

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - High Point vs Vanderbilt

Friday, March 20, 2026

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Memorial Gymnasium

High Point Panthers

Aaliyah Collins

Macy Spencer

Coach Chelsea Banbury

Media Conference

Q Macy, you transferred to High Point from UNLV, how do you feel about that decision now that you're here at this point?

MACY SPENCER: It feels amazing just being here with my team and coaches. They've instilled a lot of confidence in me over the season. I think it's helped me get where we are and where I am. I'm excited to be here.

Q On that same topic, did you always believe you could become this kind of player or has this season surprised you at all?

MACY SPENCER: I knew I was capable of a lot more than I was producing and kind of the minutes that I was getting. I think I've worked a lot harder this season. I don't know if I thought it would get to this point, but I'm very glad it did and I think my training and work ethic has brought me here.

Q For either of you, did your team have a chance to watch the men's team yesterday pull their upset and what was your reaction to that?

MACY SPENCER: Our friend, Lexi, she's a part of the team, we actually have a TikTok. We were going crazy. It's just great that, you know, both teams are in the tournament and that they pulled that off and hopefully we can get another one.

AALIYAH COLLINS: I've never felt more happier or proud for somebody else. My roommates and I, we were watching the game on my phone. Like, I don't think I've ever screamed at a game before or just I was so excited, so happy for them. It's cool.



Q Aaliyah, you were a conference MVP most recently, congratulations. How are you bringing that energy into this game with Vanderbilt?

AALIYAH COLLINS: Honestly, my biggest emphasis, at least for myself, is I'm just focusing on the defensive side today. Offense will come, obviously. Especially with me, my defense creates a lot of my offense, but I think if we stop a lot of their key players just on the defensive side that we'll have a pretty good chance of winning. That's my biggest focus.

Q Defensively, what's a game plan for Aubrey and for Mikayla?

AALIYAH COLLINS: Really just shutting them down, forcing them into their weaknesses. They're really good offensive players, but every offensive player has a weakness. So capitalizing on that. Also, we have to be on our defense. We can't be on an island, but we have to be able to guard without help, but also having that help for us. That's just the biggest thing.

Q This is your biggest test this year. What's been the message from the coaching staff all week long for this game upcoming?

AALIYAH COLLINS: I guess to say the same thing. Stopping their key players, but also just trusting our game plan, trusting that all of the work that we put in leading up to this point, it helped us get to this stage. And then having trust within ourselves on the defensive end, but really it's really just the defensive side and also having confidence in ourselves. Like, yeah, we're playing a good team, but we got ourselves here for a reason. So just having confidence and trust.

Q My colleague that's covering the men's team had a story on how your assistant coach, Katie, is bringing Flynn coming back here. Has she gotten back? And how is it having an assistant coach, you know, with a young one around and, you know, the synergy? How much does it feed between the men's program and the women's program for you all?

AALIYAH COLLINS: Well, one, I'm very happy for Flynn and Katie for that, because it's a big thing. But also, for her to be able to support her husband and then also still be able to be here for us, it's a long flight to go from there and over here. So I don't know, just having support within each team. And then it carries farther than that with our fans and whatnot. So it's pretty cool. It's nice. I'm glad that she's able to -- she was able to make it to their first game and then also still be here for us.

Q I did want to go back to, I think, Selection Sunday. Y'all's reactions and the fan's reactions behind you went super viral. Can you just take me back to that moment, what was going through your head and how did that work in terms of watching it?

AALIYAH COLLINS: Once again, going back with having support, that was awesome, but also we're excited. I can't really say too much to that. To finally be on the sage again and then also play a really good team, like it's gonna be a big test for us, but it's a test that I'm positive if we follow through with it, we have a good chance.

Q Aaliyah, you played in the play-in game last year. What kind of experience can you draw from that versus come back here and what differences do you feel between the two?

AALIYAH COLLINS: I think we're more connected this year. I think we're all on the same page more than the last. The biggest takeaway I would say though is we can't play scared. We need to trust in our work and just our skills because I feel like once you start -- we'll have some jitters, but once we get that out of the way, we should be fine. If you really overthink it too much or, you know, yeah, we are an underdog. But we can't feed into that because once we start playing scared or like we don't have a chance at all, that's when it will go bad.

That's the biggest thing I can really say about this. We need to trust ourselves and trust our work.

Q Has the preparation for this game been any different or are you guys sticking to the same game plan?

AALIYAH COLLINS: What do you mean? I'm sorry.

Q Preparing for this game, are you guys preparing any differently than any other game?

AALIYAH COLLINS: More emphasis of personnel and guarding, but not too much different, I wouldn't say, but just having more emphasis on different things is like a regular game plan. Every game plan is going to change.

Q Coach Banbury came out and said she didn't think you guys were a 16-seed, she knew you were higher than that. How does it feel to accomplish that after all of your success this season to not be in a play-in game or anything like that and secure a 15-seed?

AALIYAH COLLINS: It feels wonderful, and it's our hard work that paid off. I keep saying that a lot, but it really is what it is. It's definitely a wonderful feeling, but the job is not done yet. So now it's time for us to prove ourselves in a sense, so yeah.

THE MODERATOR: That concludes our time. A special thank you to Macy and Aaliyah.

We are now joined by head coach Chelsea Banbury. We'll take questions.

Q I have two questions. The first was, they were a delight. They were so funny and so witty. What can you tell us about those of us who are unfamiliar with the team and culture and program?

CHELSEA BANBURY: I've said a lot this year and early on, this group came together really early and a lot of our success came from the fact they generally loved each other and liked being around each other. They are a goofy group. They know how to have fun and also know when to be serious. They've been a lot fun to coach in that sense of the sarcasm that you might get in on practice, which I get in on plenty, for those who have been in on practice.

It's a group we can have fun with and we can also be serious and know when it's time to work and do what we have to do.

Q Second question, actually, I spoke to Karl Smesko about your time together. He had all wonderful things to say. I'd like to know about his impact on your coaching and how you've grown since?

CHELSEA BANBURY: I don't know that there's been anyone at least probably in my life or in my profession that had a bigger impact on me than what he did. Just every day under him was a learning experience just from the beginning, even when I was a player. How he looked at the game was completely different. I was down there. I played, it was 2005 and he was doing points per possession. Synergy didn't exist, all of that, points per shot, he was just giving those numbers to us, making them himself either from practice or from scouts or from box scores and stuff. Doing that in 2005. He was one of the first ones that stretched out defenses and understood the value of a three-point shot. And hey, if you only shoot 33

percent from three, you're at one point per possession. You have to shoot 50 percent from two to have the same return.

So just, you know, that analytical mind, how he looked at basketball and just, you know, I'd watch film with him. It was always a learning experience. It wasn't you were just sitting there watching games. It was always what are they doing, how can they beat us, what can we do that can use their weaknesses against them. Having that different mind and giving you a different perspective of how to learn the game and look at the game and, you know, just being under him for 14 years, like, you know, it's invaluable. He's had a ton of success.

Then when you leave, you know, you grow, you put your own stamp on things. Maybe it's different actions. You have to evolve with what you have on your team and constantly be, you know, a learner of the game, and constantly trying to grow and you have to do with what fits with what you have and every team is different. I think I learned that from him a lot is just, you know you have to work with what you have and be really good at that. I can't say enough about what I learned from him, but he is, he's one of the best minds out there, I think, in the sport.

Q Chelsea, you had one of your assistant coaches who went to support her husband as he was coaching the High Point men's team. What does it mean to you to allow your assistant coach to go and support her husband's team as well, and what did it mean to you guys to be able to watch the men pull an upset win?

CHELSEA BANBURY: Man, yesterday was unbelievable. I was packing my stuff to come here, we had the game on, my son and I were watching the game, he's jumping on the couch, getting excited, yelling at Chase, getting hyped. It was awesome.

One thing I believe, and my son is here with me at practice, is family is first. Family is important to us. Our families are around. We want them to be around the support. I do think we've kind of developed that at High Point and we have that going for us, that, you know, she should be there. She should be there supporting Flynn. This was his first NCAA Tournament as a head coach. I couldn't imagine what she'd be going through if she missed it. It was incredible. She was 100 percent where she needed. She'll be here with us and where she needs to be tomorrow.

Q Chelsea, just to follow up, what's the timing? Because it's not an easy trip to get from there to here. Is there a timeline? Has she made it to town? Is the advantage today with technology making it easier for her to be pre-scouting and things like that? Anything you might need

until she does get back on the ground?

CHELSEA BANBURY: It's obviously long travel days. There's not any direct flights, but she'll get here this evening. I've been in touch with her. She's watching film. I've given her a task of what I want to see when she gets here and what to have broken down by the time she is, and we can go around tomorrow and shoot around with the team.

Q Coach, this is your biggest task this year, Vanderbilt, very good team. I asked Aaliyah and Macy this earlier: What's been the message to the team going into a game like this?

CHELSEA BANBURY: The message has been, you know, every game that we play, we're going to have a game plan. They have really good players, you know, but the only thing you can do is try to play them to their weaknesses as much as you can. So we're going to have a game plan for what we wanted to. Offensively, I believe in what we can do. I believe we can cause them problems at the same time. We're going to be us. You don't come to the NCAA Tournament to try to be somebody else. So we're going to show up and be who we've been all year offensively and defensively in the league. We had the best defense in our league this year. Now I understand the competition is a little higher, but I do think part of that has been our team's ability to game plan and follow a game plan.

This isn't going to be any different than any game that we've had this year. We're going to have a game plan, we're going to do our best to execute that game plan and then offensively we're going to be us. We're going to play to our strengths. I think we have some good players and they've done a lot of really impressive things this year and that's what I said to them the other day. Our strengths got us here. Now is not the time to shy away from it. We're going to play into it.

Q So after the Big South Conference tournament, you stated that you did not think you were a 16-seed and that you thought you'd placed higher than that. How did you feel in that moment? Describe your feelings when you found out you were not going to be a 16-seed and actually a 15-seed? How did that feel to you and the team?

CHELSEA BANBURY: A little bit of mixed emotions. Like oh, great, they see that, too, but now we're going against the leading scorer in the nation. That should be fun, as well. Anytime you get to the NCAA Tournament it's going to be really good teams, whether it's 1-seed or 2-seed.

But the biggest thing is I think we did a really good job at our non-conference this year. I was hoping the committee

recognized that. I think there's a chance we could have even been a 14-seed.

Our job is to handle what we can, control what we can and then get here. Like I said, 2-seed, 1-seed, they're all going to be tough, but I was happy that we got a little bit of respect in that sense.

Q Going back to last year, you played in that play-in game. Any differences both in preparation, but the overall feel from being in that play-in game, versus now you're in, like, the field of 64 this time around?

CHELSEA BANBURY: Yeah, I don't think we've really talked about that as much, same attitude going in. You know, trying to create a game plan that we think is going to give us the best chance to win and compete and doing our job in executing that game plan. I think the biggest difference is we have a good group that's been here. So you know, we understand what it takes, the level of play that it's gonna be and, you know, they are here to work.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much, Coach.