

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Norfolk State vs Maryland

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College Park, Maryland, USA

XFINITY Center

## Norfolk State Spartans Coach Larry Vickers

Media Conference

LARRY VICKERS: Good afternoon. First of all just happy to be here. This never gets old coming to the NCAA tournament. You know you work so hard for it. You know it's your number one goal especially for us as program every summer. It's an honor to be here three times in a row.

Want me to talk about the game or the year? Overall we started conditioning in the summer. Probably took over conditioning, excuse me, in about mid-August. When we got done conditioning we had something we call Pride Sprints. We wanted to run a Pride Sprint tired, exhausted, after a long conditioning day for all the games we thought would be extremely difficult.

So obviously we named our my five high major opponents. We haven't won in the Burr. That's Howard University's gym. That was one. We just had Green Bay, so many Pride Sprints to run. It old them, we can make it to the NCAA tournament and be 19 and 12, you know, have a really good year, because I felt like we really challenged them with the schedule, with the amount of traveling that we had to do.

I wouldn't have expected to sit here 30-4, you know. It just speaks to the pride this team has, the competitiveness that this team has. That's what makes us good, our competitiveness. But to be here 30 and 4, back to back to back NCAA tournaments, back-to-back to back -- back -- regular season champions, you know, it's an honor. It's an honor. It's an honor.

**Q. Coach, always congratulations on your success this season and of course prior years. All year I've talked about how outside of Puerto Rico you remain locked in, tough. How do you keep the ladies locked in and still root for the guys? As you know was they play Florida? Also, how excited are you that you're in**



**College Park not too far and going to have more green and gold versus being in California to start the tournament?**

LARRY VICKERS: Well, it's definitely a lot easier to keep them focused when there is not a beach around. You know, Puerto Rico, that beach was too close. Wasn't good for us.

But being close to home obviously is something that is -- you know, we thank the selection committee for keeping us a lot closer to home this time. Year one, South Carolina, which was a couple miles outside of being a flight.

Last year, we went all the way to Stanford and played an 8 p.m. game. If you watched our 1:30 press conference it's a lot of the yawning. Or energy wasn't high. And then so this year, just to stay on the east coast, you know, with some players that were somewhat familiar, some of my team played a lot of these players through AAU and things like that, so in personnel they were chiming in. Does she still -- and that's -- when you're closer to home that kind of stuff always helps.

I'm not sure how big of a crowd we have, but we have a large DMV alumni base here that supports us heavily in everything we do. Hopefully we can get about 500 people in here, maybe a little bit more to cheer us on tomorrow.

**Q. Congratulations. Three straight trips to the NCAA tournament.**

LARRY VICKERS: Thank you.

**Q. Tough to do.**

LARRY VICKERS: Yeah.

**Q. What will you take into this tournament that you learned from the last two years?**

LARRY VICKERS: Well, year one, you know, even drawing South Carolina, we were just happy to be there. If you would've heard us in some of our pre-game stuff we were talking like we generally don't talk.



Last year with Stanford it wasn't unhappy to be here, but wanted to have a lot better performance, and we kind of did that in the -- up until about the middle of the second. I hope, then they kind of just jumped on us a little bit.

This year, we're a seasoned group with nothing to lose. I'm not saying we're coming in here to win but we're coming to compete for 40 minutes and try to keep the score a lot closer than some of the other games have been.

**Q. Coach, what are you expecting from Mimi? Her first year she got the love from Dawn Staley last year. Faced some tough bigs at atmosphere Stanford. A little frustrated. But she worked with Diamond all season on guard skills. Got three ball working now?**

LARRY VICKERS: Yeah.

**Q. How do you expect her to shine on this stage now in her third experience?**

LARRY VICKERS: Well, one thing about key air a she's going to compete. You know, doesn't matter who we play. That's why Dawn Staley showed her this love three years ago. She's going to compete. She doesn't feel slighted by any means but she just wants to rise to the level of competition. Regardless if that's defensively, offensively, she's going to do whatever is best for our team.

That's why she's easy to coach for the most part. I know 22 will be ready tomorrow at 4:00. I don't have to motivate or talk to her. She's going to be ready. One thing I like to see as a coach, is every year you get a little better. Going from year one and year two, she had a massive weight loss. I'm not going to say the number, but it was a good amount of weight.

Year two to year three, just extending her decision making. You talked about the guard skills and the three. Just makes her so much tougher to guard.

**Q. Hey, coach.**

LARRY VICKERS: Hey.

**Q. Good to see you again. Over the last 48 hours we've seen pretty much the world go crazy when it comes to HBCU teams getting wins. For you as a HBCU head coach, what was it like seeing your counterparts perform well in this tournament and how does that add motivation for you and your team to go out and do the same tomorrow?**

LARRY VICKERS: I told everybody we generally perform well in the play-in games. What's next for our league overall, we want to try and get, especially on the women's side, more upsets. On our men's side we've had some upsets. Norfolk State beating was apart of that, but Compton State and Hampton getting wins as well in the first round.

You know we want to be dominant in the play-in so the committee can recognize, hey, when we play like opponents -- a lot of my counterparts don't get to play a lot of like opponents. They're playing a lot of guarantees.

We want to make sure that we're showing well in those games. But we want to try and get some of these first rounds. When we can start to get those people will respect our league more and more.

What did we have, three 21 teams I guess this year. We want to get it a point are we're like some other leagues getting five and six. That comes with good scheduling and sometimes we are not allowed it. You know, based upon budgets and things like that.

**Q. Follow up. For you and your team, in what ways do you feel like the three-peat, three NCAA tournament appearances, has put the world on notice of the brand of basketball that you and the MEAC play?**

LARRY VICKERS: I thin it started last year. March Madness did an amazing seven minute documentary on us. It's on YouTube if you haven't seen it. So adding Diamond -- where we won 26 games the year before we added Diamond and people were like, why would she go there? They have a good program there.

I thought the NCAA and March Madness has done a tremendous job, especially in the women's basketball space, promoting our program, what we do on social media and just throughout the year. You know, just that exposure, you can't pay for it.

So as we got into the three-peat this year we wanted to just do even more special stuff. We had 26 and then 27. We didn't talk about 30 at all. I can't sit up here and say that was even one my dreams as a head coach here to win 30 games. It's not something what you even dream of at this level.

But as it got closer, after we beat Auburn after Christmas we were like, oh, it's attainable, but we have to be kind of perfect to do so.

**Q. Coach, in the MEAC you were known for your pressure defense and full court pressure. Maryland is**



**known for that as well.**

LARRY VICKERS: Yes.

**Q. How prepared are you to be pressed when you are used to be the pressure team? If that makes sense.**

LARRY VICKERS: No, it makes a ton of sense. We struggled with it last week against South Carolina State in the opening round game. It was a perfect time because nobody ever generally tries to press us. Nobody ever tries to press us.

So South Carolina State kind of went to try something and we turned the ball over 25 times. Why would you all pick the tournament in front of the other teams in the league to expose this?

And then we spent a lot time working on it the next day. I thought next two games might have had 25 turnovers total. So that was a good thing. Coming into this game today, same thing, being strong with the basketball, making sure we're shortening the passes. Anything that's longer than 20 feet they're going to steal.

We just want to have some attention to detail tomorrow and try and handle the press on a national level well. We don't want it to frustrate us.

**Q. Kind of interesting, we got you right during the celebration when you won. Went viral a little bit.**

LARRY VICKERS: Yeah.

**Q. Your team has talked about how you're a father figure in a way to them. Talk about this being your last ride with some of the seniors and how special is this group.**

LARRY VICKERS: This group is very special. Starts with Niya and Makoye. They're the foundation of our team. They were class of 2020. That's our foundation. They built this. Niya is three years in a row unanimous captain. You know, we do a little voting system. She gets three every time for everybody.

You know, she's always -- and then she doesn't shoot the ball very much. Last year I was glad that the league gave her second team, averaging six points per game. Her and Makoye are our foundation. Koy is our energy. She's going to be bouncy and talk.

Those two really started it all. Then we got a chance to add Diamond, you know, add some others. So this group will be super special. I tell them at this point they're playing

for legacy. How many of ya'll are going into the rafters? How big is the picture of us going be in the gym? Little stuff to motivate them.

I was pleased last year in the transfer portal. We had nine returners. Didn't lose anybody in the portal at all. And we don't pay a ton, so that speaks to our culture and the love they have for each other in that locker room.

**Q. Hey, coach, Diamond said you've been working on starting fast. Key point in this matchup. In what ways have you emphasized or given them tips to make sure they start fast when they play Maryland tomorrow?**

LARRY VICKERS: I took the blame because if you watch our practices we do offensively break down, 15 defensive breakdowns before we ever started to really compete. So we been trying to put the competition right in the beginning. Send one, let's go up and down and compete.

So I took the blame for it, but we've gotten to a point where we won so many basketball games they become a little lax. You know, for me, people don't understand like how hard Coach Staley's job is, generally. People that constantly win and win and win and win and just motivating a team. This has been a different challenge. We've always been the hunters. Since 2016.

So for us now, this is something different. As a coach you got to motivate yourself a little bit different to motivate your players. They know tomorrow we can't start slow. Start slow tomorrow look like our UNC game. That was a game we started slow and couldn't come back.

Alabama we started slow, revamped at halftime, and then came back from 20. We did the same thing against Green Bay. Started a game with 20 point lead and came back. We lost that game in the last nine seconds.

They know we can't start slow tomorrow. Going to have to be locked in earlier, ready to compete from the jump.

**Q. Coach, I was at your selection party. One thing I heard was shock the world. Girls were saying it. This team 16, 15, 13. What is it about this team that can get the job done and actually shock the world tomorrow?**

LARRY VICKERS: We know we're going to be have to pretty close to perfect on the offensive and defensive end. But one is going to have to be better than the other. That 2012 men's team that beat Missouri, we gave up a lot of the points that day and scored two more points.

So whatever it is, I'm like we can't be average on one end. We have to be exceptional regardless if it's offensively, and

run everything through those two. Or defensively, then we're able to slow them down.

I think every day they come into that gym and see 40 by 20 feet poster of that 2012 team, so they know it's possible. You know, if at the watch some -- it was a 4:13 game earlier today that was extremely close. We got to have that mentality coming in that is it's possible that we're going to believe and we got to execute. Belief doesn't matter if you don't execute.

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