

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Syracuse vs Iowa State

Friday, March 20, 2026

Storrs, Connecticut, USA

Gampel Pavilion

Iowa State Cyclones

Audi Crooks

Addy Brown

Bill Fennelly

Media Conference



Q. Can you put a percentage with where you are at health-wise?

ADDY BROWN: Not really. I'm just going to go out there and do me and hoop.

Q. What's it like in those moments where you have those mismatches and it's something Audi can take advantage of, or you guys can?

ADDY BROWN: I mean, it's nice. Like Audi said, we've gotten some good mismatches in the paint the past couple years at the tournament. We'll try and take advantage of those wherever we find them, maybe in the paint and maybe a guard on the outside. Wherever it is, we'll try to take advantage of that, but it definitely helps when you have an advantage in one of those positions.

Q. I know there were some giant expectations going into the year. How much can March kind of help you guys fix or overcome what you maybe didn't accomplish this year?

ADDY BROWN: It's a fresh start. Like coming into it, we're 0-0. We're going to come into it with a fresh mindset. We were able to rest, like I said, which is really good mentally and physically for us. I think we're at a really good point from the team base.

We're going to forget about what happened early on in the season. We can't change it now. So we might as well focus on what's ahead of us, one game at a time. So that's what we're going to do. We're just going to go out there and compete and play our style of basketball. It's gotten us this far. So why change it now?

Q. Questions for both of y'all. March Madness is kind of a time where a lot of eyes are on the sport as a whole, and in a time period of really unprecedented growth for women's basketball, is that something you all think about as you're getting ready to play a game, just what this tournament could mean for the sport as a whole?

AUDI CROOKS: Absolutely. I think you look at the

THE MODERATOR: At this time, we're joined by Iowa State University student-athletes Audi Crooks and Addy Brown.

Q. Audi, you've had some big games in March in the past. Just what's been the key to that?

AUDI CROOKS: It's really just staying locked in, and our team be willing to execute our game plans and our matchups.

I feel like we've gotten kind of lucky the past couple Marches having the advantage in the paint, and my teammates did a great job of recognizing that. And that's where those headlines come from.

Q. What do you think of the potential matchup you're going to have tomorrow?

AUDI CROOKS: It's going to be a good one. We scouted a little bit. Freshman post player looks like she's got a lot of talent. We're just excited to get the ball rolling and see what happens out there.

Q. Addy, I'm just curious, how do you feel like the time off benefited you?

ADDY BROWN: It was nice to have a little extra time off. We still practiced really hard, though. I was able to get some extra shots up, which I wasn't really able to do coming back from my injury earlier on. So that was nice just to get those reps back and get my legs under me. So feeling good with where I am.



movement going on with women's sports in general, let alone women's basketball. It's an honor to be here. It's a great time to be a student-athlete. It's a great time to play basketball for our university.

I think, yeah, it's definitely something we think about and we consider. We want to go out there and do well on the biggest stage in basketball.

ADDY BROWN: We're happy to be here. This is a super cool arena with a lot of history behind it. We've been lucky to play in some really cool places the past two years at this tournament.

Even like Audi said, with the WNBA, the CBA negotiations, it's a great time to be a female in sports. We're fighting for what we deserve, and it's really cool to see. We're just blessed to be a little part of that and just represent the game the right way.

Q. Is there anything you can expand on as far as just playing at Gampel, the history here, the players maybe you grew up watching?

ADDY BROWN: Absolutely. We all grew up watching UConn, let's be real, as little kids. It's just super cool to be here. It's one of those full circle moments where it's like, okay, this is my dream to play at the collegiate level.

Even though it's for a different university, I'm still here postseason getting to play in the tournament, which a lot of people and teams want to be able to do. Just full circle, being grateful but also knowing we're not done yet.

Q. You said that it was a full circle moment and that you grew up watching UConn, but there are young girls watching you guys play and seeing the legacy that you guys have and the impressions. What do you say to the young female athlete that's are watching you guys saying that one day they too can make it?

AUDI CROOKS: Absolutely, I would tell them to 100 percent follow their dreams, make their own path, make their own road. You don't have to be like us. You can be like you. You can be a trailblazer and make your own path. It means a lot to have those little girls and little eyes on us, and we don't take that for granted.

So we use this opportunity to the best of our abilities and make the best impression we can.

ADDY BROWN: I would just say watch every game you can. You learn a lot just from watching the game. That was something I did a lot when I was little. Work as hard as you can. You can outwork anybody. You can go really

far. Just set big dreams and big goals for yourself. No one should be able to limit you to what you can and can't do.

Yeah, I think it's the best time of the year, so just enjoy it.

Q. The two of you kind of came into school together. Can you run me through the first time you met each other and just kind of recap how much of a blast it's been for the two of you at Iowa State?

AUDI CROOKS: First time we met, what was it on a visit?

ADDY BROWN: Yeah, official visit.

AUDI CROOKS: It was an official visit, and I never really -- we hadn't talked. We hadn't talked much at all. We started talking. I think we went to a football game. We were chitchatting. We were friends. We lived together our first year in a dorm, in a three-person dorm.

We've made a lot of fun memories since then and gotten to know each other very, very, very well. I feel like that kind of translates to our connection on the court. We're kind of known as the duo, and we take that with pride and wear that with pride. I think our friendship has blossomed on and off the court.

ADDY BROWN: I think it helps when you come in with somebody and you're able to kind of experience, the firsts with each other, the hard times, the good times. That's definitely helped, like Audi said, our connection on the court as well.

THE MODERATOR: At this time, we are joined by Iowa State University head coach Bill Fennelly.

BILL FENNELLY: First of all, it's a great honor to be a part of this event again. Our kids worked really, really hard this year to get here. We never take this for granted at all.

Excited about the challenge. Excited to finally play, watching everyone else play last night got us all excited. We're honored to be here.

One thing about coming here for sure, they know how to run this thing. They've done it forever. Very efficient, and we appreciate all the work of the people here at UConn, and we're ready to go to work.

Q. Kind of controlling their freshman post player, where does that rank among the top priorities for you guys?

BILL FENNELLY: Oh, it's by far at the top. She's different than what we've seen. We face a lot of good post players

this year, but she's unique. Plays away from the basket. Very skilled. Very aggressive kid.

The way they rebound the ball is a problem for us, but a skill set that combines not just an offensive factor, but she does some things defensively too. She's a shot blocker. You know when you have a player that can impact the game at both ends of the court, that's truly special. She's really good on tape, and I'm sure we'll have a lot of work to do to figure out what to do.

Q. Is the basketball fan in you at least interested or excited for that type of battle that will take place between her and Audi?

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, I think that's part of what this tournament is about. Our players that you hear about, read about, watch on TV, and all of a sudden they get to play against each other.

I think that's one of the great things about the NCAA Tournament. You're playing different teams, teams you don't see, and at the same time -- you kind of get caught up in that, but at the same time, it's a 5-on-5 game, and those are the things that we've tried to stress with our kids. Unless they change the rule tomorrow, I don't think Audi and Uche are going to play one-on-one against the crowd.

But again a talented team, a talented player. Felisha is someone I've known for a long time. Does a great job at Syracuse. She's an outstanding coach, and she's one of the better human beings I've met in this profession. So it's an honor to play against her team.

Q. Where do you think you are healthwise when it comes to Addy and just like in terms of it sounds like she's not going to be 100 percent at this time of year, but just where do you think you are with her and what she can do?

BILL FENNELLY: I don't think anyone's probably 100 percent at this time of the year. I think she's in a good spot. I think probably the thing with her is when you miss that much time, in the back of your mind, you're not completely ready to just go out and let it rip. Your conditioning is an issue.

You can do a lot of stuff on a bike and in a pool and all that stuff, but it's different running up-and-down a basketball court. She's in as good a spot as she could probably be in. We didn't even know if we'd have her at this point. So just to have her is a great thing, but she's ready to go.

Q. What's it like seeing Audi garner all of the All-American accolades?

BILL FENNELLY: It's great. She earned all of them. She had a tremendous year. I say this all the time. Any time anything positive happens for Iowa State, Audi Crooks plays basketball at Iowa State. It's great for our university. And I think for her it truly is a team thing.

You've heard me say it millions of times. We've never thrown the ball inbounds to Audi Crooks and let her dribble it up and shoot it. She probably wants to. But every basket she has made this year someone threw her the ball. So I think it's an award that she's earned by her play, but I think at the same time it's an award -- or it's honors that epitomize what the team is about. Hopefully that's a great sign for her and the group.

Q. EP good to go? Do you have any other health issues?

BILL FENNELLY: EP is going to try to practice today. So my guess is yes. I'll let you know for sure. She's okay to practice today, and she has not fully practiced yet. We'll see what happens here in about ten minutes.

Q. Everybody else?

BILL FENNELLY: Everyone else is good. No excuses. We're ready to go.

Q. Coach Auriemma recalled one of your first matchups, I think one of the first matchups in this building, the 1991 match when you were head coach at Toledo. He shared his memories of that game. Wondering if you have any memories of that game, and talk a little bit about your relationship with Coach Auriemma.

BILL FENNELLY: My recollections of that game are probably different than his, I would say. No, it was a phenomenal game in a lot of ways. I think it was the first year they went to the Final Four.

One thing I do remember is I think the Final Four was in New Orleans. Sorry, I'm getting old, and I forget stuff. We're walking in with our staff, and I kept walking, and literally I was sitting in my seat, and Geno was sitting on the court. I'm thinking, I should be sitting in that seat.

No, it was a great game. Obviously one that people in Toledo still talk about. A lot of my staff is with me that played there. Geno, he's been a really good friend of mine. Way, way, way back he was an assistant at Virginia and I was an assistant at Notre Dame. We crossed paths a lot there. We recruited a lot of the same kinds of kids.

Not just in women's basketball, he's truly one of the most influential people in sport, in my opinion. If you look at the greatest coaches of all time in any sport, he'd be on the Mt. Rushmore for sure, and you can pick your sport -- Bill Belichick, Phil Jackson, Geno, John Wooden. Whatever you want, he's there.

What he's done, not just for our sport, but for our game and for the people that he's connected to. What he did for USA basketball. But he's always been very gracious. I told my grandkids that there's not many people -- I know someone who goes by one name. There's not many people that can say that.

Over the years when I've had some struggles, inevitably I'll get a handwritten note from him. It's an honor to say that I know him and interact with him. It's been amazing to watch what he's done here.

Q. Kind of in a similar vein, what is it like for you to be back in this building, to bring a team back here to play in the tournament after so many years from that first one?

BILL FENNELLY: We were here, I don't know, eight years ago maybe and played Syracuse in this building. No, it's -- I think when you get to play in places like this, the history here, UConn women's basketball is such a big deal, and to play a great team like Syracuse, that's what this tournament is about.

I'd probably -- besides Christmas with my grandkids, Selection Sunday is the greatest day of the year for me. It's what I live for. It's on my practice card every morning or every day. So to be selected to represent your school -- our men are playing this afternoon. So we have both programs. It doesn't get much better.

The one thing I've tried to say to our players, there's a balance between you want to get in the NCAA Tournament, but you want to play in it and play well. You don't want to take it for granted, and sometimes that happens. I'm sure it happens here all the time. The rest of us don't live in that world.

You want them to enjoy everything about it, and the people here have been phenomenal, people in Hartford. It's an experience that they'll remember forever. I hope that our experience tomorrow is a little bit better than eight years ago. No, it's an honor to be here.

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