

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Montana State vs Ohio State

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Value City Arena

## Ohio State Buckeyes

## Cotie McMahon

## Taylor Thierry

## Ajae Petty

Media Conference



game early with an arm injury. How are you feeling after that?

COTIE McMAHON: Feeling good. Feeling better.

**Q. This is for either you or Taylor. You guys have had success coming in first round. You guys have always won the first round. How do you guys do it being a higher seed making sure that you guys aren't looking too far ahead in this tournament?**

TAYLOR THIERRY: Honestly just going through the game with a chip on our shoulder. Anything can happen, so I don't think we want to take any of these opportunities for granted.

I just think we're going to come in and execute our game plan, like I keep saying. Doesn't matter who we are playing as long. As we are just executing what we're supposed to do, I think we'll be fine.

**Q. This is for any of you. I guess what are the specific takeaways that you had when looking at Montana State on tape? What I guess stands out from what you have seen?**

COTIE McMAHON: I would say they are a little taller as far as everybody on the court. I would say, what, they have one or two guards that are probably 5'10"-ish, but the rest of them are pretty tall.

They have really good defensive pressure. They play in the passing lanes really well. Offense they're not stagnant at all. They move a lot. So I think for us just staying poised on defense and making sure we're not taking a break, we're not resting because they move really well off the ball and on the ball.

Then as far as our offense, making sure that we execute and just do what we do, making the extra pass when needed. Hopefully we can get going in transition. I think we would thrive against them to kind of just push the ball because they do press, yeah.

**Q. This is for any of you, but I suppose more Ajae and**

THE MODERATOR: We'll open the floor up for questions.

**Q. Question for Cotie and Taylor. Can you compare last year the team came in as the No. 2 seed. You were kind of flying into the postseason. Can you compare what it's like going into the postseason this year compared to last year?**

TAYLOR THIERRY: Yeah, I mean, just compared to last year with our seeding, I feel like whether we're a 1 seed or 4 seed, it doesn't matter. All our opponents are going to be tough. I think we're just going to go in with just a mindset to execute our game plan and just play our game and not worry about outside factors.

**Q. Just how confident the team was last season winning the Big Ten title and this year kind of having to fight in games where it's the end of the season. Would you rather be in a position where you are coming in after having to fight in games or coming in where you are like, okay, we obviously can do this?**

COTIE McMAHON: I mean, kind of both. I would rather come in having to kind of fight with the games we've had too and come in having that under our belt. Also, it comes with how our energy is from the start.

I would say Big Ten Tournament, first game our energy was great. Second game, dead, even during warmups. So I just feel like as long as we find that energy and that fight from everyone and not just one, two people, I mean, we can really do anything.

**Q. Cotie, I first want to ask, obviously you left that**



**Taylor. How much pressure I guess and urgency is there for March Madness when this could be the end of the season and end of the career and how do you sort of keep those emotions in check so that you guys can still play your best?**

AJAE PETTY: I don't think it's really pressure. I would say you kind of view it as an opportunity. You try to go out and play your hardest every time you are stepping on the floor. So if you view it as pressure, then it's going to make you nervous. So I just try not to view it that way and try to think of it like thanking God that I get another chance to go out and play the game that I love to play, so...

TAYLOR THIERRY: It's basically the same thing. Try not to think about it that way. Just viewing it as another opportunity to come out and compete with my teammates.

**Q. Ajae, let me ask you about the end of the year. Your double-double string has been pretty impressive. What has clicked? What has changed? Does some of that come from Katie and working with her? Where do you get the fuel, I guess, to do what you have done lately?**

AJAE PETTY: I think it's just consistency. Obviously first coming in I didn't perform the way that I've wanted to perform, and it hasn't been as consistent as I would like it to be, but I think a lot of it has been my faith, like relying on God and trusting in his timing.

It's a lot of times where I feel like I work extremely hard, I'm always here working out outside of practice, and I work with all of the coaches. Not just Katie. I work with Ryan. I work with JP. I work with Carla. I try to work and pick all of their brains because they all have different things that they can provide me with.

So I would just say the biggest thing for me has just been relying a lot on my faith. When things have been really hard for me, I just continue to try to think, like, hey, you can learn from whatever is going on and just continue to try to do what I know how to do because obviously coming in, like, last year, I averaged a double-double where I was at, all of those different things. So just knowing that I have it inside of me and not just looking at the challenges that I've faced.

**Q. For Cotie, you have mentioned before that this team needs to be more consistent, especially on the defensive end. What do you think it takes here now that it's tournament time for you all to find that consistency on a game-to-game basis?**

COTIE McMAHON: Just fight. I mean, the want to lock in

on defense. I don't know. I feel like hopefully going into this tournament, we find a different notch and everybody is on the same page and everybody realizes that this could be our last game for the season.

But I feel like that goes with anything. I feel like we have the capability to play defense. We can be a good defensive team when we all are on the same page and all have a fight to want to play defense. I feel like that's just where we lack. That's not just on the defensive end either.

**Q. Do you feel like this team has ever really played its best basketball this year, or is there a different level you all need to get to if you are going to make a run in this tournament?**

COTIE McMAHON: Honestly, I don't think there was a game where we've played our best basketball. So that could be a bad thing, but I look at it as kind of a good thing. We have this last opportunity to kind of prove to people that we are the Ohio State team that has been on the radar for the past couple of years. I mean, we still have a couple of more games to prove it. It's if we choose to prove it or not.

**Q. For Ajae and Taylor, same question that Cotie got earlier. What stands out most about Montana State?**

AJAE PETTY: I would just say their versatility, just being able to sit down and defend. Yeah, that would be the biggest thing. Just to build on also what Cotie was saying, they move well without the ball. They are big. That's the main thing.

TAYLOR THIERRY: Yeah, they can shoot the ball well. I think they're ranked fourth in the NCAA for their points off turnovers, so I feel like we do a pretty good job of scoring off the turnovers, but they do an even better job, so I think we just have to take care of the ball on offense and just make sure we're executing to the best of our ability.

**Q. For any of you, both teams are top ten in steals. What do you do especially well to get so many steals and turnovers?**

COTIE McMAHON: Definitely our 22. I feel like that's where it kind of starts. That's like our energizer, I would say. Especially when it's going well.

Then just, you know, coming out of 22 and playing half court defense after that. 22 can mess a lot of people's heads up, especially just because of the pressure. So going back into half court, everybody's brains are kind of frantic on offense. That just opens the door for us to kind of get steals, yeah.

**Q. For Cotie and Taylor, undefeated at home this year, and this weekend you have an opportunity with a win over Montana State to play two games here to advance. Just how important is it for home court advantage for you guys? You've worked so hard to get it. Just the thought last year that you weren't able to maintain it against Duke in the tournament, that's the last game you guys have lost here. So just your thought about that.**

COTIE McMAHON: I think especially for me and TT, it's not something that we want to feel again. Not being able to win both games.

It definitely hurt us a lot, I would say. Having the chance to host an NCAA Tournament, it's crazy. It's not every day where a lot of teams get to do what we do and have the opportunity to do what we do. So I would just say hopefully everybody really understands how big and how serious this is. And, too, we kind of tell them, it didn't feel good, so we kind of don't want to repeat that same incident we did last year.

TAYLOR THIERRY: Yeah, basically the same thing. I think it just also goes to the credit for how good our fans are. I think they play a crucial role in the success that we've had here. We obviously just appreciate their support.

Like Cotie said, it definitely stung last year not being able to win the two games out here. We're just not trying to repeat that, so we're going in with a different mindset this year.

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