

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Gonzaga vs Ole Miss

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Williams Arena

## Gonzaga Bulldogs

## Lisa Fortier

## Ines Bettencourt

## Lauren Whittaker

### Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. How do you see this first round game being an opportunity for you to establish yourself on a national stage?**

LAUREN WHITTAKER: Yeah, I mean, Gonzaga I think playing in the WCC probably doesn't get as much media attention as these bigger schools like Ole Miss in the SEC. But I think it's just an important opportunity for our team and the girls on the team to really showcase our talent. I mean, we've done a really well this season, had some ups and downs, but finished really strong and I think we're coming together as a strong group, and I think the NCAA and the tournament is a great way to display our talent as a whole team, for sure.

**Q. What challenges do you think the Rebels present and what have you seen from them in the film that you've seen this week?**

LAUREN WHITTAKER: I think they're a very physical team. I think the SEC in general is a very competitive and physical conference. So I think it will definitely be something that we will definitely have to bring to the table tomorrow.

INES BETTENCOURT: I think during the season we faced a lot of teams that showed a lot of physicality and super aggressive, so I think that's what we'll see tomorrow or yeah, tomorrow, so...

**Q. You've got to see some pretty lengthy NCAA**



tournament runs up close and in person. How do you think your experience and your history with the NCAA tournament helps Gonzaga going into this matchup tomorrow?

INES BETTENCOURT: Yeah, I've been super blessed to go a long way in a tournament with UConn. And I think, I mean it's different with us, super young team. But I think just bringing my experience and leading the team on look how far a team can really go. I think just showing up every day, being in the present, and enjoying the moment, I think that's what I can really show the team and I think that's what we are here to do.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you very much.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with an opening statement from Coach.

LISA FORTIER: We're just really excited to be here and looking forward to the NCAA tournament. Obviously last year we didn't make the tournament and it's something that we aspire to every year at Gonzaga, and historically have most often been able to achieve. We have a lot of young players who it's their first time, so we're looking forward to that part. It's great to play such a veteran quality opponent like Ole Miss. I think that we always are a team that's looking to improve and test ourselves against quality teams. And so it's just another opportunity for us to do that and I'm really excited for our young guys and see what we got out there.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Questions.

**Q. Coach Yo has spoken a couple of times about how long the two of you have known each other and how much respect she has for you. Can you just speak to, from your perspective, your relationship with her and how much respect you have for her?**

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, so we were coaches in the WCC, young assistant coaches, neither of us are that young anymore (laughing). So we were young assistant coaches



together in the WCC back when she was at Portland. And we got to know each other really well then. And I think we have just stayed friends, we're Moms in Coaching, I think we love to coach our teams hard, and love our players well, and there's a lot of similarities. So she's a friend of mine, we do a lot of the Moms in Coaching and WBCA things together. We check in with each other if there's a reason, you know, for I need help with this, or what do you think about this option. So there's definitely a history there. And, for sure a mutual rhythm. Obviously we only played each other once, but we've known each other for a good long time and we're always cheering for her and I think she's always probably doing the same for us. Except for when we play each other.

**Q. What's your initial take on this matchup and what are you seeing from Ole Miss and what they're going to bring tomorrow?**

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, they're a really good team. They have a lot of veterans with a lot of experience. They're very physical, they're athletic, they rebound well. They share the ball with each other, they each try to best they can to play to their strengths, they make opponents try to play to their weaknesses. We're going to have to be good. Everybody that you come across this time of year is a good team, who, you know, their sole purpose is to survive and advance, right, that's why they say that. So we have some areas that I think our team is continuing to grow in, and then we have some areas I think we're really strong in. So I think it's going to be a good matchup. You have to play tough, you have to play together, you have to give everything that you can in these times of games or else you just won't, you won't finish ahead. So I think that they're challenging, they're going to push us for the entirety of the game, all over the court. We're going to be pushed on offense, we're going to be pushed on, and challenged just to be the very best version of ourselves and looking forward to seeing how -- I think our team has the right mentality going into it. Again, they're young players, so we don't have this experience, we have played here, ironically before, some of us, which only once, but it was last year. But I think that it's going to be a good matchup, fast paced, probably, and the team that executes better is going to win.

**Q. I've got a big picture question. In terms of growing your program, with 11 of 12 kids back next year, how big was it to get this group to the NCAA tournament?**

LISA FORTIER: Well, I've never had a younger team or a more, quote, inexperienced at Gonzaga team. And you've heard us talk about that a lot, maybe not as much for some of the other people. But we only have one year's experience coming into this season at Gonzaga, even though we have some juniors and seniors on our roster.

So I think that we've spent this entire year trying to teach culture and teach them what we expect and what the expectations are on the court, off the court, how we play as a program. And so I think we're never going to be satisfied with just getting anywhere. When people say, get to the championship game in the conference tournament. Okay, not really. Well just, you guys finished second. Okay, not really. Like we're, that was something that was ingrained in Mike Roth when he used to talk to our department was, never be satisfied. And not in a negative way, but we want to make noise. We want to do our best. We think our best is a pretty high level. So we're not just happy to be here, while we're trying to be present and take in every moment and, you know, that's the focus that we've had all year is, the circumstances change, but how can we be the same. How can we do our best. So tomorrow's going to feel a little bit different. It's exciting, of course. Every basketball player who is not playing this weekend is wishing that they were. So we're grateful for that. But at the same time we just want to go out and be our best tomorrow, and I think that there are of course implications with young players or inexperienced players, that it's positive to have done it. But we want to do more than just have done it.

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