

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Vermont vs NC State

Friday, March 21, 2025

Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Reynolds Coliseum

NC State Wolfpack

Aziaha James

Saniya Rivers

Media Conference



AZIAHA JAMES: Just allowing the game to come to me. I know I had a good run last year, but this is a different era. Just having a good group of girls surrounding me, they pick me up every chance they get. So just leaning on them and just working hard.

Q. For both players, how do you kind of temper the excitement of the tournament knowing that you're hoping it's going to be a three weekend situation? You made it to the third weekend last year. And just kind of pace yourself and not get too far ahead of yourselves.

AZIAHA JAMES: Like I said previously, just one step at a time. We can't think about ahead because it's going to mess up the training. Coach Moore emphasizes watching the team that we're playing right now and not focus on the next few games ahead because the team, like Niya said, they're here for a reason. They're going to run us the whole time. They're going to defend us the whole time. So it's a matter of what we want how we want it.

SANIYA RIVERS: I think it's hard obviously. We've been to the Final Four just last year, and knowing we can get back there, it's kind of hard not to look ahead. But like Za said, you don't want to because you got to take it one game at a time because you can't get to the next game until you win the first.

It's hard. Obviously we want to get back there. We're more than capable to. We want the freshmen to experience it as well. We've been through it, I've been through it a couple times, obviously playing in South Carolina. It's an experience, and I want everyone to be able to experience it. We definitely can, but one step at a time.

Q. Both players. Consistency is important for a program to build and continue to find success year after year. You guys have done that so far. What's your message to newer players coming in, not only just freshmen, but those that may transfer in? You've stuck around, and there's reasons why you have. If you can explain why first and also how that's helped to build that consistency for this program and your team

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with questions for our student-athletes Aziaha James, Saniya Rivers from NC State. Both went to the Final Four last year and trying to get back this year. Any questions for Aziaha or Saniya?

Q. First things first, you've both had a few days to prepare pour the NCAA Tournament. Just your first impressions on your opponent.

AZIAHA JAMES: We're taking one step at a time, focus on one team at a time. Vermont is still good, so we're going to play our game as well as they're going to play their game.

It comes down to who's going to work the hardest, who wants to gain the most. So it's going to be a good game.

SANIYA RIVERS: I think they're going to force us to work 40 minutes the full game. Obviously it's March Madness. If you're here, you're here for a reason. Before this game, I don't think I've heard a whole lot about Vermont. Like I said, they're here for a reason.

Like Za said, we just have to do what we do. It matters who we play and of course film matters, but at the end of the day, if we don't what we're supposed to do -- rebound, defend, share the ball, play together -- it's not going to matter. Hopefully we lock in on the scout and do what we need to do.

Q. Saniya, Aziaha James, last year you kind of took the tournament by surprise. Not many people in the ACC, but going into the tournament, you averaged 28 points a game. How are you going to approach this tournament now that you're going to be probably on top of everybody's scouting report? How are you going to approach that?



to keep climbing higher and reach new heights each year.

SANIYA RIVERS: I think it all depends on what you want, honestly, what you want to get out of it. Everybody comes into college with a different goal. Is it you want to win a National Championship? Is it NIL? Is it you want to make friends here? It just depends on what you want.

Obviously I came in wanting to win National Championships. I got one in South Carolina, but I realized I wanted a little bit more, maybe on the court, off the court, I wanted to be closer to family, so I made that transition for myself. It just depends on what you want.

For players coming in, I say really look at those things. When you're deciding on a college, look at all the aspects because you're going to be here four years. Nobody can make the decision except you.

I don't know, college is hard. It's way different than high school. It's a different transition on and off the court. So I just encourage players to really think about the whole picture on and off the court -- academics, recovery, mental health -- because it's all a factor.

Especially right now in the homestretch, you've got to be mentally locked in. Our bodies are aching. We're playing back-to-back games. It's almost like AAU, you're playing game after game.

You've just got to lock in, and I feel like you can really prepare before you even get here.

AZIAHA JAMES: Definitely, she hit all the key points. One of the things I say is finding your why, why you want to do this. Encourage you a little bit, just trusting the process.

I know since my freshman year I came a long way, so just staying the course, working on yourself every day. Dedication is the key to this game. So just preparing yourself for the downfalls, for the uprisings, and surround yourself with the good people that you know you can live with, like Niya said, you can live with for four years, and a great coaching staff.

You've got to find every key that would be suitable for you.

SANIYA RIVERS: I want to add, sorry, I think family is a big why for both of us. If you look at the crowd, me and Za's family are probably taking over the whole family section.

AZIAHA JAMES: I hear my mom.

SANIYA RIVERS: Every time. I hear my dad too. I think that's a big why for the both of us.

Q. Just like you mentioned, you all will be in front of family here in Reynolds Coliseum. Just both of you being in your last year, how special is it to be able to host and also play these last hopefully two games inside the Old Barn?

SANIYA RIVERS: It's exciting. It's bittersweet. Goodness, it's going to be our last game regardless, the last two games at home in Reynolds. I'm pretty sure I'm going to cry. I haven't cried yet. We had Senior Night, I stayed strong, whatever.

Even now it's just emotionally preparing to play our last game, but hopefully we get it done the last two. I think we're just excited about it, and I think we're really prepared.

AZIAHA JAMES: It sucks we only get six tickets. I don't know how many texts I got, can I get a ticket? Can I get a ticket? My family just being out there, seeing them in the crowd, scoring buckets feels so good.

Like Niya said, last two games in Reynolds, it's so crazy. I've been here since freshman year. Just to see it pass by me so fast and going to the next level is so surreal.

Q. Y'all mentioned a bit about the freshmen. I just want to ask how have you seen them sort of balance the excitement of being in the dance for the very first time and focusing in on the opponent, and how have you as leaders helped them kind of temper their emotions?

AZIAHA JAMES: Definitely, it goes back to the last year, like the last year freshmen. They're not freshmen when it comes around this point. They already showed it to us. They proved it to us. They've been thrown in the fire all season long, and we've seen their progress since the summer.

We're proud of them. We're proud of Zam, Lorena, Devyn, Tilda. They all came a long way and can't wait to see what they do in the next few years.

SANIYA RIVERS: I think some of them have more nerves than excitement. That's expected, right? They're freshmen. They've never been here before. Obviously we just encourage them to try to change their perspective. Okay, you're here for a reason. You're almost through your freshman season.

I just think, like Za said, they all worked hard to get here. When you have nerves, it just means that you care. They

don't want to mess up when they go out there, but obviously they want the chance to touch the floor. So it's kind of hard to differentiate the two.

Nerves are good, and I just hope that, when their number's called, they're ready.

Q. Speaking of the freshmen, it seems like we've seen a lot of them, and kind of down the stretch of the season and into the conference tournament, it seems like the rotations have been pretty -- you aren't playing 40 minutes every night like we saw a lot in last year's run. How much has that helped you all, as the main core, be able to stay fresh during the grind of March and also help the freshmen contribute, young players contribute in big minutes like we've seen down the stretch of the season?

SANIYA RIVERS: Staying fresh is definitely key down the stretch. Just like I said, them being prepared to come on the court when their number's called is big. It really shows our versatility. It just shows that we have a deep bench, and any time someone's jersey is called, they're ready to handle whatever.

We never know if it's going to be foul trouble, we never know, knock on wood, it's going to be injuries, someone's having a bad night, it doesn't matter. I think they work hard enough in practice and have proven themselves worthy to be a part of this just as much as anything else.

I think down the stretch they're definitely going to be needed. I just hope, again, I can't stress enough, that they're ready to perform when it's their time.

AZIAHA JAMES: I don't know, we're getting a little old, so we need that little break (laughter). No, when their numbers are called, I feel like they handle it very well. They execute everything Coach Moore says. They look at us when we're on the court and do the same thing.

Just to see them do that gives us the relief of we can go to the bench and get a little break and trust our other teammates to handle the same situation that's going on in the game.

Q. Just talk about your maturation, both players. Coming out of high school, is this what you expected out of your careers here? You started at South Carolina, but is this where you wanted to -- you figured yourself to be at this time in your careers? Going into the WNBA after this and All-American statuses, is this what you as a young kid playing ball envisioned for yourself?

AZIAHA JAMES: Definitely, I have been playing ball since at least third grade. So that was instilled in my mind since that point. I wanted to go to the next level. I was playing under a good coach. I was blessed to be a four-year state champion in high school.

To come to college, my freshman year definitely did humble me to lock in on myself, understand myself, who I am as a person, and it made me who I am today. So definitely.

SANIYA RIVERS: You're taking me back.

AZIAHA JAMES: For real.

SANIYA RIVERS: Let me see.

Q. You sound like y'all are old.

SANIYA RIVERS: I think for me my thoughts and feelings have fluctuated a lot since I've been younger. Everybody always had that dream college they're wanting to go to. I don't think I ever had that being younger. I would hit all the games, being from North Carolina, I would go to State games, Duke games, Carolina games.

Just coming up, I just knew I wanted to play basketball. Whether that was professional, collegiate, high school, whatever the case may be, I just wanted a ball in my hands.

I think when high school hit, Hurricane Florence took a toll on me. I had to move. I had to transfer schools. I think that hit. COVID was a factor, and I think at that point where I couldn't play basketball, I was just like, okay, like I don't know what to do now.

So I think it was just a big mental aspect for me hopping around not knowing what I wanted to do. Everyone knows I had points where I didn't know if I wanted to play professionally. So I went to Kelsey Plum's camp, changed my perspective. So I think for me it's just going all around.

If you had asked me if I would have expected to be on a Final Four team or be part of a championship team or cut down nets or be drafted in the WNBA, I hope, I don't think I ever would have seen any of this. My parents sacrificed a lot for me, and like I said, family is a big motivation for me.

I think just wanting to give things a try, and I think it just shows that I love them and I want to give back to them, and I want them to know that none of that went to waste and they didn't sacrifice for nothing. I think that's what drives me. Like I said, I never expected to be here.

Q. I don't know if you remember, we asked you in the preseason if you had a dark horse breakout pick on this team. You said Tilda Trygger, ACC All-Freshman. That's a pretty good pick right there.

SANIYA RIVERS: Told you.

Q. What's it been like to see her grow throughout the season? Aziaha, you can talk about this as well. Basically in a trial by fire situation. She did a good job.

SANIYA RIVERS: I knew she was going to be special. I hate to say I told you so, but I told you so. Just to see her grow, obviously Tilda came in a shooter. Tilda wanted to play the wing. I heard all the calls with Coach Moore. She was like, wait, post? I want to play the wing. I want to be a guard. Tilda, baby, you're 6'6", you're going to the post.

Just be thrown in the fire, I think that's the quickest way to learn, and obviously she's done a great job for us.

I think me and Tilda have a personal connection on that pick-and-roll, pick-and-pop. Obviously everybody is going to look for her on the roll-and-pop, but something about that duo I can't really shake.

Tilda has grown a lot on and off the court. You don't know the Tilda we know off the court. She may come off a little shy, but that girl isn't shy at all. Just to see her grow, it's just beautiful.

I know she's going to be great for this program the next three years, and I just hope that those nerves have kind of passed her by and she's ready to step it up right here because it's big, it's big.

I think hearing her name more has really motivated her a lot. I think she knows how big she is to this team, and she's really going to show up in ways you haven't seen this season. Be on the lookout, and remember I told you so again.

AZIAHA JAMES: Just like Niya just said, Tilda, since the summer, she was quiet, she was timid, she was by herself. Then once we started getting that chemistry back together, she just blossomed, and it led onto the court.

Like Niya said, when she started to hear her name and things like that, she started to play more aggressive and started to execute a lot of plays, doing the things that she probably thought she never would have done on this type of floor.

Tilda, she's like more than a teammate. She's our sister. We love to bond with Tilda. If y'all don't know, we're part

Swedish now. She makes a lot of stuff from Sweden lately. We've got a lot of stuff in our bag.

Tilda is going to be great the next few years, and I can't wait to see. I'm just proud of her the way she's learning so fast. Coach Moore is throwing everything at her every week, and she's handling it every time. Just to see that, I'm proud of her.

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