

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 3 Semifinal - Notre Dame vs TCU

Friday, March 28, 2025

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena

Notre Dame Fighting Irish Niele Ivey

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

Birmingham - March 28, 2025.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for Coach Ivey.

Q. What are some of the talking points from the first time that you played TCU that you used this week?

NIELE IVEY: Well, just having that experience, having the film of knowing what we need to fix. I think it's, again, a great opportunity. We're really excited to be here. We know defensively that's, again, an area that we are really, really focused on. They had an incredible year, playing extremely well. They have great guard play and also have great post play with Sedona. We've been really focused on defensively defending their sets.

Q. With the schedule being so early today, how do you adjust to that? Are you a morning person?

NIELE IVEY: I am a morning person, especially when you are still dancing. We've talked about it all week, just making sure that they got their rest. We got a chance to practice earlier, so we got into Birmingham a little bit earlier, went straight to dinner. Have curfew, just to get their bodies knowing that it was going to be a very early morning.

Again, they're so excited and so excited to be here. They're locked and focused. No matter the time, we'll be ready.

Q. You guys weren't healthy completely in that game. How much does that factor into using that film that you didn't have Maddy, didn't have other players that you have now available to you?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, really excited about that. Again, depth



was a big area for us, not having one post-up off the bench. Kate was maybe her fifth game of the season, so very green at that point.

Looking forward to having more depth in the post position. With the experience Maddy and Liza both have incredible experience. Definitely going to rely on that and happy that we have a healthier roster than the last time we played them.

Q. I guess are you kind of a fan of the two-site regional format, or would you rather go back to four?

NIELE IVEY: Well, when you are still dancing, it doesn't matter what type of format it is. I think it's super interesting. You get a chance to watch great basketball. We have incredible basketball play with eight teams in one region, so the environment I think is really exciting.

I think it's interesting and, again, just happy to be a part of it.

Q. Just beyond basketball with the elevation of the spotlight on women's basketball both at the collegiate and pro level, talk about the opportunity and the obligation it's given you as an African-American woman to not just coach basketball, but to be a face of the sport and also to coach young women beyond basketball and in the frame of leadership?

NIELE IVEY: Right. It's an honor. I understand that my role is major. I understand the magnitude of being in this position, being in a leadership position as a black woman, having success and hopefully opening doors for more black women, people that look like me. My players being able to relate to them, knowing that having this opportunity and being a leader, it's big for them to see as well. That's a big piece of recruiting. I take it on like a cape. It's something that I know that it's bigger than me.

I'm fortunate that I have a lot of role models that I look up to. Dawn Staley is one of mine. She's someone that has always reached out to me, empowered me. Being in this role, I'm hoping to continue to inspire people that are looking, especially young assistants, that want to get in this

profession and be successful, and just try and pay it forward is what I'm always trying to do being in this role.

Q. Obviously JuJu went down with the ACL injury earlier this week. I guess if you were going to give Lindsay Gottlieb some advice about handling an ACL injury that your star guard has had, I guess what kind of advice would you give her?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, we are still praying for her. I reached out to Lindsay watching the game. So unfortunate the timing of it, and her team is rallying behind her because it's something, again, we've experienced the last couple of years. Having everybody step up to do a little bit more is going to be motivation for them.

Again, just trying to keep -- for Lindsay I would say just keep encouraging the team, keep doing the same thing that you've been doing. They've had such incredible success the last few seasons and what she's done in turning that program again. Just really pour into the rest of the team and allow that to be motivation for them to continue thriving in this tournament.

Q. How are you feeling about your team's response to the challenges at the end of the season?

NIELE IVEY: I'm really proud of them. As everyone knows, we had a rough couple of weeks. We bounced back from the ACC regular season, conference play. Got back to work, really focused on our fundamentals. Came out in South Bend the first two rounds and played inspired basketball. I thought they were relentless. I thought they were focused and locked in. You could tell there was a big carry-over. I challenged them. They had a great response to that challenge.

Now stakes are high. They're just playing at a high level and playing for each other. Defensively they've really taken on a different identity. I'm really proud of that.

Q. You've had a couple of days for Olivia to sort of get healthier. Has that helped her get back to where she needs to be with her ankle?

NIELE IVEY: Yes, I gave her a couple of days off after Sunday's matchup. She's practiced the last couple of days and she really feels good, but just being cautious making sure that she's really getting in the rest that she needs.

Credit to our performance team and my trainer, Anne Marquez. They did a great job preparing her before the Michigan game and then getting her ready for tomorrow.

Q. The other one is you've been around for many

years as a player and an assistant head coach. Is TCU sort of the new model of how teams can turn around quickly in women's basketball, in college basketball? It used to be you would have to find players in high school, recruit them, develop from freshmen to seniors. Now they can find ten players in the transfer portal and turn a 1-17 team a few years ago to now being playing you in the Sweet 16?

NIELE IVEY: That's the nature of collegiate athletics having that opportunity to go into the portal and bring in experienced players. Like you mentioned, they brought in seven to ten portal players, players with experience, years of experience. Tennessee, same.

I think that's the nature of collegiate athletics that you can go in and get experienced players that can come in, ready-made for the next level, for collegiate level, and you don't have time to have to groom high school players. I think that's just what our game is trending towards.

Q. I wanted to follow up on your answer on kind of being a black woman in this space and how that helps you with recruiting. How does your understanding of your role and your importance inform the way you recruit and approach connecting with players?

NIELE IVEY: Right. I think outside of just being a black woman in sports, I played at Notre Dame. I have had success. I'm fortunate that Notre Dame has shaped the person that I am. So in recruiting I talk about not only somebody that looks like them or a female, but somebody that has walked in their shoes.

I've been a student-athlete, got a degree from Notre Dame. I had success, came back from an injury. I had two ACL injuries. Being able to relate to the parents, knowing that I'm a player's coach, but I'm also a coach that has walked in their shoes. I'm a mother as well, so I talk about that, wearing multiple hats.

It's all about love in my program. They know that I can coach them and challenge them hard because they know that it's coming from a place of love. I wear that mother hat a lot, so I'm coach, I'm mom. I think that's another way that I try to recruit, so parents can be comfortable that their daughter is going to be taken care of, not just for the four years here at Notre Dame, but for life.

Those are my recruiting pitches because, again, I've walked in their shoes. I know what it feels like, looks like to be a collegiate student-athlete, and to be one at Notre Dame I think is unique because I know exactly what they're going through. That's the way that I coach them.



Q. I just want to follow up on Olivia. It seemed like the Michigan game was a lot of adrenaline. I'm curious how she's kind of taken to what the performance staff has set out for her this week and maybe will she be even healthier than the Michigan game, because that ankle looked pretty gnarly in the locker room?

NIELE IVEY: Yes. I thought that the adrenaline definitely kicked in for her. It is going to kick in tomorrow as well, but again, we had the entire week that she received a lot of rest, a lot of treatment. She did exactly what she needed to do as far as being at home, doing the things that our trainer required her to do. She feels really good, has had a couple of practices, and she's fresh and ready.

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