

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Colorado State vs Michigan State

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Norman, Oklahoma, USA

Lloyd Noble Center

**Michigan State Spartans**

**Robyn Fralick**

**Grace Van Slooten**

**Kennedy Blair**

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to Norman, Oklahoma, for today's press conference with Michigan State. We'll open it up for questions for student-athletes Kennedy Blair and Grace Van Slooten.

**Q. Grace, you got to be in the Big Dance and have this experience last year, and you played some of your best basketball yet. In two tournament games you had two double-doubles. What is it about the tournament that kind of brings the most out of you?**

GRACE VAN SLOOTEN: You know, I think it's just kind of the mentality of win or go home. You know, I don't think we want to go home, so obviously you got to be playing your best basketball in order to not go home.

But, yeah, I just think it's the mentality of you want to kind of survive as long as you can, and you don't want to your season to end, so you have to bring your best basketball.

**Q. Kennedy, we've talked a lot about your growth this season and going from former walk-on to rotational player to now a starter and All-Big Ten Second Team member. Last year in the tournament you played five total minutes and had one rebound.**

KENNEDY BLAIR: Nice.

**Q. This year you're going to have a lot more. What does that mean to you to be able to have such a huge role this year in the tournament?**

KENNEDY BLAIR: Yeah, I think it's really meaningful, and



I appreciate Coach for trusting me and giving me this opportunity. I think that I learned a lot just watching last year, and even those great five minutes that I played, I was able to -- at least I got a rebound. So you can tell Coach Fralick that.

No, I think it's really important. I think that the meaningful games that we played in conference this year and nonconference has given me a lot of experience and confidence going into these games. I don't think I'm very worried about not being ready just because I haven't played, I guess, in these type of games yet.

Just doing whatever I need to do, and I think it's just another game for me and just playing hard and doing the best I can to get us a win.

**Q. What does this mean for you guys being here and having this opportunity? So many of the players in the locker room, this is their first time, so what is the message?**

GRACE VAN SLOOTEN: I think, first and foremost, just enjoy the opportunity. Have fun. You know, my first two years of college I didn't get to come to March Madness and was always really jealous of teams that did.

Last year was just a lot of fun. It's a great bonding time. I think you're just really soaking up any day you have left, because you know, if you lose, you're done, your season is over.

I think a lot of people just really are enjoying the moment and soaking up every last minute with your teammates.

KENNEDY BLAIR: Yeah, I think it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. So just being able to really, like Grace said, live in the moment and just play for each other. We know that the seniors only have so many games left and being able to represent Michigan State and being able to do things that this program hasn't done in a long time. Just being able to do that and trusting each other and really just learning from all the games that we get to play.

**Q. Kennedy, Cara has done a good job kind of sharing**

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**your story, but tomorrow night when we're talking to a national audience that has not watched you before, could you recap for me this going from walk-on to scholarship player to now starter?**

KENNEDY BLAIR: Yeah. So I committed to BG back when I was a senior in high school, so I committed to Coach Fralick and the staff. When she got the opportunity to go to Michigan State, obviously I'm a Michigan kid, grew up an hour away from State, so she gave me an opportunity to come in as a walk-on, so I took it.

Broke my foot my freshman year. Didn't play at all. Then last year came back, got some little bit of minutes here and there. Then this year now going to my redshirt sophomore year, you know, I'm doing things I never really thought I would be doing.

It's pretty awesome. Just being able to work in the process and Coach Fralick giving me this chance and never running away from hard work and all the people around me that have given me this chance has been pretty awesome.

**Q. To follow up on that, what do you attribute your success this year to? How did you make that big jump from last year to this year?**

KENNEDY BLAIR: Hard work. I think that trust, too. I've built a lot of confidence because I've been in the gym all summer and worked really hard and got myself in really good shape, put on a lot of muscle, and just watched great players do really good things. So I was able to learn from that.

I worked with Dean Lockwood. He's one of the greatest coaches that I've ever been able to work with, and he pushed me really hard. A lot of that goes to them and to the staff for giving me just an opportunity to work. I just sacrificed my life for this kind of for a little bit in the summer.

Yeah, it's been a fun journey, and I think that I've just kept growing. There's still a lot of growing to go, so just a lot of hard work and determination.

**Q. Finally, Grace, she mentioned Dean Lockwood. Can you tell me about your relationship with him?**

GRACE VAN SLOOTEN: Yeah, ever since I stepped on campus, he's been my position coach. We spent countless hours in the gym and then also countless hours on film.

I wish everybody had the chance to meet and spend time with Dean Lockwood, because he is just the most amazing human I've ever met. Extremely committed, extremely

consistent. What you see is what you get. I think what's even the best thing about Dean is off the court what he's able to do for me just mentally, emotionally, things like that.

He's got countless sayings that he can just ramble off of his head. It really just helps me stay committed and helps me stay level-headed. Definitely one of the greatest coaches I've ever had the opportunity to play for.

**Q. Coach Fralick had mentioned that when adversity hits you guys at times, it's key to not get discouraged ever. This season you've had a school best start at 17-1. It had never been done in the school's history before, program's history. Are there things like that, accomplishments throughout the year, that you guys point back to and say, we are what we think we are, we are this certain caliber, we should all the confidence? Grace, if you want to start.**

GRACE VAN SLOOTEN: Yeah, I think so. I think it's just super important towards the end of the season to remember that great start and just remember the coaches do a great job at reminding us that we're doing things that haven't really been done for a while here.

It's super important for confidence. I think a lot of times the more confident team wins. The people who have the most amount of faith in their teammates wins and kind of walk in with a chip on your shoulder and basically say that we deserve to be here, we've had a great season, and obviously it's not over.

We're just trying to remain in the head space that, like, yeah, we deserve to be here, and we've done great things this season, but it's definitely not over.

KENNEDY BLAIR: Yeah, I think it's really important for us to have the confidence. We obviously played a really hard schedule. Obviously the last ten games we haven't done as well as we think we would have wanted to, but that's a testament to the Big Ten and just getting us ready for these moments. I think that was really important for us.

Also, the start we had was unbelievable and really cool to be a part of and just hitting a little bit adversity gets us ready for these type of games. We're ready to play whoever, and I think that we can play with whoever. So we're just getting confidence and being able to understand that we can do it and that we're ready for it.

**Q. Grace, how have you seen your game evolve from your freshman year to where you are now?**

GRACE VAN SLOOTEN: I think I've gotten a lot more physical. I think that's definitely a change that you have to

make when you go from high school to college.

I think most importantly it's just been my mindset. Mentally I think I've grown so much. I used to just let a bad game completely derail me for the next few games. I've kind of adopted the mindset of, like, you know, I play this game because it's fun and because I love it. I didn't basically want to be, like, miserable anymore after a loss or after a bad game and stuff like that. I think that's really just helped me bounce back maybe after a tough loss or a tough game.

I'm not holding onto that for weeks and weeks and weeks. I just kind of let it go and mentally just come back and be ready for the next game and stay confident, stay ready.

I think I just think back to all the times I've put in the work and all the reps and everything like that, and I think that helps me keep going. I think I've just really found a way to have fun with it now and just kind of enjoy where I'm at and really soak in the moment. I used to be so worried about my future, but I'm just really focused on enjoying where I'm at now and see what happens next.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, both. We will now start with an opening statement from Coach Fralick followed by questions.

ROBYN FRALICK: Yeah, we're thrilled to be here. Very grateful to participate in March Madness. I think it's something that we have a real appreciation for how hard it is to make it here and for the level of teams continuing to compete.

Oklahoma has been a great guest. We've loved the sunshine, and we're really excited to play some good basketball.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Robyn, this is year three for you at Michigan State, and the first year we've talked about you were a 9 seed and were kind of happy to be there. Last year it was a 7 seed, and you get the first tournament win in six years. Now this year you jump up to a 5 seed. What's the focus or mission? What would be the slogan approaching this tournament this year?**

ROBYN FRALICK: Yeah, no, I appreciate you sharing that, Dalton. A lot of credit to the staff and people at Michigan State and players who have believed and worked and continued to improve from going from a 9 to a 7 to a 5. Proud of the trajectory.

Phrases... we had a two-week break between the Big Ten

Tournament and this game. What we talked a lot about during that segment of time was "win the wait." Then over this particular piece, "win the weekend."

You can't zoom out. You've got to really be able to zoom in. The game requires that, but those are the things we've been rallying around.

**Q. As you look at this team and you said, "win the weekend," what do you think -- I know it's game by game, but going into tomorrow's game, what is the first focus for you guys?**

ROBYN FRALICK: Yeah. Well, Colorado State is a really good team. I mean, 27 wins is a lot of wins over the course of a season. What stands out about them is their patience, their discipline. You know, they do a really good job of executing on both sides of the ball.

Obviously we have pretty contrasting styles of play, so we're going to have to -- we have to have a level of patience. One of the phrases we've been using is "aggressive patience." We still have to play the way we love to play, but we also have to understand there's a discipline and a patience to the possessions. That's how you execute at a high level. Making sure that our possessions have a meaningfulness behind them. We don't want to have empty possessions.

**Q. A follow-up question. You guys do a great job of moving the ball. Five players in double digits every single night. I guess is that the design of your offense?**

ROBYN FRALICK: At its best (laughing). I've seen it at its best and at its worst, but at its best we're hunting good shots together. At its best we have an understanding of how to create advantage and keep advantage and create good shots as a group. So that's something that we really care about.

I think it's something, too, that we've over these two weeks that we've had to have an understanding of. That's that aggressive patience. Sometimes I think we get aggressive, but without patience. At our best that dichotomy exists.

**Q. Robyn, you're the first Spartan head women's basketball coach to make the Big Dance in each of the first three years that you've been in East Lansing. What do you give the most credit to? What's the largest testament to that? Is it culture, competitiveness? What is the DNA that allows that?**

ROBYN FRALICK: Well, it's so many factors. That's the



really fun thing about coaching a team sport is that it requires this entire group of people to be about the right thing. So over our first three years, I give a lot of credit to our staff. I have a really committed and invested staff that spends a lot of time with our players and finding ways to help us get better.

A lot of credit to the players. You know, when we've had players that were here, that have graduated. We've had one-year transfers. We've had four-year players. But ability to care about the right thing.

I always say the game doesn't -- what the game requires, requires. Even with how many things have changed in the current landscape, what is successful about basketball hasn't changed. When you can get a group of people to care about that over the course of a season, you know, good things come about.

I'll share a little side story. Very cool. Actually, my childhood home is six miles from the Breslin Center. I actually grew up watching a bunch of Michigan State women's teams over the years. I remember Kristen Rasmussen, Maxann Reese, Kristin Haynie was actually one of my AAU teammates, one of the all-time best players.

I feel very grateful for the opportunity and having watched it as a kid, getting a chance on the other side of it now.

**Q. Two questions. First, how nice is it to be out of the Big Ten and have new teams to scout and just kind of the process you go through now in March Madness as opposed to what you just went through in the regular season?**

ROBYN FRALICK: Yeah, well, the Big Ten is incredible. The level of play, the level of players, the level of coaching, it's a gauntlet, and it makes you better. It makes you tougher. It challenges you in every possible way because there are so many good teams that are successful because of so many different styles of play.

But, yeah, I think all of us in the Big Ten would probably say we're very happy to see just a new opponent, a little bit probably cleaner game. But with that being said, Colorado State is a really, really good team. That aligns with what we have been seeing in the Big Ten.

I think, though, in the Big Ten we just know each other so well, which is what makes it very challenging, but what makes it really fun, too.

**Q. Then my second question is unrelated. We're going to spend some time tomorrow night highlighting**

**Dean Lockwood.**

ROBYN FRALICK: Yeah.

**Q. Obviously he coached Tamika. He has coached so many of the all-time greats. Can you tell me about that relationship with him and how he ended up on your staff?**

ROBYN FRALICK: Well, a cool back story about Coach Lockwood. He was actually my husband's college coach. So my husband played Division II basketball at Saginaw Valley State. Dean was his coach. What's really great about that is I've known Dean for a long time, but I've known Dean too through Tim's stories and the impact he had on Tim. So I've known him as a person, but I've also known him as his impact.

When the Michigan State opportunity came about, he had been on the staff. We were just really fortunate to be able to keep him. He's somebody that we had known, we had a relationship with, but we were really fortunate.

His wisdom, his positivity, his perspective, his ability to connect with players is just top notch. Wherever he goes, he makes places better, and he makes people better. So we were very grateful that we were able to keep him as a Spartan.

He always talks about all these great players he coached, but he somehow always leaves Tim Fralick off the list.

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