

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - South Dakota State vs UConn

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Storrs, Connecticut, USA

Gampel Pavilion

## UConn Huskies

## Coach Geno Auriemma

### Media Conference



time, so they're experienced. They know each other. They remind me of the Creighton team in our league where they run their stuff, they execute so well offensively and defensively.

I just think that playing them is a challenge in that you have to beat them. You can't go in expecting that they're going to make enough mistakes to lose. Teams like that are dangerous in the NCAA Tournament.

They can shoot. They're smart. They're disciplined. They're the kind of teams that everybody picks in their sleeper/upset specials. I'm not exactly pumped up about this, as you can tell.

**Q. Last year you had almost all your starters averaging 30 minutes a game. This year not so much. I know some of that is you're up big in conference (indiscernible). But how much does it help in practice to not have to wear players out and to help you change things if things aren't going the way you want? You have more options to bring off the bench.**

GENO AURIEMMA: I've gotten so used to not having a full complement of players that I had forgotten that coaching is hard. A lot of coaches have to make decisions on what's my lineup going to look like. I haven't had to make that decision in four years. I haven't had to sub in four years. So, I haven't had any pissed off players in four years. Everybody plays 40 minutes and they all love life.

So finding a right balance between getting players a lot of minutes, getting enough people in the rotation, I think we've managed to do a really good job with that.

Practices haven't changed much at all. They're still the same. But we're fortunate that we have two kids coming off the bench that started 33 or 35 games last year, and that's a luxury that not a lot of teams have. To have two kids who started in a Final Four game last year coming off the bench for us.

So it's benefited us. Less minutes means that when you are out there, you can be out there and you're fresher and you can do more. You don't have to pace yourself. We

**Q. Over the last however many years that South Dakota State has been on the rise a little bit. When did they sort of come on your radar, like, hey, this is a pretty good program, we could run into them some day?**

GENO AURIEMMA: I think anybody that's followed our sport certainly knows about their success. For me, it was as they were getting better and them beating teams that common sense would tell you, well, they're the underdog but they would always win.

Then they hit it at home when they invited us to come and play in their tournament. And I said no way in hell am I coming up there.

So I think everybody in women's basketball, and me personally, I have so much respect for them and the way they do it and the consistency that they do it. I don't care who you are, to do what they've done, it's just been really impressive to watch.

**Q. Specifically this year's team, now that you've maybe had a chance to watch them a little bit, what do you think they do well? And what do you think, maybe they could give you guys some problems tomorrow night?**

GENO AURIEMMA: The thing that, when you look at your bracket, I don't know how other coaches are, but I look at the bracket and I go, okay, I don't want to see anybody in our bracket that kind of reminds me of us a little bit. I want somebody that has no idea how we play or what we're trying to do and their style of play is completely different than ours.

Unfortunately, we didn't get that, because these guys, they're incredibly disciplined. They've been together a long



can change the game if need be.

For me, it's been pleasant to a point.

**Q. They've been talking about expanding the NCAA Tournament, but you look at the scores, notwithstanding South Dakota State yesterday, a lot of 20-, 30-, 40-point games. What are your thoughts, stay where they are or do they need to add more teams?**

GENO AURIEMMA: Expanding the tournament? Who doesn't look forward to March to watching six more teams, 4-12 in their league, playing for the national championship. I don't know how I would get through winter if I didn't have the opportunity to look forward to that.

I think the national championship tournament should be for teams that have an outstanding regular season, and they get rewarded for doing that.

How many of those teams should there be in the tournament? I've lived through, what, 32, 48 -- and every time you want to expand, somebody is jumping up and down going, yeah, that will get us in, and you've got other people that, this is bad for the sport.

It always ends upturning out okay. I can't imagine going back to 48 now. Adding four more, we got to 68. That was a terrible idea. It's not that bad an idea now. But there comes a point where enough is enough.

I understand there's people that say, well, it would be more games, more revenue, more money. Yeah, that's great as far as that's concerned. I just don't know that that's eventually going to help the teams that make the NCAA Tournament exciting -- the Cinderellas the upsets, where is that team from? That's what's made the NCAA Tournament what it is.

Unfortunately we don't have enough of that yet in women's basketball. I think you're going to see more really good second-round games than you used to.

And I don't know how it is on the men's side. Obviously it's a little more advanced. They're way ahead of us in terms of how long they've been doing it.

But as a general rule, if you're going to keep letting teams with losing records in their league into the tournament, then adding these teams will just mean there's more of them. I'm not really excited about watching any of that.

You had your chance. You had your chance. You just played 30-some games. You had your chance. Well, it's a real hard league. Well, don't be in that league.

**Q. The reward for playing well in a tournament and having institutional support, program support is you get to host. This year's no different. Huge crowds. That's obviously got to fuel your team. There's a maturity that they're just playing basketball, too. Talk a little bit about the opportunity to play in front of your home crowd and your home institution.**

GENO AURIEMMA: I go back and forth with that, too. Do you reward teams for having a great season? Every other sport, that's what they do. You have a great year, you play the regular season so you can have a home game.

Major League Baseball, the NFL, NBA, NHL, every sport you can imagine. NCAA, every sport except men's basketball. Even football is going to end up -- they're playing on home campuses.

It's a reward for the kind of season you have. Is it a competitive advantage? It can be. It can be. I've also said that, the examples I always use is, I think we've lost more Big East tournaments at home than we have on the road.

And St. John's men, which is a great story in college basketball, great story in college basketball this year, this was their fourth Big East championship. They've had the tournament at The Garden for 35 years.

So I do think it's a reward for the kind of season you have. But at the same time, if you have the best team, you're probably going to win regardless of where you play. Could there be upsets, whatever? Yeah, I'm sure there will be.

But right now that's where we are. That's where we are. A lot of times for your own kids, we just made the NCAA Tournament. Why does it feel like a regular-season game then? We're not on the road. No "Pomp and Circumstance." We're going to the NCAA Tournament, great send-off. You're playing at home. So, there's a benefit to it. And it's also just another game.

**Q. You talked about teams having losing records and stuff getting in, so you don't want to see that kind of thing in expansion. But in terms of like the mid-major programs like South Dakota State, you're playing, they had to win their tournament to get in. Do you feel like there's anything that could be changed so that those kind of programs have better chances to get in? Because obviously building a resumé is way harder for them.**

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah. Yeah. I always think that way harder and in some ways not as hard either, you know?

If that was going to be the case, hey, we want to expand by 32 more teams. 20 of those 32 are going to be mid-majors that had great years, let's let them in. Do you really think that's going to happen? No.

So if that was the case I'd be all for it. I'd be all for it.

I saw one interesting thing, I think it was Dom in The Hartford Courant. He made an interesting observation. He said, if they do expand they should have all the teams with a losing record that made the NCAA Tournament all have to play in the first round against each other. Get them the hell out of the way as fast as possible. And then let all the mid-majors go immediately to the second round. You know?

If it's about the money, they'll expand, for sure. If it's about competitive fairness and opportunity, like you're talking about, and they expand for those reasons as well, great, I'm all for it.

But you're in a 15-team league and you finished 11th, sorry, you're out.

**Q. Your birthday has been a quieter affair this year than it was last year. Did the players do anything to celebrate with you, or are you keeping it lower key this time around?**

GENO AURIEMMA: No, it's been pretty low key. I saw Paige nod her head when I said something. So that was a birthday gift to me, I think. So that was touching. But other than that, no, it's been pretty uneventful so far.

It would have been nicer if our guys won. That would have been really cool. But it wasn't meant to be.

**Q. Talk a little bit about the cultures of your team and South Dakota State here today, too. Only one transfer that's on your team. But the building of cultures, it's obviously, because of your tenures, but also the assistant staffs that build that culture that kids want to come, that kids want to stay and play. What makes a great culture for your program and/or South Dakota State?**

GENO AURIEMMA: Coach and I have been at the same school for a long time, right? He's been there, what, 25 -- 25. I think that creates a consistency. I think if you go to South Dakota State or you go to UConn, you know exactly what you're getting. You know what you're in store for. You know what the expectations are.

We tend to recruit similar-minded players. You look at his team, you look at our team, there's a connection between

the players. They all kind of have that same stuff. So it's hard for somebody who doesn't have that to make their way in. And then if somebody is in and doesn't have that stuff, they probably don't stay.

If you get it right most of the time, you end up with people staying all the time. Hard to bring people in.

Having said all that, the world's changing so much that who is to say there's a kid they're recruiting, we're recruiting that we really, really want, we don't get? Then a year later you have an opportunity to get them. And all of a sudden, you do it, which before you probably didn't have an opportunity to do that.

I just think we've been here long enough, their program and our program, that we get to be a little bit more selective. We can choose kind of who we want and have standards that we don't have to deviate from. I don't think either of us -- at least he's not in danger of losing a job if they don't win a national championship. I should trade places with him, maybe, I don't know. So I think we're in a pretty good spot. I know he's fortunate and I know I am.

**Q. You mentioned earlier how South Dakota State asked you guys to come and play in Brookings?**

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, we've got a great place to play. We'll give you a lot of money.

**Q. Would you have any interest now?**

GENO AURIEMMA: No. You never say never. We've been really good about taking our brand all over the country. So who's to say? You never know. You never know.

It's gotten harder the more conference games you keep adding every year. Like, we're adding a couple more, makes it harder to fit in all the non-conference stuff that you would like to do. But you never say never.

When they've got five freshmen in the starting lineup, and I know when that's happening, I'll be happy to go up there. Maybe when Sarah is a senior.

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