OLSON: I think it's not so much against each other, but I think it's with each other. Like, we want to raise the program to another level. I think we're just, like, wired a little different in the effort aspect of we want to bring our teammates up to that level.

I think coach has done a great job of, like, getting that from everybody. So that's who we are. We want to be the best. So to be able to do that together, just compete together, I think it's really cool. It makes it fun.

SYLA SWORDS: Yeah, I would agree. I wouldn't take it's like a back and forth standpoint at all. From the very beginning, like she said, we have a very similar mindset.

Coming in as a freshman, there's just a sense of familiarity as being on the court with Liv. It's kind of like a mirror reflection, thinking she's out here doing this with me, so why wouldn't I be going 100% like she is.

It's been really special. You don't see the best players in the country, I don't know what she averages, close to 20 and 7, something like that, you don't see them diving on the floor the day after a game to get a loose ball.

That's an encouraging thing not only for me but for everybody else that is a staple of our program.

Q. What were the conversations like with coach when she first started talking to you when you were in high school? How much did you talk about that?

OLIVIA OLSON: Yeah, she talked about her goals of the

program to make it to a Final Four, make it to a national championship. Talked about the people that came before us in Naz, Katelynn Flaherty, how they committed to her, raising the bar of the program. They did so making Sweet 16, Elite Eight. I think just following in their footsteps.

All coach does is recruit players like-minded, hard workers that want to bring the program to another level. We've done that this year. We've done that together. We just want to continue to raise the bar and continue to raise the standard of Michigan basketball.

Q. I should ask about you North Carolina State. What have you seen on the scout so far?

SYLA SWORDS: It's going to be a really physical matchup, I think, opposed to last night's team where they got a lot of their offense off of passes, cuts. This is a lot more one on one. They're very skilled players, so we're going to have to lock in on our one-on-one defense, also loading to the paint to make sure we have each other's support defensively.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

We are joined by head coach Kim Barnes Arico. We'll start with questions.

Q. Anyone who's watched your team this year knows how good Mila is. With more eyes watching because of the NCAA tournament, what kind of opportunity is this for her? What are people going to see?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, Mila Holloway is a special player. She's been a special player for us since she stepped on campus as a freshman. I think she's just growing and improving every single day, which is what you want from all your players.

She wants to be the best point guard in the country. Whether she's watching film, whether she's studying our plays, whether she's meeting with her teammates, she's trying to do something to really work on her game.

I think the rest of the country got to see last night how special she is. She can score the basketball. She makes other people better. She had a great rebounding night. She could be a great defender. She really impacted the game for us last night. We're counting on her to do that moving into tomorrow.

Q. I hate to compare, promise I'm not doing that, but Dusty May talked about that he knew back in the summer they were going to be pretty good, his team was going to be pretty good this year. I'm curious



when you figured that out with your group, and was it even a year ago when you got the three sophomores as freshmen kind of projected forward?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, I don't know. Dusty's mindset is a little bit different. I always am, Are we going to be good? I'm always questioning how good are we really going to be. I think that's the coach in me.

But last year, I know we talk about this a lot, when this group of sophomores came in as freshmen, they were just different. When we headed into the first game of their college career in Vegas against South Carolina, I don't know if people expected us to lose by 30. We were in a one-possession game at the end of the game. At that point I realized we had something special.

This team just doesn't get flustered. They don't get sped up. They are completely unselfish. She are incredibly hard workers. They want to get better. They want to be the best.

Having an opportunity to coach them through their freshman year and now into their sophomore year, I knew we had a chance to be good pretty sure when they all came back. When Mila and Sylva went to play Canada basketball, they got some international experience this summer. The rest of them stayed on campus. We got a couple of transfers to add to that mix.

I knew we would have a chance to be pretty good. Did I realize that we would be a top-10 team all season long? No. Did I realize that we would play some of the best teams in the country, the No. 1 and the No. 2 team in the country, to a one-possession game, with a chance to tie the game in both of those games? No.

But I think sometimes this team, this group of young women, continue to surprise me. They're fearless. They go into every game believing that they are going to win that game. They prepare themselves to do that.

They're just a different group. Would I have expected it? No. I would have hoped that we would be pretty good, but I'm really happy where we are.

Q. If Brooks is healthy for NC State, what does she bring to the table? Wes Moore, when you think of him, what do you think of him in terms of his career, legacy, style?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Well, two things. So he Brooks' dad played for my husband in college, played football for my husband. I've seen Zoe Brooks since she's been a little girl growing up in the state of New Jersey. She was a

special player from the time she was five years old.

She just can affect the game in so many ways with the ball in her hand. She's so dynamic. She's such a play-maker. She can score the basketball. She can facilitate. She's just built a little bit different. She has been great for them.

The start that they had last night with the ball in her hands was just different. I mean, I think they were eight for eight to start the game. That was without Pierre even getting a shot. She's a double-double machine. She just had a tremendous start.

I think they have so many players that really ignite their team, but Zoe is certainly one of 'em. She's got to be one of the best players in the country.

When I think of NC State, and I said this heading into this tournament when I saw that we would be hosting and then we would be hosting Tennessee and NC State, like holy cow, those are two of the known programs in women's basketball. Those are two of the premier programs in women's basketball. They are two programs that have been to championships or been to Final Fours.

NC State has had a tremendous run prior to Coach Moore being there. But since he's been there, as well. He's one of the best coaches in our business. He does a really great job. They've been a great team year in, year out. Always the sign of a really great program is have that consistency year in, year out. They've had that consistency. They have great players. They have a great coach. They're a really great program.

Q. NC State has a couple of bigs with the 6'6" center, then the 6'2" forward in Pierre. We saw a little bit with Iowa. They don't do the same necessarily offensively, but how do you plan to neutralize the two bigs when they're on the floor together?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, there's definitely a challenge. 6'6" is a tough matchup for anyone. We talked a little bit about that at practice today. You can't just go right at her. Her shot blocking ability is crazy. You have to have a counter move. You have to do something different.

She shoots the ball really well, too. She pick and pops. She's a face-up kid that's playing really well. She's involved on the offensive end as well as the defensive end.

Pierre, we talked about her a lot in our scout. She's a double-double every single night. I watched their press conference last night. She's like, Well, that's kind of what's expect of me.

That's pretty nice to know you're expected double-double every night (smiling). She's incredibly talented. She has a knack for the basketball. She has a motor for the basketball. She reminds me a little bit of Naz in terms of her rebounding motor. Then she has an incredibly soft touch around the rim. She can take you with the back to the basketball basket, with a face-up. That's going to present a challenge for us.

I think one of the great things about our team is the versatility. We talked about that a little bit. We have length and size at multiple spots. She might be guards, but they're big and strong. We can use them in positions to have to guard a big at times. We will definitely be able to shift our matchups and try to utilize that.

I think the other thing when we face matchups like that, too, is the flipside is how are they defending us. If they have two big bigs out there, like does that give us a matchup advantage. Who for them is defending Olivia Olson? Who is defending Te'Yala? As much as that's going to be a challenge for us this way, how can we take advantage of our matchups.

Try to figure out that chess match a little bit.

Q. You mentioned Tennessee and NC State being premier programs. Do you think your program is now? Eight straight tournaments. Has this program arrived or not yet?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, I mean, it's pretty cool. It's pretty cool to be sitting here. It's been cool to be in the top 10 all season long. To get a 2 seed I think is really special.

We had Olivia and Sylva up here a few minutes ago. When I go down, when you're preparing for your opponent, you go down, your players match up with their players. Olivia and Sylva are two of the best players in the country right now. Two of the best women's basketball players.

They decided to come to the University of Michigan. They decided to help create something, to leave their legacy, to help create something incredibly special.

Mila came on board with that. Te'Yala came on board. All the players that came before, the players that stayed, whether that's Macy Brown or Alyssa Crockett.

I think our team right now is in a really great position. We've been consistent, but now we're trying to take that next step. That next step is advancing in that tournament. That next step is hanging some more banners. That next step is being one of the top programs year in and year out.

Q. In the open practices, it was clear from Friday that your team was having so much fun, they were really close. What does that team culture say about your team? What do you think it brings in these types of tournaments?

KIM BARNES ARICO: I think at the end of the day you realize as you go through this, I've been coaching for a pretty long time now, they're young women and they are driven and passionate and hard working and want to be successful. All that being said, they want to have fun. They want to be connected.

They were up here talking a little bit before about how they went and met with the Maize Rage. Their meeting with the Maize Rage was about connecting and building those relationships because if they wanted them to be at our games, they felt like they had to have a relationship with them.

I think the same is true with the culture of our team and our program. They want to have a relationship with each other. They want to have a relationship with the coaches. They want to feel like we're in this together.

It's about winning basketball games. But really it's about having a great time while we're doing it, as well. I think when we're loose and we're having a good time and we're playing for each other, we're playing at our best.

You could see the energy when you come to practice. I forget sometimes you only get to watch the games and you don't get to watch practice. But that's kind of the intensity of our practice every day. That's kind of the environment of our practice every day.

When you have great people, and we have great people, our players are incredible, incredible people, and they love basketball, and they love to have a good time. I'm glad that that shined through when you guys had a chance to watch us.

Q. Talking to a couple of the players, they said this is your most skilled group. How do you change your coaching when you've got this much talent? In your 14 years, how have you changed?

KIM BARNES ARICO: I think that's a great question. That's an interesting question 'cause I always reflect on other coaches, other teams, trying to learn and trying to continue to grow and evolve. I think that's one of the most important things as a coach, as a person, is that you continue to grow and continue to evolve.

Kids are different 10 years ago to how they are today. So

if you don't grow and evolve, you're going to be left behind. I think you have to connect with the players that you're coaching and you have to change with the times.

This group kind of has allowed me to do that because they're so willing to do it. I think open dialogue has been really, really important. I always tell them, too, If this is important to you, if you say this really matters, please tell me because then it's going to matter to me.

I think we've developed that kind of rapport. They are extremely, extremely talented. They're extremely, extremely hard working. They want to be pushed and they want to be challenged.

I think the number one thing with this group is they want to be developed. They came in as talented players, but they didn't come in as finished products. They say to us as coaches every single day, How can you help me be better? Can I watch film? Can we get on the court and work on this?

I think sometimes I don't talk enough about my team of assistant coaches that have just been the best. They've been working with these women for now we're almost like on a hundred practices, every single day.

At the end of the year we put together a development plan. We meet and discuss it during the course of the year. Are we getting better? Where are we?

As coaches the things that make us most happy is when you see players develop and when you can really see the things they've been working on come into play.

A number of times these last couple days people have talked about Mila. Just to see Mila's growth over the course of her time here has really been special.

I think as much as we have more talented players, basketball is basketball, and coaching is coaching. These young women are talented, but they want to get better and they want to continue to grow and they want to continue to improve.

As coaches, how are we going to help them do that? As we help them do that, we become a better program.

Q. Obviously super quick turnaround games. What can you say about your staff and your players, the preparation to get ready?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, like I said, my staff, kind of 24/7 at this time of year. Even last night, it was probably close to midnight, and I said, I can't keep my eyes open

anymore, guys. I got to get to bed. They were still sitting in our workroom just getting prepared for today. Getting prepared for today meant getting ready for NC State, but I also meant us reflecting on yesterday as a team, what could we do better.

We had one coach working on that, showing clips of us, where were some of our mistakes yesterday and how could we improve, as well as getting prepared for NC State.

I think my staff, it's like all hands on deck. Everyone has been phenomenal.

Then today in between, they're meeting with our players, watching film from yesterday so they can see where they can really improve, as well as then watching their opponent for tomorrow, what their matchup is going to be, how to really lock into that.

One of the things we've challenged our team with is really our maturity and our focus. As a young group of mostly sophomores, how do you sustain that for longer periods of time? We challenge them with that every single day in practice.

We're really great in practice for 90 minutes. Can we get better in practice for a hundred minutes. We're really great in games for 15 minutes. Can we get better for 20 minutes.

In the quick turnarounds, it's how sharp can we be in one practice - that was today - while at the same time trying to make sure we're resting, we're recovering and we're having our legs, because we want to bring our legs into the game tomorrow.

I talked a lot about my staff. Our training staff, our nutritionist, all the other people that are around our players 24/7 are key to our success.

Christina Fanning is our trainer. She's like all hands on deck. Some of them are scheduled for massage, some of them were in cold tub. After games she's here three hours postgame to make sure they get the treatment that they need and make sure they're feeling great coming into the next day.

I think it's a whole team of people just pouring into them as much as possible, but then also our players making sure that they're locked in and focused on a quick turnaround.

Q. Talking about all those assistant coaches one of the them, Danielle, is now back with the program after being a player. What's that been like? Could you

describe the phone call to bring her back?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, so I think as a coach every player, like, leaves their mark on you personally. But those underdog stories that people have to, like, stay and have to persevere and have to fight through and don't see results. We're not talking about not seeing results for a day or a season, we're talking about not seeing results for potentially years.

That was kind of Danielle Rauch's story, kind of her career until her senior year, or late in her junior year. Prior to that she battled through injury. Prior to that she didn't get much playing time, but she came to practice every single day and was our hardest worker, our most committed kid.

She'd be in there studying the point guard position and helping our starting point guard in Amy at the time learn all the plays. She was like another assistant on the bench when Amy was out there, calling the plays for her, helping her read her reads.

She always had something in her to be a coach. She always had that extra effort and that underdog mentality. One of the greatest stories is her junior season when we were headed to the bubble in the NCAA tournament, our starting point guard at the time got an injury and wasn't able to make the trip. We were getting on the plane to head to the bubble, and I would say Danielle probably played 10 minutes in the five games prior to that. She was getting on that plane realizing that she was going to be our starting point guard in the NCAA tournament when she hadn't really played much all season long.

She led us to a Sweet 16. She led us to a Sweet 16. She was ready for that moment. I mean, it could bring me to tears every single time because she was ready for the moment and she embraced the moment.

It was all her work behind the scenes that no one saw to make her ready. 95% of the rest of the world would have quit or not have given 100%. She never did that.

To now have her back, I mean, I tried to get her back probably before she actually came back. She always wanted to come back because her and Naz had this plan of since they were players who was going to be my successor. They have me gone already. They had plan, they used to fight about it in practice, who is going to replace me.

All right, guys, I have a few years left in me.

Danielle was like, Naz, you're going to be playing so I'm going to be coaching and I'll be ready.

Naz was like, They'll hire me before they'll hire you.

They would banter back and forth about who was going to be the next coach at Michigan, which was going to follow me.

I always knew she wanted to be a coach. I think when you face that type of adversity as a player, any type of adversity in your life like that, you just persevere and overcome. Like what an incredible role model for our players to have, what a difference maker she could be in their life.

I think it makes me sad that our players really don't understand because when you're in the moment, you think, our current players, they think they're the only people ever to ever have gone through this situation, and I couldn't have happened like this to anyone else in the whole world, when actually it has.

I think for them, Danielle is that person that's been through all of those situations. She really connects with our team. She really helps make us a better program. She really understands what it takes to be successful and to pour in when you're not seeing results.

I don't know my first phone call. She might have been back her with her clays mates I think to watch a football game, Naz, Emily, the whole crew. I tried to get her then. She might have been running away from me at the time, like not ready for it.

But she's done a heck of a job. I'm happy she's back at home.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much for your time.

KIM BARNES ARICO: Thank you, guys.

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