

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Virginia Tech vs Oregon

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Austin, Texas, USA

Moody Center

Virginia Tech Hokies

Carleigh Wenzel

Carys Baker

Coach Megan Duffy

Media Conference



of grandparents, stuff like that. So we're gonna have a big crowd for sure.

Q Following up on that, Carleigh, your parents are Texas exes?

CARLEIGH WENZEL: Not Texas, but McMurray and Concordia.

Q How many people are you gonna have, estimate?

CARLEIGH WENZEL: It was kind of a joke because I was kind of taking all the tickets from the girls this week. I have about 40 put in right now. Hopefully just a little bit more just through the grapevine.

Q For both of you, making the NCAA Tournament has been the goal ever since you got left out last March. Now that you're here and in the arena, is there a sense of you walking around with a sense of pride that you accomplished your goal or appreciation or gratitude? What's the thoughts there?

CARYS BAKER: I think we have a lot of gratitude. Last year not hearing our name called was definitely a bummer for us. We took that as a chip on our shoulder this year. We're really excited and grateful to be in the opportunity we're in today. That's just what we've come in today, just having that joy for the game because not a lot of people get to say they are in the NCAA Tournament. So just to say we're here, we're super grateful.

Q Carleigh, even though you didn't play, what were you able to learn from that Final Four run that has kind of helped you over these last couple years?

CARLEIGH WENZEL: I think most importantly was kind of the grit that they had going in. They were a limited roster. And they went in so deep to the Final Four and they were not playing at a hundred percent in any way. I know T. Soule was kind of having a lot of games where she was getting IV's after the games, things like that. Really just putting it all on the line, giving your all whether you feel great or everything is hurting. You're going to go out and show up for the people next to you and hope that they're

Q Carleigh, you were on the Final Four team three years ago, but you were redshirted that year. Both of you were on the NCAA Tournament team last year but backups. For the both of you, is the mindset or pressure any different now that you're the leading scorers on an NCAA Tournament team?

CARYS BAKER: I don't think there's any added pressure for us. We put the work in all season, so I don't think this stage is any different. Obviously we're in the NCAA Tournament, it's really exciting. We worked hard for this all season. I think for me and Carleigh specifically, we just know what we have to do together. We have to do it as a team. So I don't think there's any sort of pressure. We've been here before, like you said, so it's just more fun for us and exciting and we're really excited to be in different roles this year, obviously, but we get to do it with the team which we're really excited about.

CARLEIGH WENZEL: I think we're both just a lot more comfortable now, we've been through it for a couple years now. So just using the knowledge we know, spreading that to the people who may be their first time this time around. But yeah, I think we're confident. We're comfortable. We're prepared. So I think we're just looking forward to it.

Q Carleigh, you've got plenty of ties to Austin, obviously growing up in San Antonio. What does it mean to just be here playing this weekend?

CARLEIGH WENZEL: I'm ecstatic. Obviously a lot of friends and family. Mom and Dad are kind of from the area, grew up, went to college here, Austin. And so we're really excited. A lot of family and friends in the area, a lot



going to come out and do the same thing for you.

Q Carleigh, Oregon makes a lot of steals. How do you feel Virginia Tech's built to kind of, you know, gel with that defensive approach and not turn the ball over too much tonight -- tomorrow?

CARLEIGH WENZEL: I think our biggest strength is how we push in transition. So get the ball up the net quick, if they happen to go on runs get it out. Don't kind of dwell on anything, next play mentality. Don't make the same mistakes, learn as the game goes on, things like that. But definitely just pushing pace, making them run with the way we like to run and finding people, make sure everybody is a threat on all ends of the floor.

Q For either of you, how important do you think three-pointers' shooting is going to be tomorrow and what's your kind of confidence level about your team's ability to make some threes in a big game tomorrow?

CARYS BAKER: Yeah, I think that just goes back to our preparation. Obviously we're going to have practice today in the actual arena. So that will be good to get some shots up there just to get used to the rims and stuff. I think it always goes back to our preparation and the hard work we've put in all season. If they're not falling, there's so many other things we can do. We rely on our defense, other things we can do, our rebounding. I think it comes down to our hard work at the end of the day and getting one extra little push in before the game tomorrow.

Q Carleigh, you guys had a winning ACC season. Do you feel that the ACC schedule has been good preparation for the NCAA's?

CARLEIGH WENZEL: Yeah, absolutely. I think we had nine, ten teams in the tournament, something like that. So I think that half that schedule is a tournament schedule. Things like that, and so I think we prepared absolutely great. Now it's just going up against the other tournament teams and the other P-Four conferences, things like that.

But I think the differences that we have to face every night, different power houses, different stars, whether that be a guard, whether that point guard, post player, things like that, I think we've been faced with a lot of different match-ups, I would say, that you have to adjust to, and I think that works well going into other -- up against other teams.

So looking forward to that. We're kind of just excited to play somebody new, play somebody that doesn't know us, somebody that we don't know. Kind of like a fresh slate. We always say it's like a new season when you start post

season for sure.

Q Do you feel like you won't have any jitters tomorrow because of your NCAA experience from a couple years ago and are you going to try to give any wisdom to some of the younger players that didn't have any experience?

CARYS BAKER: I feel like jitters always come with a basketball game. I know for both of us, we get those jitters. I think it's more really excited for us. Excited to compete, excited to have another day and opportunity to play basketball. Like I said before, not a lot of people can say that they have the opportunity to wake up tomorrow and be able to play another basketball game. We're just really excited. Obviously the team, I'm sure, is gonna have the jitters, too, but I think if we come in together like we always have all season, we're just going to just preach a lot that it's just another basketball game for us.

Q But is it?

CARYS BAKER: I mean, yeah, it is. I mean, the stakes are definitely higher. It's the NCAA Tournament. But like I said, we've been playing basketball all season long, so it is a basketball game. It's what we do. We lace our shoes up all the same way, so...

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thank you for your time. Best of luck tomorrow against Oregon.

Coach, congratulations. We will begin with an opening statement.

MEGAN DUFFY: Thank you so much. We are thrilled to be here in Austin. What a tremendous city. I'm so proud of our team for the season we've had. This group of women have worked extremely hard to get to this point. I think the greatest thing about them is just how much they've improved from the summertime to now, and we're just very grateful for this opportunity to be here in Texas and play a tremendous Oregon team.

Q Now that you've had a few days to look at Oregon film, what concerns do they pose for you and what do you feel like you'll need to do to beat them tomorrow?

MEGAN DUFFY: It's an awesome feeling when you hear your name and finally get an opponent. First and foremost, I'm really appreciative of our staff and how they've worked over the last few days to dig in and try to learn what we can about Oregon. Kelly has done a phenomenal job in his career. He's a winner at his stops at Gonzaga and then Oregon. I've always been a big fan from afar, just the way he's built his teams year in and year-out.

I think the thing about this Oregon team is a little bit similar to us. They've been resilient. They've fought through many different moments from this year, whether it's coming from behind in a game, whether it's sustaining runs, getting huge road wins, whatever it is. So they're battle-tested. I think for a group of players who have been in new roles this year, similar to some of our kids. It will be a challenge for us from that standpoint, and they're led by two tremendous players in Fiso and Etute, their inside-outside combination. They've really carried the team in a lot of ways. And then I think the thing that separates them is their role players that have stepped up, whether it's hit big shots or get a big defensive stop, they've been balanced at different points that have made them very dangerous.

Q One of your players called missing the tournament last year a bummer. That really set a chip on their shoulder. Did you sense that from the beginning in this season and did that carry all the way through?

MEGAN DUFFY: I think so. We had a group of women who, at the end of last season, you know, recommitted to Virginia Tech, and they wanted to be here and they wanted a chance to really prove themselves to be in the tournament. And yeah, of course we were probably more than a bummer. We were disappointed, but at the same time, we really dug in of what we could do to be in a better position, that it wasn't a bubble team. It was, you know, you've won enough games. You've put together the right schedule. You've got leaders that are leading us through every aspect of a college basketball season.

And, you know, I was not the type of coach that, you know, went publically and just begged and pleaded to just get into the tournament. I was the opposite. You know, I said give me as much information that you can that we can be better next year so there's no question we should be in the Dance. We got to work in the spring and summer and got a few pieces, whether that was our freshman class or portal, and didn't pay attention to anything else. It was about getting better and seeing what we need to do better both in non-conference and ACC play. We were at that 500 mark in ACC play, and I got a little bit of insight. And simple enough, we gotta win more games. And I said, fair enough. Let's do it.

That's been our approach even if we had some disappointing losses or had a tough game, we just kept sticking to our process and coming back to, you know, the best product we can put on the floor, the chemistry of our team, the relationships we've been building since the spring and summer. And fortunately, those have been the ingredients of our success of why we're here and why we're very excited to be playing here in Austin against Oregon.

Q The coach's challenge, now in NCAA Tournament environment where the pressure is even higher, have you even talked yet about the strategy behind the rule going into the tournament and how are you going to handle it and do you think it's going to be a really interesting point for everybody in this tournament?

MEGAN DUFFY: Yeah, I mean we've really tried to kind of figure out what fits us best in every situation this year. I mean, we spent some time in the summer and fall figuring out how we were going to communicate it. We got some analytics on these calls that are made even on the baseline, the percentage of ones that are actually correct versus not. They're actually correct majority of the time, so you gotta be careful with, you know, how emotional you get about a call and really kind of settle yourself down and make sure you're connected with your staff to potentially review it.

The other thing that I think has been a challenge is we don't get a lot of timeouts. You have your media ones that come, you know, organically. But, you know, if you just start spewing, using timeouts off reviews or trying to be right versus the referees, I think you can get in trouble a little bit. We haven't had to review too many this year. We decided to hold back on some of them. I think there was one situation for me in a game, I just did it to do it. I think the game was out of reach and, you know, you have to trust the refs and their judgment between the three of them. They still can go to the monitor for certain things. I know for me, personally, I don't try to put too much pressure on myself or our staff. We don't have to be perfect. We have to do what we've been doing all season with it.

Q Are there certain aspects you feel you'll need to do pretty well tomorrow to kind of counteract with whatever their strong truths are?

MEGAN DUFFY: Absolutely. We're going to have to play a really good basketball game to beat Oregon. We've been talking about that. We don't have to play a perfect game, but the small things we've been talking about all year. The rebounding is always critical when you play any good opponent, whether that's your offensive rebounding or keeping somebody like Etute or their other support players off the glass.

Sometimes in an NCAA Tournament, too, it's timely rebounding. We've kind of established that a little bit with our team this year. We haven't always won every rebounding battle, but it's the moments when there's runs going on in games or somebody makes a mental mistake to miss a blockout. Those are the ones you really gotta be

good in the tournament. I think the ability to take care of the ball is critical against Oregon, you know, between their switching defenses and, you know, the way they have some length at different positions they can disrupt you in different ways. So it's not just one way they do it. So we've tried to kind of corollate, you know, a few different teams in our league who have done that so our players are confident.

What I love about our team is we have multiple ball handlers that can handle pressure and try and negate some of that, but I think if you lose possessions in a game like the NCAA Tournament game or your first round game, you lose opportunities to score. And that's always a positive thing when you have more opportunities to score than the other team.

Q Carleigh and Carys were on the NCAA Tournament team two years ago but as backups. I don't think anybody else has played in the NCAA Tournament on your team. Does that concern you at all? Are you relying on Carys and Carleigh to have a certain err about them tomorrow or what's kind of your feeling about, you know, having a good team that may not have been here before, might be overly excited or overwhelmed tomorrow?

MEGAN DUFFY: I think one of the things we've been really, really strong at from our coaching staff to our players is to really lean on each other through every situation. We're not afraid to talk about nerves or we're a little anxious about being in our first NCAA Tournament. I told them, even I want to put you on my back a little bit. I've been here and seen different aspects of the tournament, so nobody feels they have to carry the whole world. That's been the recipe of our team success, as well. When we've said, okay, only Carleigh or only Carys or Mackie is our point guard or Kilah with our interior game, you know, thinks they have to do it all themselves, we've not been very good. So we've talked all week about the work we've put in all season, the work we put in last week after our ACC tournament game against North Carolina. We were really disappointed with how we played, just our response in practice in attacking the work.

And sometimes everybody around you can make this moment bigger than it is, and I think the reason why we've been successful is we haven't had only a couple people helping. It's been, you know, from myself all the way down to our managers and support staff who have put in the work. And we're trying to just express that every second until that buzzer goes off that we can feel good about the work we've put in. I don't know if we're going to win or lose the game, but being in the right head space is important.

I'll just add, too, I'm thrilled for our team to be able to get

this opportunity. There's so many story lines within a season of what they all go through, but the way they've matured, the way they've turned off noise around them. And it's just been all about Virginia Tech and the name across their chest and fighting for their teammate to their left and their right. I think that's what I'm most proud about them coming into the game is they're doing it the right way and buying into the things that we believe are going to help them be successful. It's been a phenomenal journey to be their coach and watch them make mistakes and go through them and shine in some of the biggest moments in college basketball.

Q When you look at Oregon on film these last couple days, does it seem to you like this does seem like an 8-9 kind of game, a toss-up kind of game?

MEGAN DUFFY: I think once you get in here, seeding has become a little bit irrelevant. And I know just with the committee, the amount of work they had to do to try and get it right from the 8-9 seeds, the 10-11's, the last few teams in. I wouldn't want that job. At this point, once you've dug into film and we've been staying up late and trying to get every advantage we can to prepare our team, I don't really look at seedings or a next game. Is just, like, can you play, you know, a great first quarter or second quarter or third quarter or fourth quarter and build the pieces together that hopefully you have a great outcome at the end?

I think sometimes you can get so wrapped up in other things you can't control and go crazy. Fortunately, our team in the month of February and early March were really hungry to win basketball games and get better and that's gotta be our mindset, the hunger here tomorrow to play our best basketball.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Best of luck in your match-up tomorrow against Oregon.

