

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - UTSA vs UConn

Friday, March 20, 2026

Storrs, Connecticut, USA

Gampel Pavilion

UConn Huskies

Azzi Fudd

Sarah Strong

Geno Auriemma

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: At this time we are joined by University of Connecticut student-athletes Azzi Fudd and Sarah Strong.

Q. Can you just talk about how your on court partnership has grown from this point, from this year to last year?

SARAH STRONG: I would say it's grown a lot. I feel more comfortable playing around Azzi and playing alongside her. I know kind of where she likes the ball and what she likes to do with the and trying to make the right reads off of her. So I feel like we've gotten a lot better doing that.

AZZI FUDD: I agree. Exactly what she said. I think we've just gotten more comfortable playing together, playing off each other, knowing what the other person likes, our tendencies, when they're going to cut, where they're going to cut, when to get out of Sarah's way and let her do her thing. So it's been a lot of fun.

Q. Just your thoughts on the preparation coming in first round. How's it been looking in practice? What's the team's mood right now?

AZZI FUDD: This last -- has it been a week and a half since Big East -- has been really nice because we've gotten to focus on ourself, focus on fine tuning things, working on our offense, our defense, just the little things you don't necessarily get the time to work on midseason when you're constantly going from game to game and always focusing on scouts. So it gave us some time to really work on us and what we need to going into this postseason I think was really important.



THE MODERATOR: At this time we're joined by University of Connecticut head coach Geno Auriemma.

GENO AURIEMMA: I'm sure I'll answer or have something to explain when I start answering questions. Why don't we just start it.

Q. Coach, I was just kind of wondering what was it like seeing that Fennelly was going to be at the same site as you. Do you have any good stories? Obviously you guys go way, way back.

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, I think this is the third time that we've been in the same -- we may have been in the same bracket other times, I have no idea, but the third time where there's a direct connection between us playing from 1991 to 2001 to -- I'm sorry. 1998 to today, which for as many times as they've been in the NCAA Tournament, it's kind of not a lot for the success that they've had. We go back to when he was an assistant at Notre Dame, which there's a special place in heaven for him.

Yeah, we've known each other a long, long, long, long time. We played them last year. I guess you can't avoid matchups that could possibly happen between people that you know very well.

The stories that involve Bill and myself, those are probably best left for when we're both retired, but I have a lot of respect for him and his program and his family.

I coached against Karen when she was at Texas, then in the other game I recruited Felicia coming out of high school, and then we got Bill. So I guess if you stay around long enough, you get to experience all of it.

Q. Just talking to Blanca and Jana, roommates, international players. First of all, how are they as roommates would you say? What's the transition when you're coming from another country, this isn't your first language, how do you handle that and making sure they adapt to the student life first before you throw too much basketball stuff at them?



GENO AURIEMMA: Believe it or not, I think sometimes the international kids have an easier time adapting to college than the home grown ones. There seems to be a tremendous level of confidence, independence, self awareness for the most part, commitment. They're here for a reason. They're very driven, and their English is really, really good, better than good.

In Blanca's case, obviously she's got the Ecuador and Italy and now the U.S. I've never had an international kid come here and not be those things I just said. So it's a pleasure to have them around. The players enjoy their company. They bring a whole different perspective to the locker room. There's a certain maturity about them, having lived on their own for a long time, the independence that they have.

I think they bring an awful lot to a team that's quite different than what you get on a daily basis.

Q. Coach, obviously you're accustomed to hosting these first and second round games here. How do you keep your team's attention grounded in Storrs and not in Dallas or Phoenix, knowing this team has aspirations to win another championship?

GENO AURIEMMA: We were having the discussion this morning with some people about how much more difficult it is now to harness that concentration, that focus. There's two sides to this. The one side is hard to get them to concentrate on the same thing for 15 minutes, right?

When you think about it, even me, you, anybody, we're so -- I'm guessing that them thinking about Fort Worth or beyond probably only lasts about 30 seconds, and then they're on to something different. I'm hoping for that.

All we can do is just keep reminding them that whatever they think is in the future isn't going to happen if you don't take care of the present. That's all. And you have to hope that the players that have been there already can explain to them this is how it goes.

And maybe the more games they watch on TV and see how close some people do get knocked out -- I mean, there haven't been any women's games except for the first four games, but you saw some of the men's games last night, and you see what can happen in the NCAA Tournament.

Big shout out to the whole Marteli family down there in Richmond, God bless them. What they did last night was incredible. Yeah, I think that's a reminder to everybody.

Q. Last year the narrative was really about Paige's last

year, and obviously the media sort of clung onto that and had that ending that everyone sort of wanted to see. Do you feel like the pressure this year is less because there's less of that narrative surrounding one particular player, or is there just kind of a different pressure?

GENO AURIEMMA: Yeah, that's interesting too. Last year I think eventually the narrative was let's win one for Paige. Let's win one for Paige. It's Paige, Paige, Paige, Paige, Paige. Let's win this one for Paige. I think a lot of the other players, they hadn't won a National Championship either, none of them had. But we made it -- we, all of us collectively -- maybe naturally it became Paige. So that happens.

But in reality each of those players that played in that game that are back got to experience something for the very first time. This year the pressure is losing the National Player of the Year and having to go back and do the exact same thing. That's, I think, a part that gets sometimes glossed over. Don't worry about it.

I don't know about that. Somebody said would you rather have the pressure of getting Paige another one, or would you rather have the pressure of winning one without the best player in the country last year? In addition to the two players that we had that could be the best player in the country this year. Whoever knows? I would say I would take last year's pressure over this year's pressure.

But pressure and UConn go together. It's there every time. All I can do is -- and I do -- just address it for what it is and move on. I think the fact that they have to deal with that from the minute they step on campus, I think helps them during these times.

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