

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Ole Miss vs Minnesota

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Williams Arena

Minnesota Golden Gophers

Dawn Plitzuweit

Mara Braun

Amaya Battle

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. What have you noticed about I guess what's different in Ole Miss's style based on them playing in the SEC versus you guys as a Big10 team?

MARA BRAUN: I think they're really physical, play a fast pace. I do think we see that in the Big10 as well. For tomorrow we just need to be just focusing and locked in on rebounding, keeping them one and done, and just being physical back.

Yeah.

AMAYA BATTLE: I would agree.

Q. McMahon, you guys have played against her the past three years. What do you remember about your matchups with her when she was at Ohio State?

AMAYA BATTLE: Yeah, she was really good. I'm pretty sure she won freshman of the year her freshman year, didn't she?

Q. I think she did.

AMAYA BATTLE: Yeah, she was really good. She's grown a lot. She's definitely developed her shot. Now she's a really good three point shooter. She's now looking to hunt for shots more.

She was super aggressive and super physical and could get to her spots.



Q. What type of challenge do you think that will be for tomorrow's game?

MARA BRAUN: It's nice that we kind of know her a little bit and have played against her and scouted her, so we know we're prepared for that.

Like Amaya said, she's more aggressive than ever so just have to make sure we're locked in and stopping her in transition, too, and helping each other on defense.

Q. What's the key to turning the page emotionally from yesterday, which was a lot of emotion it felt like in there? Now you have another game, what, 36 hours later.

AMAYA BATTLE: I think going back to what Dawny P preaches, being in the precious presence. We got to enjoy that yesterday and now we got to lock into our new matchup, Ole Miss. Just staying locked in and where our feet are.

MARA BRAUN: It was nice to have that game where first three quarters didn't necessarily go our way, but the fourth quarter we kind of found our groove and were able to use the crowd to our advantage.

Now knowing what that feels like, we can just go out there tomorrow and just play.

Q. Amaya, what was working with the three ball yesterday?

AMAYA BATTLE: It's funny, I was talking to G one time and I was like, what does it feel like to be a shooter? And I was like, if you miss the first one, like how do you feel? She was like, if I miss the first one I feel good. I'm hunting the next one.

I had an early three in like the first quarter I think. It felt good. Then I got another one and it went in. I was like, all right, we're going keep rolling with that.

Q. Mara, what was your perspective of their disagreement at the start of the fourth quarter on being



down in certain drill? Why is Amaya the one that seems to be one that can get you guys to that place emotionally where you play well apparently?

MARA BRAUN: We were laughing about it earlier. Any time she talks we're listening because it doesn't happen all the time where she's in the huddle and starting the huddle and the first voice and loudest voice, so we knew it was time.

Obviously she played really well yesterday and I think that just speaks to especially her leadership and the way she was able to bring that moment out of everybody.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, just an opening statement and we'll take questions.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, first of all, really incredible atmosphere last night for our game and certainly want to thank all of our students who came out, Gopher season ticket holders, university -- the university faculty staff and Gopher Nation. It was an incredible atmosphere for our young ladies to have a chance to play in, and the game made it really exciting.

Hopefully we'll get a lot of them back again on Sunday, tomorrow, for our matchup. That's something that I think we're certainly thrilled for our young ladies who came to the University of Minnesota and stayed at the University of Minnesota. To have that type of a moment and then to see that kind of come to fruition is something that's really, really special and something we don't want it take for granted.

We talk a lot in our program about enjoying the precious present. Now we've moved on and we're in today's precious present, but at the same time want certainly appreciate and thank all the people that made that possible. That certainly was very special, special evening for us.

Moving on I think we face an opponent in Ole Miss who provides a lot of different challenges with their physicality, athleticism, and how they do things on both ends of the court.

Certainly excited about the matchup and an opportunity to continue playing.

Q. Coach, you mentioned Ole Miss' physicality. Last game was very physical obviously. When you see a player like Sophie Hart throwing her body on the line to get second chance points for your team, how does that make you feel as a coach knowing your players understand the physicality and they're putting that physicality in, but you have a bigger matchup

tomorrow?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: You're exactly right. We have an acronym within our program. We talk about the pillars of our program, toughness, togetherness, and find-a-way mentality. Part of the toughness is doing the little things well: Taking care of the ball, sharing the ball.

Part the toughness is also finishing plays. FTP, that's our acronym. Get after it. FTP, finish the play. Doing that and whatever that looks like, whether that's taking a charge. Amaya drew one, Mara drew one in that game. Getting on the floor or doing little things, Bershears cam in the game and had a big time play for us and dumped it down low to Brylee Glenn and laid it in.

I think it's really important. Every moment matters, every possession really matters, and so finding a way to try to battle for that possession and be really intelligent doing that. You want to battle for possessions and not take yourself out of position to get a stop or out of position to guard without fouling.

So you have to understand what it's supposed to look like and how to exactly do that. I do think our young ladies are playing with a lot of heart and toughness.

Q. Grace led you in assists and rebounds. Is that a testament to even if you're not seeing the shot go in, making an impact other ways?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: That's exactly right. This group of young ladies really has a team-first mentality. Certainly all five players who are on the court for us have the ability to score in different ways. Grace is someone who can do that from the three point arc, getting to the rim, posting up. But she's someone can do it -- offensive rebounding -- but she's someone who wasn't scoring it yesterday at the level that she does a lot of times, but yet she was doing other things to impact the game at a really high level.

I think some of it, from her standpoint, she's one of those people that's willing to do whatever it takes. We got a chance to see that last night.

Q. Dawn, when you're scouting Ole Miss, do you go back to before Sira Thienou's injury to see how they were playing then versus how they looked in the last five or six games, and what does her return do for that lineup?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, I think they've had a chance during the course of the season to play a couple different lineups and play different groups together. I think more of it is just overall style of play. What are they really good at?

They push the ball at a high level in transition and they're in transition about 20% the game and score about one point per possession.

Anyone who has the ball in their hands has the ability to score one-on-one. They also make good decisions and take really good shots.

So what does that look like? How do you slow that down? And then how do you finish plays? Because one of the things I think they are really elite at is finishing plays.

There is some -- they're a team that gets to the offensive glass at an incredibly high level, so putting ourselves in position to -- if we have to come over and help, that someone else is rotating and trying to put a body on someone.

That makes it really tough, because in a lot of teams you have one or two players who are kind of your key offensive rebounders, they have a couple kids who are really good at it, but their whole team is really good at it.

That presents different challenges, too.

Q. It's not often that you see Big10 and SEC teams matchup. This is a little different having Cotie McMahon who played in the Big10 the last couple years. What do you remember about the matchups you coached against her?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: That's a great question. Cotie McMahon, seen her quite a bit from Ohio State days when she was there. She's continuing to grow and develop. Shoots the ball from the arc more this year than we've seen her in the past but continues to attack.

Probably attacks more in transition than we've seen in the past because the ball is had her hands more in that way. So she just continues -- and yet if it's not in her hands she's finding a way to make things happen, maybe how she does in the past, too.

I think her game has continued to grow and develop.

Q. How does having that prior experience coaching against her kind of help coming into game plan on such a quick turnaround?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Right, I think from our young ladies' standpoint, you have to understand how hard she attacks and how quick that is and how physical it is when she gets downhill and gets her own rebound a lot of times, draws a lot of fouls.

So what does that kind of look like? How do you work to put yourself in the best position to defend that knowing that with a player like Cotie McMahon, you're not taking away all her shots. You're not. You're trying to make them challenge, but then you also understand she can make challenged shots at a high level.

So how do you just do the best that you can to make those as challenging as you possibly can?

Q. Coach you've talked about Mara quite a bit this season. Just being with her through all the injuries and now being able to see her kind of play with such joy in the NCAA tournament, what does it mean for you personally being able to see a player battle through so much and get these moments?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Yeah, that's a great question. Mara has been through a great, great deal in the last two -- well, two seasons before this year and the injuries that she's sustained.

The way that she has responded in terms of the face she puts on for everyone else and how she's supported her teammates and how she's also continued to grow and develop and gotten stronger and more physical herself, her game has continued to grow.

Just to see her have that moment yesterday late in the game and then to enjoy it afterwards was something that was just -- it's really special. We're really, really proud of her and thankful that she is continuing to grow and develop.

But she's always been a young lady who just wants to win. That's the most important thing to her. So this season you can tell because that's all she preaches to her teammates. That's all she's talking about.

It's not about what it is for her. It's all about what is it going to take for us to be successful.

Q. A little bit less serious, but Nepheesa Collier, Kayla McBride were in attendance last night. To have players of their caliber come out and support this program, and also like people who are such leaders in this community, what does it mean building this program to have that type of support?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Yeah, actually got a text from Lindsay Whalen a little while ago and the Lynx crew is coming back. I just think that's really special and we're really, really thankful to have their support and to have them in-house and watching.

This is really -- this is a program that Lindsay Whalen has her fingerprints all over; a program she really built. For her to be here and to be able to bring the Lynx or they bring her, however that all works, but to have them here is something really, really special and we're really thankful for that.

Q. Your stars, some of your key players grew up in Minnesota. They have never seen The Barn the way it has been. You personally as a coach, knowing these players trusted you with their careers, knowing that you have made their wildest dreams come true, how does that make you feel?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, last night was something that was really special. To see the joy on their faces and to see them afterwards kind of take in the moment was something that was really, really special.

They've earned it. They put in the work. They come here, they worked for it, they earned it. To see and hear -- I think the one thing that is hard to really explain to people unless you're a part of it is how loud The Barn gets; and last night it was incredibly loud.

So even today PJ Fleck, recorded a little video and sent it to us and we played it for the team. Talked about in his ten years he's never heard The Barn that loud.

So I just think for those young ladies who came here and have stuck with it through some challenges and to have that, it's something that's really, really special.

Again, something they can take away from them. Now got to get ready for Ole Miss.

Q. Two-parter here. Were you reasonably confident that Sophie would get this year back? And then is she playing her best basketball right now for you?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, when it comes to the NCAA and rulings, I don't know that I would say reasonably confident. Very hopeful that would happen. Thought she had a strong case.

But the reality is we're really thankful that she did. She's having a great senior or whatever year it is for her, extra senior year type thing.

Again, she's someone who it matters to her. She really wants to play at a high level. She's been limited in terms of kind of how many reps she can do to keep her as healthy as possible, and for her to be continuing to battle and to play is something that I think is, again, a tribute to her.

I think she's been really, really aware this season, certainly in particular about all of it. All that goes into it from rest and hydration to recovery and practice time and strength and conditioning and those type of things, to nutrition, all of it.

She's just really dedicated herself. I think what's really been fun to watch is her teammates celebrate that with her and celebrate the success that she's having with her.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports