

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

Sunday, March 22, 2026

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Williams Arena

Minnesota Golden Gophers Coach Dawn Plitzuweit

Amaya Battle

Mara Braun

Media Conference

Minnesota 65, Ole Miss 63

THE MODERATOR: I would like to welcome Minnesota to the press conference. We'll have an opening statement from Coach when she is ready and we'll take questions for the student-athletes.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, first of all. We have so much respect for Ole Miss and how they attack and what they do and I thought they played really hard and played well and it was kind of an epic type of a game.

Certainly just really appreciative of our fans who came out. It was deafening. It was deafening in warmups when the rouser played, you couldn't hear anything. During the course of the game in the fourth quarter, there was a shot clock expiration. There may have been an extra second that went off the clock it felt like at that point in time because nobody could hear because the fans were so loud.

Just a really, really great atmosphere for college women's basketball and thankful for our fan base for bringing that type of energy. That certainly helped us because we were able to get stops in the fourth quarter when we needed them.

Overall, just really proud of our young ladies. We needed to show a lot of resilience. I was told we were down five with about three minutes to play and made big shots but really got some big stops as well.

These young ladies have put their hearts and souls on the line and are building something that's really, really special.



Really proud of them. I'm really proud of these two that are up here. The word I use for them is legacy. They're using a legacy in Minnesota women's basketball right now.

It's an opportunity to keep playing but we're just really, really thankful to all of our young ladies for the type of dedication and sacrifices that they make to have opportunities and big games like today.

Q. Amaya, did that unfold, the last sequence there, exactly how you guys true it up in the huddle there?

AMAYA BATTLE: Yeah, as long as somebody made a shot, it was fine.

Q. What was going through your head when the ball went through the hoop?

MARA BRAUN: We practice it almost every day before every game so it's nothing really new. She hits those shots every day in practice over our scout guys. So honestly when she took that shot, it took her two dribbles and pullup, everyone I think knew that it was in. But, yeah, we just had to regroup, play some defense. I'm just so proud of her.

Q. Amaya, is that the kind of thing you grew up dreaming about, the kind of shot that you practice in your backyard a hundred times?

AMAYA BATTLE: Yeah, I think any basketball player, when you shoot on your own, you're like, okay, three, two, one, throw it up there and see what happens. It was real life today. (Laughter)

Q. You wanted to come to Minnesota. You wanted to play here. You stayed here when things were changed. This game has to be something that will last in your memory in terms of just what you did tonight.

AMAYA BATTLE: Yeah, I think this whole season, honestly, this whole season is a perfect way to wrap up the four years here. We had a lot of ups and downs but we all stuck together and the fans stuck with us. They filled it out today when we needed them.



Today will be -- it's bittersweet. I'll never play at The Barn ever again, but we're leaving it -- I'm leaving it with a win. We're leaving it with a win and we're about to go to the Sweet 16 so what better way?

Q. Mara, along those lines, you hit the big three, Sophie has the layup. Amaya takes the charge and hits the game winner. Minnesota kids doing something for the home team. What does that mean, you guys agree up here to do it for your program?

MARA BRAUN: It's just the pride we have for our state, and honestly, just not wanting to let that crowd down. They came out, they showed out for us, like Amaya said, when we really needed them. We love this place. That's why we stayed. We stuck together and I'm so happy we could do what we just did in front of that crowd and just going to the Sweet 16, it doesn't seem real. We have a lot of work today but we're really thankful we could end this one on a win.

Q. Was there a point in that last, you would say, 40 seconds where you were like we got this?

AMAYA BATTLE: Yeah, that whole game we always believed in each other. We believed we were going to win and we stuck together and that's really a big part of how it ended.

MARA BRAUN: Yeah, we all ground each other. There's times where I started pressing towards the end of the game and they all were just like we need you, you're in this. That speaks so highly of them as my teammates and how everyone has a voice on this team and can really speak up when it's needed.

She was the most vocal one and she doesn't even have a voice. I'm just so proud of her, too, as a leader. This whole group. Everyone made an impact on that game.

Q. Amaya, the charge you took on Cotie there. Did you know she was going to try to be physical there going in for that layup? Did you play that against her?

AMAYA BATTLE: Yeah, she got a ton of buckets out of me, on us, and it was because she was powering through. I was like all right, I'm just going to try to fall and see what happens and it worked out.

Q. I don't even know exactly what years you guys were born so I don't know if you guys have any memories from the '03-'05 run when they went to the Sweet 16 three seasons in a row but I'm curious what you guys know about that run, if you guys do have

memories or have been told about that run. Obviously Lindsay recruited you guys and she was a big part of that '03-'04 run and I'm just curious what you guys remember.

AMAYA BATTLE: I was one year old. (Laughter)

MARA BRAUN: Yeah, I was just going to say, just freshly born. No, we heard of it. We came under Coach Whay. We have so much respect for here. She's still rooting us on every single day. We both get texts from her all the time. She's paved the way for us, honestly, and when we came here, we wanted to do what she had done and bring the hype back to Minnesota. I think we're doing that and a lot of it does go to her.

Q. Mara, seemed like you had to work so hard just to get open, being physical with you. The three you hit to make it 63 all. Take me through that. Did that unfold the set play the way you drew it up there?

MARA BRAUN: Eh, not really. I don't know. I just knew I wanted to make a play and do whatever it took. I didn't want to lose that game, so just had to focus and stick that shot even when I was tired. Soph, the whole time, is setting such great screens for us. Our posts did an amazing job of getting us open. I just had to focus and stick it.

Q. Amaya, we just left the locker room and all the girls down there are saying, ladies I should say, you were their favorite player. Coach drew up that shot. They said they all had confidence in you. What does it mean, you're final game at Williams Arena, to have that confidence from your team and go out and end your career like that?

AMAYA BATTLE: Yeah, I think it just means a lot. We came here and the first season was not how we planned it. Every year we did a little something but there was a lot of rough times. I'm just super proud that we all stuck to it and the fans because look at what happened. I think it just goes to show if you really want to do something, find people who want to do it with you and stick to it you and you can do it.

And shout out my teammates because this is the best year of basketball I have ever played.

Q. First of all, besides the winning, why was it the best year of basketball you've ever played?

AMAYA BATTLE: I think just everything we've been through and I think this year we really kind of like were all right, we're going to do it. We're not just going to sit and

talk. We're actually going to get it done. We've been blessed with joy, a ton of joy. You can see that when we play in practice. I think that's our superpower. That's what gets us through.

They're really my best friends. We spend a ton of time with each other because we have to, but also when we don't have to, we're still hanging out. We genuinely like each other and I think that's what makes it the best year.

Q. Could you have drawn up those last plays any better in your driveway? I'm sure you practiced that a million times growing up.

MARA BRAUN: Shout out coaching staff for putting us in those positions. Everything we ran down the line we executed and we got something out of it. They teach us all the time to just play basketball and make basketball decisions. To answer your question, if it was perfectly drawn up that way, no, sometimes you have to just improvise and see what happens. But we have so many great players with high IQ that can just get it done when you need it to.

Q. Amaya, this is for you: In those final moments, what is the thing you feel like you learned the most about yourself?

AMAYA BATTLE: That's a good question. I think I would say even just through this whole experience, one thing that I've really learned about myself this year is I value the little moments in the relationships. Everybody here does because we're still here. We all could have left, went somewhere and probably won quicker than we did here, but we stayed with each other because we like each other.

I value the relationships and the little moments like going on the bus or yesterday we had recovery until like 8:30 and we didn't want to be there but that's a moment I'm going to look back and I'm going to remember and I'm going to miss.

Q. Mara, it seems like the moment is never too big for you. You hit big shots, you turnaround, you're yelling into the crowd. What does it mean to you to finally play in front of a packed crowd like you guys did this weekend?

MARA BRAUN: Oh my gosh, I love it and I just feed off of it so much. I'm just waiting to make a shot just so I can turn to the crowd and get them going. I love it. It's something I'm always going to remember. These past two years, I was on the sideline. It's what I dreamt of doing. You just got to stay focused, stay resilient, and know that your time is coming.

Q. I know you guys came in together but what has it been like to watch Amaya grow into the leader that's she's become for the program?

MARA BRAUN: I think she's always led by example but especially this year, just her voice and finding it and I said it in another presser, but when Amaya talks, we listen. It doesn't happen all the time but when she does, it's urgent and it's like, guys, we need to get this done.

Tonight I think she just realized that's her last game at The Barn and the last time this team was going to play in front of a crowd like that. Just to take advantage of it and we weren't going to lose. Honestly, I owe it all to her and her relationship. The whole game, honestly.

Q. This game was obviously physical. Both of you were on the floor several times in this game. We saw how physical it was, but how was that on your body in the moment, especially in such a rocking gym?

AMAYA BATTLE: Tiring, honestly. But, no, our staff does a really good job at making us strong and putting us through situations. I feel like we're always on a grind. Any college basketball player would say the same, but, yeah, it was very tiring for sure.

MARA BRAUN: I think, too, it gets down to the point where you don't think about that anymore. You just want to win the game. You're willing to do whatever it takes, taking charges down the line, just putting your body out there and just having a will to win. Ultimately we'll probably feel it tomorrow, but for right now it feels good.

THE MODERATOR: Mara, Amaya, thank you very much. You can head back to the locker room.

We will now go ahead and take questions for Coach.

Q. Coach, when you got here three years ago, this was your vision, to return this team back to the national stage, to make a deep run in the tournament. How good does it feel right now in this journey that you're on?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, it certainly is something that's really, really special. It's something that to happen the way that it did with the fans, to be able to host. To be able to have the fan base that we did both games, and then for the games to be really exciting all the way down the stretch. I think there's just so much of it that these young ladies are going to take away from this and remember for the rest of their lives. It's something that's really, really special.

We're just really, really thankful to have the opportunity to, one, be here; and, two, continue playing.

Q. Coach, you said yesterday there's no stopping Cotie, just slowing her down. Early on y'all had her in foul trouble. At what point did it click in your brain like attack her. Let's get her out of this game?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Right, when we tried, we didn't have as much success doing that as we wanted to. I thought there were -- later in the game there were two or three opportunities where late shot clock scenarios. She got the ball to the left elbow, drove by and scored it as the shot clock was expiring. And then there was one on the right block.

So, again, our players really couldn't hear us, but we were trying to tell them you've got to go double her. You've got to go make somebody else take a shot because she is someone who can score one-on-one at a really, really high level regardless. What we did say at the time out is you can't give ground. You've got to stop -- you've got to hold your ground and you've got to take a charge and somebody else has to help you.

We were planning it not necessarily being right at the rim earlier in the lane, but certainly Amaya did a tremendous job of taking the last charge.

Q. Talking about toughness being a pillar, did you see that in those final minutes with the execution they had to have? In those got-to-have-it moments they, they almost flawlessly did offensively what you drew up.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Right. A good thing it's -- for us, toughness has a connotation of getting on the floor, taking charges and rebounding. We did those things at a high level to finish the game, but for us, toughness is also doing little things well. Sticking to screen, making an entry pass inside to Sophie late in the game. Making something happen out of a broken play. Recognizing, getting an offensive rebound and you're swarmed by them, you have to kick it out. All of those things are in that toughness category for us.

This group of young ladies really played with that discipline, which is also part of our toughness. That was really fun to see.

Q. You have come in and done an absolutely phenomenal job but can you speak to what Lindsay Whalen has meant to this program and the team and you?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Lindsay is someone who I watched

play a lot and certainly have just a tremendous amount of respect and so when she was coaching at Minnesota and I was coaching at South Dakota, we would sit together during recruiting periods and talk quite a bit and compete against each other in some closed scrimmage type of things.

I just think she's someone who I have a lot of respect for, someone who I consider a friend. Someone who has built this program and did it as a player and certainly has done it as a coach and certainly we're very thankful for what she's done. We have her in the house today. I think she was here -- she was telling me she was coming, so I think that she was here. Was she here? So that's really, really important to us.

Q. First, congrats, Coach. In the locker room just now, from Tori to Sophie, everyone was kind of crediting the bench, end of the edge especially of being in their ears, giving them encouragement. How special is it to have such a bond even between the seniors and the freshman in this program?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: It means everything. I really do believe that. I thought what was great at the end of the second -- well, it wasn't great that we were all in foul trouble but the young ladies who got into the game at the end of that second quarter handled the pressure, took court of the ball. Made good decisions, played really, really hard. Maybe their minutes weren't long but they did a great job.

What was neat at halftime is telling our young ladies we've got to be able to handle the pressure because they're going to turn it up. We felt like the crew that finished out that second quarter did a really good job of doing that for us.

To hear the starters who were either in the game or who were on the bench celebrate their teammates for that period of time was something that was really special. That's what makes this group unique. I think it makes it really fun. They really do love each other. I think they really do play with joy.

I remember looking at our players in the fourth quarter when they were on defense and it was after either we scored or it was a dead ball scenario and they were smiling and I think we were still down. But it was just the joy that they're playing with, I felt like they exuded confidence. We talk act in our little kids' camp, smile and love it, but that was also our message today. You have to love this because this is what you want to play in. This is exactly what you want, the environment that you want to be in. You have to be willing to do little things really, really well.

We didn't do that, I don't think, in the third quarter. They refused ball screens. We let players get to their strong hands. We kind of lost a little bit of our discipline. So I think that that group did a really good job. When we were down nine and there was a time-out, I was like well, what do you guys think? Well, we just got to get some stops. I agree with you, they scored on a 75% clip or something like that. They're like okay, Coach, you don't have to give us the stats. We know, we know.

But they're really locked in. So it's just fun to have that unity among all four team players.

Q. You literally just led into my question because I was about to ask you about that fourth quarter, about midway through, y'all were down like double digits and you were noticeably more energized. There was something about that moment that was just like what is really going on? Can you please just say a little more about that, please?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: I think it's -- we have a couple of phrases, things that we say and one of the things that we say before the game is we're never, ever -- we'll never, ever give in. That is a mantra for us. We were in that moment. We could be down nine, you could fold at that point in time but our goal is to find a way. That's a pillar in our program.

I do think this: I think a coach can say those things. That's great. It can be great on the bulletin board. It can be a great text message. It can be a great hype video. Really, ultimately, the players -- since we have been here for three years, our goal was to have this be a player-led program. It takes time because how do players lead when they don't even know what the expectations are, what it's supposed to look like, those type of things. There's a learning curve within that.

This is truly a player-led program. We were actually having a discussion, maybe if you would call it an argument in the fourth quarter about our ball screen coverage and so it was kind of interesting because -- but they understand the game at a high level. They want to be successful and they are leading the charge. So it's really, really special when they get rewarded for doing little things really well.

Q. When would you saw Amaya took that jump of leading by example to being willing to speak up and have people listen?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: I would say it was probably earlier in the season, maybe midway through the season is when she really became vocal. I think from day one meeting with

this group and the returners have been here for three years. I think she's always been someone the players have said to me they see as a leader.

Yes, there's being a leader by example and doing things well, but there's also that -- you need that inspiration. You need that voice. You need that confidence. You need that accountability. That's a good word. It's holding your teammates accountable. Holding yourself accountable.

I thought she made that decision or started doing that probably midway through the year. She's just continuing to play at a higher and higher level all the time.

Q. We'll focus on her shot, Amaya's shot, but how much did taking that charge really change that thing there.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Right. Having Cotie McMahon not on the court changes the game. We were in foul trouble. She was in foul trouble. Yes, it's a game-changing play. It really was. Tori took one earlier in the game, and so those are our big, big plays. We weren't really slowing her down. She scored at an 83% clip against us. She was 5-6. That was our best defense, not having her on the court, very honestly. It wasn't that we were trying to necessarily doing that, it just kind of happened.

Q. Mara said when she saw Amaya rise up on the baseline, the whole team knew it was going in. Did you know? What was going through your head when it did?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, 3.5 seconds. Take you through the sequence. I don't know how much time they had on their possession. Was it like 14 seconds? Something along those lines? Woe had one foul to give. We were at three fouls. We were, at that point in time, if we got beat, we were going to use a foul but we weren't just going to use a foul to use a foul because there was still enough time that they dowed take it out of bounds and now if you happen to foul them now they're shooting free throws.

We didn't really want G in that position. We debated as a coaching staff, G is a really good defender but then she was going to four fouls and she didn't foul and they scored it. That didn't really work out the way that we -- if ifs and buts, you know, if we could have changed that, we would have changed that. We would have done something a little bit different at that point in time. Change a match-up, put her in a different spot, whatever the case was.

Then 3.5 seconds, we call a time-out. We really do in every one of our shoot arounds -- and our shoot around

was early this morning. It was early and I think our -- we found a way for them to hopefully sleep in until 6:00 in the morning and then get started and that's kind of early on game day with getting up, getting taped, getting moving and having breakfast, getting over here, doing those kinds of things. In our shoot arounds we practice some end-of-game situations. We have a lead, we're behind, or we have a short shot clock scenario.

Ole Miss is a team that is tough to prepare for in a one-day prep based upon how they defend, based upon how they attack. Based upon baseline out of bounds defense that they play and all those situations. But we felt it was really important to come back again this morning and do that and go through some of those end-of-game scenarios, and that is -- when we run that, we ran it today and there were two options. We ran it twice and that was option number one and option number two I'm not going to tell you what that is because maybe we'll have to use that at another time. There are two primary options within that that are quick hitters.

3.5 seconds isn't a long time, but certainly she made the play and that's kind of a patent Amaya Battle baseline pullup jumper. That's exactly what's she's really, really good at.

Q. Can you walk us through your emotions after the game, walking around, firing up the crowd and what it means to have the support you guys did not just for the Gophers' program but women's basketball in Minnesota.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Yeah, I don't know that there were actually thoughts going through... now, we missed an assignment in the last possession with 0.8 seconds left so very thankful that shot didn't go in. We weren't supposed to switch on that -- anyway. We missed an assignment on that. Thank apply that didn't go through because that would have been really anti climactic when we all celebrated thinking the game was at that point.

Then, again, The Barn is a really special place. It's an incredible place to play because it's -- you've got the raised floor. There's so much history there and also it's loud. It's really, really, really loud. I don't want to say how many years I've been coaching but it's been quite a few years. As a player, as a coach, I have never been in an environment that was that loud. Ever. It is something that is just -- your players have to make plays, because they can't hear each other. We can talk about communicating all you want but it gives you energy.

To have our young ladies perform at a really high level at crunch time in front of that crowd. To have our young

ladies on the bench going crazy, enjoying that, encouraging their teammates, doing -- everybody has a role. Everybody has an impact. Every moment matters. You never know what one thing a player says to another player is the difference in that player's confidence. You don't know that, right? That player may know it but we, the rest of us maybe aren't ever going to know but we know there's an impact in all those things.

There's an impact with the fans that come, the support that they give. It really was surreal. It was really pretty awesome and to have this group of young ladies, really, come and stay with this and build this into exactly what they wanted to build this into and have that be, for Amaya, her last game in the The Barn. That's the stuff -- you can't make this stuff up. That's movie line stuff at that point in time.

Those are the things that were going through my mind and certainly have a lot of family and friends who were in town that I haven't seen for about two days. As a matter of fact, I stayed away from them because we were busy with things going on. To be able to celebrate with them afterwards was certainly a fun moment.

Having my parents here certainly was kind of a fun moment at that point in time, too. Those are key takeaways. I think both of our children watched it. Our daughter is on the road getting ready to play in the Elite Eight. Got a text message from her. Guessing our son has as well but to have my husband be a part of that situation and a lot of family and friends is something that's special on top of all of it.

But this is a great environment. I think we had a lot of recruits here, I think. But you can't tell. We can't give them tickets or any of those types of things but getting text messages from a lot of them prior to. To have them see this and see what Minnesota women's basketball is becoming on a national stage is something that we believed can happen here and it's something that's in the process of happening right now. So it is really, really special.

I think everyone's eardrums -- Brynn Senden actual said her eardrums popped. I would not doubt that. It was deafening. I'm telling you. I told the announcers today that during the game against Green Bay, the first round game, that it was probably the loudest atmosphere. If you turn the TV on and you're watching all these women's games. I don't know, if there's one out there, then that's great. Not trying to take anything away from anyone else, but I'm telling you, that is the loudest I have ever heard an environment that you're playing in, so that was really, really special.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We appreciate your time.

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