

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

Friday, March 20, 2026

Storrs, Connecticut, USA

Gampel Pavilion

**Syracuse Orange**

**Coach Felisha**

**Legette-Jack**

**Sophie Burrows**

**Laila Phelia**

Media Conference

MODERATOR: We are joined by Syracuse University Student-Athletes Sophie Burrows and Laila Phelia.

**Q. Sophie, you were in this building two years ago for your last NCAA Tournament. Now does it kind of feel like a full-circle moment to be back here?**

SOPHIE BURROWS: Yeah, for sure. I think as a freshman I didn't really know what to expect coming in. Coming from Australia, there's nothing kind of this large scale. I was a little bit like shocked, I guess. But now coming back, being able to have that experience and then helping my teammates out, it's definitely a full-circle moment.

**Q. Laila, for you, now on your third team. With your other two, made pretty deep runs in March Madness. How are you using that past experience playing on this stage to be kind of that leader in the locker room with a team that has several players that have on the stage for the first time?**

LAILA PHELIA: Yes, I feel like the biggest thing right now is just for us to have an understanding that we got 40 minutes left to play, and right now we're going to be facing different competition. It's going to be big for us to continue to play Syracuse women's basketball with the help from Sophie, because she does have that experience also. Just being able to work together and be able to take our teammates there.

**Q. This could be for either one of you. Now having a couple games without Dom in the lineup to figure out**



**what to do offensively, what schematic changes have you now made with her out of the lineup the last couple of games?**

LAILA PHELIA: The biggest thing right now is that unfortunately, yes, she won't be able to be out there with us, but we definitely have done a great job just honing into Syracuse women's basketball and just understanding what Coach Jack has in place for us and her plan for us. Just sticking to that, just going ahead and making this run. So with all the practices and stuff that we've had, we've been able to prepare.

**Q. With just the format of the season where your last game was now two weeks ago, how have you used that time to your benefit, whether that's resting up, or what are some things that you've been working on personally or as a team to get ready for this moment?**

SOPHIE BURROWS: Yeah, we definitely got some rest in there. I think it's a very long season, so having a few days off was definitely helpful for the bodies.

But I think the last few weeks in practice we've really just been focusing on us. It has been a long season, so we've had a lot of opportunity to kind of see what we need to work on. I think that was definitely shown in the ACC tournament.

So we've had time to work on ourselves and what we need to focus on, and then also scouting for Iowa State. Yeah, it's been a big focus on just us and what we need to work on, and I think we've done a really good job of that.

**Q. With Uche coming in this season, expectations, we weren't really sure how she's going to be, and then she's kind of exploded into this unbelievable player. Is this something you guys expected from the first day you saw her at practice?**

LAILA PHELIA: Definitely expected a lot from her with her experiences she had playing in Japan and everything. Feel like that was pretty big for this team. We are definitely overly proud and excited just to watch her growth and everything. She's a very special player.



MODERATOR: Thank you for your time. Good luck tomorrow.

We are now joined by Syracuse University Head Coach Felisha Legette-Jack. We will begin with an opening statement from Coach and then open it up to questions.

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: We are really excited about being here. Anytime that you get an opportunity to have a fourth season, it's always amazing. People think that it's summer, winter, spring or fall. In the Coach's world, it's pre-season, nonconference, conference and postseason.

Obviously last year we didn't have a fourth season and it kind of stuck with us for an entire year. Our team just went after it. We went recruiting and we got some fine players, got some focus, coaches. Now we're here in the fourth season and we could not be more happy.

But one thing is for certain, if I get a fourth season, I'm going to be at UConn. It's the only place I get to go. So I don't know how big the world really is or this country really is because this is where I always end up.

I think Geno wants me on his staff and he just don't know how to ask me. So we'll talk after this, Geno.

**Q. And Audi Crooks had mentioned that you were on the USA basketball selection committee one year when she tried out. Do you remember when that was, what stood out, and did she make that team?**

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: I just know that if indeed she was there, I was there and she was on the basketball court running up and down. I voted for her because she has always been an incredible athlete. I just think that -- I just love the way she just plays the game with joy. She's just always smiling and laughing, but she's vicious and tough, but yet she's having a lot of fun.

This game, you know, can take you so many places in life. It can help you through so many obstacles in your life. She truly understands what this game is all about.

So yes, I do remember her there, and I know that for certain I might have -- I voted for her. Did she make the team or not? I don't remember.

**Q. Do you remember how many years ago that was?**

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: No, because if I do, I have to tell my age. My husband's here, I haven't told him my age yet.

I don't remember. I definitely, I know we played her before in Vegas a couple years ago her freshman year. So time-wise, I'm so sorry, I don't recall a time.

**Q. You talked about being back at UConn again. What is it like for you playing here, and is there anything from that first experience a couple years ago that you think will help you guys going through it again this time?**

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: It's the same feeling for me. To be here and to be a part of one of 68 is always incredible. And I like to have fun just like, you know, Crooks always had fun every time I see her out there playing. It's important, it's impactful to our lives and I don't take it for granted.

So I joke there's other places we've been as well, and I have the same kind of giddiness at 59 years old because I know what this game brings. It brings opportunities for so many people, not just the players but for the assistant coaches and the trainers, including myself.

So this is just a special place. Winning always happens here, and you want to be a part of that magic, and if you schedule UConn and you actually have to play them on their home court on a normal basis, you're not going to be giddy and happy because you know the results of that outcome most of the time. So this situation here, you have an opportunity to have success but more important than anything, you have the opportunity to be here. We don't take it for granted.

**Q. Coach, the big matchup people are talking about in this game is Uche against Audi. What are you most looking forward to in seeing that matchup tomorrow?**

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: I'm looking forward to Iowa State versus Syracuse. I would say I don't have a go-to player. Some people may say they do. I do not. I don't ever want to have that.

I have a young lady on my team named Dyaisha Fair, and we sat together and she ended up being the third leading scorer in the history of the game. I never called her our go-to, nor did I see her do it. Or Stephanie Reid. I think it's important that my players understand where I'm coming from.

It's going to take our collective effort to beat a great team, Hall of Fame Coach like Iowa State. And if I concentrate on one person going up against one person, I think you take the beauty from the game. I think it's what makes women's basketball magical.

You guys have a great team here, but you can't say Fudd without saying Strong without saying Williams without saying all the rest of the incredible players here.

So I say the same thing about our team. We're growing. We're not at that capacity yet, but in my mind I just believe that if we stay to our family versus our team, we're going to have a fighting chance.

**Q. Coach, can you just talk about, you talk about the three seasons you've had so far within this season. Can you talk about how your team has grown during that time and what you worked on to improve for this final post-season?**

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: It started so early when we had to get everybody from all over the world. They didn't even get to Syracuse until the middle of June.

The first thing we did, we took them to the mecca of the world, which is New York City. We didn't know what we were going to get, eight new players, so many different coaches and so many changes that occurred at our university. So we just said, let's just take a trip.

Through that trip so many fun things occurred. They came together as sisters and laughed and figured out how to get through the city, navigate without -- I don't even know, I wouldn't say me because I'm terrible with directions even in Syracuse, I'm from there. But they did their thing, we did our thing and we met together.

Pre-season came and I just liked the mentality. There was no person left behind. They run the mile and the people that finished first were going around the track and pushed the other ones through the line. We said we should do some things like that in earlier years in Buffalo.

Then nonconference came and the cheering of our team for each other, for all success. The starters did great, the bench is incredibly loud. We sub people in. You don't know who's starting or not because it's incredibly loud. And I call that sisterhood that was created very early on their part. Just watching them grow into that and learning and making mistakes and raising their hand and womaning up, things of that nature. I just felt they had a fighting chance.

Then we got in our most incredibly tough conference in the ACC. I think the ACC has placed eight teams in the conference with their last, what, eight, 10 years? This year we placed nine not because we're cute, other than it's a tough conference. I didn't know where we stood because last year we were so poor, we weren't so good and we found a way to manage it and play and compete and win and learn and win and learn. Now we're in fourth season,

they brought me here and I'm hopeful that we're going to give our best effort to sustain as long as we can.

**Q. Coach, it's been two weeks since your last game, which is obviously great players wise, recovery and getting stuff in, but how do you try and avoid coming up flat when you're not playing on a consistent basis like you have during the season and then throughout the ACC tournament playing every single day?**

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: I don't know. I was in the MAC conference for 10 years and we bellied up right into the tournament. We played all the way up to that Saturday, Selection Sunday would come and we were off and running.

This time -- last time we were here I gave them time off. I said go away, because it was during our spring break and we had done the same thing. They left and went to spring break and hung out all over the country for four, five days. We got back into the gym and I'm like, we're going to run them, get them in shape. No matter what we did, they were already in shape. No one seemed like they were huffing and puffing. They text me pictures of themselves playing pickup, playing basketball in other states.

This is a team that wants greatness, and they're doing everything in their power to become. What's going to happen tomorrow at 5:30, I don't have an answer for that. I do know that we have done everything in our power to be ready and going to show the world our best effort.

**Q. Coach, with Dom not being in the lineup especially in the last couple of games for the ACC tournament, have you seen that offense kind of change in terms of those games in the ACC tournament, now preparation as you go to the NCAA Tournament?**

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Can't replace Dominique Darius. What she's done to get us here is nothing short of amazing. Didn't play at UCLA that much. Didn't play at all at USC. Coach there gave her an opportunity to redshirt and find another place she can call home, and after four years she got an opportunity to have the ball in her hand, the keys. I call it the keys to my Mercedes, which no one gets that, including my husband, and I gave them to her and she led us to a place of greatness.

Of course the other 14 followed her lead, that made it a little bit easier. So we go out and win the ACC tournament and we're doing a fantastic job. It's a really tough California team and she goes down. We think it's a concussion, think it's her knee and find out it's her hand.

So what we're going to do to try to replace her?



Collectively, we have three great guards. A fourth is going to play as well in that point position. Instead of having that ball being bounced up and down the floor like she likes to do, we're going to hopefully push it with the pass and pass it more. Everybody's got to be accountable to bringing the ball up the floor, not just one person. Usually we kind of give her the ball, everybody turns their backs and kind of run to their positions. Now everybody's got their head on a swivel trying to figure out if the guard that's bringing the ball up is going to need some help.

So it will be a collective effort for sure. She knows that she's missed. She's actually on a bus right now trying to get to us, to give us her love and conversation on the sideline. In order to respect what she did, what we have to do is just again, I'm going to say these words as long as I'm here, we've got to give her our best effort.

**Q. Just going back to have Selection Sunday back in Syracuse, you had that watch party with just such a great gathering there, and then your send-off yesterday. What does that support mean to you, and just how cool is that to see, and how proud are you to lead your alma mater back to this big stage?**

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: My mom always used to say you put your head down and tend to the sheep, and when you look up, the support's going to be there that you're going to need.

That's what we did. We went there. We had four players left that stayed when I got the job, and I got eight major kids to join me, and we ended up trying to have some success there, and the following year we did pretty well.

We had the selection show over at the same place. We had a group of people there, probably 50, 60. To go back the last Sunday and get there at 6:30, I see a line formed almost around the corner. I could have cried because you don't want to do it so people can come, you want to do it because you love it and you know that you gave your best effort.

But when your best effort says others want to see it again and again and again, I am humbled and grateful for the support Syracuse has given. Not just my program, but all programs. But ours in particular. See the walls almost have to be pushed outward for women's basketball. And to see our chancellor show up and our football coach shows up for a celebration that I know what we're doing. We're building something that was very familiar to me when I was a student-athlete, when we were winning bowl game after bowl game, and getting to the NCAA in women's basketball, and our lacrosse team was going to championship games and winning national championship

games. I believed a percolation is right now, right here. I saw that crowd and I said man, I never thought I would be back here, and it happened again. It's happening right now. I'm humbled and grateful.

And again, the Syracuse community, if you hear me, I want you to know you pushed us, you gave us our wings and we're going to fly forward and we're going to give you our best effort. Thank you so much for all you guys do for women's basketball.

