

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

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Storrs, Connecticut, USA

Gampel Pavilion

Iowa State Cyclones Coach Bill Fennelly Audi Crooks Jada Williams

Media Conference

Syracuse 72, Iowa State 63

THE MODERATOR: At this point, we welcome the Iowa State Cyclones to the stage. We are joined by head coach Bill Fennelly, along with student-athletes Audi Crooks and Jada Williams. We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach.

BILL FENNELLY: First of all, I want to thank everyone here at the University of Connecticut. Amazing effort to run this event. We appreciate that very much. Secondly, certainly want to congratulate Syracuse. Played a very, very good game. Felisha is an outstanding person and coach. Wish them nothing but the best.

I guess from my point, from a basketball standpoint, two quick points. Number one, I love our team. I love what they're about. I love the way they've represented Iowa State University to get to this point and in the game today, I've been doing this a long time, probably too long, and the game gets very simple. They made shots and we didn't. I know that's not an Earth-shattering analysis but that's the game. Turnovers were fairly even. Rebounds were even. We had two people make baskets. They had more. That's why they won the game.

THE MODERATOR: At this time, we will open it up for questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Guys, what happened in that second quarter when they really pulled away?

JADA WILLIAMS: They caught fire. They were finding a person in every single possession and they found holes in



our defense. I think if the second quarter goes different, the game goes different.

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah, Coach said it best. They hit shots. We didn't.

Q. When you look at your roster, you seem to be a very young team but you guys are one of the leaders of the team. Clearly it's a trying time right now because you just lost, but what are you telling your teammates as far as when you go in the locker room? I know they had, just like you had, a different outcome of how this game was going to end and now they're going to go home and you're going to have to restart again. What are you going to say to your team on the way back home?

JADA WILLIAMS: Confidence. I think right now it's less about basketball and more about the fact that we love each other and we're here for anybody that needs a shoulder to lean on. Shoot, I know I need one. Like I told Tommy, this team believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. Same with the coaching staff. They brought the old Jada back. This is the first time in college I have felt like myself, mentally, physically, all the things. Just making sure the younger girls know that it's going to be okay. I believe in every single person on our roster. I love them to death. I will be there for them regardless. I think right now it's just about being together.

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah.

Q. You said it's a lot about other stuff outside of basketball. Although you guys lost, can you guys reflect on the season and the positive things throughout the season and name one or two things that you guys enjoyed about this season with each other.

AUDI CROOKS: Absolutely. I'll start. I would say when we all got together this summer, it was really fun to see all the different personalities click. We had a lot of new people, some transfers that came in so it was cool to get to know everyone.



And then a moment from the season that really sticks out to me was the Texas Tech game. On the road, tough environment, an upset win from us and we needed some good news. Our season was up and down and when you talk about roller coasters, that was us. The lows were low but the highs were high and we stuck together through it all, so that's a fun memory that I look fondly on.

Q. Audi, they just kept going to you late in the game and you really picked up the momentum. What went into what you were doing there late in the game and getting this team back into the game?

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah, I was talking to Coach Steyer a little bit about it. It was kind of reminiscent of the Maryland game when we were down at half and needed a comeback and eventually we figured out that we could lob the ball in there and we were able to get some good passes in, credit the guards, credit this one right here. Once we figured that that was going to work, that's what we ran with late in the game.

Wasn't enough to dig us out of the hole that we all created for ourselves, but I think that was the mindset going into that.

Q. Audi, what did you see from your match-up, Uche?

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah. She was fun. She was a fun match-up. She kind of reminded me -- she's got like this Larry Bird-style jumper. I felt like if I had took another step forward, I was going to foul her and she would be on the floor. So super impressed with her. She was fan to trade bucket for bucket but then later in the fourth, she switched off of me on defense. So we were going at it for a little while and then that stopped. But credit Syracuse, great team. Great player. I'm excited to see her in the future, hopefully.

Q. Some of your teammates were talking about how promising still the future looks for this team. What do you guys think of that? Obviously in this day and age, there's so many questions about the future. Do both of you plan to be back here?

JADA WILLIAMS: Um, yeah. I haven't really thought about it, but I don't think that's a question.

AUDI CROOKS: Yeah, we're all still processing everything and just being there for each other right now is the priority. That's the main thing, making sure everybody is mentally okay through this tough time.

Q. March is Women's History Month so I would like to ask who are the women who inspired you in your

personal lives and you can talk about your inspiration during Women's History Month.

JADA WILLIAMS: I would definitely say my mom. She's a fighter. That's where I get it from. She's sacrificed her whole life so I could be sitting in front of you today, so my mom's here. I'm just waiting to go get that mom hug because I need it.

AUDI CROOKS: I would say the same, my mama. Been through a lot with her and she has been there for me and made sacrifices. All moms are superheroes to me. And I would also say my grandma. She's a woman of faith and has helped carry me through a lot of times when I didn't know if I could make it through. Shout out all the moms and grandmas.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions for the student-athletes? All right, thank you for your time.

We will now start questions for Coach.

Q. Coach, what went wrong during that second quarter where they just took off?

BILL FENNELLY: They had a kid make five threes, made ten all season. You've been around me enough. We went O-fer and they didn't and that's the game. We went 3-22 from the three-point line. Besides Jada and Audi, I think we were 4-29 from the field. We didn't turn the ball over much. We rebounded fine. That's basketball, and unfortunately for us, the people that we need to be that third or fourth scorer couldn't get it done tonight. That happens and they got that third and fourth scorer and we didn't.

Q. There's a senior on your team, Sydney Harris. I'm assuming this is her last year. I feel like being that she wasn't able to come up on this podium and I'm pretty sure you appreciate her as a player and a person, I figured since you have the floor, given the opportunity, you could speak about her and her last year and what she contributed to the team.

BILL FENNELLY: Syd was a great teammate. Came in, gave us two really good years. Loved by her teammates, by the coaches. Had a very positive impact. I think when we had senior night, the way our players reacted and the day they gave her speaks to what she meant to our team and what she did not just on the court but off the court. We were blessed to have her as part of our team. She'll always be a Cyclone for sure.

Q. You mentioned just the shooting disparity, 3-22 from beyond the arc. What kind of challenges was



Syracuse throwing at you defensively to make some of those looks difficult?

BILL FENNELLY: I would say their length is good. Their guards are long so I think there's a couple of types we had some looks that we kind of maybe overthought. They blocked the first three of the game in the corner and then you get a little gun shy a little bit.

But most of the other ones we had were, I think quickly we looked at the end, we had 18 of the 22 were fairly good looks, but you don't know what's in a kid's head after they had one belong. Again, they're long, they switched a little bit, but definitely would you describe an impact in the game for sure. You have to give them a lot of credit.

Q. Coach, how impressed with Izoje were you today?

BILL FENNELLY: Very impressed. Obviously we talked a lot about her going into the game, but live, she was good. Those are some tough shots. Mid-range jumpers. You got a hand in your face and she's got a good look at it. Her length. It's a unique skill set, and one that we had not seen. We knew that going into the game, but, no, very impressed. She made it look pretty easy and that's the a tough shot for a post player. Her length and her ability to get the ball above the defense with a nice touch around the rim, too. Very, very good player, very good player.

Q. Bill, Audi talked about the roller coaster this season, it being up and down, what was that like for you and do you feel like this team accomplished everything it could? How would you view this season?

BILL FENNELLY: I view things a lot different than most people. Media, fans, their view of the world is a little bit different than mine.

The two things I would say is we made the NCAA Tournament. I don't think that should be thought of as not a big deal. I think it is a big deal. I really thought our team -- you've heard me say this before. I think showing up to work is a skill. I really do. Our team showed up every day. We weren't great every day. Obviously, we had our ups and downs, winning and losing. But when you lose key players for a big part of the season injury-wise and EP and whatever, it's not an excuse. It is what it is. No one's going to feel sorry for you and I'm not asking for that.

I'm really proud of our team, I really am. I'm proud of the way they conducted themselves. I'm proud of the way they acted. We got off a charter flight here and the flight attendant ran me down as we're loading the bags and she said I have been doing this 26 years and I have never had a team be that gracious, that nice. Every single person on

the plane. And I know that doesn't mean anything to anybody in this room, but it does to me. It does to me. Those are the things that our kids will remember. Those are the things I hope we've taught them. They'll forget this game but they won't forget the impact they've made on other people.

I know that's a boring coach-speak answer, but that's how I feel. I guess I got the microphone, so I can say whatever I want to say. Better be careful, my wife is probably -- oh, good, she's not in here. Oh, yeah, she is. Dammit. Sorry, babe.

Q. Coach Legette-Jack talked about how great of a person you are, so it was kind of bittersweet. She was happy she won but it was against you. It kind of wasn't too great about that.

BILL FENNELLY: She doesn't feel that bad, I promise you. (Laughter) Nice of her to say, though.

Q. If you could just speak to -- she talked about how great of a coach you are and how great of a person you are and why she respects to. If you can talk to me about Coach Jack and what do you see in her?

BILL FENNELLY: Yeah, Coach Jack, Felisha, obviously she loves Syracuse and Syracuse is truly blessed to have her because, again, the way she conducts herself. Her team plays the game the right way. She represents a great university. She represents a university that has a great history of basketball and I think that the fans, the administration need to understand how lucky they have to have her.

I said in the press conference the other day I think she's an outstanding coach but she is truly -- in a sport where now there's not as many quality human beings in our profession, I'll put it that way, she is at the top of the list. She does it right. She's someone that I've known for a long, long time. We've exchanged text messages during the season.

When people say what do you do for a living and I say I'm a basketball coach, I'm honored to say I'm a basketball coach and I have the same job as Felisha. I think that's something that as I look at my career, I'm blessed to have met so many wonderful people and she's certainly one of those.

Q. Coach, I know you said you have been doing this for a long time. You have had a lot of players and rosters come and go. You mentioned everything with the flight attendance coming off the plane. What's something about this group specifically of players that

you're going to miss and you're also going to look back on and really remember that helps stand this roster out from some of the others you have had over the years?

BILL FENNELLY: We talk a lot at our place about the Iowa State way of doing things. Our players, be the newness of some of them, I think the biggest thing was just the way they conducted themselves every single day. It was a very connected group.

I tell people all the time I coach basketball, I'm not a drama teacher. I don't handle that very well. This group was great. Like I said, we didn't play great every day. We didn't practice great every day, but it was a fun group to manage. I love being around them. I loved the way they did things. I think our fans got really connected to them on and off the court the way they showed themselves as human beings and student-athletes and representatives of our school, so very proud of that.

Sad we don't get to practice tomorrow, but I'm very proud of the way they did the things that, as a coach, as a parent, as a grandparent, that I ask people to do and they did that from June on.

Q. In the past you've said you're often a person that wonders what-if. When it comes to the season, you'd mentioned some of the injuries. Are you going to think back at this season and kind of wonder if you had been healthy for better stretches?

BILL FENNELLY: Nah. That's -- I would say a few years ago I would. I'm not at that stage of my life and my bride would tell me it's wasted energy. (Tearfully) I love my job and it's hard. This job has gotten so hard. So hard. But I'm lucky that I have a really good group of kids that did it the right way. We didn't win enough games, I get it. That's my fault, but I get to do it with my family, my grandkids. So, no, no what-ifs for me. As long as those guys are here with me, no what-ifs. Sorry.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time, Coach.

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