

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

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Schottenstein Center

Howard Bison

Coach Ty Grace

Ariella Henigan

Zennia Thomas

Media Conference



for us. I know it's early, but in a word or two, how do you sum up the season?

ARIELLA HENIGAN: Amazing. I've had a great experience. But Z, with Z and Nile and Jen, all of those seniors, yeah, amazing. I've had a wonderful time. I couldn't ask for more being in the championships, being able to come to the NCAA Tournament as a freshman. So I'm very grateful for this opportunity and I'm just here, I'm here in the moment.

ZENNIA THOMAS: Yeah, I would say this season has been an absolute blessing. I think I knocked off every goal that I wanted to hit on my list that I had from the beginning of the season. To be able to do it with this team, Coach Ty, a great coaching staff, it just meant everything to me. I'm very proud of where we are right now.

Q. Zennia, what was it like playing close to home but also facing Kennedy on opposing teams?

ZENNIA THOMAS: I would say it was fun. I got to play in front of a bunch of my family and friends and some old coaches. It was just a moment to remember I think for everybody.

And then to be playing against Kennedy, I didn't think that would ever happen. I didn't think I would see some of my old teammates again. It was very exciting. I'm very happy to have finished my career here.

Q. Ladies, I have two questions if that's OK. My first question more so for Z to start. What made this locker room different from others that you've been a part of?

ZENNIA THOMAS: I would just say our mentality and our willingness to compete for each other. I think our team camaraderie was way different from last year. That Portugal trip that we had in the summer definitely brought us all together. We got to know each other and we just developed our relationships with each other quickly off the court.

And when it came to being on the court, because we were so close, we decided to play for each other even times that

Ohio State 75, Howard 54

MODERATOR: We'll open the floor for questions from the student-athletes, please.

Q. For Ariella and Zennia, about a four-minute gap in there in the second quarter. What happened there and what did you think of their press at that point, because other than that, fairly even.

ZENNIA THOMAS: I think we just had a few mental lapses in that moment. Just needed to come together and kind of like settle down and figure everything out. Of course, like in the moment of the game, in the heat of everything, we didn't really get to that. But just moving forward, like I hope that's a learning lesson for everybody that returns next year to be able to come together in those moments and kind of settle everything down. Especially Ari being a point guard, just taking control of the situation and being able to get the team together so that we are not like discombobulated in those moments.

ARIELLA HENIGAN: Yeah, just like she said. We got riled up, I think, after we seen the first two or three steals. We didn't try to slow their pace down, we just kept trying to push the tempo and push it up. We should have slowed down in that moment.

Again, like she said, in the heat of the moment, it's a little hard, harder to make those adjustments. Moving forward, we're going to try harder to make those adjustments in those times in the game.

Q. For both ladies, this has been an historic season



were tough, just being selfless and giving ourselves for one another.

Q. And then my second question for both of you, what did it mean to you to represent Howard in this moment in program history? It's been an amazing week for you all, but what did it mean to represent Howard this week for the two of you?

ARIELLA HENIGAN: It meant a lot to me. Being at an HBCU and putting them on the map, it's not common that you see an HBCU at the NCAA Tournament in the first round. Just being here and being able to put my school on the map and just know that Howard is somebody to keep an eye on.

ZENNIA THOMAS: Yeah, I would agree. Coming in as a 14 seed, you don't see that a lot, especially from an HBCU. But just giving it all that we had in order to show that we can compete at this level, and hopefully everybody carries that into next season so that we can come back and do it again.

MODERATOR: Student-athletes, we'll go ahead and excuse you at this time. Thank you so much.

Q. Coach, can you just talk a little bit about what this experience meant for you and the team this year, but also how it can impact the future for the Bison program?

TY GRACE: So every year you set goals about what you want the season to look like, and it always ends up -- one of the main goals is winning a championship.

So we set those goals early on. When I say repetitive, it was something that each team every year had set out. And so as we were going into the season and we were getting closer and closer to that goal, I started to realize, one, how special this team was and how fortunate I've been to coach all the other teams that I've had.

So this season has meant a lot to me. I go into each one not knowing what to expect, but when I get into the season and things start to happen, I'm just proud every day of how we evolved and how we get to this moment like today.

So it's just been a phenomenal year. I couldn't have asked for a better group of young ladies, a better staff, a better administration. I just try to embrace every moment that I get a chance to be -- an opportunity to be a part of.

Yeah, it's just been -- it's just been really special.

Q. Coach, congratulations on a wonderful season.

TY GRACE: Thank you.

Q. When you first made the tournament in 2022, 16 seed, we know the result. Coming in this year, you were a 14 seed, we saw what happened today. Can you describe how far your program has come from 2022, that first appearance, to where they are right now?

TY GRACE: It's come very far. Like I said, when I took the job in 2015, I came in to turn the program around and make it into what you see today, and continue to do more. So in '22, nobody expected that, right? Like everybody was like, oh, it's great, yeah, we made it. But from that day, that's been the print, the print that we wanted to put in the sand. We wanted to make sure that we're going to show up here each year and that's what we've been striving for.

We came up short obviously sometimes, but in '22 that definitely kind of set the trend of what we wanted it to look like, and here we are again, five years later. Couldn't ask for a better opportunity.

Q. Second quarter, what did you think of their press, and what can you do when you start to see things sort of snowball like that? Is there anything you really can do other than try to calm them?

TY GRACE: Well, we practice. You know, we've seen presses probably not as (inaudible) as their press but we've seen a press and we go against it. I think we kind of lost our composure.

People say I could have called timeouts. I haven't called timeouts all year, even when we've been pressed. It's not part of my strategy unless it gets completely out of control. They went on an 8-0 run.

But my team knows what to do, and I have to trust them and I have to trust that they're going to make good decisions. When they don't, I have to live with that because I didn't call a timeout.

But it wasn't something we were unfamiliar with. It wasn't a moment that we had never seen before. So I was hoping that they had made an adjustment a little quicker than they did. And then we didn't score, so obviously that's going to look very lopsided at that point.

Q. Where did their quickness rank in terms of teams you played in terms of the hands and just the steals? They had I think six in a four-minute span.

TY GRACE: I think it was probably one player that ranked pretty high. Jaloni is just, she's so effective in the press,



and her sister is just as good. So it's pretty high. I mean, we play some pretty good teams, but probably not that press the way they do, so I would say it's pretty high.

Q. Coach, you have a lot of young players, a lot of young talented players coming back. How does this experience, how do you hope they segue into a strong season for next year?

TY GRACE: I hope it definitely gives them some thought about what it should look like for them in that they want to be a part of this every year. That's why I tried to get some of those younger players in at the end of the game, so they can be on this stage. So they can see what it feels like to be on that floor, to play against that caliber type of talent. I think it's very important that they are a part of this, and that they're going to be the future of our program. I hope they embrace that experience.

Q. Quick followup to that, Coach. You're losing an amazing senior like Z. How do you hope what you've done and accomplished this season helps open up doors and players for the team for next year?

TY GRACE: Z is a special player. I don't know if we lose her too quickly, but we'll see. I think she might have something left for us.

Anytime that we recruit a player, I'm recruiting them as young women first and I want them to come into this program to know that we're going to take care of them and they're going to have an opportunity to get a great degree from Howard University and they're going to have an opportunity to win.

So once we start that trend and we have players like Z and we have players like Ari that are doing those things on a regular basis, I think it just makes it so much easier for us to attract those type of players, and I want to continue to do that, and I think that we've been doing it the right way so far.

MODERATOR: We would like to thank you for your time, Coach.

TY GRACE: Thank you.