

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

Friday, March 22, 2024

Bloomington, Indiana, USA

Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall

## Indiana Hoosiers

## Teri Moren

## Mackenzie Holmes

## Sara Scalia

### Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall for the first round games of the 2024 NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Championship. Congratulations to Indiana and head coach Teri Moren on their at-large selection to the bracket.

We are joined on the dais by Head Coach Teri Moren. If you could make an opening statement, and then we'll take some questions.

TERI MOREN: It's one of the best times of the year if you do what we do, and that's play this great game.

Once again, we're excited to be able to host right here in Bloomington in front of our home fans. I feel like our group has been here before. We came up a little short last year. So I think there's extra motivation behind being able to not just host, but to show up these two days with a tremendous amount of energy and poise.

**Q. Teri, when you spoke on Sunday, you hadn't had much time to really do your scout on Fairfield. Just having these four or five days now, what has stood out to you about them?**

TERI MOREN: The fact that they shoot right around 242 more threes than we do says a lot about who they are in terms of how they want to generate their offense. I think they do a tremendous job of really trying to put pressure on you, getting to the paint with two feet, draw two, and kick out. They share the ball extremely well.

They have a dynamic point guard in Nelly Brown, who was their Conference Player of the Year. Then a lot of really



great pieces around them.

I think all of them have the green light although I think Coach wants them to take great shots. But they play with a lot of freedom, a lot of movement, a lot of cutting. Going to put pressure on us defensively to stay below our man but also communicate at a very, very high level. This is a very, very good team.

**Q. Teri, in terms of health, obviously Mackenzie, how did she make it through the week, and how do you feel about the status of the team in general? You kind of hoped it would be a much healthier group.**

TERI MOREN: Yeah, I can sit here and tell you we are much healthier. Mack has been really good all week, has been constant in practice, as well as Syd. Lilly feels good on that ankle as well.

This break, as I knew it would be, has been really good for this group. I do feel like we're going to enter tomorrow's game with our normal five starters and kids that are much healthier.

**Q. What's kind of the regimen for Mackenzie and Lilly as you get this amount of rest that you were able to get between now and tomorrow?**

TERI MOREN: Believe it or not, Syd really got the most rest out of all of them. Mack was feeling better even in the Big Ten Tournament, and then coming out of that, it just gave her more time.

Lilly needed -- once we got back, that ankle was swollen once again, so she needed extra time. Between Lilly and Syd, they probably required the most time off when we returned.

We just tried to, again, have a ton of confidence in Ben and Dr. Tripp and our medical staff. I just really went off of what they were telling me in terms of how our kids were feeling, maybe giving them an extra day here or there. I really shortened up practice. It was intense, but it was short.



Then every time we went live and we got up-and-down, I held my breath too because I certainly didn't want anything strange to happen. But I also knew that we couldn't take this two weeks off without trying to be competitive, trying to go live, and getting them those real, live reps.

So we managed to get through the last two weeks with, knock on wood, everybody staying healthy.

**Q. Teri, two-part question about Lexus. I know you all were working with her on her free-throw motion in the middle of the season. Is that something you've had to do before, just in the middle of the season changing up a motion like that as radically as you did with her? And maybe just in terms of the things we don't see behind the scenes, where have you seen her grow the most this year?**

TERI MOREN: In regards to her free throw, she and Ali -- Ali works with her daily before practice. It was really AP's decision to try to help her with the free throw. She actually shoots it probably better just one handed but didn't want to do that. So she does have kind of the guide hand, but it steers her to ultimately shooting a one-handed free throw.

Drastically, I don't like to. I don't think our staff does either. We don't like to change shooting mechanics during the season, but with Lexi, we felt like it's a free throw, and just in working with her and watching she and Ali work, it just seemed to suit her best if she could go to that kind of one-handed with a little bit of a guide hand on the side.

She's been great. When Syd went out those six games and she had to slide over into the other spot for us, that guard spot for us, what I was proud of Lexi is she didn't try to do too much. She tried to facilitate. She tried to make her teammates around her better. She gave us another great on-ball defender. She's a great athlete, can jump, quick.

So what she gave us -- again, in what we've seen her do from the bench, but she played a lot more minutes. So it gave her great experience as we go into March, or this tournament.

**Q. Two quick questions, personnel related. Can we expect to see Chloe get the call on Janelle for defense? And on defense, are you expecting to see their 2-3 most of the day? And if so, will Yarden be coming in sharing the 5 responsibilities?**

TERI MOREN: I don't know. With Chloe and Lexi, certainly have the assignment of guarding Brown. What we've seen from them is more of less zone. They're going to switch five ways, much like Maryland did or does.

We expect Mack to be doubled and/or fronted, but we go into every game expecting that. So ball movement, player movement, our ability to draw and get to the paint, draw two defenders, and kick is going to be as important, our ability to knock down shots.

I feel like we do have an advantage. I feel like we're a little bit bigger. But I think any time you go into tournament play, you have to expect anything, and they could come out and do something junkie, or they could sit in the 2-3 or a 3-2 or come out and switch five ways.

The great thing about our year is that we've seen just about everything. I don't think that there's going to be any surprises. We may have to adjust some of the things we're doing, but it's not going to keep us from trying to do what we're good at, and that's play fast.

**Q. I'm kind of curious, how do you balance the intensity that you need with the fun so that they're not too stressed but they are dialed in?**

TERI MOREN: They are dialed in, I can tell you that. We don't talk about anything other than the fact that we're grateful to be in this tournament and we're entitled to absolutely nothing, right?

We understand that tournament play, or a tournament like this, they call it madness for a reason, and we've got to show up and everybody has to do their job.

But inside of that, you want them to enjoy the moment. There's a lot of teams that don't have the privilege of playing in this tournament. We're one of those. So we try to keep that in perspective. But I want them to have fun. I want them to enjoy all of it.

But I do know this. I have a tremendous amount of confidence in that group that's down there in that locker room that they understand the task, and in order to achieve the goals that we want to achieve, we've got to get the first one. And then we move on from there.

**Q. Throughout the course of the season periodically you have talked about it, just almost casually in post-game press conferences, this is a great time to be a woman in sports in America and the game itself. Are you feeling that a little more even now that you're here and the attention that has been focused on women's basketball this season, which everybody's talking about more and more?**

TERI MOREN: I think that I felt that way throughout probably the last couple years. I think this year in

particular in our game it's been so great because there's been -- you know, we talk about parity, but this year you can really talk about it, you know, with the early upsets that happened.

I've heard Mackenzie talk about it. It's a great time to be a women's basketball player, and it's a great time to be a female that gets to coach women's basketball.

Yeah, there's a popularity out there, I think, and there's a lot of people. It's for a variety of reasons. I think Caitlin Clark, we talk about her, there's this phenomenon with her, and it's well deserved. But I think it's also put eyes on other games, other women's games out there.

I think, if you've never watched women's basketball and now you're starting to watch women's basketball, you realize you've missed a lot because there's an opportunity there to, not just support, but also enjoy how we play the game.

**Q. Teri, I was just kind of wondering how you're going to go about managing Mackenzie's minutes, whether it's a target number that you have in your head or if you're just going to maybe play it by ear tomorrow afternoon?**

TERI MOREN: I'm going to play it by ear, I really am. This is tournament time. We'll listen to Mackenzie, and we'll have conversations throughout, but as far as I'm concerned, she's good to go. We're going to play her as much as we can.

THE MODERATOR: In the room, we are joined by graduate student Mackenzie Holmes and senior Sara Scalia.

**Q. Sara, for you, obviously their coach coached you while you were at Minnesota. Talk about your relationship with her. Are you going to throw anything different that she hasn't seen? Because I'm sure she's got the scouting report on you. And just how excited are you to see her bring her team here?**

SARA SCALIA: Yeah, I'm definitely excited. She's taken this program really far over just two years, but it's not surprising to me. I was really close with her at Minnesota. She was my position coach, and she helped me develop as a player. So she knows a lot about my game.

Yeah, I have a lot of respect for her. Definitely excited to see her. Probably not going to throw anything too different. There's a lot of other things to worry about too.

**Q. For either of you, you were obviously in this**

**position last year and it didn't end the way you wanted. Do you guys talk about that? Do you use that as motivation this week now that you're back in the same spot?**

SARA SCALIA: I would say it's definitely motivation. We have a lot of the same players that came back, so they kind of know how we felt last year after we did lose to Miami. Definitely not a feeling we want to feel again this year.

We got the advantage to play at home again, which we're really grateful for. So we've got to take advantage of that and our home crowd.

MACKENZIE HOLMES: I think that of course it's on our minds, but we kind of have to put it behind us. This is a new team this year though we have a lot of the same players. We're a different team, and we have a really good Fairfield team to prepare for. So that's where our focus has been this past week.

**Q. For both of you, this is your last weekend playing here in Bloomington for Indiana. How do you balance kind of knowing that and the emotions that might come with that while still focusing on the games that you have to play?**

SARA SCALIA: Yeah, like I said, I'm just really grateful that I got to play in Assembly again in the postseason in front of the fans that show up for a game. It's definitely really exciting.

And not thinking too much about how it could be my last two games. Just kind of going into each game worried about getting the win and kind of moving on from there.

**Q. We were just talking to Teri, and I asked her a question about the growth in women's basketball and the attention on it. She said that you have talked about parity more this year than before. Do you feel that's definitely something to watch for as we go into this tournament?**

MACKENZIE HOLMES: Yeah, I've said this before, like Coach has said, it's a very exciting time to be a women's basketball player. We have a platform that I don't think we've ever had before. There's so much great talent, so many great teams, players, coaches.

To be able to play in this tournament specifically is super exciting because I think women's basketball is at an all time high, and it's just going to continue to grow because of all the talent that we're seeing this year.

**Q. Mackenzie, in terms of the knee, are you able to kind of turn the page on it mentally? Is that hard to sort of get past knowing that it's something that could reoccur? How have you felt during practice? Teri said you're kind of a constant presence. Just physically you feel 100 percent right now?**

MACKENZIE HOLMES: I never go into a practice or go into a game worrying about getting injured. I don't think that's a way to play the game in fear. It's never good for anybody. So that's never something that's specifically on my mind when I'm out there on the court. It's honestly the one place that I don't have to stress about it.

I know that my training staff and my coaches are making the right decisions to help me feel the healthiest and the best that I can throughout practice and throughout games.

**Q. What's been your overall impressions of Fairfield, their style of play, and how do you approach that matchup?**

MACKENZIE HOLMES: Clearly they're a very good team. Their record shows it. They play fast. They're a quick team. They shoot the ball at a really high clip. They cut well off the ball. They play really fast.

We've had to really be focused in these last two days of prep on just locking in, knowing the personnel, knowing the pieces. We're very much aware of how talented of a team that this group is coming into Assembly Hall tomorrow.

SARA SCALIA: Just going off that, they do a lot of little things. They look really connected as a team. I think we just have to work hard, give it our all, and play our game.

**Q. Just for both of you, how do you combine the intensity, the one-and-done focus you need to have, with you want to have fun, you want to enjoy the moment?**

SARA SCALIA: Yeah, I think we've just kind of got to just take it one game at a time, one possession at a time, really just play our game, play connected as a team, and show the work that we've put in these past two weeks to prep for this tournament.

MACKENZIE HOLMES: I think that we're wasting time if we're looking too far ahead into the future thinking about this is our last this, this is our last that. I think we just take it, like Sara said, day by day, possession by possession.

Throughout the game, there's going to be highs and lows, ebbs and flows. So we're going to really just have to stay locked in for 40 minutes and not worry about the future just

yet.

**Q. Mackenzie, I know that Fairfield is of course in Connecticut. I know you're from Maine. I know you take your opponents all the same. Does this game hit a little different because you're very familiar with them, being in your region?**

MACKENZIE HOLMES: I mean, it's March. Every game hits a little different in March. That's what I'll say about that.

I do know one of their assistants. He was the former head coach at Boston College when I was in high school and was recruited by him pretty heavily. I know Coach Johnson very well. I know that they're going to be a very well-prepared basketball team.

But just the fact that it's March, that is what the difference maker is and what's at stake in this game.

**Q. Sara, Lexi Bargesser has had a greater role this season. She's been put in position to start a few times due to injuries. Can you tell me what you feel has grown in her game and how dependable she's been as a teammate to kind of take advantage of her versatile skills?**

SARA SCALIA: I think she does a great job just kind of knowing her role. We need her to come in, and she has a really big impact for our team. She does a lot of the little things. She's a really good defender. She's really quick. Obviously she has the ball in her hands a lot.

She's a very important piece to our team, and she's grown a lot from last year, just as far as her confidence as a player.

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