

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

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Schottenstein Center

**Fairfield Stags**

**Carly Thibault-DuDonis**

**Janelle Brown**

**Meghan Andersen**

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.

CARLY THIBAUT-DuDONIS: Let me start by saying I'm really proud of the growth from June until now of this team. We've thrown a lot of adversity at them intentionally to be prepared for this moment, and individually and collectively we've grown so much as a group. That's a great team in Notre Dame that certainly has the capability to go make a run in this tournament. So that is a great opponent that, you know, they did what they did as far as getting steals and converting those into some points.

But I'm really proud of our fight to stick with it, especially in that fourth quarter when it would have been easy to make some different decisions, and we fought until the end. Immensely proud of our seniors, they have changed the course of this program. We are here to stay as a women's basketball, one of the best women's basketball programs in the country. And that is so much because of the seniors in this group, Nelly, who is here with us on this podium, have truly changed the trajectory of this program. So thankful to them, so honored to have coached them for the years that I did, and excited for what's ahead for this group.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. As a team you've talked a lot this year about how close you are and how much you value your relationships with one another. What will you all remember most about playing together and just being**



**a part of this group?**

MEGHAN ANDERSEN: This is a tough one. I really cannot say how grateful I am to -- like I can't put into words how grateful I am to be with this team. Nelly especially. I don't know what Fairfield's going to be like without her. I think, oh, sorry. It's going to be so different. But the amount of work and just the connections that we've made. Like I know that without -- like even without them there I'm still going to feel their presence. I know I still have girls from past years texting me and just, I mean Amina, she came to the game today, so I know that this family, they're here to stay. I think that's what's helping me get through this a little bit, or I'll probably start breaking down in tears right now. But I'm just so grateful for these girls.

JANELLE BROWN: I probably say the joy that we always share and have on and off the court. Yeah, the outcome isn't what we want it to be, but I think the fact that we're just doing it with each other, doing it for each other too, it just shows how close we are as a team, how well our culture is, and what we want to do for each other. I feel like, like Coach Carly said, we're just scratching the surface with this. I feel like we will definitely be here. We'll be back, we're always going to be back. But I think the joy and the competitiveness is what I'll always remember from this women's basketball team, especially from this group. You got a lot of women who don't like to lose on this team, and who are going to be crawling and scratching just to get that loose ball. So the joy and the competitiveness.

CARLY THIBAUT-DuDONIS: And we have Nelly to thank for creating that in our locker room all the time.

**Q. Nelly, six years as a fair field Stag. What emotions are going through your head right now?**

JANELLE BROWN: Just gratitude. I'm really just grateful to be here. Kind of said it in the locker room too, like even though we lost, we're still champions. Back-to-back-to-back champions, in fact. So I'm just grateful to have this opportunity, to be with my teammates, be with the best coach in the nation, and just soaking it all in. I don't really have a bad bone in my body. I'm glad that we are here. I'm glad that we made the run that we could,



but just grateful for the opportunity.

**Q. You mentioned this time last year I think on Friday that you were playing this time around. How do you see what you guys have left, back-to-back-to-back MAC champions, for this program moving forward, I know we talked about it being a standard here, but carrying on that legacy that you guys have, you, Beach, have been such an instrumental part in?**

JANELLE BROWN: Just showing our resilience and our relentlessness, both on and off the court. Like Coach said, it really started in the summer, trying to get our movement going, whether it's on an offensive, defensive end. But we're just a gritty team who don't want to give up. We don't like to followed. So we just going to keep fighting until double zeros hit the clock.

**Q. What made the three-point shooting challenging during the first half for you guys?**

MEGHAN ANDERSEN: I think we just needed to get our rhythm. It's a different gym, but I think we eventually got it back to us. But, yeah, I think we just needed to get back into our rhythm.

**Q. And then just what was it like just going up against Hidalgo?**

MEGHAN ANDERSEN: She's a tough player, very gritty. But I think that's the beauty of this experience, you get to play against girls like her and teams like Notre Dame. So it's something that you can't take for granted, not everyone gets that opportunity, so I'm just grateful to be able to be here.

JANELLE BROWN: It was great to go through a dog fight with her. Like it was so much fun. She's very tenacious, great leader for their team, she's a great player. So it was definitely fun to go up against her.

**Q. Meg, I think you mentioned over the years you said you grew more in confidence and calmer. It showed today, 21 points, 8-18 shooting. What does this type of game do for your confidence moving forward and establish momentum heading into an off-season?**

MEGHAN ANDERSEN: Yeah, they're a great team to be able to do that against, but at the end of the day I would rather have scored zero points and won that game, to be honest. But I think just taking what we can from this game and moving forward, because there's a lot to learn from both wins and losses, and I think we're going to have a lot, once we look back at the film, we're going to have a lot to learn from this.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll now excuse the student-athletes and take questions for Coach.

**Q. What can you take away just from this game, but also from this season as you look forward to the next season?**

CARLY THIBAUT-DuDONIS: A few different things. There was some areas that we grew in certainly that were very intentional for us. We wanted to become a little bit more efficient in our ability to stretch the ball from the three this year, and we took huge steps in that.

This game specifically I don't even think we attempted enough threes. So that's the biggest thing, you know, the question about what, why we weren't able to get into a rhythm from the three-point line, we're at our best when we get a couple of ball reversals and a paint touch. And I thought they did a really nice job of digging in early in a possession, and we didn't get to a second action enough to get to that point in an offensive possession. So in a microcosm, going forward, we need to be a little bit more physically tougher, mentally focused, to be who we are when someone tries to take away what we're good at. Teams that don't give a lot of resistance, we're able to get quick ball reversals and it pops around and we get wide open threes. But when someone digs in a little bit, they're a little bit physical with us, they make a catch harder on the perimeter, we've got to be better at getting to that next action quicker and with pace. So certainly that, the physical, mental toughness of that. But through the course of the year we went from being a very mediocre at best defensive team, to one of the best in the country. So I love that step that we took forward, and we'll continue to do that next year.

**Q. Carly, going up against a player like Hidalgo, who not only dominates offensively but defensively with rebounds and steals, just how much of a challenge is it?**

CARLY THIBAUT-DuDONIS: Oh, I mean, clearly it changed the course of the game for us today. We were trying to, didn't always show up that way, but our attempt was to try to kind of throw it up to somebody else so that we weren't bringing the ball up in an open floor against her. But certainly she picked her moments and made us pay for it. So when we were getting maybe a little bit of a defensive stop with some momentum to try to score in transition, she did a great job of halting that and we weren't able to score with numbers. So certainly a challenge, and like Meg said, we'll learn from it. There's not a lot of people out there like her, she's very one-of-a-kind. But we love playing against players who are going to make us make

better decisions and challenge us and bring some adversity. So it was a good learning moment for certainly our returners, and she's a great player and an All-American for a reason.

**Q. Then the challenge going into next year, three-time MAC champions, one of the top Mid Major programs in the country, you've done a good job of being able to retain most of your roster in a transfer portal year, in a competitive part of the country. Just does it get more challenging as the titles pile up?**

CARLY THIBAUT-DuDONIS: Thankfully, no. It certainly, you have to be aware of the landscape and you have to be prepared for it. I think my administration has done an unbelievable job of preparing us, investing in women's basketball, so that we can be prepared for retention in the changing landscape. But you look at someone like Janelle Brown, who has had every opportunity to choose elsewhere, and she has created a culture, Lauren Beach has created a culture of this is a place that you come and stay, and this is your family for life. So they make the program what it is, as far as, you come here to be a Stag. So I mean we didn't lose anybody that played a minute last year that had remaining eligibility. So that I think tells you how much they believe in this culture and each other and how much they care about each other. But I'm also so grateful that we get to be at Fairfield a little bit of a unicorn. Where we don't have to sell our souls. We have very strong values as a university that we can lean into, but we can also be competitive with the best in the country. And we have an administration that believes in what we're doing and the way that we do it. So we do have the ability to retain and continue to build -- and it's a competitive advantage to have that chemistry and continuity year after year. So I'm very grateful to be at Fairfield, for a lot of reasons, but that certainly being one of them. And I'm really excited to get back in the gym with this group in the spring.

**Q. You mentioned how in the fourth quarter your team kept fighting and kept pushing. What is it like from a coaching perspective just to have a team that you know is that mentally tough and resilient and that that's something that you can rely on every game in and game out?**

CARLY THIBAUT-DuDONIS: Yeah, I was proud of them. Because if you would have asked me that last year I don't know that I would have said that. So we have very pointedly attacked that all year long, all summer long, all fall, all throughout the season. Trying to kind of expose that and create adversity, whether it's in practice, in our non-conference schedule, and so you certainly don't want to have to learn from a loss, but it allows you to learn more

about yourself, to expose some weaknesses. So they could have made very different decisions today when Hidalgo got a pick six or they made a run, a 6-0 run, 8-0 run, whatever it was. So there was a lot of growth. You look at particularly somebody like Kaety L'Amoreaux as a sophomore class year to being a junior this year and a captain for us. How she responded in those moments. How Nelly responded in those moments as point guard. It's really, it's a hard moment to get picked in the middle of the floor as a point guard, and they all responded with some toughness. I mean, you said the word, but they are, I would choose this team all day every day, and I'm really excited to keep working with 'em and I'm excited to be part of our seniors and Nelly's life for the rest of time. That's what Stags do.

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