

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

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Norman, Oklahoma, USA

Lloyd Noble Center

Oklahoma Sooners
Jennie Baranczyk
Raegan Beers
Sahara Williams
Payton Verhulst

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have our Oklahoma student-athletes. Questions.

Q. Y'all had four freshmen that all got in the game last night and did something to impact the game. What is it like seeing them handle that first NCAA Tournament moment so well.

RAEGAN BEERS: It's so exciting. This team is really easy to cheer for. I know we talk about that a lot, but Brooklyn and Emma and Keziah and all those freshmen, Aaliyah, obviously. Then our younger classmen, Zya and Caya, as well. To see them succeed and work all year to get to this point is really, really fun and easy to love on them when they have loved on us all career.

Q. For any of you guys, what do you know about Grace and the threat she poses, and what are some ways you think you can slow her down?

SAHARA WILLIAMS: She obviously has a good inside presence. Very physical. Plays with a lot of finesse and a very good passer, especially at her position for that team.

So just making sure that we contain her and especially No. 35. I know especially they're two key players. I mean, she's good, but Reagan is also really good too, so I think it will be a good match-up.

Sorry, that's just the confidence I have in this team.

Q. Sahara, yesterday Jennie was talking about



through the grind of SEC play it's about how do you find the sunshine even on cloudy days. You talked about playing with joy last night. Is it easier when you get to tournament time to roll it over and continue to have that joy with just the excitement and everything that surrounds the tournament?

SAHARA WILLIAMS: I think it's March. You kind of really don't have a choice but to have joy. This is the best time of the year. You've worked honestly nine out of the 12 months for this moment. Especially doing it with this team has been so much fun.

Just showing up especially for Raegan and Payton and Beatrice. These are our seniors. They won't get this moment back, so just making sure that we really create so many good memories, and just have fun I think has been the focus for this team this year.

Q. Raegan, didn't you play against their center in USA ball?

RAEGAN BEERS: Yes, this past summer I played with Grace, yeah.

Q. Does that help you, hurt you? Does it give you any insight?

RAEGAN BEERS: I also played against her when she was at Oregon, and I was at Oregon State. So I've played against Grace and know her well for the past couple of years of my college career. She was a McDonald's All-American with me as well, so I've known her for a long time now.

Really great player. Obviously really versatile, as we said. She rebounds really, really well, is relentless on the boards, which is something that we struggled with last night that I think we can take a step forward in tomorrow, especially against a good rebounding team.

But she's a great person, and I love that about her. She was really fun. We actually celebrated her birthday while we were at USA. We got her a little cake and everything. So it was really fun. She's a great player, and I'm excited



to match up against her.

Q. Payton, at 7:00 p.m. Any easier for you?

PAYTON VERHULST: Thank you for thinking about me.

Q. Fast start, was that something for you that just how the game kind of went, or is there something you can take from how quickly you started last night into tomorrow?

PAYTON VERHULST: Absolutely. I think just as a team kind of what Sahara said, what we talked about before. When we have fun, we're so good. Obviously seeing last night how everybody was able to get involved, everybody was able to get different looks, easy looks. I think that's something when we do that, we're really good.

Even if we give up a good shot to get a great shot, I think you saw that a lot last night and something obviously we're going to bring tomorrow and something that's really Oklahoma basketball. So I think, again be, when we do that, we're really good.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

We have Head Coach Jennie Baranczyk. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Jennie, you talked last night about the pace Michigan State plays with and the challenge of VanSlooten. What else stands out about you about that match-up that you're going to have tomorrow night?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Yeah, I mean, they're just a really well-balanced team. They move so well on the offensive end, and they share the basketball. They play, you know, a ton of ball screens. They get up and down in transition. They do multiple things in transition. They can shoot the three. They did get to the rim. They get to the foul line a lot. So those are areas we really have to focus.

Then they rebound the ball well, and clearly last night we didn't. So that's something we've really got to fix on. But they hang their hat on their defense, and they'll ball pressure, and they'll get out and pick you up 90 feet. So you got to take care of the ball against them. Sometimes we do a really good job of that, and sometimes we don't.

We have our hands full, for sure, but it's also March, and that's what it's supposed to be, and we know that. So it's going to be a really, really good basketball game.

Q. Last night you talked about during SEC play

sometimes it's about founding the sunshine even on the cloudy days. With the tournament we think more pressure, do-or-die, but is it almost easier to just put that aside and just keep going and play with that joy that you guys like to play when you get to this time of year?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Easy is not the word that comes to mind, but I mean, I think just the longevity of this season is what gets to be a challenge for young people sometimes, right? Especially when you do have a team that hasn't experienced a year long season of basketball.

They've come in the summer, and they think that's the hardest thing they've ever done. Then they go home for a couple of weeks, and then they come in the fall, and they're, like, Oh, my gosh, now this is the hardest thing I've ever done. Meanwhile, the seniors and the coaches are, like, No, February is the hardest thing that you're ever going to do.

I think it's more of just there's not the light at the end of the tunnel. Now it's March. I mean, the weather is nice. That helps, right? Everybody knows March Madness, and there's this magic in the air that you just have to go play.

So I don't think it's easier. I think it's more of, oh, this is real now. You know, win or go home. So you have that kind of motivation, but then also, you're a product of what you've done the whole year.

You forget that some of those rainy days are part of your journey, and that's actually how you build resilience and grit, right? That's how you build not tanking when Idaho banks in a three or all of a sudden their centers start shooting threes, and that's not part of what you thought was going happen.

So I think those types of things where you've seen so much more, you've put together your portfolio a little bit more, and so now is where you just play more so than, oh, here's another lesson, here's another lesson, here's another lesson. I think it's more of that.

I didn't articulate that well, but it took me a long time to. Sorry.

Q. Jennie, in this game there's two really good posts. Can you talk about how that could influence the game or maybe how the game may center around those two players?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Yeah. Well, what a beautiful picture of post play that is completely different. That's what's so cool about the game of basketball is there are so

many different ways to be really, really good.

Obviously Grace just does an incredible job of being shifty. She's crafty. She's been a winner. She has so much experience.

Her and Raegan were teammates this summer, so we saw them play against each other in some of those practice settings. We got to see them play together in some of those practice settings. It's fun. The seat that I was in, it was really fun to be able to watch that.

Then you have Raegan who has an outside game, and she has this brute strength inside. They're so different, and yet, they both impact the game so greatly, especially for their respective teams. You know, we are a much better team with Raegan Beers on the floor, and they're a much better team with Grace VanSlooten on the floor.

Q. I was just talking to Beatrice. When she was banged up, she had the waste basket you guys had on the bench. How important that was just for a mindset reset? She also said that's the one that's in your office. So did you find a new one, or did you lie to her?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: We get creative. I had two. Isn't that nice? I know. No, I had two.

No, it was a way for them to -- again, when you are young and -- you know, I know we're more experienced now, but we're still freshmen. You're still young, and you're still learning so many things for the first time. Even our sophomores didn't have as much experience as even our current freshmen do. When you go through that, your mind can -- the SEC, it will make a woman out of you. It can play tricks on you, and you've got to show up, and you've got to work, and you've got to be able to reset quickly.

That's something sometimes the whole idea of failure recovery is not something that's glorified, right? We hold it as a badge of honor. Oh, it's my fault. Oh, this was so bad, and it's my fault. I took the blame, but that also hurts your team just as much as if you think everything should be for you, right?

So for us to just reset from one possession to the next possession is really important, and also, you want to make it less about whether or not I control that as a coach, because I don't control that as a coach. They do as a team. So that's for them to be able to manage how do you leave some things on the bench, how do you leave some things off the floor, so when we are on the floor we can keep it all about team, and whenever we need to be able to do that, anything individual we've got to leave off.

Everything we have about the team needs to be on.

They can kind of be there for each other. Sometimes you got to kind of, you know, hold each other accountable with a harder line, and sometimes you just got to love on each other enough that you just got to leave your baggage at the door and be able to step on the floor. That's more for them.

I think our seniors have done a nice job of leading them in that.

Q. Jennie, preparing for the second team in an NCAA Tournament, I know you guys work ahead and everything. You had a little bit of an insight on Michigan State. More than probably we know, right?

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I hope I know more than you know, yes, but -- no, I know, I know. I mean, you do, you look ahead in terms of -- I don't. I stay pretty present-focused with our team, but we have multiple coaches on our staff that do different scouts. So we've had different coaches looking at different scouts, but we also make sure that we're very familiar with the current team.

A lot of times we have different areas that we focus on. You know, we have some position coaches that focus more on the point guard position, and we have some that focus more on the post position. So they'll look at offense and defense that way, and then we'll kind of put stuff together.

It was a late night trying to get caught up as much as you can get caught up because, again, you don't really get to know who you play. You just have got to really study it fast. That's why I look so good today (laughing), because I haven't slept that much.

But, yeah, no, you go as far ahead as you can, but you've got to stay present. Again, it's March Madness. You better be prepared for every single minute. Not even just every game.

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