

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

Friday, March 20, 2026

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Williams Arena

Gonzaga Bulldogs Coach Lisa Fortier Allie Turner Lauren Whittaker

Media Conference

Ole Miss 81, Gonzaga 66

LISA FORTIER: Just really happy for how we finished that game. Our team, we are always trying to make sure that we build confidence in them and help them to know that they can rely on each other and that everyone is capable of helping contribute to the good of the group, and the last quarter is when it looked like that the most.

I obviously wish that we had a couple more quarters of that, but have a lot of young players who are really capable of a lot of things, and the future in the program is really bright.

There are plenty of areas on paper that didn't quite go our way, but I thought that we fought hard until the end, and I'm always proud of our team when they play like that.

Q. Allie, what did it mean to you to be able to close out the way that you guys did in the last seven minutes or so, the way you finished it?

ALLIE TURNER: Yeah, I think our team showed a lot of fight and it was honestly fun. The end of the game was fun. It's hard to play when you're losing by 30, but Lisa told us every time-out keep going, it's one possession at a time, and I think we did that, so I'm proud of our team.

Q. For Lauren, they have a big lineup and it was wave after wave of 6'2", 6'3", 6'4" players. What troubles did the size give you guys as a team maybe?

LAUREN WHITTAKER: Yeah, I think we probably haven't faced a team where they have that many bigger players,



and I think just the physicality in general was probably a little bit of a shock to us coming in. I don't think we've played at that level, and to have everyone constantly bringing that physicality every play and every possession I think was just hard for us, but I think by the end, like Allie said, in that fourth quarter we came together, played as a team and kind of started punching back in that sense.

So yeah, just really proud of the team.

Q. For both of you guys, this was your first taste of March Madness. What was this experience like, and how can you take this with you through the rest of your college careers?

LAUREN WHITTAKER: Yeah, it's just a really exciting experience, and I said to someone else before that we have a really young team, and I think we have a lot of potential. We really don't know what our ceiling is going to look like, so I think that's really exciting, and to know that we can compete at this level and that fourth quarter really showed, and I think if we can do that from the start going forward in future seasons, I think we could be really good.

ALLIE TURNER: Yeah, I agree. Our team is really young, and I'm excited to get back here, but just taking in every moment. It's something that not a lot of teams get to do, and we all recognize that. But that fourth quarter, it was just so fun. To play another one of those would be amazing.

Q. Lisa, talk about the start; it just seemed like you guys were in mud for a while to get going, and then some of the things that have bothered you kind of bothered you.

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, I mean, they're really physical. So I thought it was 2-0 and then it was maybe 5-0, I think it maybe got to 8-0, and we had some looks. There were certainly some things -- it's challenging when you get here after being officiated a certain way for the entirety of the year, and our team plays to that -- I'm not knocking the officiating; it's just different.

So there was a couple plays where Lauren is literally being



bear-mauled, and I think that's common in the SEC, and that's not what she's had to face in our conference.

It took us a while to get the hang of that, and I think that we did. We settled in somewhere in the first quarter, but then still, just the pressure that they applied, it was different. That's what happens when you play in the NCAA Tournament. Every team that you play is really good or really big or really athletic or really hot, like maybe all of those things.

We had simulated it the best we could in the beginning of -- all week actually, since we got the draw. We've been simulating that type of thing for a while, and I think we did a fair job of simulating it, but simulation and actuality are still a little bit different. So looked a little bit nervous to start, but I liked when we settled in and looked a little bit more like ourselves.

Q. I remember looking at the scoreboard and it was 70-37, and a 17-0 run later, talk about the finish, what pride your girls had, what fight they had.

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, I should have said at halftime, maybe I should have doubled down on win the half because I definitely doubled down on win the quarter to start the fourth, and that we wanted to give everything we had.

We had a lot of our alums talk to us last night, and they all shared the same sentiment, that you want to leave everything you can out there and give everything you can for the person to your right and to your left.

Our team, they got a little fiery. You've seen us play quite often, and making shots, getting rebounds, pushing in transition, that's who we are at our best. I am grateful for them because I think that they're able to look at that quarter and be happy with themselves, and if we would have just kind of continued on and the lead would have extended, I don't think that they would have felt any kind of positivity out of that.

It is a young group. If you look at our box score, our three leading scorers, our four leading scorers are all freshmen or sophomores, and our three leading rebounders were freshmen and sophomores.

We have a lot to learn, none of which had played in the NCAA tournament. Nes is the only one who played in the NCAA Tournament. I think it's good to give them a taste of what you have to do and what we can be, what we are capable of.

Q. Speaking of Ines, I noticed at the end of the game

some of her teammates embracing her after the game. What has her leadership meant to this young team, and what have the young players learned from her?

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, all the tears in the locker room were basically about Nesy. She worked through what she worked through her first two years at UConn, and then last year even there was a lot that she had to work through, and this year she's been as good as any leader we've ever had. She gives everything to them on the court. She tries hard. She holds the line. She challenges people when they have below-the-line behavior. If she makes a mistake, she admits that she's made a mistake. I think she was -- one of my coaches commented that she's going to go down -- she doesn't look like a two-year player for us and a one-year starter. She looks like someone who'd been in our program for four or five years and gave everything because they cared with everything in her heart about Gonzaga basketball. That's the kind of leader that you hope to have, and I hope that her teammates felt that in her all year.

Q. You guys made big strides getting back to the tournament with such a young team. How do you carry that momentum into the off-season and the next season?

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, every player seems to be motivated in spring. The ones that didn't play want to play. The ones that didn't play well want to play better. The ones who played well want to go further. I think that that's kind of -- if you don't have motivation going into the off-season, then you're probably in the wrong situation.

So hopefully they have a taste in their mouth -- not a bad taste, but a taste of who we would be. The last time we were in this situation happened to be against Ole Miss, as well, and we talked a lot about being uncomfortable and pushing yourself to be uncomfortable in the off-season because we don't want to be in that situation again. We want to win games. We followed that up with a Sweet 16 run.

They're aware of that, and we're not necessarily making that our goal, but our goal of being our very best every day and getting better every day is something that we're going to take and just try to kind of be the same, but have the same be higher and higher level.

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