

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

Friday, March 20, 2026

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Schottenstein Center

Howard Bison

Coach Ty Grace

Zennia Thomas

Zoe Stewart

Nile Miller

Media Conference



was that we worked way too hard to fall short. And I think that just kind of represents how it's been from Portugal all the way to now.

We've just worked really, really hard. There's been ups and downs and there's been hardships, there's been some easy points. But we really stringed like a good season together. We've worked really hard.

We've had conversations helping out our chemistry, different things like that. We've really bonded together to have the best season possible.

Q. Zennia, I was talking to Kennedy Cambridge earlier, the two of you at Kentucky. And she said, I quote, you were the funniest person she's ever met. Could you just talk about time playing with Kennedy, the two of you at Kentucky? And were you kind of excited to see that you were going to be playing against her here?

ZENNIA THOMAS: Yeah, I know a couple of their players on the roster, Kennedy Cambridge, Chance Gray, Seini Henry.

I got a chance to see Jaloni Cambridge a little bit, but I didn't really know her that well; I just knew her through Kennedy. Just being able to kind of reunite with them is very exciting. (Lost audio).

But as far as Kennedy goes, I just know she's a very talented player, defensively incredible, like, best defender I've seen so far.

It's just going to be a great experience. I'm definitely ready to go out there and play with them -- or play against them.

Q. Can you talk about your scout, what you're seeing with Ohio State and getting prepared for the match-up tomorrow?

ZOE STEWART: One of the biggest things that they talked about is transition. They really get out and run. We've got to stop them early, and just kind of slow them down, just because you've got Cambridge up there, she's just really quick.

THE MODERATOR: Today with us we have the student-athletes from Howard, Nile Miller, Zennia Thomas and Zoe Stewart. Open the floor for questions.

Q. Zennia, what is it like coming back to the state of Ohio and getting to play in the NCAA Tournament?

ZENNIA THOMAS: I mean, it's very exciting. I get to play in front of my family on a big stage. So, I mean, I couldn't be more than happy to do it here in Ohio.

Q. How many family members do you think you'll have at tomorrow's game?

ZENNIA THOMAS: It will definitely be a family reunion, I can say that.

Q. For those that will get to see on you the national stage, maybe for the first time, how would you describe your game defensively?

NILE MILLER: I would probably say long and lengthy. How else can I describe it? Just anticipating passes, anticipating next dribble moves.

Q. What has this experience been like this season, with this team coming all the way from your trip to Portugal, to now being at this stage, what does this mean to you and to the program?

ZOE STEWART: I think one of the things that we drilled into each other, especially during our championship game,



And they're kicking it out for 3s, and they can knock it down. They shoot really well from the field. So just being able to slow them down and trying to maintain that transition.

NILE MILLER: She said it all, basically. Just very fast-paced team.

Q. Can you ladies talk about what this means for women's basketball and HBCU women's basketball in particular, for you to be a 14 seed and representing Howard and HBCUs on this stage?

ZENNIA THOMAS: Honestly, it's just kind of a trailblazing moment. I mean, we have Southern, who was a 16 seed, but they also made it to the tournament and got their first win as well.

So just being able to kind of set the standard for HBCUs, especially on the women's side, just to show that we are able to compete at a high level.

And it also gives us an opportunity to show, you know, future talents that are looking to play maybe at a HBCU or, not too sure where they want to go, that HBCUs can be an option if they want to compete.

ZOE STEWART: I think I just have to agree with the same thing. Just putting them on the map and saying we can compete. And I think we believe and we know we can compete with anybody.

So hopefully giving that aspiration to other people and letting them know that too and letting the world know it.

Q. Zoe, it's your first year with the program. What was your biggest adjustment?

ZOE STEWART: I think my biggest adjustment was trying to step into a leadership role, being older, and then just also having a very new team and coming into a new team and then trying to be a leader. It was definitely hard.

Just getting to know everybody, learning how people respond to things, how people -- how everybody handles things differently. You have to adapt to that and get to know that. So that was probably one of my biggest challenges.

But I mean, they made everything pretty easy. I'm not going to lie. I really haven't struggled much. I've loved my time. The coaches and the players. So I think that's just one of my biggest struggles and stepping stones, for sure.

Q. Obviously been a big week for Howard with what the men have done. Could you share how this brought the community together and just how hyped you all were to kind of experience it and see how it meant to run through the tournament. Anybody can answer.

ZOE STEWART: I think it's been really exciting. One of the I think fun moments and just really seeing that community come together was when we won at the MEAC Tournament and they did too, and being able to celebrate on the court together.

And just seeing the community on social media and different things like that all rallying together, making posts. We've definitely been supporting each other, watching the games and stuff.

It's just been really exciting and really fun to see that happening. We've been able to see the support, too, within the community for both men's and women's. So just a really exciting moment, for sure.

Q. You guys had a pretty competitive non-conference schedule, going to Purdue, Syracuse. You had Fairfield at home, went to Virginia. How much do you think that experience can carry through going into the tournament?

ZENNIA THOMAS: I mean, we are definitely battle-tested, I would say. There was a lot of hardships and adversity that came with some of those games. Some of them we were able to come out on top.

But honestly, just being able to experience that kind of gave us the confidence that we needed to go into the conference and be able to dominate, go up against Norfolk State, which is a very good team, but we faced them off three times, two times in the regular season, and then eventually in the championship.

But just being able to have the confidence that we need to perform at a high level. And then to come into this type of game and be ready to perform and just showcase that we're here to compete, we're here to play, and we're not going to lie down for anyone.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by coach Ty Grace.

Q. I asked the young ladies earlier, but can you talk a little bit about what this season has meant in terms of kind of setting the standard for women's basketball, and particularly HBCU basketball?

TY GRACE: Well, that's a great question. I think every season we go into it looking to set some type of precedent

or some type of standard. As soon as I stepped foot on campus in 2015, I wanted to set the standard. And I think we've done a great job.

As far as HBCU basketball, you couldn't ask for a more competitive place. These young ladies compete, like Z said. Every day they are stepping up, ready to compete against the best of the best.

We don't go into games saying we have to be the best HBCU basketball every day. We just know that we represent that and we're proud to wear Howard on our chest.

We go out to compete as young women, just like everybody else in this tournament. So I'm just proud to be a part of that. And I'm proud to be at an HBCU.

Q. Been here 11 years now at Howard. What should fans know about Bison basketball that they might not know yet?

TY GRACE: I hope they know a lot, if they've been paying attention. We have some of the best and the brightest. I mean, these young ladies are phenomenal, not only the court -- because that's what people see every day -- but as individuals, they're just as impressive.

I mean, we have a team GPA over 3.3. We have young ladies that want to be sports agents, that want to be psychologist. So I think a lot of times we forget about the human part of who they are, and that's equally as important.

So I just want to know that they're watching people that are getting ready to go out into the world and really put their mark on it. And I'm just proud to coach them.

Q. How would you describe the brand of basketball that your teams have played with in your time at Howard?

TY GRACE: I think we've tried to play a brand of basketball that's been disciplined, that's been fun to watch. We've had a lot of different type of talent. We're pretty versatile. And I try to have that every season, to have somebody or some players that can add a different spark to our team.

We've had three players of the year, three rookies of the year, all-conference players. So to be able to attract those players is important to me. I hope when people watch, they see that.

Q. You mentioned rookie of the year, you've got one

on the team this year in Ariella Henigan. Six freshmen overall on your team this year. For Ariella, what does she bring to the program and how mature maybe beyond her freshman year is she?

TY GRACE: If you watch her, she's about as competitive as anybody on the planet. I mean, she's a very hard-nosed kid out of Chicago.

She has certainly grown from the time she stepped on campus in June until now. I don't call her a freshman anymore, even though she'll say that. She's matured and just grew.

She 's had some struggles and different -- we head-butted a little bit. But she listened and she made sure that she paid attention to the things that we were asking her to do. And she tries to do that each time she steps out onto the floor.

So I'm just glad to see her flourish and be the player who I know she can be.

Q. Ohio State is known for their press. Just how are you guys approaching the press and getting past it?

TY GRACE: That's a great question. So we've seen pressure all year. We just have to have composure and patience.

We know that they're not going to stop. They're going to be relentless. Obviously we practice and work on it. So our players just have to have the confidence to go against it.

It's not something we haven't seen before -- maybe amplified, obviously, on this stage. But we prepared as best we can, and hopefully our players are going to be ready.

Q. Ohio State has an All-American in Jaloni Cambridge. How have you guys prepared to face her this week?

TY GRACE: She's super talented. I mean she's one of the best players in the country. As we all say, they put their shorts on the same way. They bleed the same blood. So we're going to go out there and compete to the best of our ability. We have respect for every team. But we fear no one.

Q. Zennia was talking about how the team faced some adversity earlier on in this season then you go on this 14-game run to the end of the season. How have you seen this team grow through that adversity on the

court from the beginning of the season to now playing in the NCAA Tournament?

TY GRACE: I think the biggest thing that I've seen with this team is that they show up for one another. Obviously having nine new players and five freshmen, five returners and then four of those others are transfers, you kind of try to figure out who one another is, right? So they did that. They did a great job of that.

It started in Portugal, the international trip that we took. But as the season went on, they just kept believing in one another. They kept trusting in each other and they trusted the process. They respected each other's games. Because they didn't know each other, they never played together before. So that part started to come together pretty quickly.

Then when we faced a really tough schedule, and we won some games, they started to really, really believe. And I think that kind of has just been put together as the season went on.

We had some injuries here and there, and they fought through. Some of these kids are playing with some nagging injuries, but they fought through everything. I'm just proud they were able to get to this moment.

Q. Building on that, I know you have talked about the depth of this team and the growth of that. Just kind of explain why that depth is an advantage?

TY GRACE: Well, if you watch some of our games this year, we've had some moments where we didn't start so great. So to be able to have the ability to put some fresh legs in and to not lose anything, it was extremely beneficial to us.

And when we go and recruit young ladies, we don't recruit people to come sit on the bench. We recruit ladies to come compete for playing time. So the ones that we have on this team can certainly do that.

I think we have players that can certainly start on other teams. So the benefit of that, I'm very happy about. Each time that I get to put those people out on the floor, they show up and they show me the reason why they're here and that they came to play.

So I couldn't be more happy to have that type of team that can challenge another team's bench or another's team -- even their starters. So really happy about that.

Q. What has this week meant for Howard University in overall scheme of things, just with the men and the

women, you all being able to celebrate together? How special was that?

TY GRACE: It was very special. It was historic. I mean, you just have such a sense of pride to watch two teams that you get to spend time with, because people from the outside don't -- maybe not the Bison Brother Podcast -- are not there every day in every practice, in the locker room. So to be able to see that work that was put in all year is phenomenal.

I mean, the way we have represented the university, so proud of the men's team and Coach Blakeney and my team and how they actually support each other. It's just been a really big deal and I'm just really, really happy to be a part of it.

Q. Secondly, you've been at Howard for a minute coaching. In what ways have you seen the respect around HBCU women's basketball maybe enhanced? Obviously you all are a 14 seed. Norfolk was 13 last year. Two years ago Jackson was a 14, and beyond that, now Southern has won a couple of games. You HBCU women are beginning to win a little bit more against Power Four schools. In what ways have you seen a respect level grow?

TY GRACE: I mean, if you know, you know. If you pay attention to basketball, if you watch basketball, if you're a fan of women's basketball, then you know that each year, these teams, especially HBCUs, are trying to take things to another level. We are trying to do the things that every school is trying to do to get to the tournament, to win championships.

So just to see that it has -- I don't think it's a surprise. I think that it's something that we know was going to happen, that all the coaches that coached those programs are trying to do to make a wider reach for their programs and their teams.

So I'm just trying to be a part of the collective and hopefully we have set a standard and that we're going to continue to do that moving forward.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

