

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

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Bloomington, Indiana, USA

Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall

Fairfield Stags

Coach Carly

Thibault-DuDonis

Janelle Brown

Emina Selimovic

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: From Fairfield University we have guard Janelle Brown and road runner Emina Selimovic.

It's been quite the season for you. An early season setback and then wins since then. What has the ride been like over the last couple of weeks to continue to keep that winning streak going?

JANELLE BROWN: I think that the ride has just been something that we expected. We come into our games ready, even though we don't really win pretty, we kind of win ugly. We have some gritty wins. But we hold ourselves to a high standard to where we know what we are capable of, how we can compete.

So with this winning streak and with our reminder of our early loss in the season, we always keep a chip on our shoulders about how we want to perform, how we want to play.

And we just speak that into existence. We work hard day in and day out, and we try to show the world what we can actually do.

EMINA SELIMOVIC: Like she said, we have high standards. And those standards have been set since June 18th when we stepped foot on campus for summer workouts.

And no matter what time of the season it was, we always came into practice competitive, we were humble and hungry, and the last win didn't change the next game that



we were going to have.

So we stayed consistent in our efforts, and we stayed competitive in practice. And we never gave in and got too comfortable.

And I think that's how the last few weeks, actually the last few months, of practice have been. So the last few weeks haven't really changed much since the beginning of this season.

Q. Can you talk about -- Coach discussed how you shot maybe 240 more threes as a team than IU has, and she talked about how just about everybody on your team might have the green light. Talk about that philosophy and how important that is to your team's overall game.

EMINA SELIMOVIC: Well, Coach Carly has a hundred percent trust in every one of us. And I think that that's huge in everyone's confidence on this team.

And on top of that, we take a lot of shots in practice and outside of practice. That makes us confident in our shooting ability on this team.

So I think that's a huge part of our consistency and how many threes we have made as a team this year.

JANELLE BROWN: And I also think that we have a team just full of talent. So at any given day, any given night, you know, next man up, whoever is ready.

I think that that's what I really find interesting about our team is like it doesn't matter if we got road runners or if we got guards, as long as you got confidence, you can shoot the ball.

I personally -- I guess we do take a lot of three-point shots. But you miss a hundred percent of the shots you don't take. So I think that just attests to us and how we want to play and how we just want to keep our foot on the pedal.

Q. You guys obviously have a Big Ten win this season over Rutgers, but what kind of challenge does Indiana

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present for tomorrow?

JANELLE BROWN: I think their posts, and they're very long. I feel like we're a very small team -- well, I'm a very small person, so I know that I'm going to have some difficulty trying to either pass some balls or something because of their length.

But I also think that their post player, Mackenzie Holmes, she's just a complete dawg. So we really just have to try to maintain her and kind of get her off the boards, get her off of sweet spot, which is the block.

So I think that that's going to be a major key for our game.

Q. I know the record says 31-1, but there's been adversity along the way. How do you think that's going to help going into the NCAA Tournament?

EMINA SELIMOVIC: Yeah, I mean, like Nelly said in the first question, in her answer, not all of our wins have been smooth. We haven't won every game by 20 points. More specifically, our championship game was an overtime game.

And it helps prepare us to be able to keep our composure under pressure and to know that we've been in that situation before. So coming up, like if, you know -- once the game within Indiana starts, and if it's a close game, you know, we are ready for that. And we've been in that situation before. So it's not going to be our first time.

And I think that's helped build us up for this game coming up.

JANELLE BROWN: I completely agree with Emina. She said it perfectly.

THE MODERATOR: I'm going to ask Coach this as well, but describe a road runner for me. What is the position?

EMINA SELIMOVIC: So, we're not your typical forwards or posts. Yeah, you know, we have length and, you know, inside we can -- we have our game, but we can also run the floor and stretch the floor.

And I think that's what a road runner is, as Coach Blake likes to call us. We aren't, like I said, your typical post that just stays in from block to block and just, you know -- we can stretch the floor, and we're almost like a mixture of a guard and a forward.

JANELLE BROWN: I would like to add that our road runners are just stupid athletic. Like just they can defend, they can play offense. It don't matter. They're just

everywhere.

Meep-meep.

THE MODERATOR: Between the All-Tournament team and the All-Conference teams in your conference, you guys had a number of people that were honored with those things, Freshman of the Year, Player of the Year. What is it like to play around so many people who maybe elevate those that are around you?

JANELLE BROWN: I, honestly, love it because it not only makes me better, but it makes the people around me better, makes my teammates better.

So us just challenging each other every single day and seeing what we're capable of and how we go against adversity, it's a beautiful thing to see.

And I think that it's very necessary to keep this going and to keep just pushing each other and trying to, you know -- as a guard, I try to make Emina the best road runner in the nation by trying to give her the ball with her sweet spots. But just knowing each other's personnel, knowing how each other place, I think that is a really important part of the accolades that we've won.

We just play together and connected. And I think that this team is definitely different from a lot of teams that I've been a part of. And I'm very grateful to have these people, whether coaches or players, around me to make me better.

EMINA SELIMOVIC: All I would add to that is, you know, this team is -- we have a deep bench. You never know whose night it's going to be. And that contributes to all the accolades we got because there's not just one player that does everything. Everyone contributes on this team. And that's what makes us -- made or season so successful.

THE MODERATOR: Emina, if you want to start with this one, how would you describe your head coach?

EMINA SELIMOVIC: She is so passionate in what she does. I mean, you can tell. She comes in every day with this -- this passion and she works so hard for us. She cares about us. And you can tell by what she brings every day. Like she brings all this energy. And she knows us as individuals first, as people, and then as basketball players.

And I think that's a huge part in why she's such an amazing coach and how much of an impact she's had on us.

JANELLE BROWN: She's dawg. I think one of the words that I had said during our MAC press conference was demanding, but I really wanted to say like, yes, she may be

demanding, but she knows what we're capable of and what it takes to be in this position itself.

So I think that she is, again, what Emina said, passionate. She always gets us fired up. And she's just amazing to be around. She knows you as a person other than a basketball player.

And I think that that's what makes her so great, is like she tries to make those personal connections off the court so that she can have a better understanding of you or get to know you better on the court.

So I think that she's just an amazing person. I wouldn't want to play for anyone but her. But, again, passionate, demanding, and dawg. I would definitely say those are the three characteristics that I would use to describe Coach Carly.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you so much for joining us today.

EMINA SELIMOVIC: Thank you.

JANELLE BROWN: Thank you.

Meep-meep.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Fairfield head Coach Carly Thibault-DuDonis. Coach, we will ask you to make an opening statement, and then we'll take questions.

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: I'll just start by saying our team is incredibly excited to be here. I wouldn't want to be here and on this journey with anybody else. I love this team. I love how they love each other and show up for one another. I love how they work every day to not only get better individually but to push the person to their right and to their left.

And I've truly enjoyed the journey and know that we're not done yet. But you don't do what we've done this year without great people. And that's where it started every step of the way.

And we're looking forward to the challenge of playing on the road at a Big Ten school. And this team has never backed down from a challenge, so we're looking forward to what this weekend has to hold.

Q. I just wanted to ask, as a team, you have attempted like 200 more three-pointers than IU have, I think. How do you use three-pointers to your advantage?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: This team was built very

intentionally. We've studied mid-majors that have been really successful, not only in their leagues, but in postseason, when I took this job, and my staff has done a great job of that.

One of the common denominators is a team that plays five out, stretches the floor, forces you to make tough decisions inside and out. So we've been able to recruit to that in two short years to add shooters all around at all positions and make that a difficult matchup.

And so we've had a ton of great three-point shooters, and we play fast to allow more shot attempts as well. And so I think all around we've been able to shoot more threes and use our versatility to our advantage.

I think that is a hard feat because Indiana is a great three-point shooting team as well. But I think our pace of play and our ability to do that one through five has increased those numbers significantly.

Q. 15-15 last season, you're 31-1, a 20-plus game winning streak this season. What clicked from last season to this season for your group that enabled them to do what they've done so far?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: I think last year we worked really hard to -- we got to take over a program and a team that had really good individuals and great humans, people that were on a championship team prior to me taking over.

And so we were able to kind of find a happy medium of maybe playing not fully this five-out system, but we were a really good defensive team. So not only were we focused on that but as well as just building our culture and what that looked like.

So I think last year prepared us a lot to have a great foundation, both in our culture and in our defensive system and how we shared the ball.

And the ball didn't go in quite as much as we would have wanted to last year, but we went to work recruiting to continue to add the holes of players that we graduated and just holes in general of how we wanted to play.

So we added seven new players, and three of which who are transfers that we kind of had a proof of concept that played the way that we wanted to, and four freshmen that are all very versatile as well. Those all have contributed in this year and this run we've had.

So I think the foundation we built, both in how they care for one another, they share the basketball, our defensive prowess, was started long ago in that first year. And now



we've been able to add and build to that with our offensive stamina, our pace, and our spacing on the floor.

Q. The past few months the team has been the hunted. Is there any less pressure of the team now being the underdog?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: I think it's a -- I said this recently on a news interview that I think it's a welcome change. This team has had a lot of pressure on them. And while they've earned that responsibility because of how good they've been, it's nice to be able to have a chip on our shoulder. We know what the odds are in the game. That's been stated in a lot of different ways. And I think this team loves being the underdog as well.

So I think they're excited for the opportunity to challenge a really good team. And I think we played a little bit tight in the conference tournament because of that, so I think we will see a team that's ready to play free, as they've done most of the season.

Q. You have a connection with Sara Scalia, who transferred here I think the same year you went to Fairfield. What do you see from her, and what are your impressions of the IU team?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: I'm so happy for Sara. She's done a great job throughout the course of her career, and continuing to grow and expand her game. She seems to have found an awesome role with this Indiana team.

Watching her, I've kept up with her and watched their games as much as I can, and always rooting for her.

I think one thing I know about her is she's going stay in the gym, and she loves being in the gym and continuing to get better. She's clearly done that year in and year out.

And she's a great piece of a team that shoots a really high percentage from three, first in the country, surrounding a really good post player in Mackenzie Holmes. So you have to make really difficult decisions of what you're going to take away.

And so obviously we've got our work cut out for us and know that we have to pick our poison in some ways but also find ways to hopefully be disruptive in that as well.

THE MODERATOR: We just talked to Janelle and Emina, and they described you as passionate and demanding in a good way. I'm interested how maybe they bring your personality to the floor because they both seemed very passionate and like they would be demanding of their teammates as well.

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: I'm fortunate that I have women that, A, love the game as much as I do. I challenged our staff early on of we wanted people who loved the game, we didn't have to force them to do something they didn't love. A lot of that starts with who they are as people. And I think when your leaders reflect the head coach, you see some really special things happen.

I know I love being in the gym with them every single day. They love each other. And I think you see that how they play and share the basketball, they're first to pick one of their teammates up off the floor, how they point to the passer. I think that's something that my staff and I really emphasize.

At the end of the day, I get to coach basketball for a living, and that's an amazing thing. But I think the more beautiful thing about it is that we get to empower young women to be the best version of themselves. And I think we're seeing that in Nelly and Emina and all their teammates of how they get to be authentically themselves and show that in their own way, but then they bring it together in a lot of different ways to be something really special.

So I just am fortunate that we've been able to give them the freedom to be who they are and empower one another as well.

Q. It's been a selfless team all year. How do you get a whole team to buy into that concept?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: First of all, you have to recruit selfless people and have selfless people in your locker room. You can do all the right things, but if it's not in their heart, that's really hard.

I think that's a testament to these women, their families, their upbringing, that they're all willing to sacrifice for the greater good of this team.

But if you look back, I think it was in June or July, we did a team activity of how many minutes in your perfect world would you play, and I think we added up to about 400 minutes, which we don't intend to play multiple overtimes to get to 400 minutes.

And so I think that was a tone set for our team that nobody really -- even if you said you were going to play 35 minutes, that's not the case on this team.

And so there was an idea early on that you're going to sacrifice a little bit of maybe what you want to do something really special. And they've done that.

And I think I'm fortunate with captains in Lauren Beach, Janelle Brown, and Izabela Nicoletti Leite, that those three have set the tone for that; that it's okay to play eight less minutes so that you can be really fresh and play at a high-octane level when you go back in. And they trust the teammate that's subbing in for them to do the same.

I think that also speaks to the amount of time that they spend together; that they trust one another in the way that they do that they don't have to take it on all themselves.

THE MODERATOR: This is a place that some of your team has played at. Did they talk about what the atmosphere was like? Have you had them address the team on maybe what to expect coming in here with the fan base at all?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: Some of them have talked about it, maybe not in a formal setting. And they knew they were a different team then, we're a different team now. So there are some -- obviously a little bit of an advantage for Janelle Brown to have played here, but knowing that it's a very different situation, a very different environment.

We're looking forward to having a great fan environment. I think anytime you are a great basketball player, you want to play in an environment like that. So I know they're looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Positions have kind of evolved since everybody went two guards, two forwards, and a center. We asked Emina the same question, but where did road runner come from, and maybe how has it evolved your way of coaching?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: Well, I mentioned earlier that we built this team very intentionally to be a team that can make some noise in the postseason. And one of the things that you see in those common denominators is that we're likely not going to get a Mackenzie Holmes who is 6'4" and incredibly skilled, but we can get an Emina Selimovic, who is a little undersized, she's incredibly versatile.

So we knew our positions would reflect that and in recruiting and this team, kind of building their own identity that's not a traditional post player where you have to sit on the block and play with your back to the basket.

So our road runners are versatile. They run, they play on inside and out, they pass, they dribble, they play a little bit like guards, like Emina said.

So we knew that, A, we wanted that group to buy in to that

identity; and, B, when we go recruiting, nobody wants to be a post player anymore. Some do. Very few. And knowing that we would be able to go recruit the type of player that we wanted and knowing that they could come in not be limited on what their role would be and what they can do.

So you see that in Meghan, Emina and Karly and Mac and Lauren Beach. Those guys are kind of our road runner group. And they show that in how they stretch the floor out to three, how they pass, how they dribble, rebound, and play with their back to the basket.

Q. There's been some games this year where the team really had to dig in and find a way to win, down 13 in the second half in the championship game. How has the team been able to accomplish that?

CARLY THIBAUT-DUDONIS: Again, I think it starts with our leadership. You mentioned our championship game. I think our leaders, and specifically those three captains, did a really good job of keeping their composure, communicating with their teammates, keeping the goal and the immediate process in mind.

And I think we've put them in positions, whether it's practice, we've had a couple conference games that have been close, we've had to come from behind, to face some adversity. And I know our coaching staff puts them in adversity in practice. So that's not the first time they would see that.

We're fortunate to have a great group of scout guys that challenge us every day. And we've had games at Mount St Mary's and Niagara that we're ready for these moments, but I think it really starts with our leadership within the team that they don't freak out. They're able to grab somebody next to them and keep kind of process oriented in that moment of what the next stop looks like or if we need to share the ball in a different way, if we need to make a certain read off of one of our motion actions.

So I think they do a good job of being where their feet are versus, oh, my gosh, we're down 13, what now?

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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