

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Green Bay vs Minnesota

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Williams Arena

Minnesota Golden Gophers

Dawn Plitzuweit

Tori McKinney

Mara Braun

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: What's the experience been since the Big Ten tournament and getting prepared for the first round of the NCAA tournament?

MARA BRAUN: We've had a lot of practice, a lot of just time to spend together and get back to just kind of what we do and making sure that everything is crisp and clean by the time we get to playing tomorrow. So a lot of practice a lot of time together and we're just ready to play an opponent now.

TORI MCKINNEY: Yeah, I would agree. I think practice has just kind of been focused on us and just getting back to what we do, and now like Mara said, we're just super excited to play against someone else besides each other and our green team, an actual real opponent, so, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: It's been awhile since you've been in the NCAA tournament. How has the coaching staff and others been preparing you for this type of experience, especially getting to play in your home arena?

MARA BRAUN: I think playing in our home arena is going to be a huge advantage, especially since this group hasn't been to the tournament yet. So just knowing that it will be a fun experience, but we'll also have our home crowd behind us, just to help us out and especially in the first few minutes, give us that energy and that reassurance. But really excited and obviously the coaching staff has been here before, we haven't as players, but they can kind of offer that sense of calm and knowing that they have been there.

TORI MCKINNEY: I would just say that our coaching staff,



yeah, has definitely continued to get us prepared, especially throughout these two weeks. Our focus has been obviously the NCAA tournament, so, yeah. And then it's also nice to have senior leadership like Mara, even though she's never necessarily played in the NCAA tournament yet before, she's just a leader on the court and so they just give you that sense of calmness.

THE MODERATOR: What do you expect in terms of the fan experience and the crowd tomorrow, as you said playing in your home arena, but the fan excitement for having home NCAA tournament games here in Williams Arena?

MARA BRAUN: Yeah, I think there's been a buzz around campus for sure, and just around the state. Just people wishing us luck. Knowing that we're going to have our family and friends there, but the biggest crowd of the season so far is what we've heard. So just being able to run out there and seeing all those fans watching us that have been supporting since day one, it's going to mean a lot to us and we're just excited to have that atmosphere behind us.

THE MODERATOR: What have you seen in terms of Green Bay? I'm sure there's some crossover in terms of growing up playing basketball with some of the players there, your familiarity with the team and what do you expect tomorrow?

TORI MCKINNEY: Yeah, I think they're obviously a great team. They're in the same place that we are, so they worked for it, we worked for it as well. I think it's going to be very exciting to see kind of -- because we both played for North Tartan and there's a few a couple North Tartan ran girls on their team too. So it will be good to see them in a different aspect as a competitor, but, yeah, we're just very excited.

THE MODERATOR: Any questions? All right, hearing none, we will conclude the press conference you can head back to the locker room.

(Pause.)



THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from coach.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well first and foremost really appreciative to each of you in the media to coming out and supporting, not only our program, but this tournament. It means a great, great deal. I think this is not only very special for our team, this is great for our community as well. So certainly appreciate you being here and being a part of this event. Special thank you to our administration for kind of moving things around so we did have the ability to host this tournament. With that said, our young ladies are really excited to be back in the big dance and then certainly to host it. Our first round opponent in Green Bay is a very familiar team in a lot of ways to us, but certainly an opponent that we respect at an incredibly, incredibly high level. I think their toughness, the way that they defend, their physicality, their discipline, the way they take care of the ball, the way they share the ball, the way they have I think everybody on their team post up in different scenarios is something that is just, I think it speaks volumes of their program and of how well they're coached and the toughness that their players play with. We're very excited about the matchup and excited to be able to play at home and to be able to start the tournament.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Couple of your players used the word patience and discipline to describe their offense and how they will use the whole shot clock. What kind of challenge does that present for your defense?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well first of all I think Green Bay is really good in transition. They probably don't get as much credit for being in transition as much as they really are because I think a lot of times it's like well if you have to race down the court and you have to score in the first five to six seconds and theirs may be eight to 10 seconds. But in transition they're very, very efficient. I think they score 1.08 points per possession in transition. So they can take you quickly. They're really disciplined in that way. If they get a good early shot they're very willing to take that. Whether that's inside or whether that's from the arc. But then they're not afraid to work to get a good shot. And that can take awhile sometimes for them to get to the shots that they want. So the challenge with that is you're going to have to be disciplined enough defensively on both ends of the court to, one, stay with the possession as long as it takes on the defensive end, and on the offensive end you have to make sure that you're attacking and it has to make sense at the same time too. Because sometimes teams want to really get out and go really, really fast, and maybe that allows them to come back and attack you really quickly

too. So figuring out what that exactly looks like, sometimes that's just within the flow of the game to figure that out.

Q. How do you feel like your team's performance in big game this season has prepared them for this big of a stage?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well I think our team's discipline in the Big Ten and the way that we've competed in the Big Ten is something that is, that this team has done at a really high level. Now, you got to turn around and you got to do it again. Just because you've done that doesn't guarantee you of anything except that you've done that in other games and so you know that you have the ability to play at a high level. But you still have to go do that, and you have to go do that against a team that's going to be battling at the same level. So I think, and Green Bay's played against, I don't know, four Power Four teams this season already and played at a really high level against each and every one of them, and beat K-State, it was a close game against Wisconsin and played really well against NC State and had a 10 point lead in the third quarter against Washington. So I think they are very well versed at what this looks like too.

Q. It's no secret your team is at their best when they're last and they're having fun. How have you managed the pressure of getting ready for this big game but also making sure then joy this moment and this process?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well I think that's really important for this team, certainly. I think it's something that you can tell sometimes the team when they're together in the middle of battle is giggling and laughing and having a really good time. But also competing at a really high level and figuring out how to balance all that. So this week has been important for us and even this morning before we started watching film we had a fun little segment of packing our own lunch like okay it's time to get to work, we're a blue collar team and so we're going to do that, get you a little brown paper bags and go pack your peanut butter and jelly sandwich and get that. And I don't know how many of them cut the crust off of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I guess that's why Uncrustables are actually really popular. And they kind of giggled and laughed, like, are we really doing this. Yes. You're going to have some time while you're waiting for the media -- I didn't know our locker room would be that full of snacks -- but we also have plenty of snack, I'm kidding. But I think it's important that this team has some fun with the things that they're doing. So we try to be intentional with that, but again, once we're on the court, then our job is to put them in the situations to be successful. Their job then is to keep their personalities and their fountain of joy to be what they are. Then at that point in time that's not us, our job is outside of that at this

point in time. So we'll have some other fun little activities as a team coming up.

Q. I was curious how your time at Green Bay under Kevin shaped your career, the coach you are now, and also do you see any similarities, because Kayla has that experience with him as well.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Right, that's a great question. So Kevin Borseth recruited me and I played for him at Michigan Tech University and then coached with him at Michigan Tech and coached with him at Green Bay and also coached with him at the University of Michigan. So really -- what we do has so many, Kevin's fingerprints are all over what we do in a lot of different ways. He's really influenced me, not only as a player, as a coach, but as a person at a very, very high level. So do I see his fingerprints on this team at Green Bay? Yes, very, very much so. Because he recruited Kayla, didn't coach Kayla, but I think that the mentality at Green Bay, the Green Bay way, if you will, is still a major, major part of it. Kayla's had a tremendous amount of success and to step into that situation after Kevin Borseth left is a really hard situation. And she's done incredibly, incredibly well. So that's just attribute to her and to I think the culture at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay. I think they have done a really nice job. So, yes, Coach Forseth will not be at the game, he's going to be in the Caymen Islands. I guess when you're retired you can do those kind of things. I'm sure they will be watching it and it will be kind of interesting at that point.

Q. With Guyer, is she a typical post to defend or is she different?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: I think she's similar to some of the very versatile, I don't know if she's a post or a forward or a guard or if she's a little bit of everything. She has versatility written all over how she plays. She leads them in scoring and but she also leads them in and she's really good and very efficient at the rim and she also leads them in three-point shots attempted and shooting I think at a 39 percent clip. So I just think she's really, really challenging to match up with in so many ways. So and they can play smaller and she can play at the 5, but she's not always at the 5, she's out on the perimeter a lot of times and they have got other kids posting up or then all of a sudden she finds a way to get back in there and post up. So I think her versatility is something that is very, very special.

Q. Wondering about Sophie and when she transferred back here. I know you had some interest in her while you were still at West Virginia what was that process like of getting to know her and kind of recruiting her to come here?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Right, when Sophie -- well actually the kind of the back story with that too is that I watched Sophie play when she was in AAU because we recruited Minnesota kids at the time but also because she was on teams and competing against our daughter who is a senior in college. So had a chance to watch her at that level and obviously didn't coach her up until we came here and she was already here. We did recruit her before. But she's someone who I just think she's continued to -- her basketball IQ has been good and now it's I think it's continuing to grow, but I think her, just her resilience, her toughness, her awareness has continued to get better all along. So she's someone who, if I do make a mistake in film, which happens very often and I say the wrong name or I say the wrong number, she's always catching it, because she's paying attention. She's read the scouting report, as a matter of fact today I was told that the margins were too small on the scouting report on that word document. It's not very fancy, you guys, sometimes things are bolded and every once in a while they're in italics, but there are no pictures, it's pretty simple stuff. That's who we are, right, basic, simple, fundamental. So she had to tell me that the margins were smaller than normal. I was like, but the font is bigger than normal. So evidently I messed that up this time, so I'm working on that. She makes sure that she keeps us in check.

Q. Between the final game of the regular season and the Big Ten tournament you guys have only played two games in March. How have you avoided that rust from building up and has this rest been an advantage in any way?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Right. I think from our team standpoint, the advantage that we have is that we have so many young ladies who are in the gym outside of our practice time. So even though we may not be doing as many things as a team, our practices aren't very long at this point in time. They are intense when we go, but they're not very long. We have a lot of young ladies who are investing time and still working on their skills and ultimately that's what it comes down to, I believe. So it's strange, really in how we went from so many games, we had our first bye in the Big Ten after we played our first game against, after Christmas at Indiana and then we had a bye and then we had 15 straight Big Ten games and it was just go, go, go. Then we had a bye. Then we had more time. So it has been a different way, but I do think what it's allowed us to do, and this was similar last year before the WBIT tournament for us, it allowed us some time to work on us. And when you're in the stretch of 15 straight Big Ten games without a bye, you don't have, you have time to work on the skills, but those skills had better apply exactly to that game and that team. So there's so much that is just really driven on your opponent at that

point in time that those few weeks have been good for us and those extra practices to really go back to working on us.

Q. Wanted to ask you earlier this week we got the news if of a new CBA for the WNBA wanted to ask you some general thoughts on thousand how that might impact a program like yours, recruiting, pipelines, both in the short-term and the long-term.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Yeah, I think that it's incredible. We've been waiting for that moment in the with fabulous. Certainly want that this season to be a really important season moving forward. And the players to have the ability to get paid what their value is. That's really, really important for our young ladies moving forward and for a lot of young ladies who aspire to be playing at that level. So I think it's really important. I do think it's great for us, we are one of the few programs in the nation that has a WNBA team right down the road or in the same city and ours is I think less than three miles away. So it's certainly a great opportunity for our young ladies to get to games, to see it, to watch it, and hopefully for teams when they are here playing against the Lynx, to come and either practice in our facility, watch us practice, those type of things. So I think it is, it's a great -- we have a great advantage in that regard.

Q. Talking about Tonga and what she's meant to this team.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Who is that?

Q. Finau.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Finau. Yeah, Fi is someone who I think just certainly from her playing standpoint, the physicality that she plays with, is something that really has helped us. But I just think her maturity, her fun loving nature, when you watch her, she's always bringing out the best in others and it's usually finding a way to make them kind of to his point, kind of smile and laugh and kind of lift other people up. So she's helped us in so many different ways.

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