

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

Friday, March 21, 2025

Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Reynolds Coliseum

## Michigan State Spartans

## Grace VanSlooten

## Julia Ayrault

### Media Conference



GRACE VANSLOOTEN: Yeah, like you said, they're both really good teams, both raised the level of competition. Yeah, it's definitely weird to be playing at a different school and not back on the West Coast.

It's always really fun to play them. They always have really great players, and it's always a really competitive game. Yeah, just a lot of fun.

JULIA AYRAULT: I think obviously both teams add a level of just challenge and competition to our league. I think they both obviously did a really good job this season. It was really cool to go out there and kind of get to experience their campuses and just the different environment of playing out in California.

It was really good. I think, just like Grace said again, they've raised the level of the Big Ten, and I think it's good for our league for sure.

**Q. What do you think you gained from last year's tournament experience in the one round that you played and how that will help you perhaps this week?**

JULIA AYRAULT: I'd say just I think our main focus this week -- Coach Fralick talks about winning the wait, like using this time as a really beneficial time for us to work on us.

I think this last week and a half, two weeks of practice have been really, really good for us. We've had a really high focus and got an opportunity to play a little bit, which is also good, just so we're not coming in after a long break without having any games. It was a highly competitive week for us.

And I think being ready to go from the jump. I think last year we got off to a slow start and kind of dug ourselves a hole. So just kind of being ready when the ball tips and just being fired up and ready to go for the tournament. I think we're really excited for it.

**Q. Grace, is this your first NCAA Tournament?**

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: It is.

THE MODERATOR: I'll introduce our student-athletes, Grace VanSlooten and Julia Ayrault.

**Q. For both players, looks like there was some tough going down the stretch of the regular season, playing some tough opponents. Do you think you've solved some of those issues maybe over the last week or so?**

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: Yeah, it definitely was a tough stretch. I think it was really competitive, kind of felt like March Madness games honestly. I think it really prepared us, and I think we had a really good week of practice. We're all feeling really confident going in.

JULIA AYRAULT: Kind of just like Grace said. Coach Fralick talked a lot about we played a lot of games that feel like tournament games, and obviously the Big Ten is where it is right now. So I think that helps us a lot.

I think just being in games like that constantly, like back-to-back, just tournament style, really competitive games, I think helps our confidence.

We obviously had some close ones that we want to get over that hump and just move forward. Kind of the same thing, we're feeling pretty good after a really good week of practice.

**Q. For both of you guys, as student-athletes, the addition of USC and UCLA, I know for you, Grace, it had to be a little odd coming from Oregon, to all of a sudden see some of your former Pac-12 opponents. What's it been like to have them in your league, and they're two Number 1 seeds. They obviously have raised the level of play in the Big Ten.**



**Q. What are your expectations, and what kind of feedback have you gotten from those young ladies who have been able to play in the tournament?**

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: It just seems like a lot of fun. I'm really excited. I know it's going to be really competitive. Everybody is going to be playing their best basketball. Yeah, I'm just really excited. Everything I've heard about it is really positive and just a really great experience.

**Q. Julia, did you give her any advice?**

JULIA AYRAULT: I mean, keep doing what she's doing. She's been playing her butt off and just really excited for her and excited for us. I think just keeping confidence up and getting ready to play hard and taking one game at a time.

**Q. Julia, and for Grace too, Julia, you talked about winning the wait, and that's been the message from Robyn here the last week and a half after the Big Ten Tournament. What are the things, after you hit the reset button for the last week and a half and started to work on things, what are some of those that you came away really impressed with during the week?**

JULIA AYRAULT: I'd say two things that stick out to me that kind of Coach Fralick has mentioned is just our confidence and just our ability to keep pushing through everything. I think we've had a lot of games where we've shown a lot of fight. So just kind of starting our games off strong and coming into the tournament with confidence.

I think that's something she's touched on a lot is doing the things we need to do to win, but also the belief in ourselves and each other and doing it together. I think that just really stands out to me. I think we always talk about, when we're together, that's when we're at our best and our strongest.

Those are things this week I've thought a lot about, and just appreciated Coach's intent and really focusing on those things.

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: A lot of the same. We had a few competition days over the break, and I think those are really fun for us. We kind of got to go at each other a little bit and really get that competitive fire back and have a lot of fun. It's important to not forget to have fun while you're playing.

Yesterday she was talking about how her confidence comes from toughness, and I think that really makes a lot of sense, especially in March. A lot of times the tougher teams win. They come out on top. I think just being the

tougher team matters a lot right now.

**Q. Just to follow up on that with both of you. Grace, we'll start with you. Unlike the men's tournament, you guys get a week off in between. This late in the year when everybody's kind of banged up, mentally you're drained, how refreshing is it to get a little time away where you can just take a deep breath and then take it into March?**

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: Yeah, it was great. We spent a lot of those days doing just like individual workouts or small group workouts, kind of getting that confidence back and really just getting a really good workout in.

Coach Fralick said yesterday that at the end of the year, this is actually when you need to ramp up your training. So I think we spent a lot of time doing that, and it really gave me a lot of confidence, and I'm sure a lot of other people a lot of confidence, just to get that work in and get those reps because confidence comes from reps and just seeing the ball go through the hoop.

JULIA AYRAULT: I think similar. We've talked about like just fighting through that but also using it as a good little refresher, but also just attacking that week. I think Coach Fralick and staff have done a tremendous job just having us really just attack the days, like when we're on and in practice, we went hard.

I think it's easy to kind of want to take rest time because you can, but I think kind of just like Grace said, this is the time when you can really separate and ramp things up and be competitive. I think they did a great job of that. Kind of like we've been saying, it helps a lot with our confidence and our readiness. After the week we had, we feel good.

**Q. One question about your opponent. There is a lot of talent in the Big Ten. What is your evaluation of Harvard's guard Harmoni Turner?**

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: She's a great player. I think she's really important to focus on and do our best to kind of contain her as much as possible. I mean, all positive things to say about her. She's really good. Watching film on her, it's just -- I don't know, I haven't really experienced playing somebody with that much confidence. She goes out there, and she fights hard and she wants to win, and it's clear to see that in every game she plays.

I think it's really important to do a really good job on her, and I think it's definitely going to be a challenge for us.

JULIA AYRAULT: Similar things. I think we've talked about just her effort and watch her crash the O boards and

stuff. You can tell, just like Grace said, she wants to win, and obviously she's really talented alongside of that. So it's a good combination.

Like Grace said, again, we've got to do a good job of containing her and limiting the things that she does.

**Q. When Raleigh popped up as your assignment, did that mean anything to either one of you, and any of these other teams here, are you familiar with anybody, or are you kind of coming in blind on all that?**

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: I was excited to go somewhere with some sunshine, that was important. I also know one of the players on Harvard. I played AAU with her all three years, Gabby Anderson, one of their starters. I know her really well, went to high school with her too.

I'm really excited to see her and just kind of face-off because we never thought we'd play each other. She's in the Ivy League, and Big Ten, so really excited to see her.

**Q. Just to follow up on that, you're playing on opposite coasts for a good chunk of the time, so that is a neat reunion, I guess, for you.**

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: Yeah, really excited. One of my best friends honestly. We played together IMG my senior year. We got really close during my time there. I'm really excited to see her. She's got a great family that we're still close with and honestly talk almost every day. So really excited to see her.

**Q. Julia, this is your third trip around in the Big Dance, March Madness. What is it about this specific team, what kind of characteristics is it that makes you believe that this group has a kind of run in it? What is it about the makeup of this group that makes you believe in them?**

JULIA AYRAULT: Honestly, I just think my confidence overall in everybody is really, really high. I know talking with Coach Fralick last week, I just love when everyone's just clicking and just like this person's having a great night, this person's having a great night, it's just exciting. That can be something that can separate us.

I think on any given night, it can be any one of our nights, and that's awesome because we have a lot of different pieces that work together. Obviously just a lot of talent across the board. I think that's what makes us strong is just kind of, like I said, top to bottom, I think everyone is really skilled and can really just perform and have a great night.

So I think that kind of makes us dangerous in the sense of whoever's night it is, let's do it and let's roll with it, and we're in it together. That's what excites me the most, to be honest.

**Q. Grace, I know we talked about it being your first trip to the Big Dance. Rehashing the excitement it was to see the name on Selection Sunday pop up for Michigan State, and now you sit here with the March Madness backdrop and all the March Madness logos around, and you're actually in it. Is there any nostalgia it brings up from watching this as a kid and now you get to be a part of it?**

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: Definitely a little bit of nostalgia. I'm also really excited. My past two years, I'd see it all over my social media and just kind of be jealous of everybody that got to come here. So I'm just really excited.

I think it's going to be a lot of fun. That's one of the reasons I came to Michigan State is I told them, I want to be in the March Madness tournament. I'm really happy that we got here, and I'm just excited to play tomorrow.

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