

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Notre Dame vs Ohio State

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Schottenstein Center

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Cassandre Prosper

Hannah Hidalgo

Media Conference



I just remember her speed. She's a great guard, dynamic guard. Knows how to get her teammates involved. It'll be a fun game tomorrow.

Q. You guys do both play very similar games. How do you prepare for a matchup knowing that you guys are so similar? Do you prefer playing teams like yourself? This is for either of you.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, I think for one, it'll be important, although we like to play fast, but not being sped up. To be able to play within ourselves and not let Ohio State make us do anything that we don't want to do.

We have to handle their pressure, because they press for like 40 minutes a game. Maintaining that, take care of the ball, and still be able to run our sets.

I think we've been battle tested a lot, especially throughout the season. It was a little shaky in the beginning of the season, but I think we really have been able to figure it out and we'll be able to handle it tomorrow.

CASSANDRE PROSPER: I feel like we've gone through a lot of different situations throughout the season, so I think tomorrow we'll be ready for whatever they throw at us. I feel like even though they are a team that's similar to us I think watching film and making sure that we're exploiting the places where they're not great at.

Q. I know you guys are technically a 6 seed. On the board you guys are the underdog. Do you feel like you're going in as the underdogs or do you feel like this is an evenly matched up game?

CASSANDRE PROSPER: Yeah, I don't think we're the underdogs. I think we are prepared. I think the growth that we've had this year, right now it's just about putting it out there on the court. But we feel very confident coming into the game.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, I think we are the underdogs. I think a lot of people have been counting us out all season. But we've never counted ourselves out and we've grown a lot and have a lot of confidence in ourselves. I

Q. Both your team and Ohio State you force a lot of turn organize. You're playing with a lot of pace. In your preparation for this game tomorrow, a lot of people see the similarities. What are the differences you're seeing between the two sides?

CASSANDRE PROSPER: I mean, I think, yeah, like you said, we're both very aggressive defensive teams, and so I think we got to be patient. I feel like offensively we have grown a lot and we are used to that kind of pressure.

I feel like we have really great weapons all around. We have a lot of versatility on the court and so taking advantage of that, recognizing mismatches when we're on the court and making sure we're staying patient offensively.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, great question. I guess we really haven't thought about the differences that we've had. I think really just focused on personnel and making sure we know personnel and trying to go inside. Like Cassandre said, exploiting the mismatches. Especially with Cassandre being able to play the guard position, we'll be able to get a lot of post ups from her.

Q. Hannah, how would you describe your relationship with Jalon Cambridge and what do you remember about your time with her at USA Basketball?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, me and Jalon played against and with each other at USA a lot of time. Spent together at trials and things like that trying to go toe for toe with her, open down the floor. I thought I was the fastest one in the camp and she beat me by a milestone.

don't think we have any pressure going into this game.

I think it's a lot of pressure hosting and being expected to win, so we're just going to go out and have fun and play with confidence like we been doing this past few months.

Q. You both have had quite a bit of success in the second round in your careers here. Ohio State struggled in this round. How much confidence or familiarity going into the second round do you think will help you guys? What's the intensity difference as I move on in this tournament?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, I mean, it's a completely different team. We have a completely different group of girls. A lot of the girls haven't been in this position and of course me and Cassandre and KK have been, so we know what it takes. With us being leaders it will be easy for us to make sure our team knows how important this is and how we have to come to play.

We know what it feels like to be home and playing with our fans and having our fans behind us, so now playing second round and being on somebody else's floor, just making sure that we're all locked in and prepared for what the fans are going to bring and how well Ohio State will play and being able to maintain that.

CASSANDRE PROSPER: Yeah, I agree.

Q. Quick turnaround. Fairfield played a pretty unique style. How hard is it to get adjusted to Ohio State on a couple days of rest and preparation?

CASSANDRE PROSPER: I mean, we've been practicing. We been practicing and getting prepared for Ohio State this whole week. Fairfield, they were a different style. I think there are similarities between both teams.

We are prepared for Ohio State and I feel like watching them, watching a lot of the film and just making sure that we're all locked in and disciplined on defense is going to be the biggest key.

And so, yeah, I think we're prepared for this game.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, basically to go off that, they are -- they do have differences. I think Fairfield was a great prep game with us not playing for about a week or so. So with us having to figure out how to defend the three-point line being run them off the three-point line while also continuing to stay in front of the drive. I think it was a great prep game for us.

And I think just kind of bringing that into Ohio State, the

personnel is a little different, but I think like Cassandre said, we been preparing all week for it. So I think for this it was a lot of mentally locking in because we had to focus at Fairfield. Trying to take it one game at a time.

But I think we're prepared. Like I said, we been battle tested.

Q. This is for either of you, KK coming back to the state of Ohio, how much has her return back to the lineup been a boost for you and your squad?

CASSANDRE PROSPER: Yeah, I mean, KK brings such a spark to the team. On and off the court she's one of our leaders, so having her back on the court for her to just be able to lead on the court and just her confidence, her versatility, we feel it on the court. Since she's been back we been on a winning streak, so I think it's a testament to how important she is to the team and how needed she is on the court for us.

So, yeah, it's just -- I'm excited her whole family is here. Her friends are here. It's great for her to be in Ohio and just be able to be on this stage.

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah. Cassandre said it all. KK brings so much for us on a different level. She knows the system so well. She brings something that we were lacking when she was out. So now to finally have her back you can tell. It makes a big difference with how we're playing on the floor. She brings that spark off the bench that we really need and we didn't have.

For her to be able to do it in her hometown in front of her family, it means so much more to her. To be able to go out and win it game, it'll mean a lot for all of us.

Q. Hannah, Ohio State doesn't have a lot of bigs but Elsa leads the Big10 in blocks; sets the tone for them inside. When you're going against a big like that, I don't know if UConn consciously think how you have to adjust your shot or change your shot, but just how much does that affect your game when you have a big who can impact things around the rim so much?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, I don't really think it affects my game much at all. I think it's just being smart with when I'm driving. You know, finishing differently around bigs.

I played with the boys growing up. My brother's 6'4", cousins 6'4", too, so I played with people a lot bigger than I am and I had to figure out how to score over them. This will probably be a lot for mid-range, a lot more floaters instead getting all the way to the basket.

I think that's the only thing I'll change. Nothing much.

Q. Hannah, I know you've been asked a lot about Jaloni, but, Kennedy, her sister has a similar defensive style as you. How much have you looked at her game and are preparing to go up against her defense?

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, Kennedy, she's definitely one of the X factors and she brings a lot for their team. We watch her. We just watched and talked about how tenacious she is on the ball.

But it's fun. Again, playing in the ACC we been through this. I feel like we have been through a lot of different defensive schemes, whether that's double teaming, you know, just shifts, heavy shifts, heavy ball pressure.

We have been through that a lot this season, so I think it'll be fun going up against different competition. We haven't seen Kennedy yet so it will be exciting to go up against her defense.

NIELE IVEY: Just excited to get to the second round game. Really proud of my team. Really proud of our performance yesterday. Looking forward to this matchup.

Q. You talked yesterday about knowing Kevin's system pretty well. Seems like both of your teams are built similarly. Both have elite lead guards and defensively you want to cause a lot of havoc, force a lot of turnovers. Does that make a short turnaround prep a little bit easier when you're kind of familiar, not only with Kevin, but your team kind of knows what to expect because you kind of might play a similar kind of way?

NIELE IVEY: Absolutely. Again, like you mentioned, being familiar with his system and watching Jaloni. I watched her for the last couple years. Watched her with USA Basketball. I support Kevin so I'm always following them and his career.

So, yeah, I'm very aware of what they do. It's obviously different when we're playing them live and seeing them in person. Yeah, he runs a great system, but we run very similar like you mentioned. A lot of five out; dynamic guard play.

So very similar in a lot of aspects. The way they shoot the ball, they have great guards and also good inside game, so yeah, we know each other very well.

Q. Kind of going off that, can I just take us through your relationship with the McGuff family? Just the closeness is pretty remarkable to get ready to play in

our NCAA tournament game together.

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, you know, Kevin was the wing position coach when I was a player, so I've known him for so long. The recruiting process, also Teesh graduated from Notre Dame. She's one of my best friends. We talk almost every day. I'm godmother to her second youngest Lily.

Just an incredible family. You know, the Notre Dame network, family network dynamic has been strong since I was in college, since '96 is when I met both Teesh and Kevin. They got married and, yeah, I spent a lot of summers here with my son when he was growing up.

So very family -- we have a nice close-knit family dynamic.

Q. How much do you kind of credit both coming from the Muffet McGraw coaching tree and the kind of style you both have?

NIELE IVEY: Absolutely. Coach McGraw has produced a lot of incredible coaches, and so, yeah, I absolutely credit Coach McGraw us being part of that same system. The values she created, the way we coach, the way we mentor is very similar. The way our coaching style is very similar.

Then I also will say that even with the five out I feel like college basketball has morphed into more a little bit more five out, a little bit more WNBA, NBA action. You could tell by the tendencies that we both run.

Again, just having that foundation with the Notre Dame family like you mentioned, that network is the reason we're very similar.

Q. We talk a lot about similarities. What are the key differences you're seeing with the two styles between yourselves and Ohio State?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, they don't go too deep in the rotation as far as his bench. Very similar. We have -- we both probably go about seven deep. He goes seven maybe eight deep, so I think that's similar. Everybody is different. Jaloni is different. She's fast.

Jaloni and Hannah is going to be a great matchup but they both do things that are different. Again, they have great inside presence, shooters. I would say the difference is they press for 40 minutes, and so that's something that we're preparing for.

We pick up sometimes man to man full court, but they press for 40 minutes. That's something they're trying to turn you over. They have great offensive efficiency, but also defensively I think is where they're bread and butter in



the full court press. I think that's different.

And I think both programs are going to adjust to the things that we both feel that we do well. And our identities.

Q. Thanks for the time, Coach.

NIELE IVEY: Absolutely.

Q. You spent time also under Kevin's staff at Xavier for '05 to '07. How did that time in Cincinnati kind of lay the foundation for what would turn into be a great coaching career for you?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, thank you. I'm really grateful for Coach McGraw and Kevin, both of them giving me an opportunity. When I was with Xavier I was an intern and still playing in the WNBA. I unfortunately had a third knee surgery. I was like, I think I need to transition and maybe do something differently besides playing.

Kevin gave me that opportunity. Brought me on staff. I learned a lot, and that's where that love started to come from. Being a part of his program, being around the players, that's where I kind of developed that itch to be able to want to coach.

Because interns, you're not -- there is certain things you're not allowed to do. That's where I think I got that passion for becoming a coach, being a part of that program. Wanting to be a part of basketball in some aspect. I knew that was something I was really good at, building relationships so that's where to start for me.

Then Coach McGraw gave me my first opportunity as assistant coach. I always credit Kevin and Coach McGraw for giving me the opportunity. When you get into coaching it's getting a chance because I was green. I had no experience. So they both gave me my first opportunity and Kevin definitely opened my eyes to the possibility of being a coach.

So that was an incredible time back then. Like I said my son was young, probably like two, three years old. They kind of took me in as family.

Q. You all were together in '01. How often does the '01 team leak into your messaging to your team this time of year?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, I mean, just knowing that -- and March anything can happen. You know, those experiences I try to share with the team. You have to survive and advance, but it's one game at a time. Anything is possible if you believe.

That's how we were that year, coming into every game just having that trust in each other and having that belief that anything is possible. That's kind of the message I sent to this group.

Q. Just we caught up with KK in the locker room for a little bit. You talked a lot about how this team is rallied around her since she came back in February. I wanted to talk about just how she's playing in her home state. She's from Cincinnati. Just about an hour and a half away?

NIELE IVEY: Right.

Q. You were talking about it a little bit there. Just your relationship with Ohio State and just the importance of family, is whether it's against Ohio State and also in house, though?

NIELE IVEY: Right.

Q. What is that family atmosphere like with this team, especially when you maybe see a player like KK, all her family travels for these games and they're especially going to be her against Ohio State?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, I think that's the beauty of basketball that you get a chance to share your journey with your family. For her to be back in her home state, I think that's amazing.

Being here in Columbus, we got an opportunity for our fans to travel. The connectivity even with my relationship with the McGuffs, I think that's all a part of basketball. It's kind of bigger than basketball at times.

But, yeah, I'm happy for KK that she gets a chance to be able to be in front of her family can travel. For me as a coach I'm always trying to schedule so my players have an opportunity at some point in their four-year career that they can play in front of their families.

So that she gets that opportunity I think it's awesome. Again, like you mentioned, she's a big piece of our success the last several weeks, and I credit the value that she brings to our group. We're definitely a different team with her.

Q. When there is a game like this where whether it's again, KK has family in the stands, you got a connection against the opposing head coach.

NIELE IVEY: Yes.

Q. Other games where there is connections like that, how do you maybe balance being reflective and obviously your friends are even closer off the court while also being competitive and when the ball tips off it's go time and those relationships are out the window?

NIELE IVEY: Oh, yeah, I'm not friends with him tomorrow. He knows that. And same way for him. It's a business trip and we've played against Ohio State as an assistant of the coach in the -- I think it was the Big10. It was a challenge that we had and then they came to sound bend.

Also we play them in the Sweet 16 a couple years ago with Arike and Jackie Young, those players. So we've gone against each other a couple times. I was an assist of the coach then, but I think both like -- this is a business. We're both trying to advance.

We support each other outside of playing each other obviously but you know how to keep it competitive and business oriented. That's how we both are and definitely how I am.

Q. You mentioned earlier both teams only go about seven deep. You've done tat most of the year but haven't had many quick turnarounds besides the ACC tournament.

NIELE IVEY: Yeah.

Q. How important is today getting rest and recovery and emphasizing you need to be fresh for tomorrow?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, I have a great performance team so they've done a great job of preparing us. Like you mentioned the ACC we had three games in a row so we know what to expect. The girls know what at that expect as far as that routine. We have that blueprint of what to do. So we do have to have some really strong, intense prep.

Then we're pretty smart about what we needed to as far as saving their legs. We been in this situation all season long. There was a moment where I only had six scholarship players this season so we know what to do.

Q. Coach, is two quick questions for you: One you mentioned obviously we talked a lot about your relationship with McGuff family.

NIELE IVEY: Yeah.

Q. Have you talked to Kevin's wife? You guys talking right now?

NIELE IVEY: Oh, yeah, we're talking.

Q. How has that conversation been? On a separate note tore your coaching career it's been a lot for, what, last five years that you had the covered year, four straight Sweet 16s.

NIELE IVEY: Yes.

Q. How have those years, ups and downs of that prepares you for this year when like you said you had six scholarship players at one point, had to revamp so much and getting back to this point?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, well, the first part of your question with Teesh we are really, really close and we don't talk basketball. So that's what's the best about us. We don't talk about basketball. Obviously she also has that tie of being from Notre Dame. This is her alma mater. She was one of our best post players. She's broken a lot of records in our program.

But when we're together we talk family. We talk everything but basketball. Super supportive. She's somebody that I really lean on. She's been one of my mentors. So we both have very strong in our faith so we talk about every thing but basketball.

So that's the beauty of that relationship. And then just my experiences since I've been here, you know, with -- being in the tournament, I try to utilize all those experiences and the things I've learned, I try to implement that and where we are right now being on the road, my second year.

You know, being in the fire my second year and every year. So I try to utilize all the experiences and I'm grateful because I feel like I can use that heading into really, really tough environment tomorrow.

Q. Coach, circling back to KK you mentioned how valuable she has been down the stretch for you. What are some of the things is that she's done that are easy to see? What are some of the things behind the scenes that we don't see?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, her versatility is what is easy to see. She can guard on the perimeter. Sometimes I have her at the four. Her IQ is something I'm sure you see. Somebody that makes the right play, extra pass knowing the offense.

I think those are the things that you see.

Then the things you don't see I think is her voice. Her voice in the locker room. Her voice in the timeouts. She is kind of an extension of me because she's really, really

smart so she's helping a lot. When she's on the court, being that glue player to help with the offense letting them know what we need defensively.

She knows my system probably the most out of anyone because she's been here the longest. So she does a lot of thing intangibly communicating with the team and helping them in small situations of how to defend things and where to be in the offense.

So those are the things you might not see. But, again, her versatility has helped us, presence, rebounding, some things that really helped us.

Again, being able to defend inside or on the perimeter.

Q. You come off as somebody that's constantly learning and trying to get better at what they do. What did you learn about the end of last season that helped you have an ascending team at the end of that season?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, I mean, I think I credit this group. This group has been tremendous for me as far as the way that they work and the way that we prepare. The way that they can get to the next game.

Like this group is a really business oriented group. So I think initially just having this type of team has been amazing for me. But, again, just defensive things. I think the way that we defend this year is different.

I have a completely different team so my style a differently offense I had to adjust this offense. It's completely different -- not completely different. I have had to adjust this offense a little bit.

But I think for me, the way that I prepare and making sure they're ready in February, I did some things that helped us I think get to that point of having momentum heading into the tournament.

But, again, that's credit to this group. They work hard. This is an incredible group. They really trust each other. So I think building that trust is something that I really worked on.

Culture is something I really worked on this season with this group. Again it's a credit to the character of this group because they're amazing.

Q. Does Coach McGraw say anything but good luck to the two of you, does she stay out the it?

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, she stays out of it. I connected with

her last week before we left. She hates playing against family so that's something I always as an assistant coach, and myself as well. But she loves both of us. She's godmother to one of their kids. He has six so she's godmother to one of their kids, too.

So she's just literally like good luck; love you. I'm sure she's saying the same thing to Kevin.

Q. Kind of on the topic of -- this group all year and you said it as well, just the team is very present where they're feet are?

NIELE IVEY: Yes.

Q. I think that's what you say normally.

NIELE IVEY: Yes.

Q. Also, it does feel like especially with the experience this team has and what a lot of these players have gone through both on and off the court, it's a reflective group as well?

NIELE IVEY: Uh-huh.

Q. What's the value that you see in this group being maybe simultaneously present at all times while also reflective.

NIELE IVEY: When you have a team that's present like you're saying, it's so much different to coach against a team like that because they're really -- they really are in the moment. Had he relish every moment, every shootaround. They're very business oriented. Very focused.

Everyone has that determination and passion and love. Love for each other but passion to get better. Passion for better for the team.

I have a lot of players doing whatever it takes it help us win. Yesterday we had foul trouble. I got Cas at the five. This group is going to run through a wall for me because they want to win, do whatever they can to help us win.

When you have a team that's determined, you know selfish, and has that energy and passion of really relishing the moment is the reason why we have been peaking at the right time.

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