

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Columbia vs West Virginia

Saturday, March 22, 2025
Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA
Carmichael Arena

Columbia Lions Coach Megan Griffith Cecelia Collins Kitty Henderson

Media Conference

West Virginia 78, Columbia 59

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Columbia Head Coach, Megan Griffith.

MEGAN GRIFFITH: West Virginia is a great team and a super unique team in the women's game. I think what they do not a lot of teams do, right, and especially defensively. March Madness is who can make the other team the most uncomfortable, and I thought they did that successfully to start the game. You know, forcing 11 turnovers.

We knew it was coming too, but honestly, like I said, this is what March is about. It's about getting this experience, but we didn't just come here to come here. That's a lesson. That's a really valuable lesson that the rest of our program has learned today and will continue to learn. Obviously I'm really proud of these two.

Our two seniors, Kitty and Cece, who literally gave this program everything they had, I'm going to miss them tremendously. I said this to them, but it's been a true honor to coach them. Really, really proud of them.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for our student-athletes.

Q. As you both wrapped up your collegiate careers, what are the moments that you're going to remember most fondly?

KITTY HENDERSON: I mean, this program means everything to me. I'm going to remember all the moments with my teammates. When we're all going through it in practice, like, I don't know. Just everything with my



teammates.

With the staff, I mean, we just love each other so much. I feel like we mean so much to each other, so just spending time even in the locker room, anything like that, it's just the little moments mean so much.

CECELIA COLLINS: Yeah, I mean, I would go off the same thing that Kitty said. Obviously I only had two years here, but I said it in the locker room, and I'm just forever in debt to this program and this university and Coach G and the rest of the staff for giving me a chance here.

Yeah, I mean, it's every day at practice. Just the little things. Seeing your teammates on the way to class. Those are the little things I'm going to miss and just having a team around me all the time. They'll always have my back, especially Kitty here. I mean, she's had my back for the past two years. I can't thank her enough for that, so...

Q. Obviously both of you have given so much to this program. What does it mean to you to have led this team to its first tournament victory in program history?

CECELIA COLLINS: It means a lot to make history obviously for this program, but you know, our goal was to go deep into this tournament, so we're obviously disappointed with the outcome of today's game, but yeah, like I said, we're happy about that first win, but we wanted to turn the page and get it done versus West Virginia.

Q. This is obviously a team that has a lot of younger players. When you look at the growth throughout the season and throughout this tournament, what have you sort of seen from them?

KITTY HENDERSON: In the locker room we were just saying they have everything they need. The young players have so much grit, so much energy. I think they've had so many chances to learn from people this year. I think they have everything they need.

I mean, we have such a great coaching staff. This program has a championship culture for a reason, and it's not going to stop here. So the young players definitely



have, like, the way ahead of them, and they're ready.

KITTY HENDERSON: I was just going to add on to that and say the potential is all there for them. You know, there's going to be space to take obviously with us leaving. They're completely capable of taking that space. You know, like Kit said, continuing to drive that championship culture forward.

Q. This question is really more for Kitty. You picked up your third foul early in the second quarter. Coach trusted you to come back in the game after only a few minutes on the bench. You managed to stay in the rest of the game, scored in double digits, game high 9 rebounds. What was your mentality once you came back in? You did a similar thing against Princeton. How were you able to discipline yourself, still play high-impact basketball, and keep yourself in the game when you've got foul trouble early like you did today?

KITTY HENDERSON: Yeah, I mean, I keep getting myself into those situations, but I just need to be smarter. I come on with three fouls, and I just know that I need to be smarter with how I play and what rebounds I go for.

I think just, like, being a gritty player, I need to be smart with which ones I go for and which balls and things. It's just like down to that and just picking and choosing the right battle I think, but yeah.

Q. Cece, it seemed like you were pretty effective throughout the game getting to the lower or other soft spots in their half court defense, whether you were looking for yourself or finding a teammate. I'm curious, how are you thinking about your matchups there? What were you kind of able to pick apart in their half court defense?

CECELIA COLLINS: Yeah, I mean, we definitely talked about that before the game that that high post area was someplace that we could expose them. I feel like I was just trying to find little gaps. If I was open, just try and look to score or hit cuts on the back side or even skips to the corners.

I think I definitely forced a few up there and needed to be a little bit more controlled and sound in my decision, but yeah, that was definitely a point of emphasis going into the game.

Q. Kitty, what does it mean for you that you are leaving a Columbia program that's in a way better place and just on an upward trajectory than the way that you found it when you first came to campus?

KITTY HENDERSON: This program means everything to me. Sorry. This place is so special. I mean, the coaching staff, they just give you everything. I mean, it's in such a good place. It's just going to keep getting better. It's going to mean so much to me for the rest of my life.

Yeah, I definitely gave it my everything, and I'm going to continue to do that whether I'm in the team or not, so yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Kitty, Cece. Questions for Coach Griffith.

Q. Coach, obviously it's still fresh, but what has it meant to have Kitty and Cece on this team, particularly late in the season with the two tournament runs?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: Wow, a lot of things. You know, Kitty -- I just said there in the locker room to keep it lighter, I was just, like, Listen, we took an endurance athlete essentially and made her a basketball player, and at that, made her a hell of a basketball player, who is fighting to be the best player in our league all season.

She's just a winner in so many ways. She's also just been so eager to learn how to be better in her life, and that's been such an honor to coach her.

Cecilia just brings so much joy every day. She's probably one of, if not the most, enjoyable people to coach that I've had in my career because it's about loving the game, and it's so pure when you're around her.

So, yeah, they've meant so much to me and my family.

Q. It might be a little bit hard to look into the future right now, but you guys are a very young team. How do you see these tournament experiences now two years in a row benefitting the program going forward?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: Great pivot. Thank you (laughing). It's amazing experience, honestly. This is why I came back home. I believe that we can be a championship program that would play deep into March, and all those young players, they've never experienced anything else. Only Susie and Perri. They went to the WNIT final, and then the very next year they go to the NCAA Tournament, and they win the first NCAA Tournament game. Every year they see this program growing. For all of our young players, they know one way now.

We fought like hell to get here, and I promise you that is not something we will let go easily. Every year it just continues to motivate you knowing that you can do more. That's what they were talking about in the locker room, which gives me a lot of hope as a coach too to say, hey,

we're going to take that next step. We're going to win that first game. We're going to the Round of 32. We're going to the Sweet 16. It's just invaluable to have these experiences.

Q. Sort of on the game itself, West Virginia ran a really effective press. It seemed like you had a little bit of trouble breaking it. What were you seeing that wasn't going right? What adjustments maybe did you try to make to get around that?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: In one and a half days it's obviously -- you've got to really focus on, okay, these are the things we're going to do. I thought early on just even the two quick turnovers we had, not in the press -- like, one of them was literally not in the press, right? It was just like that pressure, that constant pressure that you are going to feel them the whole game. It's so hard to simulate that. You can talk a lot about it. You can watch a lot of film. You can walk through it. We just didn't settle in quick enough.

Honestly, we talked about flashing and having all five players on the court be options, and once they started doing that, you saw Susie Rafiu bringing the ball up. You saw Perri Page bringing the ball up. It's not just one person. That's not how you beat this team's press. It's by committee.

Once we settled in and even some of our young players got in there and started helping us out, but when you are playing at that speed all the time, you just have to find moments where you can catch your breath essentially. I think every time we did execute what we wanted to, we got a great look. You know, those are going to fall. Those are not going to fall, but we've got to be better in transitions too getting back on defense, things like that.

It's a great team. It's a really good team. It's a really unique team. It's a lot of fun to plan for.

Q. Just following up on that last question a little bit on the press. You know, there's this old expression in basketball that teams that press don't like to be pressed themselves. Both of you guys press. You pressed each other. They got 25 turnovers off of you. You got 21 off of them. So a total of 46 turnovers in this game. Do you think there's any truth to that adage, and if so, why? I mean, why is it that teams that press don't like to be pressed?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: I can tell I think it's because both of those teams want to be in control, right? Two, it's intense. You know, being able to play in press and then get pressed, I mean, it's exhausting. You need some elite, really high-level competitors, mentally, physically,

emotionally that can handle that.

Also, you're practicing your press a lot. It's stylistically we don't press the same way West Virginia does. I'm sure they're pressing and using their press a lot, right, and working against that, but when we run more of a structured zone press and they're running a zone press that's structured as well but flying around, running and jumping you, it's very different than ours.

That is honestly why we could force so many turnovers. We just have to do something with it now. That's the big reason why I think teams that press don't like to get pressed.

Q. I want to ask you about Cece. Similar to what I asked her. First of all, just with Kitty going out with the foul trouble, how important was kind of her leadership while Kitty is on the bench? Then, you know, with her ability to kind of get into those soft spots offensively, how helpful was kind of her versatility to how you were kind of trying to attack them?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: Yes, Cece is a tremendous passer and playmaker. She's got great size. She's physical. We knew that was the soft spot in the zone. We decided, hey, we're going to put you in there. We're going to let you make quick decision. We're going to let you play free.

I told her this is a great game. Cece doesn't have back-to-back games where she doesn't feel like she performed well, so she was excited to attack this challenge and be our prominent decisionmaker today. I thought she did really well with that.

Q. As a coach, when you see a team even when the game was out of reach late in the fourth quarter, your team was still fighting, your team was still putting in that effort and scoring and doing, you know, everything that looks like Columbia basketball. What does that mean for you that they didn't give up all the way until the final buzzer?

MEGAN GRIFFITH: You know, it's a true testament to trusting the process and just buying in, being bought in, believing in what you're doing. We talk a lot about you don't just play to the buzzer, you play through the buzzer, right. When they tell you you have to stop, then you stop maybe or maybe you hold on to the ball a little bit longer.

That's just something we talk a lot about in practice. We preach every day. We play pass the buzzer in drills. To me they just weren't outcome driven today. They could have given in, and honestly in the first half I felt a little

sense of, okay, we got to get going again. We got to recharge the batteries. I thought they were great in the second half, but you can't dig yourself that hole.

They have a no-quit mentality. That's what I love about the way my staff coaches is we're going to be all over you for the entire practice, and that's what we do when we play. 40 minutes or 40-plus minutes of whatever we can give all-out, no regrets.

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