

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

Friday, March 21, 2025

Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Reynolds Coliseum

Vermont Catamounts Coach Alisa Kresge

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We now welcome in Head Coach of Vermont, Alisa Kresge, who is in her seventh season. I'll just open things up. As I just closed with your student-athletes, how has it having been in this seat before and in this environment before which is NCAA postseason play?

ALISA KRESGE: I do think obviously our recent history of being here two years ago has really helped us. The vibe is a little different this time. I do think when we got to UConn, it had been a long time for Vermont women's basketball to be on that stage and no player that was on that team has ever been to that level. So I do feel like there was a moment that this is just awesome to be here.

Obviously this is a really talented NC State team on their home court, but I do think there's a demeanor of we want to show everyone what we're made of mentality right now. I think that's what shifted in our season. That's why we're at this point.

So I do think, one, being in the tournament two years ago and having most of our top players that are playing most of our minutes experience that, but also, the success that we've had whether it was just in a quarter or on a road at a Purdue, experiencing that helps us in these situations.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Again, Coach, I think I asked you a similar question two years ago, but as a player being able to go into a road environment and win a couple of NCAA Tournament games and advance to the Sweet 16, how much has that experience kind of helped you in your career kind of going forward as a coach? How do you try and convey, I don't know, the attitude, the mentality that your Marist team had to this group that it's possible you can go in and beat some of these really



good teams in their home arenas?

ALISA KRESGE: Yeah, this time of year, we obviously had a couple of extra days to start preparing for NC State, so it gives you a time to reflect. I took that time talking to teammates and watching some old film and just trying to really remember what that feeling was like and how we had those moments and what we made of those moments.

So I did share some of those thoughts that I had with our players, but it was really just echoing what their mentality has been and that has been the group that has been fearless and confident. That's been the Vermont team that we've seen on the back end of this season versus the front end of the season. We weren't really sure who we are and what we were made of.

Really it was just reminding them of what they already had, and that's what I felt like was the special sauce for those Marist teams that made some noise. They really believed in each other. It was an absolute team effort, but they were fearless, and that wasn't cocky. It was just they believed in who they were, and they were going to give it their all. I feel like you see a lot of that in this group, which is really exciting.

Q. Obviously I asked you a couple of days ago about Reynolds, and we just hadn't had the opportunity to come in here before. Now that you've had the opportunity to walk into this building, see kind of some of the banners, see the floors from the Final Fours, there's the Jim Valvano National Championship Trophy and stuff. Has it hit you how special a place this is that you have the opportunity to play?

ALISA KRESGE: It's incredible. I've obviously known about the history, but I've never stepped in this building, and it's a really cool feeling. It's just awesome.

It's an incredible place. Obviously men's basketball has been incredible here, but women's basketball has been incredible. I'm just fortunate to be in this opportunity in a place that cares about women's basketball and has done an incredible job.



So it's an awesome opportunity. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. We're really excited to be playing in a historical building with a lot of great basketball that has been played here before us.

THE MODERATOR: There's a uniqueness of you guys playing your conference tournament onsite. How much does that prepare you to come in to play NC State in their home gym that you beat Albany in their home gym to win your conference championship?

ALISA KRESGE: I think being at Albany, we were clearly a road team. That being said, Catamounts country really traveled, so that was great. You can feel that energy at times, and there were moments in those games where the building was about to erupt because they were making their run.

I thought our players handled that with a lot of poise. I'm thankful that those kind of moments and what we've seen in the back end of the season is going to help us in moments when NC State makes a run and how we stay poised and how we control what we can control.

I think those moments are going to be very valuable in this game.

Q. Your players were just in here talking about how important defense is to you to the point that if you don't play -- or if you don't play defense, you don't play. One, I was wondering how do you sort of establish that as a culture, and also, how do you teach it in a culture way where you can go on Instagram and learn every move in two seconds and have the biggest bag ever? I wonder if you have a way to say, this is how you puck and roll, this is how you help? How do you make that more interesting, I guess?

ALISA KRESGE: Yeah, it is part of the recruiting process. We're very transparent. Some think they like defense until they get to Vermont, and then they really realize how hard it is. There's a lot of hard work. You have to be two feet in the circle.

I do think the recruiting process is a big key.

you're not shocked when I tell you if you can't defend, you're not going to play. We talked about that already. But then it's just instilling it every single day. My coaching staff is amazing. It is nonstop teaching and coaching. They don't make a mistake in practice without somebody talking to them about it and fixing it.

So I think it's just instilling it every single day over and over. We'll make mistakes that we've talked about for five years,

some of them, but they're still going to hear about it. It's just constantly coaching them. They shared it, but we start every practice with a defensive drill to set the tone. We do like offense, though, so I know it sounds like we only like defense, but we do like offense too.

I do think they see that our defense has created a lot of good offense, so now you're tying in the fun of the game, right? Everyone wants to go put up points, but they see, oh, we can play and get out in transition, which everyone loves. You do that, you can do some of the fun stuff.

I think they're seeing the reward of what defense can bring, and obviously the big picture is winning games and winning championships.

THE MODERATOR: Most kids are shooting in their backyard. I don't know how many kids are doing defensive slides. For you when did defense become a part of your DNA?

ALISA KRESGE: Really, really early on. I've been very fortunate to play for a lot of great coaches, starting with my father. He was a hard-working, in-your-face kind of player. He instilled it in all his kids.

Then every coach I played for moving forward, it just happened to be they all loved defense. So I've been really, really lucky and taught by different coaches, different philosophies, which has helped kind of get me to this point as a coach and believing in defense.

Q. I'm just curious, this is a philosophical question, and I hate to compare. Is coaching defense harder than coaching offense sometimes, just strategically? I know some people know what a pindown is and what a triple handoff is, whatever, right, but just conceptually there's so much that goes into defense that might not be able to be drawn up.

ALISA KRESGE: It is that gray area. We'll find a lot of first-years come into our program, and they want it to be black and white. That's the game of basketball, even on offense. You have to live in that gray area and make plays on the defensive end.

It's, like, don't strong side help, but it's a shooter that doesn't shoot at all, right? You are, like, but it's no strong side help, and it's the end of a shot clock. They can hit three. It's a gray area.

I do think the film, the fact that we have every single practice filmed, and they can watch it right then and there. Every game is filmed, right? Our players, they spend a lot of time in film learning that stuff.

The biggest thing at the end of the day is I'm not asking them to be perfect on defense. It's effort. Give me your effort. Somebody else is going to have your back, and we're going to be okay. It comes down to that. It's hustle plays. It's effort. Of course, you have to know our philosophies, but if you give effort, usually something good is going to come of it.

Q. What have you seen from NC State when you look at them on film? Especially offensively they can score pretty quickly.

ALISA KRESGE: Yes, very quickly. I was almost statting how fast they can score. They have outstanding guard play, and they want to play fast and loose, and they're having a lot of fun doing it.

I think they love and they thrive off of that one-on-one game, but they also can really find open people. So now when you really collapse or step uphill, they're finding that.

So I do think that's something that is going to be really important is how can we limit their transition, how can we have to force them to share the ball for not layups? I do think that they're very, very talented, and they love to score. They love to score fast, and we're going to have to try to utilize some of our defense to slow down the game.

THE MODERATOR: What's the challenge defensively to defend a team that is sometimes one in, four out, and sometimes five out?

ALISA KRESGE: We really can't be put on an island, and I think they do an excellent job putting teams on islands and playing one-on-one and creating whether it is for themselves going to get a bucket or finding that open person.

It's not a team that you can just pack the paint either. Obviously they have a bunch of weapons that can shoot threes and really one through five will take them. That's a little bit of the challenge.

They like to go one-on-one to get into the paint, but they don't have shooters. Okay, you can game plan for that. I think they do an incredible job of putting you on an island and then when you try to pack it in, they kill you with threes.

They have a lot of weapons. They're incredible. They've done really well, and we're just going to try to make them take uncomfortable shots as best we can.

Q. More basketball philosophy. You mentioned you

have every practice recorded, which feels like a normal thing now, which I'm 40, which is crazy, but it wasn't when I wasn't 40. I was wondering, do kids learn -- do players learn faster having that much film available than they had in the past by your observation? Then maybe too, also, do they think more because -- do they overthink more because they can literally analyze everything they see all the time? I'm not sure what the effects are.

ALISA KRESGE: Yeah, that's a great point. I think everyone -- as coaches you know that everybody is a little bit different. You don't coach every player the same way.

I think it's the same with that. We have all these resources, and we talk to our players about picking and choosing the resources that help them the best. I will say in my time at UVM with the extensive film work -- or the film access we have now, some of our best players watched every single practice. Before I even got home to watch it, they were watching it for a second time.

Those were our best players doing it. So I think they thrived off of it. It's a way to learn without just constantly repping and the pounding on their body. They can really learn a lot from it, but there's also players that we do sometimes -- they overthink, and then they get paralyzed. So as coaches, we have to navigate that with our players. We have a lot of meetings of discussing, okay, what helps you, what makes you tick, how are you motivated? The relationship piece.

We don't force-feed things. We just try to figure out what everybody needs and then we give them what we need because we have all these different resources, but not everybody needs the same thing.

THE MODERATOR: You guys, you start and play Missouri. You play Minnesota, but you start the season 5-10. What has allowed you guys to turn it around where you have won 16 of 18? Was there an instance that you point to and say, this is when we started to turn it around?

ALISA KRESGE: Yeah, I think our players talked about it, but our defense was always there, so for me the turning point was really figuring out offensively where our confidence lied and what we were trying to do.

Early on, you know, we were force-feeding the ball to Anna, rightfully so. She's been incredible for our program. But we had other weapons. I think we didn't utilize those weapons sometimes it was self-inflicted and people were taking shots we knew they were capable of taking. I think our offense has found a balance. Our players understand in order to win, you need to do your job on offense as well.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

I think our defense for the most part was pretty consistent, especially that time of year. I think the shift has really been in our offense and seeing players playing with that self-confidence. If anything, more times you heard in practice or in games, coaches and teammates telling each other, shoot the ball. Now I feel like we're shooting the ball, and we don't have to tell each other to do that.

I think that has been our big shift. Just that confidence in ourselves. We all believed in each other, so now we have to believe in ourselves as well.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports