

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 1 Semifinal - LSU vs NC State

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Spokane, Washington, USA

Spokane Arena

**NC State Wolfpack**

**Wes Moore**

**Madison Hayes**

**Aziaha James**

**Saniya Rivers**

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have the NC State student-athletes, and we'll take questions for them at this time.

**Q. Madison, it seems like your season really sort of took a change when Tilda entered the starting lineup. Wondering what difference she's brought to you guys.**

MADISON HAYES: I feel like Tilda has come in out of position, trying to be a center. I feel like she's done a great job, obviously, for us. She's six-six. So it's really hard to go against that size. But she's been great for us shooting, she's done great -- she's getting better being more physical, and that's what we kind of emphasize for her. But I feel like she's done a great job, so she will continue to do that as well for us.

**Q. Saniya, you guys have familiarity because you played earlier. How much different of a team are you now compared to back then when you played? And what are some takeaways that you can take from that game to learn from?**

SANIYA RIVERS: I think we're a much different team. At the beginning of the season we were still trying to get a feel of each other, get a grasp. Obviously, we had a lot of returners, but I feel like with the freshmen coming in and people playing out of position, we just weren't very comfortable and confident. So as the season went along, and we started putting pieces together, I would say we're a much different team. So even though we lost to LSU early, I hope people don't look at that because we're a different



team, and we're ready to compete tomorrow.

**Q. Saniya, a long trip, but the Northwest was very good to you last year en route to the Final Four. Do you like coming back out here?**

SANIYA RIVERS: That flight is long, five hours. But we find stuff to do. We sleep, we eat, we play games. We just keep ourselves occupied. I'm glad we came out here a day or two earlier so that we can get used to the time change. We were out here last year, so it's not something that we're not used to. But I mean, we've gotten some rest and I think we're adjusting and I think we'll be definitely ready for tomorrow.

**Q. All three of you have a lot of experience in this tournament, so how do you -- for the younger players that haven't been here, had the experience, how do you get them into the mindset of where ya'll are in this tournament and where you're trying to go?**

MADISON HAYES: I feel like for the freshmen, we always try to keep in mind that this is their first time being here and obviously giving them that experience to be here because not a lot of people can say they have been here before. But just making sure obviously treatment is a big thing, making sure recovery is huge for us, especially on this long stretch for the Sweet 16 and Elite 8 because we're playing really tough teams.

But at the end of the day, when you go out there, you just got to be ready for when your number is called because everybody brings different things to the table for us. So I think they -- the only thing that I can say for them is just be ready.

AZIAHA JAMES: Yeah, same thing what she said. We been here since last year -- like, last year. Sorry. So we know the steps, we know the key, so it's just a matter of them following behind us and us leading the way as captains and for them to be ready when their number's called.

SANIYA RIVERS: I think they said it all. I'm good. Yeah, they said it all. Don't need to repeat nothing (laughing).



**Q. With being seasoned in this tournament, what changes have you seen over the years? Obviously, there was an incident a few years back with inequity in training facilities between the women's tournament and the men's. So have you seen any positive changes in that in the last few years?**

SANIYA RIVERS: I think the gear's starting to fit a lot better. I think my first year here, I got my stuff, and the shorts were hanging to my knees, and the stuff was just oversized. But I think when we started going on social media and posting that and saying, Hey, this isn't fair. The dudes' stuff, theirs is fitting, and now it fit real good and I have no complaints, so, yeah (laughing).

MADISON HAYES: I got nothing to say to that.

AZIAHA JAMES: No, nothing.

**Q. USC lost JuJu to a season-ending injury, and I wanted to get your reaction to that and how do you feel about being in a tournament and injuries are a real possibility at this point and just wanted to get your thoughts on all of that.**

MADISON HAYES: It's crazy that you said that because we me and Niya were watching it in the room together. Obviously it's very unfortunate, you don't want things to happen like that to great players, or any player in that matter. We're sorry about that. Nothing that -- she could have done nothing to prevent that. I feel like Mississippi State didn't do anything as well. I think it was just a basketball play and it ended up happening that way. We just got to keep praying for her and just hope for the best for her in her recovery.

AZIAHA JAMES: Definitely, JuJu is one of the faces of women's basketball today and the whole nation has got her back on this. We're praying for her. Hoping for a speedy recovery. Just the thoughts of that, like she said, it sucks, and her team's going to keep pushing for her and they're going to have her back.

SANIYA RIVERS: Yeah, for me I don't know JuJu personally, but obviously she's done a lot for our game, brought a lot of attention, done a lot for her university, her teammates. Hoping for speedy recovery. I'm a firm believer that everything happens for a reason, and unfortunately we don't want things like that to happen, but I just know she's going to bounce back better than ever, so I'm looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll dismiss the student-athletes and we'll wait for Coach Moore.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: All right. We welcome NC State coach, Wes Moore, to the dais, and we'll start with questions.

**Q. How has playing in the ACC prepared you and the Wolfpack for this moment in the tournament?**

WES MOORE: Yeah, I mean, obviously, ACC's an unbelievable conference. Night-in, night-out you're playing against talented players, great coaches, and we're going to be doing that tomorrow. LSU's super talented, super athletic, and then Kim Mulkey, Hall of Fame coach over there.

So we know it's a big challenge. Obviously, we met them earlier in the year, and so we know we're going to have to play really well. I think we're coming off maybe one of our best games of the season. I thought Monday our defense was great. I thought offensively we shot the heck out of it. So hopefully, we can build off that momentum. But, yeah, it's going to be a big challenge.

**Q. A long ways from home, but the success you enjoyed last year in Portland, does it make a little easier to come back out here to the Northwest?**

WES MOORE: Maybe repeat it one more time.

**Q. A long ways from home, but does the success you enjoyed last year in Portland make it a little easier to come back to the Northwest?**

WES MOORE: Yeah, yeah. Hey, most people probably say, Oh, wow, that's a long trip. We think, Hey, man, we did this last year, so we know what's going on. Everybody's been unbelievable. Spokane's an unbelievable place. Our hotel is awesome, and everyone's been so friendly. So we're enjoying it, and I think everything's first class.

Again, I thought Portland was unbelievable a year ago. So hopefully, we can keep that same mojo and you guys maybe will adopt us as your team (smiling).

**Q. In what ways are you an improved team since that meeting in the Bahamas? And then, if you would, in what ways is LSU an improved team that you see?**

WES MOORE: Yeah, I mean, for us -- obviously, I've watched that game a couple of times now and we didn't -- defensively we didn't have near as much urgency and energy as we needed. I mean, again, LSU was the

aggressor and they usually are. I mean, as I like to say, they're dogs, now. They're going to get after you and play, and you got to be ready, you got to try to slow down their transition, you got to try to keep 'em off the boards. They have got great scorers.

So, again, it's a big challenge, but I think we've also -- our post position has adjusted some now. We've had some freshmen that have come on, and they're getting more playing time. Just, hopefully, we've gotten better defensively -- I mean, we started out season 4-3 and since then, we're 24-3. So I'm proud of this group. They have done a heck of a job of turning it around. We lost some key players a year ago in River Baldwin and Mimi Collins, fifth year, you know, McDonald's All-Americans out of high school and all that.

But LSU, I think Coach Mulkey, again, is a great coach. They're always going to get better. And I think probably offensively they're more efficient than they were early in the year. They're still a great defensive team. That's a big thing. You got to take care of the ball because if you turn it over, it's defense to offense really, really quick.

And then trying to also handle their pressure in the half court and take care of the ball, get looks. They make it hard for you to do that. Our eyes are wide open. We know, again, we've got a big challenge.

**Q. LSU has a three-headed monster going on with Morrow, Johnson, and Williams. What is the challenge of game planning for that, knowing that you probably aren't going to stop all three but trying to stall out and get 'em out of rhythm as much as possible?**

WES MOORE: Yeah, obviously, I just left ESPN, the TV crew that will be doing the game, and rightfully so, they kept grilling me on Morrow. And, again, like I said, she's the king dog. She's the lead dog. But, you know, you can't lose sight of Williams and Flau'Jae. And I mean, again, there's a lot of talent on that team. So you can't get too caught up in just one player.

But, yeah, that's what they all talk about in the NBA now, WNBA, having three great players, great scorers, and LSU has that formula. So we're just going to have to see how the game unfolds. They kept wanting to ask me, How you going to do this? How you going to do that? We're going to see how the game goes, see who is hot and, hopefully, they don't get hot, but, you know, just you're going to have to make adjustments and you're going to have to give attention to who is hurting you at the time. But again, they have got a lot of people that can hurt you.

**Q. You were speaking about the development in your**

**post play since you guys matched up back in November. I was curious, specifically when it comes to you and your rebounding abilities after that game where they really took advantage on the boards, how did you guys evolve with crashing the glass and preventing second-chance points and just being better there?**

WES MOORE: Well, we'll see if we have evolved tomorrow. We did, we got out-rebounded by 20, and that's a big part of it right there. Yeah, I mean, again, Tilda Trygger, she's from Sweden. She played a lot of European basketball, a lot of five-out stuff, so it's been an adjustment for her to have to go inside and try to bang. Sometimes she's a little too Swedish, and so we got to make sure she understands she's going to have to be physical and battle in there.

And then Lorena Awou, another freshman that now is getting to play a little bit more, has the physicality, the body to get in there and do that. But LSU's a different animal. Again, they're a great offensive rebounding team, and that's what concerns you going into this game, is can we limit 'em to one shot a possession. I think that's -- I think rebounds are the most important factor in the game because no matter how bad of a shooting day you have, if you're getting second and third chances and the other team's one and done, you got a really good chance of winning. So you've hit it on the head. That's what we got to worry about.

**Q. I wanted to ask you real quick about Devyn. She's really embraced sort of a backup new role. How much confidence does that give you knowing eventually you're going to lose Madison Hayes, but you have someone who will hopefully step up into a similar role?**

WES MOORE: Okay. And this is about Devyn?

**Q. Yes.**

WES MOORE: Yeah, I think Devyn's come on as well. I got to give a lot of credit to my assistant coaches. They do a lot of individual work, development work, with our players, and I think they have done a great job with Tilda, for instance, and Lorena, and then with the guards. I think Devyn's come a long way. I was real disappointed after the ACC championship game. I felt like we didn't always lock in on defending on and rebounding, and so I told 'em, When we got -- after that game, I said, I'm going to hold everybody more accountable, so, you know, if you have a lapse on defense or rebounding, no matter who you are, we're going to rotate. We're going to go to the bench.

So that really -- and part of that too was I felt more confident about Devyn and where she was. So, you know, that's the biggest thing, she gives us some depth there, she gives us some size, she can go get a rebound, she can score at all three levels. She's a freshman, Tilda's a freshman, Lorena's a freshman. We'll see how they handle this stage. But so far they have done a pretty good job.

**Q. You mentioned the 24-3 since LSU the first time. At what point do you feel like it clicked and what was the thing that sort of made it click from that point on that you guys played so well?**

WES MOORE: Yeah, that's a good question. I don't know if I know the exact point that it clicked. I mean, we had some big wins along the way that obviously gives you great confidence, especially a road win. Just the consistency, that's a big thing to me. I don't want to be a team that's up and down and, as you mentioned, if we win on days we shoot well, we lose on days we don't, I don't want to be that team. So for this team to turn it around like they did.

But I think it's just a combination of things, maybe some of the freshmen stepping up, our veteran guards getting their mojo going and taking on leadership roles and things like that. But I don't know if I can point to just one situation. Again, you're always evolving as a team and hoping to get better every day.

**Q. How have you seen the inequality gap between the men's and women's game maybe lessened in some ways but where do you also see that there's still a lot of room to improve?**

WES MOORE: Well, I mean, again, like I said, I've been doing it awhile and it's amazing to me, especially the last few years, how our game has grown, how the talent has gotten so much better. That's why -- last year, we outdrew the men TV viewership, and that's because I think the entertainment value. Our players have gotten so good that people enjoy watching 'em.

So, you know, I don't know. I mean, again, we're excited about being here at the tournament and we've been treated unbelievable. Last year, Final Four experience was out of this world. I just can't go on enough. So right now, I'm very pleased where we are and now obviously the teams are going to be able to earn units for their athletic department. I think that's cool that we're going to be able to carry our load a little bit. So right now, I have no complaints.

**Q. Coach Mulkey gave you a great compliment when she was in her interview. She said, aside from tomorrow, she's always rooting for you to win. Talk**

**about your relationship with Coach Mulkey.**

WES MOORE: Yeah. Yeah, she's hilarious, fun to be around. That's the thing I love about this profession, there's just so many good people in it that are -- and again, someone like herself who is a legend and had so much success, National Championships. But, yeah, we go way back. We enjoy in the summer, we're out recruiting, we enjoy visiting and sharing stories and all that. Just, again, have a lot of mutual friends as well. But she's been great to me, and likewise, I pull for her a lot, but probably not tomorrow. But, yeah.

**Q. You have three very different and very young posts on this team that play probably bigger roles than you thought they were going to at the beginning of the year. How have you seen kind of your guards and your upperclassmen sort of help those three along in their development?**

WES MOORE: Yeah, I do. I think that's a big part when you have great leadership -- and we're fortunate, Saniya's been with us three years. Aziaha, all four years. Madison Hayes, her last four years. You know we got some leadership out there that knows our culture, knows how we want to do things, know how we want to handle things. So I think that they make a big difference, bringing those young players along. We're really young interior-wise, so I think that's been a challenge, but I think that's also a big reason we've taken some leaps in our success and our ability to play well. So no doubt when you have veterans it's like having extra assistant coaches when they're out there on the court, helping early in the year with drills and how want to defend stuff. So, yeah, no doubt, our veterans have made a big impact there.

**Q. Curious how much your scout got a little bit tougher, everybody talks about the big three, but they really got Sa'Myah Smith involved down low and really are distributing the ball a little bit better to the post. Is that something that you've seen?**

WES MOORE: Yeah, I mean, again, like I said, Coach Mulkey is a great coach, so they have definitely gotten better in a lot of areas. I do, I think they share the ball well and make the extra pass, very unselfish. They're great off the bounce. I think Morrow obviously is, like I said, she's a big challenge there. But Williams has a ton of assists. Even though she's a great scorer, she enjoys getting assists as much as she does putting the ball in the hole. So when you have somebody like that, it makes it a little bit tougher to help on, help off on 'em, etcetera, because they're going to make you pay.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you, Coach.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

