

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Idaho vs Oklahoma

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Norman, Oklahoma, USA

Lloyd Noble Center

Idaho Vandals

Hope Hassmann

Kyra Gardner

Debora dos Santos

Coach Arthur Moreira

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll now open it up for questions for Idaho student-athletes Hope Hassmann, Kyra Gardner, and Debora dos Santos.

Q. Hi, ladies, what has it been like the last couple days just getting prepared for this?

HOPE HASSMANN: Yeah, it's been an awesome experience so far, just starting off, getting on our charter plane was awesome. We're with our band. We're with our cheerleaders so it's so cool to experience it.

Obviously our men are in the tournament as well, so sharing that Selection Sunday was super awesome. It's just been a great experience and we're super excited to be here and take the opportunity and run with it.

DEBORA DOS SANTOS: I mean, yeah, something unique. I keep saying that's something that not everybody can be part of and I'm really, really happy to be part of it, especially for this last year of college. Just happy to be here for sure.

KYRA GARDNER: Yeah, it was a lot of fun. The band showed up at our hotel after we went out to dinner and played the fight song and all the other stuff and it was just very fun. Getting to play my last year with these people is amazing. Love it.

Q. Coming into this, there's a lot of different conferences, right? So the fun part about March Madness is we get to be introduced and we get to



introduce a lot of teams to the world, Idaho being one of them. How would you guys describe what Idaho basketball is all about?

HOPE HASSMANN: I'll start. I feel like we just bring energy every game. One thing about Idaho basketball, we're going to work the hardest every game. We have a bunch of girls who are just going to play their heart out. We have had an amazing winning streak so far, which I just think speaks to our staff and our girls.

One thing about us, our preparation is always amazing. Our assistants do a great job. I feel like. Each game will have maybe a defensive scout or something that looks a little wonky but that's just kind of who we are. Women's basketball going to go out there and that's what's going to help us win games.

We all just bought in from the beginning so I think that's also something so special. We have girls from all around the world, multiple seniors so I feel like this year is so special. Do it for the seniors. Do it for the people that gave up so many sacrifices to be here.

So, yeah, Idaho basketball, we're always going to play hard and be the toughest team out there.

DEBORA DOS SANTOS: Yeah, for sure. We're going to be hustling every time we're on the court. We're going to be trying to get all those rebounds, all those steals. We're going to be, I'm pretty sure we're going to be 100% the whole time. So, yeah, I feel like that's pretty much representing how we play. So, yeah, it's really a lot of hustle.

KYRA GARDNER: It's hard to say anything after these two, but we always go into every game underdog mentality. Always going to go in, try our hardest. It doesn't matter if we were down 20, we're always going to be the underdog mentality and work hard and try to pull off a win.

Q. I figured you guys should get some more questions. You mentioned underdog mentality. This is officially underdog reality according to everything. You guys are 35 point underdogs, not to get into all the



numbers and those things.

Obviously you guys are the 13, they're the 4. You're on their home floor. How do you take, I guess, the joy and everything you guys have been soaking in, these experiences, and turn it into fuel for there's an actual game tomorrow. You're trying to beat Oklahoma and get to the second round. That transitions from fun to business in a way. How do you mentally make that transition and turn and get ready to play basketball?

HOPE HASSMANN: I feel like we have played with a chip on our shoulder since the beginning of the Big Sky Tournament. Each game I feel like we brought the intensity and I feel like comes into March Madness, we know how cool of an opportunity it is so I feel like just keep asking the question why not us? We can do the impossible, which some people think it is, but at the end of the day, we're going to go out there and work our butts off and we know our coaches are behind our back, cheering us on and all our fans.

But, yeah, I feel like we have had a great week of preparation and, yeah, just no one should count us out. We're going to work our hardest and we have girls who are going to put everything on the line and there's no one I would rather play with. Everyone is super excited to be here but I feel like right when we step on the court, it's game-time and we're going to be focused and excited to work hard and play hard.

DEBORA DOS SANTOS: Yeah, we've been focused the whole year. Nothing is changed right now. Of course, it has been a lot of happy moments, but like she said, our coaches, us, too, this whole week we have been prepping for this game. It is March Madness and there's a reason that it's called madness, you know?

But we are ready to leave our all on the court. I feel like, of course, not putting stuff down but numbers are numbers but we are always going to be trying to give our all, you know? Yeah, whatever it takes tomorrow.

KYRA GARDNER: Yeah, we have all seen the numbers. We don't really think about it as much, so as soon as we step on to the court, it's all over the head and we're just going to play our game.

Q. The men's team is here. They're over in Oklahoma City, so will you guys get to see them? Will you just watch them on television? Will you go to the game? How close are the two teams just emotionally.

KYRA GARDNER: We're definitely going to go. We're going to support -- Vandals support Vandals so we'll

definitely be there.

DEBORA DOS SANTOS: I think it's a 30-minute drive so it's really not that much of a hassle for us to go and support and we would be supporting each other, you know? So, yeah, go Vandals.

Q. And my second question is how long was your flight to get here? How long did it take?

KYRA GARDNER: About three hours?

DEBORA DOS SANTOS: I was sleeping good (laughter) so I have no idea, but probably, yeah, three hours I would say.

KYRA GARDNER: I was being an iPad kid.

Q. (Inaudible).

DEBORA DOS SANTOS: Yeah, that was a good play, huh?

THE MODERATOR: Anything else? All right. Thank y'all.

We'll start with an opening statement from coach followed by questions.

ARTHUR MOREIRA: All right. This is really cool, guys! Thanks for having me. Awesome. Great year for us so far, right? We won 29 games, program record. Won two conference championships, regular season and the tournament. Our girls are amazing to work with. I don't know how the three did up here, but if you guys got to see any of their personalities, our whole group is like that. They're incredible.

And also great year for Vandals basketball, right? Having our men's team here, how cool is that? I don't have any friends in the business that have been able to a play in the same city as their men's staff, so we're going to make sure we go out there and support the guys tonight. It's a really good year for Vandals basketball.

Q. Hey, Coach. What has this last two years been like for you? Especially getting to this moment.

ARTHUR MOREIRA: First of all, it's really cool to have you here. You're a legend. (Laughter) I appreciate it. It's been awesome, you know? From the moment that we took over the job, our admin is super supportive, the university, the community really embraced this program.

And all the girls, they kind of took a chance on us. When I got the job two years ago, I had no head coaching

experience. One of if not the youngest head coach in the country, so they could have gone anywhere else and kind of looked at me and said no, we don't want to play for that guy, but they took a chance and it paid off.

In two years, we were able to get this team to the NCAA Tournament and I feel like we're still getting better, you know? Throughout this whole season, I feel like every month that went but we kept getting better, kept getting better, keep finding different ways to win. It's been a really fun two years and I think it's going to set the tone for the future here. There's a lot of exciting things coming for us.

Q. As a follow-up, what do you think, like, tangibly, what do you feel like you're gotten better at? I know when you win games, it's like hey, we're winning! That's grate! But how have you seen the team grow? Things we can talk about on TV. We are presenting Idaho to the world, so.

ARTHUR MOREIRA: Absolutely. The beginning of the season, we couldn't guard anybody. We lost some games and people scored 90-plus points on us. We made an emphasis offensively this year early onto play fast and play in transition and it took us a while to get us where we needed to be defensively. I like to be really creative for our defensive schemes. We play a little different than most teams. It took them a little longer to get used to it.

But I felt like by the end of the season, our conference tournament, we pretty much won because of our defense. We weren't shooting very well. I think it was the worst shooting slump we had this season, that last stretch of games. We were still able to win those games in a row because of how well we're guarding, how well we're rebounding.

We make a huge emphasis on rebounding. It's kind of funny to say that here because I think Oklahoma is like third in the country and we're fifth or second and fourth, you know? We're right there with each other. I think defense and rebounding is something that we grew a lot throughout the year and we were able to win some games late in the season.

Q. You mentioned this 18-game winning streak and where you are in your second year and you feel like your program is still growing. This challenge is a little different, though, stepping in to take on an Oklahoma team that has the fastest pace in women's college basketball. So, you've won games with defense where the last two games of the Big Sky Conference Tournament was over seven minutes no field goals in the fourth quarter. Still managed to grab --

ARTHUR MOREIRA: Brutal.

Q. That seems unlikely that you will be able to pull that off tomorrow, maybe.

ARTHUR MOREIRA: Right.

Q. What do you do to either slow them to your pace, which is still fast, or do you try to keep up with them and try to win a shootout? Or how the game unfolds will tell you that?

ARTHUR MOREIRA: Let me tell you about Oklahoma. When we got the draw, my first reaction, I was super excited, obviously, you get into the tournament. You get to play a high seed. Oh, March Madness, go for the upset and then I started watching some film and it was like oh, okay. (Laughter) They're good!

So the best thing about us and the reason we've made it this far is we're not afraid to play anybody. Obviously we recognize their strengths. They're an incredible basketball team. We prepared really hard this week to play them. It's going to be a huge challenge, but we're going to be who we are. We're still going to try to run. We're still going to try to rebound. We're going to try to -- I said this before the Montana State championship game. Montana State, they press a lot. They're really good defensively.

The pregame speech, I said do not respect their defense today. You have to go at them. I think games like this, that's what you have to do. You can't respect too much who's across from you. I have a lot of respect for Jen and her program, but in those 40 minutes that we're going to play against each other, we got to play our game, and that's what brought us here so far.

Regardless of the outcome, we're going to play to win. I always hate playing that not-to-lose game. Oh, if we play them close, I'm going to be pretty happy about it. If it's a 15-20-point game. We're going to try to play to win. If they means they make all their shots and we don't and we lose by 50, it is what it is. But we're here for a reason and we're always trying to fight to spend one more day together.

Q. I'm just going to keep asking questions.

ARTHUR MOREIRA: Go for it.

Q. No, how impressed have you been just with your players and the way that they've stepped up? Have there been any one or two players that have, I don't want to say shocked you but people that have stepped up that you want to shout out?

ARTHUR MOREIRA: Yeah, I feel like if you ask me this question, every day's going to be a different answer. Our biggest strength is we're so deep. We have our five starters and then Deb off the bench that have been consistently pretty good for us, but then in the checkup game, Ana Beatriz Passos has 10 or 12 points at halftime, you know, coming off the bench. So we're so deep.

I truly think we have seven or eight players that could start in the Big Sky. Every night somebody different steps up, which helps when playing good teams because they're always going to try to take away your leading scorer, your second leading scorer but if we have consistently different people stepping up, then it makes us really hard to guard. I think that's been one of our huge keys to success this season. Every single night a different player is a leading scorer.

We joke that I think up to the first five weeks of the season, every single one of our wins was a different player of the game, which is really cool and it's hard to say, so hopefully we can keep that going here.

Q. Tomorrow night when we're telling the team story, obviously you're a big part of that, so I'm sure all of your people know this by heart, but when we're telling the country about your story and the unconventional way you end up a Division I head coach at your young age and being from another country, how do we tell that story?

ARTHUR MOREIRA: Yeah, that's a tough question, man. You're not going to make me cry up here. We're not doing that right now. You know, I said in the press conference after we won the regular season back home, it just took a lot of unconventional decisions and gambles from multiple people.

It started with Terry, our AD, to take a chance on me, into my resume, probably not a good enough resume to have this job last year, but she saw something. I don't know what, but she saw something in me that could lead this program to where we are right now. And then all the players deciding to come and commit with us. We had a couple of players that were signed before the coaching change. Most of them decided to stay, they could have gone with the other coaching staff. They could have gone anywhere else.

And then big-time players this off season, like Deb dos Santos was all WCC First-Team and she chose to come to play for us, you know? So I just feel like a lot of people believed in the division and they took a lot of chances and those paid out. It could have gone the other way, right? And then we probably wouldn't be talking here, but it's just

a really special story because I feel like it wasn't just one person, it wasn't two. It was like five, six, seven, maybe ten people that made decisions that most people wouldn't make and then it all culminated with us being here today.

Q. So where did it start for you? When did you take an interest in basketball and then how did you begin that climb?

ARTHUR MOREIRA: Yeah, so I actually really fell in love with basketball watching the AND1 Mixtape Tour. In Brazil it was hard to watch NBA games because it was so late. Most of the year we're six hours behind the U.S. and three hours behind east coast, six hours behind the west coast, so it was really hard for me growing up to watch NBA games but then ESPN started streaming the first AND1 Mixtape Tour when they had Rafer Alston in there before he got in the league, you know? And all those guys and I was like this looks really cool. I want to try to play that.

So my dad signed me up for some basketball lessons with a local team and then I was trying to throw the ball off people's heads (laughter), and my coach was like we don't do that here. Where did you learn that?

But then I started playing. I love the physicality. I love how competitive it is. I come from a country that soccer is really big and I love soccer, but it's super slow-paced, you know? And sometimes I get bored watching soccer games. Don't tell people that because they're going to disown my back home. (Laughter) But -- cut that part. But I get bored sometimes watching games and basketball is so fast-paced that I fell in love with it right away.

I started watching college games, I think it was around my junior year of high school that they started broadcasting NCAA games back home. I started watching it and then from that moment, I was like I need to do that. I need to be in March Madness. I want to be in the -- I remember watching Butler lose to Duke on that half-court shot that Gordon Hayward missed. I was like man, I want to be there one day, be on that court and be on that stage.

Came here, went to college, was a terrible player. Got cut halfway through my freshman year at a Division II school but they didn't have a lot of the resources so they allowed me to stay as a student assistant/manager so I starting my coaching year pretty early there and from then on, kept moving up and kept being lucky that a lot of people took chances on me.

Q. So piggybacking off that, where did you get your coaching philosophy?

ARTHUR MOREIRA: Oh, it's everywhere. I love watching

Euro League basketball. I love watching the pros, watching Division III. I think there's a lot of good coaches at the lower levels. I try to get a little bit of everything and make it my own. For better or worse, I think my biggest strength is also my biggest weakness. Sometimes I'm too creative and try to create our own style. We taught our own way to offensive rebound this year. I got something from one program, something from the other, create your own style. Same thing for defensive coverages. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

I feel like it's a big melting pot of all the basketball that I've watched and consumed throughout the last few years.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, Coach.

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