

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - South Dakota State vs Washington

Friday, March 20, 2026

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Schollmaier Arena

South Dakota State Jackrabbits

Coach Aaron Johnston

Madison Mathiowetz

Brooklyn Meyer

Ellie Colbeck

Media Conference

Washington 72, South Dakota 54

THE MODERATOR: Coach, whenever you're ready. The floor is yours.

AARON JOHNSTON: Well, congratulations to Washington. I thought they played really well, just kind of watching them throughout the year and then preparing for them today. Just saw a team that was really impressive with how they were able to play together. They share the ball really well. They have great spacing. They have a lot of different people that can make plays. They made it hard for us today. I think their length and physicality made some of our offensive things difficult so they deserve a lot of credit for how today went.

Absolutely proud of our team. I thought this was just another fantastic year for our program, doing a lot of really good things. We have three great seniors sitting next to me today. I'm just really honored that they've been Jackrabbits and helped us achieved so many of the things that they've achieved throughout their career. Really becoming rare to see young people stick and commit and this group has been fantastic for us and great leaders and great examples of what we'd like our program to continue to look like.

So I just want to congratulate them and thank them and really try to honor what they've done here at South Dakota State.



Q. Maddie, you guys started great, half a 13-3 lead and there was a time-out and things seemed to sort of change after that. What happened after that time-out?

MADISON MATHIOWETZ: Yeah, we came out hot in a sense and we hit some shots. Got some stops on defense and then I thought we kind of let up a little bit. They got some offensive boards. They cleaned up missed shots and we didn't box out and make those stops that we needed to and that allowed them to open up and go on a run from there.

Q. What did you think you guys did well to get off to that good start?

BROOKLYN MEYER: Kind of like what Maddie said, I felt like we were just rebounding well and taking good looks on offense and, yeah, just being aggressive on both sides.

Q. Did they do anything that you didn't expect defensively? Or were they just really good at what they wanted to do?

BROOKLYN MEYER: Yeah, I don't think they did anything that we weren't prepared for. I feel like they just played well and executed their game plan better than we did.

Q. Brooklyn, how tough was that defense from the inside. Seemed like every team you tried to go inside they had girls all over you. What did you notice from that change in the first five minutes from the rest of the game?

BROOKLYN MEYER: Yeah, I felt like in the first quarter we were running in transition more and just getting quicker looks, and, yeah, being more aggressive and taking more open shots so I feel like as it went on, we just got a little more stagnant, and then, yeah...

Q. This one is for any of you. It's hard to envision the last time that you're walking off the court and getting to have that standing ovation from the Jackrabbit fans that traveled and also get to hug some of your teammates and coaches. What did that moment mean to you guys and, yeah.



ELLIE COLBECK: I mean, being a senior and knowing that's your last time with that group of who you've been with -- I mean, I'm been with these two for four years and I've been with a lot of the other girls for whether it's just this first year or for two or three even. It's hard to walk off knowing that it's your last time playing a support that you've done for, I mean, 10, 15 years. It becomes a big part of your life and so it is hard, but, yeah.

I felt honored by our fans. They traveled really well for us, supported us. Our families have been there for us through everything, every high and low in careers and so just very thankful to have them with us here.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions for the student-athletes? You're good.

We'll now open the floor up for head coach.

Q. Aaron, how good were you feeling when it was 13-3?

AARON JOHNSTON: Well, I don't know that I was feeling good, but I get your point. We had a good start. You couldn't have asked for a better way to get the game going. You start having a sense of, okay, there are some things working for us.

We just gave up offensive rebounds, way too many offensive rebounds that were not contested ones, just kind of flat-footed staring at it while Washington is going to get it. So offensive rebounds hurt us, I think that got them going.

Then we started turning it over too much. Some of the simple plays and passes that we were making early to get those shots and get that lead kind of went away. As we get further into the game, they switched up a little bit of their ball screen coverage and that got us away from some of the things we did early.

They were fronting a lot inside, so it was not easy to get Brooklyn the ball where we would like to in her spot, so they did a really good job of getting her uncomfortable. We just didn't handle those things.

But they do a good job. Defensively, they're long, they're athletic, they're physical, so they don't make anything easy. And then the pace they play. They got some transitions, just got going on us. Ultimately, I think they're very good. I don't think we plaid to our potential or I don't think we played the way you have to play in a tournament line this to win a game, so that's tough, but Washington deserves a lot of credit. I thought they played very well to force us into

some tough spots.

Q. They were up 14 going into half. That had kind of taken the momentum from you but I think you cut it to 9 early in the third. Was there a sense of, hey, if we get a couple of baskets here, there's still a chance we can make a run?

AARON JOHNSTON: We started the game well defensively. Forced them into some jump shots. They missed them. We could rebound, that was good. Offense was good. But then the third quarter I thought our offense picked back up. We settled down, we stopped turning it over. We just made some simple plays that looked like we can get ourselves going offensively but then we just couldn't stop them. Then they started making some shots and we got a little bit out of our plan and just couldn't get through some screens the way we need to and all of a sudden it kind of stayed. As we're scoring, it just stayed and a couple more droughts and then they pulled away.

Yeah, I felt like we could make a run, absolutely. I just felt like we could be so much better offensively.

I thought our defense was good enough. We got in a little bit of foul trouble with Brooklyn. Zone wasn't great for us, but I thought we could be in there defensively but we just couldn't slow them down enough to catch up.

Q. I know they had the run to come back and tie it but second quarter you guys were tied and then they came out and hit three threes in a row. Was that the backbreaker there just to give them the breathing room they needed?

AARON JOHNSTON: Yeah, I think when we were in zone, again, a little bit of foul trouble. I don't think that helped our cause. All of a sudden they started making some easy, uncontested shots. They weren't really having to be on the move. They weren't having to move off of screens or handoffs like they were when we were matched up against them, so I think they got some momentum and confidence for them and then we had to dig ourselves out a little bit.

We just weren't good enough offensively in that second quarter. You can't have droughts like we had and so we have to find a way to play through those a little bit better but that's what cost us today, I would say.

Q. Coach, we talked a lot about the senior class and really the success that they've had, but the underclassmen that are potentially going to carry this program into the future, how impressed were you on how they played on this stage and really throughout the whole season?

AARON JOHNSTON: Yeah, I thought our younger group played well. I thought there were some times we can look back for all of them. And we shouldn't even say younger, but our less experienced is probably a better word because we have some juniors that are not experienced in roles that they were into. I thought they got to a good level this year. They had some ups and downs.

I guess I would say I really hope they learned as much as they could from our seniors. I really hope they watched Brooklyn, Maddie and Ellie approach every single day in practice, just how competitive those three are, how driven they are, how they take care of themselves, how they prepare for games. There's just so many lessons I hope that they learn from these seniors because they're exactly what we would want from seniors.

If they did, they have a chance to really take off and be good players in the future. If they didn't, they're going to have some more ups and downs just like they had this year. There's a lot of talent with those less experienced players but they have some habits to continue to form and develop and as I said, I just really hope they soaked up as much as they could from our three seniors because they would be pretty good ones to learn from.

Q. Just what kind of legacy do those three seniors leave on your program?

AARON JOHNSTON: It's hard to define because there's a couple of ways to do it. I think if you look at statistics and wins, championships, post-season, I'm not sure there's been a better four-year run, there's maybe been some equal to but I don't know that there's been a better four-year run.

It's not all been our three seniors. They were freshmen once and had some pretty good seniors in front of them, so they were part of some really good teams, but they kind of kept things going and then when it became their year as seniors, they really carried a big load for us this year. So you have the numbers, which are good, but I just keep going back to as people they're just unbelievable people. They've been great leaders throughout their time at SDSU. They want to know what they got to do to be great. They never offer excuses, even here today. They don't point the finger anywhere. They just take a lot of accountability and ownership for what happens in our program.

So to me, that's probably the more important legacy because that's the thing that carries on. Just because we won the last four years doesn't mean next year we will. There's going to be those other pieces, leadership pieces, that I hope they've instilled in some of our returners.

Q. You had a tremendous sendoff from the hotel today and also a great showing with fans. What does that mean to the program and mean to you?

AARON JOHNSTON: I think our fan support has been great all the time. I think for a minute that's ever come and played at SDSU, been to Brookings, played in our arena, experience what our fan base is is just blown away because they're elite. They're one of the best in the nation. They just are. And when we travel, like down here, or other places, we have people that are there supporting us too.

We appreciate them an awful lot. But, again, I think they do it because they love SDSU, they're Jackrabbits, but I think everything I just described about our people, I think they see that too and they're supporting a team but they're supporting the young women on our team so I think that means a lot to them and I know it means a lot to our players, so.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions for Coach?
Thanks, Coach.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports...