

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round -Syracuse vs UConn

Sunday, March 22, 2026

Storrs, Connecticut, USA

Gampel Pavilion

Syracuse Orange

Coach Felisha

Legette-Jack

Journey Thompson

Sophie Burrows

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by student-athletes Sophie Burrows and Journey Thompson.

Q. Sophie, what do you remember about the last time you played here in the NCAA Tournament, and how much did that performance give you confidence coming into here this year, with how well you guys played then?

SOPHIE BURROWS: I definitely remember just the atmosphere. I'd never played on with that big of a crowd or anything like that. So that definitely stood out to me.

But, I mean, I think I just came into that game knowing I had to play my role. And I think that kind of understanding brought me into the next season, and this season, obviously, just being able to play my role, whatever that is. So that's definitely my goal coming into this game.

At the end of the day, it's another basketball game. And having that understanding to just go in and play our game and play Syracuse women's basketball, we have the confidence. It doesn't matter what anyone else is thinking, we have the confidence in the locker room that we need to go in and play our game. Yeah, I think that's just the energy going into the game right now.

Q. Can you talk about hitting six 3s in that game? You kind of glossed over that like it didn't happen, and it was a huge, huge part of why you guys were so competitive?



SOPHIE BURROWS: I think having Dyaisha Fair there on the court, she drew so much defensive pressure that those 3s were wide open a lot of the time because she drew all the players. I think a lot of that kind of credit goes to her.

But again that was my role going into that game, shoot wide open 3s, shoot my shot. And I mean that's what I did.

Q. Sophie, we saw in practice on Friday and then yesterday during the game you had your left thumb wrapped on your form hand. What's that been like? Talk me through that. What's the adjustment been trying to shoot with that on and trying to grip the ball and everything during game time?

SOPHIE BURROWS: Yeah, I mean, it's a pretty chunky wrap, it does get in the way a little bit. But grabbing rebounds and stuff can be a little bit tough.

I think a few times in the Iowa State game I tried to take a left-handed layup which probably wasn't my best move. I've had it on for a few weeks now. I'm getting used to it shooting a little bit now.

So, yeah, it's a little annoying, but you can play through it.

Q. Sophie, going back to that first game you had against UConn, what are some of the similarities and the differences you see between that program from a few years ago to the team they are now?

SOPHIE BURROWS: Yeah, I think they have a lot of returning players, so kind of that core group is still stuck together. And I mean, they have an amazing coaching staff that has kind of -- they're a very disciplined team. They run their sets really well. I don't think any of that has changed.

But I think our team has changed a lot. So the way that we address the game and kind of come into the game will be quite different.

But at the end of the day, as I said, it's just another basketball game. So we won't be changing too much.



Q. I spoke with Laila and she said you have nothing to lose versus UConn, a team that's in the spotlight, they're undefeated. How do you think that mindset can give you the advantage tomorrow?

SOPHIE BURROWS: I mean, obviously UConn is an amazing program. They have a lot of history of winning and playing well, good basketball. But, I mean, no one really expects us to do a whole lot in this game except the people in the locker room. And I think that's all that matters.

We have that confidence within one another to come out and play Syracuse women's basketball. And I think at the end of the day that's all that matters.

It doesn't really matter what anyone outside that locker room is saying. It's what we believe on the inside the locker room. I think we have that confidence to come in and play well.

Q. Journey, after being on such a high after winning that game yesterday, what's the preparation process like to quickly shift your focus to playing the No. 1 team in the country and having one day to get ready for that?

JOURNEY THOMPSON: Well, we don't linger too long on losses or wins. In college basketball you don't really have time to do that. So I think we came in with film. We knew what kind of game we're going to play. They're just another team.

Obviously they're the number one team in the country. But we're going to play our game and go out there and show them what Syracuse women's basketball is.

Q. I know you just said you don't like to linger on past games, but what do you think you did so well against Iowa State that you can take into your game against UConn?

SOPHIE BURROWS: I think we played a really good team game. I think that's one of the best things about our team is anyone can go off at any time. Olivia Schmitt came in hit those five 3s that gave us the lead. Uche was consistent throughout the whole game. Same with Laila. Journey came in and gave us 15 rebounds.

That's the play that we have. Like, we have 15 deep. So that's the kind of basketball that we want to play, and I think if we're able to bring that into the next game, then I think we're going to put in a really good game.

Q. On a personal note, in a game like yesterday, where

first half shot's aren't falling for you, is that a mental thing, where what do you do to keep pushing to trust yourself to ultimately make two big 3s and some clutch free throws down the stretch?

SOPHIE BURROWS: That trust definitely comes from my teammates and my coaches. That confidence from them never wavers. Me and Journey kind of got into it in the middle of the game because she was -- I'm always the one who is always telling her to keep shooting, but she really returned that favor.

And I kind of -- she could see that my confidence was dropping, so she came and she was like, keep shooting. I don't care what happens, you're the best shooter. Keep shooting, that kind of thing. That confidence from my teammates really is what helps me in those moments, for sure.

Q. You guys mentioned you watched film over the past day, and I'm sure you've seen UConn play a lot this year. What do they do that's so effective in being the No. 1 team in the country?

SOPHIE BURROWS: They just are a very disciplined team. They have a structure and they really stick to it. They find the open shots and they -- they keep playing. Doesn't matter whether it's the first shot kind of in the possession or whether it's three seconds to go. They find the right shot and they wait until the defense falls asleep. That's when they make you pay.

I think we need to match that. Play good defense for 30 seconds. And then offensively transition and find the lapses in their defense.

Q. Journey, can you talk about Sophie's importance to the team? Your best 3-point shooter, second in assists, second in steals, second in rebounding. What does she mean to you guys?

JOURNEY THOMPSON: I think Sophie's definitely one of the core, if not the core, factors on our team. I think it's easy to look at the statistical stuff, like you mentioned, the points and whatnot. But it really comes down to even the little stuff. Like, defensively she knows our system better than anyone else on the court. She knows where everyone's supposed to be during a play.

A lot of times in the game she'll be pointing, telling us where to go, repeating stuff, because I can't hear anything on the court, so she's got to tell me what we're running and that kind of stuff.

Just keeping us steady, I think, is a really big thing that she



... when all is said, we're done.®

does. Just being a leader. I think that everyone knows that if anything happens, we can lean on Sophie. So, I think it's hard to kind of put into words how important she is to the team.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Syracuse coach Felisha Legette-Jack.

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: I gave a directive to my manager. She said she's good at kidnapping people. I asked her to kidnap Geno and Sarah. And I looked at her and I said, did you follow through with the directive I gave you? And she said, no. So they're going to be there.

What a fun time it is, right? What a fun time to be part of something that's exciting, the postseason. We ask for four seasons, and most time you only get three. Last year we only had three. It was a very tough year.

And we put our head down and we tend to the sheep and we got some really good pieces to our program.

And we have a way of still believing that this crazy lady that (indiscernible) recruit, and we were selected I think 13th in the ACC. And not sure what they're going to do. I love that. I love the underdog mentality.

I love the way our team's come together. I love my prayers to my God. And I am so celebrated every time I wake up in the morning to be able to be a part of something that is so enjoyable that's called basketball.

And what I hope that you see in our team, moving forward on Monday, is celebration of freedom to become something so exciting through this game.

And that's what, I think, brings us to a gifted season like this and a gifted season a couple years ago and gifted players like Stephanie Reid that played for me at Buffalo and Cierra Dillard and Dyaisha Fair, to be the third-leading scorer in the history of the program.

There's nothing special about me. There's nothing special about our team. The only thing that happens that's different for our people is that we come together, we lock in as a family, and we say, you know what? It's just us against the world. And that's what it's probably going to feel like, probably on Monday.

There's going to be winning and learning, but it's never going to be a defeat, because one thing we don't believe in that no score is going to justify the work we put in for this postseason. And no story is going to tell what our story is going to be for our tomorrows.

Q. I was wondering, you said about Uche that she has the capability to be the next Paige Bueckers, the next Hannah Hidalgo; she has that star power. When did you know that for the first time? And, also, having her do what she did yesterday against Audi in her NCAA debut and getting you to that next game, how much did that even underscore what you already thought of her talent?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: A'Ja Wilson is more like her than the other two little guards. But we played against A'Ja Wilson when she was at South Carolina and the gift that she brought to the sport, a power forward that runs the floor, that can bring the ball up, that can shoot the 3-ball if she needs to -- but she's so good at the 18-foot shot, turnaround jump shot. That's the film that we showed her that we think that she can emulate at the next level.

What made me think that is just, I remember Dawn and A'ja's relationship and the communication that they carried and how A'ja was such an incredible human being to everybody. She was bigger than life, right?

Then she would play the game at another level and you've got to play against her. And it's like, crap, I like her too much.

That's Uche. Uche is a bigger-than-life person. Her story is a little more pronounced than someone from America. Came from Nigeria. Lived in Japan for seven years. Has been here for a year now. Hasn't seen her mom in eight years, and she's still smiling and loving life. And the first person to say, good morning, Coach Jack, in this high-pitched voice of, let's get ready to love this day. And that's what makes her so special. That makes her different than a lot of people.

The only people that I think that can be considered to be like her is her. I just think that her gift of being able to run the floor, dance with anybody, will face the challenge and never see the person as, oh, I'm just afraid of her. She doesn't even know that. She's, like, let's just go learn how I can become better. And let's write down notes on what we need to do to be better to play somebody like her.

I've never had a kid like this. When I had Dyaisha Fair, I've never had a kid that's 5'4" that's bigger than anybody on the court. Now I've got Uche. And God just keeps blessing me with amazing people. I'm just the one that he chose to witness this kind of blessing.

Q. How much has Sophie Burrows matured her game and everything since she was that kid who came in here and made six 3s two years ago?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: We hope that she's that same kid that can go for eight or 18 3s. But she's a kid that waited her turn. She understood the assignment. You come in and play with a Georgia Woolley and Dyaisha Fair and Alaina Rice. You have to wait your turn. And if that time comes where your light has to shine, give me the ball and I'll let you see what I can do as well.

Now, she understands that everyone's looking at her. Everyone on her team, all of her coaches. What do you think? How do you feel? What's our situation? We ask her her opinion all the time even through her struggles.

It was really neat that yesterday I think she shot two or three air balls in the first half. You could see her eyes about to drop. One of her roommates came up to her and said, you know, most people come up with, hang in there, you got this, we love you, win it for the Gipper. Her roommate said, don't be a hypocrite. What do you mean? Don't do not shoot the shot. Excuse the double negative. But that's what you're here to do. Now the teammates are pouring into her.

So the difference between the first year to now, she's led us to this point. She got to a point where she's about to surrender to the bad play. And her teammates just filled her up really quickly. And she became what we needed her to be for the third and fourth quarter.

Q. Geno mentioned the other day that he recruited you coming out of high school. You obviously played against him as a player at Syracuse. Just curious what you remember about him in the recruiting process, playing against him as a player. And what's it like for you now to be kind of be on the other side of things as a coach?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Well, I remember everything. I remember how my high school coach just thought he was the most handsome guy she ever saw in her life. She said, you have to be recruited by Virginia. Yeah, the coach there, she's amazing -- no, no, her assistant is involved with this, right? I'm, like, I don't know what's going on. She goes, he's so cute.

And he was the guy that came and met with Ms. Bees (phonetic), my high school coach. We said yes to go visit Virginia and Debbie Ryan was the head coach. I don't think I've seen her one time during the whole visit. It was Geno taking me around.

It just didn't feel right to leave and go to that color orange. I've got Syracuse right in my backyard. So I decided to stay home. And that same year was kind of a blessing because he ended up taking a job here. So that's how long

we've known each other.

They were really, really good at the beginning, but Syracuse used to beat them all the time for the first couple of years. And they ended up getting this kid in his third year and the rest is history. They went to a Final Four and never stopped going to the Final Four.

And one thing I love about Geno, he's a loyal human being. Once you lock in to believing in you and what you bring, you can mess up a couple times, he'll still forgive you, because his loyalty is real.

I think that I fit the category where he thinks that I'm a pretty cool person where he can help me, and he will.

Q. How important is it to throw that first punch tomorrow and try and weather the waves that UConn throws at you?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: We don't know what they're going to throw at us, but we're willing to throw the first punch, sure, because it's our story. It's not personal. It's not us being in attack mode against UConn or the next game or the next game. It's about our young people are playing for something bigger than basketball.

We're playing for the mirror, we're playing for our faith, we're playing for our families and we're playing for ourselves. And we won't back down to anybody, not because we're this tough, broody team. It's because our story matters to us more than anything else in this world.

So we understand what we're facing. Let's not pretend that the big elephant isn't in the room. The best team in college basketball right now, who hasn't lost a game, who has held people to 40 points -- and if you look at all that, then you go into the gym that they play in for the third, fourth, five years since I got accepted into this NCAA Tournament -- we won't bring that up -- you see all the accolades that they face.

But you know I think God told them in that meeting that we're the people for the assignment and we're going to give our best effort and we're not going to be afraid and we're going to learn lessons and we're going to face some difficulties.

But what you're going to find is Syracuse women's basketball, we stand true to what we talk about all the time: We believe that we're going to give our best effort from the beginning to the end, and we'll see it through.

Q. Not to bring it up, but you guys were here two years ago, as you know --

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Here you go. I knew Maggie was going to say -- I love it.

Q. KK and Ash were freshmen starters then for UConn, now junior starters. How have you seen their growth the last few years? Last year they were coming off the bench. This year they're back in the starting lineup.

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: I'll tell you, whoever is on that team, which is every single person on that team is amazing. They've all got accolades that's larger than all my players put together. It doesn't take a little coach like me to say how gifted they are.

I think that the improvement is ridiculous. I think they lost one or two games last year, and no one has even come close to beating them this year. That's the pace of the game they play. That's the credit to the hall of fame coach they have and the hall of fame staff. Let's keep that understanding. Their staff is incredible. They can still probably play and beat a college team right now, the staff. Chris, she has to be the coach.

But I think that's a tough question because that's not a fair question because I don't think that I'm prepared to say how gifted a team that hasn't lost yet and their individual players are, because it takes a team -- and Geno says the same thing -- I think they're special together.

You take them out of that category and put them in somewhere else maybe they wouldn't be so special. But because they are at UConn, they're incredible, all of them.

Q. Looking back on the film from yesterday, what were some things that you picked up on that that you think you could possibly improve on?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: I think (indiscernible) shoot it. She shoots it well in practice and now she's shooting it well in the game. I think the celebration that we have for each other, when we do something great, is not something that's staged.

These 15 players love each other. Dom hasn't played a minute. She had surgery on Wednesday. She was the biggest impact to the team, because when it got tight in the second half, it was her voice that was in the huddle prior to the coaches coming there.

I just think it's going to take our family versus any team any day. And I just love what Uche -- Uche doesn't even understand what she's dealing with right now. I think by the summer she's going to look back and say, oh, my God,

what was that all about? She just wants to play. You say, stay at the high post, stay high, go down low, I'll go down low, go down, bring the ball up. Okay.

I think she's just an easy person to coach, and we put Madi out there to start the game off, and I thought she did a pretty good job, but we took her out. But when we put her in that slot to play the 2, I thought you saw more gifts from her.

I saw the leadership from Laila and Sophie as captains out there just emerge to another level. It's just those types of things. Not the play, not a shot. It's just the oneness that we've had that we've created from the beginning.

Q. It goes without saying that playing UConn at a neutral court is one thing. But playing them at Gampel another level.

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: I would like that we'd finally played them on a neutral court. Please.

Q. That leads into my question, because something noteworthy that Sophie said when asked what she remembers from playing here two years ago, was just the environment, something she hadn't ever experienced before. So considering the fact that the rest of your team has never experienced a packed Gampel Pavilion against UConn, is there anything that differs in terms of the preparation, getting them ready for that? Are you pumping in crowd noise to practice? Is there anything there?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: No, I think they've just got to find out and celebrate this.

I'll tell you one thing, I would go to Alaska for this type of environment. What Geno and his staff have created is something every single coach and team should experience.

This is what women's basketball -- what we want Syracuse to look like. We've grown our attendance 300 percent. It's not even close to this. And I don't think Syracuse people really understand what I'm talking about when I say this is still not enough. It's still not enough!

We need more. That community, I was there when they were averaging 35,000 fans, 30,000 fans. I know that you can come. I know that you're willing to come. But you see "girl," "women," and you don't think it's good enough. Come and see this.

I'm hoping they watch it on TV, win, lose, whatever, they see us go up against this and they become more excited

about, are you interested in just winning, Syracuse? Come on, support us and be there through the foundation of the growth that we're going to have -- that's going to happen.

But this is the most magical situation. Even yesterday's environment was, like, sensational. And tomorrow, Monday, it's going to be another level because it's going to be filled and it's going to be about 3 million people watching it on television. It's what I pray for, when I decided that, yeah, mom, I think I'm going to be a coach, and the laughter in my house was like, you better get a real job. And here I am, 37 years later.

I'm excited. I'm so proud of this environment and Michigan State's environment, what Ole Miss is doing over there, and women's basketball is right now, and I said that, I think, two years ago.

It's even more impactful as we celebrate what just transpired in the WNBA and the numbers, how they've changed. Not close to being enough, but it's showing that we're willing to see athletes and not just women.

Q. Just looking at UConn's lineup, you said you watched film, but specifically to Sarah Strong who you haven't seen at the college level yet, what does she do that's so effective and how can you stop her tomorrow?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: You can't stop her. She's good. We couldn't stop Crooks. I'm not a miracle worker. I just really am not. I'm never going to say I'm that kind of coach that can create that. Because no one stopped her in 33 games, I think, they played.

I just want to be able to contain her a little bit. I want to be able to contain those shooters a little bit. I want to throw different fun things out there defensively to see if indeed that sticks. And if it sticks, we'll stay with it. If it doesn't, we'll change it, and we'll make it fun and we'll win some things. We're going to learn some things, and we're going to have this game become what it is, a basketball game.

And we're going to continue to wear this necklace that I got from Uche on my birthday. It's the tree of life. What it means is we'll stick together and love on each other and we'll have just at least tonight and tomorrow night to celebrate the fact that Syracuse women's basketball sustained all their players and all their coaches for the entire year, and to that we give the glory to God.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

