

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

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Norman, Oklahoma, USA

Lloyd Noble Center

Oklahoma Sooners

Coach Jennie Baranczyk

Raegan Beers

Sahara Williams

Media Conference

Oklahoma 89, Idaho 59

Q. Start with your veterans tonight. What did you see from them tonight?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Yeah, no, honestly, I love -- we were up here talking too loud so you didn't hear her. That was our fault.

No, I thought we came out really hungry to start. I thought the pace of the game was really fun to start. I think obviously Idaho is a really good basketball team. I think Payton really settled us this. I thought Raegan did a great job of just really setting a tone, and I think you can just see the energy and the enthusiasm that just exudes from Sahara Williams.

To be able to watch them, and also Beatrice Culliton gave us really good minutes tonight as well. So you have to go as your upperclassmen go, and that's how we went tonight.

Q. As Brooklyn was waiting to check in she couldn't contain herself from cheering for you guys. The ref had to tell her to sit back down. With the energy we see you guys playing with. Easily could have been a moment of nerves for her being in her first March Madness game, that's the energy?

SAHARA WILLIAMS: Did you say you've never seen that before? (Laughter.) That's who she is.

Q. But for you guys to have a player like that who easily could have been nervous, first March Madness game, but she's has the energy she is coming with,



how does that help fuel the team as a whole?

RAEGAN BEERS: She brings that every day in practice, every single game. If she's nervous I don't ever see it because joy and energy just bursts out of her in everything she does.

So she brought that tonight. She did it in the way she ran the floor and the way she defended. Felt like she had three blocks in one possession. I know they were probably spread out, but she was just all over the place tonight offensively and defensively, so it was great to see her do that.

SAHARA WILLIAMS: She shows up like that every day so it's easy to cheer her on. She cheers us on and as a freshmen. Especially in a moment like this, you got a lot of nerves. I thought she came in and did exactly what we wanted her to do. We're just so proud of how much she's grown.

Q. You guys pass the ball so well even if you got fouled or something like that. Had you guys had a game like this? I know that's always the goal of Jennie's teams, to pass the ball so well that you guys always make great passes. Do you feel like you came close to reaching that today?

RAEGAN BEERS: I'm going to take this one because I think Sahara does a phenomenal job of setting that tone for our team. Passing the ball, getting open, knowing where people want. There was a possession where I knew I was going to get it from her and she didn't even have ball yet. The way she was going to the high posts I was like, oh, she's throwing it. I got to post up. Sure enough, she even didn't look at me. She just threw it.

But that's what Sahara does. She knows where people want it and knows where people's advantages are, and that's just not -- Aliyah is a phenomenal passer, Payton is a phenomenal passer. I thought Caya had some in there tonight.

So when we have a team like that who passes the ball and finds joy in that, it's a really hard team to defend because



we're going to keep passing when people are open.

SAHARA WILLIAMS: Well said.

Q. Sahara, building on that, I know you guys are at your best when you're balanced. How important was it for night one of the tournament to come out and have that kind of balance just to set the tone for what you guys want to do?

SAHARA WILLIAMS: No, I think we're setting the tone for how we want to play going on into March. Just coming out and having fun was a big thing. Obviously you play hard and want to win every possession. When we have fun, I wouldn't say a win is guaranteed, but we play a lot better when we have fun and have a smile on our face and we rebound and we score and we assist the ball.

So it was just important setting the tone for going the rest of the way in the tournament.

JENNIE BARANCZYK: 7:00 Sunday. It's public knowledge. It is now. (Smiling.)

Q. I'll ask that you question, too, because we're always talking to you about movement and passing and how well you can pass it, and many times you're disappointed in maybe some of the passing, but today how satisfied were you with how they moved the ball?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I think with our finishing you could see that we were a little game-rusty in some of the finishing to be honest. I know we shot the ball well in the first half, but I think that's where our assist numbers, they look at 18 assists and they're like, we want more than that, right? They think about all the shots they missed that could have been assists. That's where they start to go.

But I do think you could see a really unselfish team. I thought you saw a team that was hungry to go out and play, got excited to play. They honestly didn't care who they were playing with. That's with all due respect to Idaho. We knew they were a good team. You knew you had to show up and bring your A game. You couldn't just step on the floor and there you go. You had to go.

And especially when you're at home, especially with the crowd we had, I really loved the crowd that we had. We had a lot of people not doing anything on a Friday night at 9:00 other than wanting to come here.

So your wife was happy. A lot of people happy. But I think that also really fed our team and that's how we want to play. When Sahara Williams has that smile on her face and they're pointing and then even when they are

disappointed when something doesn't go well, I like that too. It's real emotion and it's a real team.

So we have done this. We've had games like this. Now you got to put another game together like this. Can't be oh, this is great and this is the top of the mountain because it isn't the top the mountain. You got to go to the next game and you get to go the next game.

That's more of our focus. Yeah, of course we want to share the ball.

Q. Obviously the big point so far has been the emotions, personality of this team that got to shine tonight. Obviously having fun is not a new thing when it comes to this program and the style of play. Interested when you get deeper into the season and the pressure continues to mount, how do you maintain that aspect of not ignoring the pressure but being able to allow that personality and fun aspect to still shine through even in the higher pressure moments?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Well, that's part of being in the SEC. Every game is a high pressure moment. When you take -- when we got that week off to be able to look where we're really good, that's how we play a lot better when we play like that, you know.

So I think they really took that to heart, too, and learning that. So it's not just you had fun because the ball was going in. We had fun before it went in. We had fun on defense. You had to get used to the game, too. It was a really physical game, especially at the beginning where it's like you got to really get used to it. You have to be really scrappy.

Idaho wanted it just as much as we did, so you really have to play the game, enjoy the game, learning during the game, see how they're guarding. Michigan State will be the same way for us. So I don't know. I think it's something that you want in every single game, but the season is long and it's March.

Right now is where you've been battle tested and now is where you just got to go.

Q. I know that you're in the moment right now and you've got a game coming up on Sunday, but you've now won a tournament game every single year that you've been here. I know the goal of this program is larger than the round of 32. What does it mean for this program to have this momentum of continuing to win in the tournament every single year?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Uh-huh, well, when you're



surrounded by greatness here at Oklahoma in so many programs, you kind of take that for granted. But when you're trying to build it, that's an important step. It's important how you step out and you play that first game.

I think that's what we learned over the years. That first year we barely squeaked by that first game. Then it was about like that the second year. Every year you start to get where there is no point in being nervous. You got to go play, right? You got to be prepared.

I think the SEC made us a little bit tougher than maybe we were, and that's not a knock, but you got to -- it's hard. Every day is hard. You got to find the sunshine even on the days it's real cloudy.

So that's where I think that has really taught us. But I don't think we've arrived but I think we're building a pretty cool foundation.

Q. I think Idaho shot 25 percent from the floor. Only three points in the third quarter. What stood out about the defensive effort tonight and how important is that going into a matchup with a high offense like Michigan State?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Well, let's be honest, Idaho is a good offensive team and you could see it. Their movement is good. They've got obviously some talented players and their game plan was to shoot the three ball a lot. Maybe they don't -- didn't normally shoot it that much with their bigs, but that was their plan today.

So I feel like we came out, and even though they scored in that first quarter, I felt like we were able to sustain some of it.

But I loved the way that we adjusted in the third quarter. I loved how we were able to come out, and I thought we switched when we needed to switch, stayed when we needed to stay.

You know, obviously Raegan Beers in the paint can rebound. Sahara, both of them having double-doubles is huge. You look a little what Payton continues to do.

And I think they're different enough that to prepares you -- every game prepares you for a different game plan that our freshman are now used to having different game plans.

So when you get a day to play a great team like Michigan State, you're going to be a little bit closer to that because they're so used to preparing for different teams.

And also, you just got to get the rust off. They obviously

did, too, today. I mean, what a good game for March Madness, too right before ours. Talk about different styles of play in that game. Right, Colorado State was completely different than Idaho, so our games looked a little bit different.

And so Michigan State really does like to get up and down. They're just a well balanced team. I coached Grace VanSlooten this summer and you talk about a great player. I got to work with Robin at USA Basketball. So I'm very familiar with how good they are.

And we better be ready on Sunday.

Q. You told us yesterday that you expected big things from Payton in this tournament. She came out and really set the tone for you guys today?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Yeah.

Q. How good was that to see her play that way early?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Yeah, love it. Honestly, what she does is she does all the things, right? Shooting the ball well helps, but she just moves and she talks and she fights for rebounds. But she's not done yet, and so we're going need her even bigger on Sunday and need her even bigger if we keep going after that.

So I love how she's attacking every day like I told you, but I really expect big things from her on Sunday.

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