

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 1 Final - Notre Dame vs UConn

Saturday, March 28, 2026

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

UConn Huskies

Coach Geno Auriemma

Sarah Strong

Azzi Fudd

Elite 8 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We welcome UConn's Head Coach Geno Auriemma. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

GENO AURIEMMA: Thank you. I'm going read you some numbers, okay? Write them down. 4 for 20, 4 for 22, 1 for 17, 5 for 18, 4 for 16, 7 for 26. That's the three-point shooting yesterday across the country. How many arenas are we going to sell out with that bullshit?

Now, maybe it was just a bad day shooting by everybody. These are all teams that average probably 30, over 30, for the season. Know what time our shoot-around was yesterday? 6:00 in the morning. 6:20, I think, for half an hour.

This morning I just saw Notre Dame leaving, so they had media this morning. Their practice time is tonight at 5:30. What did you have to ask them this morning that you didn't ask them last night? Or us? You know what time our practice time is? 6:30 tonight.

So we had to get our kids up, come over here. You already knew who we were playing last night, but we can't get on the court, and neither can the other teams. Walz had media at 7:30, I think.

Does anybody who makes these decisions ever ask the coaches and the players, hey, does this work? Do you guys do this during the regular season? Is this normal? Total attendance yesterday at both places, 18,000. If we have four regions and you got a minimum 5,000 people -- I mean, I went to Westchester State University. It's a great university. I think that comes out to 20,000.



So what are we doing here? Do you know when the last time they had a regional in the Northeast? Probably because we were the No. 2 seed, and NC State was a 1 seed, and we had to play in Bridgeport, so there will be no more regionals north of -- I guess there's one in Philly coming up.

That's just a personal pet peeve, because we've gone to the Final Four no matter where the regional was, so it's kind of -- but I just don't understand some of the decisions that are made about our game when we're trying to grow the Goddamn game. And I'm thrilled to be playing Notre Dame, because they're damn good right now.

So there you have it. Do you want to know the reason for these shooting percentages? I think they bring in new baskets, new basketballs right out of the box. Got people dribbling the ball off their feet. You got people missing layups all over the place. You bounce the ball, and it goes up to the ceiling. There's just no concept of how basketball is played.

Not that I have any of the answers. Believe me, I just have questions.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions for Coach.

Q. I won't use the same word, but what makes Notre Dame darn good right now?

GENO AURIEMMA: Have you seen Hannah Hidalgo play (laughing)? Man, I don't think I've seen a performance like what she had yesterday in a long, long time. She's, like, the Lawrence Taylor of basketball. People probably too young to remember Lawrence Taylor, but Lawrence Taylor played linebacker for the Giants, and if he was in the next room and threw the ball to one of you guys, he would intercept it.

She's just a unique player that comes along once in a lifetime, and she has the ability to disrupt and cause chaos like nobody I've ever seen. I think her team obviously feeds off of that. They've had time to play together now.



You know, we played them earlier. We played them in January, and they were -- you know, they weren't at full strength, and they've had time to be together.

It's just -- and I think everybody on their team knows what their role is. They know what they do and do it well, and everybody kind of plays together really well. I mean, there's a reason why they're playing tomorrow.

Q. For all the history of Notre Dame and UConn in the NCAA Tournament, this will be the first time you guys are playing for a spot in the Final Four and not in the Final Four. Kind of your thoughts about that, and then just what are the memories that stand out from those previous games in the Final Four?

GENO AURIEMMA: It seemed like every time we played them was in the Final Four, you're right. When we would look at the brackets, it used to be like that with Tennessee too. You would look at the bracket and you would go, okay, when could we possibly face them? Most of the time, because of the high seeds that we were, it would end up being in the Final Four.

But so many great games that we've had with them. You know, I remember one of the games -- I forget where it was -- Skylar Diggins went coast-to-coast, missed a layup, and one of their kids got an offensive rebound and scored and they win the game.

Obviously Arike makes the jump shot to win. We played them first time ever two undefeated teams, played for the national championship, right? A lot of great players on both teams. A lot of great games.

Yeah, I mean, for us that became -- we knew we had -- we knew at some point we would have to beat them if we wanted to win a national championship.

Q. Obviously you spoke highly of Notre Dame, and it feels like right now their biggest strength is what you said, they're playing together and they're playing with momentum. In the past your teams have been able to beat teams in the tournament that are playing with that type of momentum, but it seems like it's very hard to do. How are you able to do that and beat teams who are red hot?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, I think that's the hardest thing to do is to catch a team that's playing really well, that's playing with a lot of momentum. Biggest reason is you don't have to sustain it for months. You know, you have three weekends. Once a team gets hot, once a player gets hot, it really, really makes it difficult.

We've had success. Again, I think you have to -- first of all, in some cases you have to hope they miss, because you can do everything right, but there's no secret formula to it. You know, you have to have -- we've had really good players. Traditionally we've been a really good defensive team through the years, and I think just making shots at the right time, yeah, that's the hardest thing to do is to beat a red hot team that's playing with a lot of confidence.

Q. Speaking of changes to the NCAA Tournament, one of the most recent ones is the No. 1 overall seed, should they advance, get an extra day of rest heading into the Final Four. How important is that extra day, even if it means one less day between the second round and Sweet 16 preparation?

GENO AURIEMMA: I don't know. We've never had it, so I don't know what that feels like. I don't ever remember playing on Sunday. All of our games have generally been on Monday nights.

So right now I'm just hoping that we get an opportunity to find out.

Q. Going off your list of frustrations that you had about the tournament, you're not the first coach to sort of voice frustrations about regionals. Maybe the rims. You have a pretty big voice in the room. If they're not listening to you, they're not listening to a lot of people. Why do you feel like the NCAA isn't making these changes and what needs to change for coaches to be able to sort of spearhead these changes?

GENO AURIEMMA: Well, I think the first question you'd have to ask is why did they go from four to two. What was the rationale? If they can explain it legitimately and then prove that it works, then great. So what was the reason?

Two, I think the lack of coaches' input, the lack of I think -- and I don't mean like send a survey out to 375 schools and say what do you think. A survey of, like, 30 teams that have consistently played in regionals and Final Fours and how does this work and why?

So you go from four to two, and you go, let's give this a shot. So they contract it for how many years? Six, seven, eight? How many total? I don't know. Normally when people try something different -- you know, like the college football playoff, like they tried it. Hey, let's play on neutral sites the first round. Year two, nah, let's play on home campuses. Didn't take them long to change.

And one team played for the national championship on their home field. Imagine that. So I think a lot of times decisions are made; fine, prove that it's a legit reason why.

Give yourself an out if it doesn't work.

The NCAA sends representatives to schools, to our school every year, at the end of the tournament. What would you change? What do you think works? What do you think doesn't work? That's been going on for about eight or nine years, and nothing changes. It's always the same thing. So I think there's a frustration.

Hopefully I'm speaking for the other coaches. Some coaches might think I'm full of it. And this is not about UConn. I hope everybody understands that. This is not about us, because you know, we've managed to go to the Final Four and win national championships no matter where they're played, when they're played, what time they're played, whatever.

I think there is a level of frustration right now among the coaches that's higher than any time I've ever seen it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time today, Coach. We are joined by student-athletes Azzi Fudd and Sarah Strong. We'll open it up to questions.

Q. I'll just ask both of you just about the idea of playing Notre Dame again, what is going to be different this time about, do you think them, and what's different about you guys from that game in January?

AZZI FUDD: Yeah, we're both very different teams since the last time we played, so we have to go out not expecting the same outcome, the same game as last time. Fresh mindset. I think we just need to really pay attention to scout, watch film. We know they're a super talented team, and yeah.

SARAH STRONG: I'll say the same thing. I think they have more chemistry, have more time playing together and playing off each other. I feel like we're the same.

But just got to focus in on the scout and be ready for whatever Coach says.

Q. Coach was in here a moment ago; talked about the format that you guys are having to deal with, the early morning shoot-arounds, coming back to the arena, things like that. From a player's perspective, can you all both talk about how different this format is and how it does -- I know there's going to be no excuses for you guys for when you get on the court, but what it's like to have to do this tournament bracket so different than what you've done in the regular season?

AZZI FUDD: I would just say it's not ideal. Like the schedule waking up early to do media and then can't come

back to this arena until later, just little things like that.

But everyone's trying to figure that out right now. Every team is going through that.

Like you said, there's no excuse in that. So we'll figure it out. We're making it work, but it definitely isn't the most ideal setup.

SARAH STRONG: I mean, yeah, what she said.

Q. Since Notre Dame wants to create turnovers and create a high pace, you do as well, is the approach for this game to play more in the half court, slow the game down, and make them play as a set defense and kind of get what you want in the half court?

AZZI FUDD: I would say the keys for us is to continue to play our basketball, keep pushing, keep playing our fast pace, but to slow them down because they are similar, like you said. They like to play fast as well.

So slow them down, not let them get out in transition as much, but for us to keep getting steals, keep trying to get in transition. If we have to play more half court offense, half court defense, I thought we did a pretty good job last game of figuring that out. I have faith in us.

Q. Azzi, obviously there's a lot of history between Notre Dame and UConn in the NCAA Tournament, but this will be the first time of the nine that they're playing for a spot in the Final Four. It's always been in the Final Four. What do you know about the history of this thing? What is this rivalry like to you?

AZZI FUDD: I watched a little of the UConn-Notre Dame growing up, and like the visual that comes to mind, just intense, hustle plays, scrappy. Kind of like a bloodbath. Definitely every time we get to play them and then any time you're playing in March in Elite Eight trying to get to the Final Four, it's an honor, it's a privilege, and every team is going to play their heart out.

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