

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Fairfield vs Notre Dame

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Schottenstein Center

Notre Dame Fighting Irish Niele Ivey

Hannah Hidalgo

Cassandre Prosper

Media Conference

Notre Dame - 79, Fairfield - 60

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

NIELE IVEY: Just really excited about this win. I thought it was a dominant win. I thought we made a statement today defensively forcing 19 turnovers. This team was ready. Ready to perform. Again, this is just -- I've enjoyed coaching this team. They're so fun to work with. I'm really proud of where we are right now. I'm proud of the way that we're playing. I think every time we step on the floor we're getting better and better. Led by these two, Hannah had almost a quadruple double, just fantastic, getting downhill, her speed. I think she broke -- I didn't say this earlier but you broke the record of the most steals in program history in an NCAA tournament. So one of the reasons why she's first team All-American. She's just phenomenal on both ends of the floor.

And Cass, just leading us had 17 points, but had to play her at the 5, so versatile, does whatever we need to help us win. It was a collective effort. Iyana came out and shot the ball really well, 4-7 from the three-point line. Had some foul trouble but we still found a way. But just the energy, the resilience, the fight, the belief and the trust that we have in each other is phenomenal. I'm super grateful to get to the second round and excited to play Ohio State on Monday.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Questions for the student-athletes, please.



Q. Hannah, this was a team that was very prolific with their three-point shooting. Can you speak to the team's, the tone that the team wanted to set defensively?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, well, we knew that going in that that was really their whole game plan was to shoot threes. And they do a great job of making threes also. I think they're top in the country with three-points made. So we set a goal before the game started that how many threes we were going to allow them to make, because it's not like we were going to hold-em to zero threes the whole game. And that was two. And then we were able to do that. So we were really locked in on kind of shutting them down, running them off the line and being intentional with making them score two points instead of three.

Q. Cass, can you speak to just the versatility that you've brought all season but you really looked really comfortable as an inside player now. Can you talk about just your ability and your willingness to take on different roles.

CASSANDRE PROSPER: Yeah, I think I love my team and I think it was a great opportunity this year to play inside more and develop my game in that sense. I knew that I was going to get mismatches inside, whichever way that I was going to be used. So taking advantage of that and then making sure that I can help my teammates whenever I need to do that.

Q. Hannah, how much have you watched Jaloni Cambridge from Ohio State, and how much are you looking forward to that head-to-head matchup with her on Monday?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, well I watched a lot of her game and we played together at USA. So it will be really exciting. We played against each other at trials and everything like that. So we've had this matchup before a couple times. But it's super exciting. Another phenomenal guard like Jaloni, and be able to go head-to-head with her, it's going to be a fun game. Two quick guards too, she's extremely fast, she ran track, so the foot speed is going to be crazy.



Q. What's the mentality just going into the next game and knowing that last year you guys didn't exactly get to where you wanted to, how does that fuel you for this year?

CASSANDRE PROSPER: Yeah, the mentality's always defense. I think it's going to be important to -- that's what we wanted to do today was punch 'em in the face first. So we want to do the same thing tomorrow and make sure that we take their confidence away from the start. So that's going to take a lot of defensive intensity. And then on offense, just being aggressive, not letting them dictate what we want on offense.

Q. Hannah, did you just make a dance for the flopping? Did you make a dance out there for the flopping or was that something else?

HANNAH HIDALGO: I don't recall. (Laughing).

CASSANDRE PROSPER: Plead the Fifth.

HANNAH HIDALGO: I plead the Fifth.

Q. Hannah, you got a Second Team Selection All-American this week, but First Team last year. Do you kind of view this game as kind of a statement game for not getting First Team?

HANNAH HIDALGO: No, not at all. Honestly, I said this before, but I think the biggest thing for me is I serve a great God who is in control of everything in my life. It wasn't His plan for me to get First Team this year. And that's okay, because I'm going to still go out and play the same way I've been playing. I've been playing consistently this whole see on and since my freshman year and right now it's about winning so I don't care about any of the accolades. I didn't care about 'em going into this year and I'm, you know, here to win.

Q. You guys talk about defense and you pride yourself especially today on trying to cause havoc, guys in the passing lanes a lot. Ohio State's very similar, like to cause a lot of havoc with the full-court press. But the idea of playing against teams who press and can get in you, I know you guys play against that at times in the ACC, what do you learn from those experiences that can prepare you for that game?

CASSANDRE PROSPER: I think they're going to try to speed us up. And then that's going to be our time for us to stay poised and then just play the game that we want. We don't want them to speed us up. We want to play fast, that's how we've been going at it. We want to play and get

steals, play defense. And then the way that they're going to play us, I think we're equipped enough and we've faced enough adversity and overcame that the whole year to be ready for it tomorrow. Well, not tomorrow. Monday.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Monday. Yeah, I think going off of that, we watched Ohio State a little bit and we know how aggressive they are. They want to force turnovers. So I think in the beginning of the season it was a little shaky, but I think we've definitely grown in so many different areas, and that being one of the biggest areas that we've grown, just being patient and being poised and not letting other teams speed us up. Knowing that traps are going to come and they're going to try and force turnovers, but just playing within ourselves.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the student-athletes and take questions for Coach.

Q. Your bigs got in some early foul trouble, can you speak to how your team responded to them not being in the game?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, again, just mentioning Cass's versatility. We've had a little bit of foul trouble this season, so our team knows next man, next woman up, even if that means Cass has to play the 5. I thought they did a good job of not allowing that to dictate what we were doing. Everybody did something a little bit more. I had to play five guards at one point. And then Malaya in the second half got back into her rhythm. But we unfortunately have been in that scenario before, so we knew how to adjust to it.

Q. You and Kevin go way back. How much have you kept in touch over the years, and when was the last time maybe you spoke with him?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, through text, I mean, he's someone, he was my coach, like you mentioned, but also one of my mentors. We are very close. Godmother to one of his daughters. His wife is one of my best friends. She was a coach and graduated from Notre Dame. So he's family. So hate that this was the road, obviously, but he's somebody that I love. I love their whole family and it's going to be exciting to play them on Monday.

Q. Off that, when you saw the bracket come out just, I know you didn't want to look ahead, you don't want to look past Fairfield, but when you saw the bracket come out, what was your thought when you saw that you were coming to Columbus and you would be potentially playing Kevin in the second round?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, well I mean, I've been kind of, they told me about different scenarios that we would be in and

again it's a drive. I thought our fans would be able to travel. Again I've watched Kevin for the last several years and kind of know his system. I know Ohio State and Jaloni and what they have. So just having that familiarity and also being close to so our fans can travel is what I thought. But I knew it was going to be an incredible mum. Two dynamic guards and again a system that I'm familiar with.

Q. And you mentioned the matchup with Hannah and Jaloni. NCAA tournaments kind of built for that, you put elite players against elite players. What does that do for the sport when you can get Hannah against a player like Jaloni so early in a tournament like this?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, I think it's awesome. You want to see great basketball. You want to see great players compete at the highest level. So we're looking forward to it. Like she said, she's familiar with her game as well, having USA Basketball experience with her. Jaloni is an incredible guard. But I think it's great to grow the game. People want to watch women's basketball, they want to see the great products on the floor. I think we have two of the best players on the floor, that will be on the floor Monday.

Q. You guys burst out to a 11-2 run to open the second half. What was the message at halftime in the locker room to kind of just keep the foot on the gas and never look back?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, just that. Not to let up. We needed to come out with that same defensive energy and intensity. And then offensively I was really focused on trying to get the ball inside. I thought we had a size advantage with Malaya being in foul trouble, I really wanted to look inside first, so that was the initial thought process. Then, again, just maintaining that lead, extending it, but doing that with our defensive pressure. I didn't want us to get complacent, because I feel like Fairfield is a great team that can go off in bunches with the way that they shoot the ball. So defensively keeping our intensity up and I wanted to see some paint touches.

Q. What is it like having the extension of a Hannah Hidalgo on the court for you? I mean, you know, when you played you were able to kind of control the game also without, from a guard perspective, but what is it like to have her on the court to do whatever it is that you need to be done?

NIELE IVEY: It's a coach's dream, to be honest. Especially being a point guard. Like you mentioned, she's an extension of me. We have a great relationship. She's one of the best guards I've ever coached. She is phenomenal. Never seen a two way player do what she does every day in practice so intense, her confidence, it's

something that sometimes it takes awhile to help players build confidence, she's come to Notre Dame with that fearlessness and that confidence. She got so much swag, she's a joy to coach. She's somebody that I just, I love so much, and I just, I love that every year she just gets better and better. But I'm really impressed and really proud of the way that she's led this season. She has had a lot of weight, a lot of pressure, she's helped take this group and I had a completely new team, and get us to where we are right now. And that speaks a lot to her game. But again, she's the best two way player, one of the best guards I've ever coached.

Q. For everything that she's accomplished this year, was this a statement game for not getting First Team and being a Second Team selection for Hannah?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah I think she mentioned that it's not about that. I believe that she's a First Team All-American and we don't need AP or anybody else to say that. She comes out with the same energy and effort every game. She just wants to win. She's about her team. I think her success and her stats speaks for itself. But again I think she's one of the best players in the country and she doesn't -- we're trying to win, and she mentioned that, like that's second to anything else. When you have somebody with that maturity, that can do what she does, it's phenomenal. So I think she's amazing.

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