

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Creighton vs Illinois

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Moody Center

Creighton Bluejays Coach Jim Flanery

Media Conference



JIM FLANERY: Great opportunity. Great experience to be in the NCAA Tournament. I'm sure our players referenced, you just don't take it for granted. We have a special group that's been together.

Really fun to coach, really enjoyable to be around. Try to soak that in. Now it's time to enjoy all the work that you've put in.

Illinois's got a really good basketball team. Really impressed with them on film. They balance, do a lot of things well at both ends and represent a big challenge for us.

But we've had all week to prepare. It's a little different. You go through the season and you have a lot of two-day preps. By the time you get to second semester, now you get a little more time.

Both teams should be prepared. And I think it's a real even game if you look at it by a lot of the metrics, which I'm kind of a numbers nerd. So I do. But anyway, excited for the opportunity.

Q. This year marks Creighton's 11th overall appearance in the NCAA Tournament and the fourth consecutive. What does that consistency say about your program and the strengths of the program?

JIM FLANERY: Well, our program has been built on retention, I think. If you look at what we've been able to do over the last 15 to 18 years, especially. It's gotten harder to retain players. It will only get more difficult.

But I do think that we have really kind of embraced that that needs to be our MO. We went from '08 to 2022 where we didn't have a transfer, 2021. So that will continue to kind of be hopefully the case.

But again, we also know we're probably going to have to be in the portal a little bit more than we would like. But I do think the consistency, the fact that our group has stayed together for as long as it has has been kind of an anomaly in the basketball scene today.

I think hopefully other young women can see that and see the value in that. We talk about all the things that athletes can get nowadays. But we don't always do a great job in the narrative of what the actual experience is going to be like. And the internal things that I think our players would say that they value, I think, sometimes is lost on some people and I think that's unfortunate. But that's an old guy talking.

But I hope that our players' message of staying together and having the experience that they have can resonate with some other people because I do think that they wouldn't trade their experience for anything.

Q. Your men's team is doing pretty well this postseason so far. They got the win to start their tournament run. Do you all use that fuel for y'all going into the postseason and the Big Dance?

JIM FLANERY: If we can shoot it like they did in that stretch, the last 10 minutes of the first half, geez -- you know, we have some similarities. We shoot a lot of 3s just like they do. We don't have the rim protection that they do with Kalkbrenner. But I do think there's an ability to kind of look at what they did.

I thought they played with great confidence and poise from the beginning. And I think that's what you hope for from your group or from our group.

But I also know that you have to have resiliency to win in the NCAA Tournament because it's not going to be a smooth 40 minutes in that first game. You're going to have players with nerves. And you've got to have other players whose nerves settle in those players who have more nerves. I think that's a key.

There's where I like the fact we have such great



experience because not everybody is going to get off to a great start. Not everybody is going to make their first three shots. To have experience I think matters. I thought you saw that to a large degree with our men yesterday.

Q. I want to go back to something you're talking about. When you think about the team culture you've built keeping these players around, obviously you've been around for a while. You have a bunch of former players on your staff now. I don't know if "difficult" is the right word, but what were the challenges of building that culture in 2025?

JIM FLANERY: In the most recent or just having --

Q. Overall (indiscernible).

JIM FLANERY: You referenced my staff and I want to give them a lot of credit because I do think when you -- there's different philosophies, but I've kind of hired from within. I've hired from people who have an affection toward Creighton that maybe somebody else wouldn't have. Not all my staff aren't Creighton people.

I think when you have that baked in, there's a little bit more investment, maybe, in terms of staying. I also think that your players can see the Creighton in them, in the staff.

I feel that's a big piece of it because I also believe wholeheartedly my staff does a great job in development. I think players want to be developed. And they can't be developed unless they're retained.

But part of retention is players seeing themselves develop. So as I see myself getting better as a player, within the context of this team, then I'm, like, okay, I can project that I'm going to play in a year. I'm going to play more in a year. I'm going to play more in two years. I think that's a big piece of it.

I'm not including myself because I am not on the court with them in the one-on-one, and if you saw me shoot you'd know why.

But I think they do a great job. My staff does a great job in development. Players see themselves get better. When they see themselves get better, they're like, okay, where else am I going to go where I can see the progress that I'm making. Maybe they think they can do that, but this group hasn't seen that.

The other thing is they do a great job of listening to our players because as you referenced, I've been around a long time. I'm a long way from their age. My assistant coaches are not nearly as far away from their age. When

they need something, when they need somebody to cry to or vent to or whatever, they don't come to me, and that's kind of by design.

But so I have a much younger staff who I think does a great job of -- every freshman is going to struggle. There's not a fresh that I've coached that isn't going to think about leaving or think about why am I here.

And I think that my staff does a great job of identifying that it is going to -- those tough times are going to pass. There are better outcomes on the other side. I think that's a huge piece of it.

I've said this and when you have players in your locker room who were in that same locker room three years ago as freshmen, it resonates differently with the freshmen you have in that locker room.

Whereas if the juniors and seniors in the locker room came from somewhere else, and they're in the same locker room as freshmen that plays differently. That's a big piece of it too.

Q. Couple of your players talked about how they liked having a chance to get away with spring break. As a coach, does that make you a little nervous that they're like out from under you for a few days? Do you send them off with a blessing to go have as much fun or relaxation? How do you handle that?

JIM FLANERY: With this team, I'm perfectly comfortable with them having the opportunity to get away. I trust them a lot.

We as a staff talk about how nerdy they are and how we need them to occasionally think about being more social.

I'll give you an example. So we have a player on our team, a freshman who is an LDS -- is of the LDS faith. The only service she could go to in Omaha was at 11:00 a.m. on Sundays. So we've got, within our team, you've got a lot of other options if you're of a different faith. But hers is at 11 to 1.

I said, okay, what are we going to do on Sundays? I'm assuming you guys would rather go in the afternoon, thinking Saturday night -- this is in September and October before we start playing games. Well, they chose to practice Sunday morning. And I think that gives you an indication of how nerdy they. They would rather practice at 8:30 on Sunday morning than Sunday afternoon. That's why I just have a lot of trust in them.

When we'll go through stuff today in regard to Illinois, we'll

say, okay, we've talked about how we want to defend this. Are you guys comfortable with this? Or do you want to change how we're going to defend this? I think you do that with an older team.

Q. Curious, Lauren and Morgan in particular seemed quite loose and just kind of comfortable in this setting. I'm curious if that's a byproduct of the fact that they've been here for four years and done it before, or if it's intentional on the team's part to kind of just really enjoy what is their last run and be as loose as possible?

JIM FLANERY: I think it's mostly a function of the experience that they have and having done this before. And I don't think it's that we've hammered to them, hey, you've got to relax because I'm not sure that's the best piece of advice you can give them because that only is probably going to make them think that they need to be conscious of their need to relax.

I think it's a product of their experience and belief in each other, in themselves and in just embracing the moment, which is what we've kind of tried to get them to do. And I tried to get myself to do too. It's not like I'm that great at it either. But I think it's more the experience piece.

Q. In terms of Illinois, what's intriguing to you about the similarities between the two of you, some of the things that are stylistically similar, especially when it comes to personnel and what they can do, what they're dangerous at? And what's intriguing to you about some of the things that are different about the two teams and the ways you can kind of expose each other in those areas?

JIM FLANERY: I think they have really good balance offensively. They certainly have their three premier scorers, but even their other kids can get hot and are dangerous. They're a low turnover team, which we are. They shoot the 3 well. They don't shoot it in the volume that we do, but they shoot it well. They've got a little bit more of an inside presence, obviously with Bostic. We have post players, but mostly they're perimeter post players.

But I think they're connected differently. They do things different than we do. But I think you see their experience defensively. They're physical defensively, more physical than we are.

They do a much better job getting to the free-throw line than we do. That's going to be key is to be good about not fouling and keeping them off the free-throw line.

But I think like I said we're certainly a little more perimeter-oriented at the offensive end and maybe more willing to be outside the box on the defensive end.

I think we're pretty similar. I was looking, I think they average 71, give up 62. We average 72 and give up 63ish.

Pace is pretty similar. They play reasonably slow, as do we in terms of pace of play. I think it's going to be a really close competitively game.

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