

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

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

Carmichael Arena

## Maryland Terrapins

## Saylor Poffenbarger

## Coach Brenda Frese

## Oluchi Okananwa

### Media Conference

(In progress.)

SAYLOR POFFENBARGER: ...watch them play at the highest level. I watched them compete on all stages. To be the one competing the one wearing the uniform represent is the university is really an honor. Super grateful to be here. Obviously this is the goal as a child, as little girl to play on this stage.

So I'm just super excited. It's bittersweet and also what I kind of dreamed of, so I'm excited.

**Q. For you Oluchi, can you explain the nickname Gucci 'Luchi and how does that showcase your personality?**

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Yeah, I mean, the nickname goes all the way back to middle school. It was kind of like the slang at the time. What's Gucci, everything Gucci. And then my friends just kind of attributed it to me just because I was always good I guess.

So just kind of stuck as the years went on. I think it's really cool now that it's like more public because it was kind of a behind-closed-doors thing.

So, yeah.

**Q. Looking at Murray State what stands out most about them on film?**

SAYLOR POFFENBARGER: They're very talented. They score a lot of points. They have some very talented players. Obviously they made it to March so they're very



good. Their bigs are very good. They play fast and score early in transition.

So we have to make sure we defend. Have to make sure we locate their shooters and go from there.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: She nailed it.

**Q. Oluchi, you transferred from Duke. What does it mean to be back in the area playing again?**

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Honestly nostalgic a little bit. Obviously like the Duke-UNC rivalry was always a big deal. Obviously being in this gym and playing in it, remembering the battles, I'm just excited to take the court again, especially with this new team that I'm on.

I love where I'm at and the girls that I'm playing with. Yeah, been really fun honestly.

**Q. To follow up on that, any particular memory from playing here the couple times that you've been here? Anything that stood out to you? Or anything about those games?**

OLUCHI OKANANWA: I mean, every time we played them and we won they stood out to me obviously because it's such a big deal. Unfortunately we did not capture a win here, but, you know, anything can change.

**Q. Just for both you guys, this group has endured a lot of injuries and adversity throughout the season. What does that say about the toughness of the group?**

SAYLOR POFFENBARGER: I just think the resilience shows the strength of our team. We have dealt with adversity and been through the toughest battles, and we've just continued to stay together. It just shows the love and the togetherness that we do play with.

I think we're prepared for everything. We've gone through the toughest things, so we're ready for whatever comes at us. We're ready to go through it together and stay together. Just makes us a lot stronger.



**Q. Going back to your time at Duke you had the opportunity to play with some of the players you might be playing against at UNC. Have you told anything to your team about playing against them or their game?**

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Honestly, no, because year to year things change. There are definitely players I remember playing against that I've actually trained with when I was here in North Carolina. It's exciting to go up against them again. Like I said, each year is new and I'm sure when we cross that gate, you know, first focus on Murray State but I know our coaches will be more than prepared.

**Q. Who were some of the players you trained with?**

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Indya Nivar.

**Q. For both players, anything particular about your February run when you won all those games in a row that went well or defined that part of the schedule for you?**

SAYLOR POFFENBARGER: Yeah, I would just say getting back to the Maryland identity: Defending, rebounding, and running. When we go to our core values and play Maryland standard, we look great and play really well together.

So getting back to that and remembering who we are and what we're really good at. And we are really good at rebounding, really good when we get out in transition and we're playing together.

So just making sure we get back to that and defending the Maryland way.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Yeah, just really each game we fed off it and it was honestly amazing to be a part. I am sure for our coaches it was amazing to watch. That's the kind of momentum we want to carry with us in the offseason.

**Q. For you Oluchi, going back to the style points, can we expect any sort of outfit?**

OLUCHI OKANANWA: I don't have any of my outfits here with me. Like this is a business trip. Just so focused on coming here and winning as many games as we can. Stay tuned on my Instagram. You will see some soon.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Oh, wow.

THE MODERATOR: The question was about her best

memories playing at Maryland.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: They're genuinely has been so many. I think this just goes back to summer and summer workouts and getting to know everyone and just creating the relationships that I have now with -- like this is such a fun group. We have a lot of fun together naturally.

It's just like being able to be around that while playing the sport that I love I think it's just been amazing.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Yeah, I mean, obviously we been through a lot of adversity. Through adversity that's when you really come together and rely on one another. We said it before to each other. We have everything that we need right now to get what we want done.

So I think that's been great.

BRENDA FRESE: Yeah, you know, just super grateful to be here, obviously to be playing in this prestigious tournament. For us it's our 16th straight appearance and we're really being look Ford to it. We've had a great week and a half to get ready.

Just so impressed with Murray State after winning their Missouri Valley Conference championship. 15 straight games. You talk about the player of the year, newcomer player the year. It's just a team that once put up a lot of points; No. 5 in the country; and want to score early and often with threes and three throws.

For us it's locking in on our defense. We're also No. 12 in the country in scoring, so a lot of offense, which I think people will really enjoy with two high-powered offenses.

For us, you know, it's also bringing our defense, so looking forward to the matchup.

**Q. Just after another really successful season. Congrats on that. With the big gap, how has your team handled the layoff? What have you emphasized in practice?**

BRENDA FRESE: It's been really good for us to be able to reset and recharge. Really the healthiest our roster has been all season long. You use this time to kind of focus on yourselves.

For us it's fine tuning the details: Our defense, offense, offensive execution. So a lot of areas I'm really just appreciative to be able to have the last couple weeks to be able to put that focus on us to improve and be ready for

this tournament.

**Q. You said you made the tournament for 16 straight years. What's different about this year and any other team that you coached?**

BRENDA FRESE: Just the thing that I'm most proud of is their resiliency. It's been a season with a lot of highs and lows to be honest when you talk about just a lot of injuries that we've had to endure. This roster has stayed super resilient and connected.

So I think we've learned a lot of lessons through those different moments. I think our conference has really prepared us for now.

I love the fact that this team has never quit fighting and they continue to just put their head down and work.

**Q. Again, as you mentioned, Murray State comes in as one of the hottest teams in the country; won 15 straight. What stands out on film and what makes them a dangerous first-round opponent?**

BRENDA FRESE: Well, to start they're really well-coached; tremendous offensive system. I think they do a really good job putting their players in positions to be successful. Any time you have a team full of scorers you're going to do really well.

You've seen that within their system. Everybody can shoot it and score it. It's not like you can help off any player on the roster because they can all score points.

So it's a team that's going to be up-tempo. They want to play fast.

So for us it's being able to bring our defense and make them have to talk more difficult shots.

**Q. So with that style of play, how difficult is it to prepare for a team like Murray State?**

BRENDA FRESE: Yeah, I mean, I don't know if difficult is the word. We see a lot of these styles in our conference. So I think for us we have been prepared. When you play against an Ohio State or Michigan State or you could go through our entire conference likes to play fast.

So I think that does prepare us for a roster like this.

But, again, I think we just have the most respect for Murray State. To win 15 straight games and be No. 5 in the country in your scoring, obviously you're doing a lot of things well.

For us we have a lot of the respect that we have to come in and be able to do our part. That's on both ends of the floor. We've got to be able to defend from our end and we've got to show our offense and the abilities that we have within our roster.

**Q. All of a sudden couple sets of twins on the team. Got your twins right there. Anything you said to those players or your sons and having those sons -- having players with such bonds and sisters and brothers? Does that ever get brought up?**

BRENDA FRESE: You know I think in the recruiting process, absolutely. Whenever I find I'm recruiting a young player and they're a twin, absolutely. I know for Yarden when I was getting to know her early through the transfer portal we were able to bond over the fact that she was a twin and having twins myself.

I love it. Obviously I can relate to that bond and what we go through as a family and how close my twins are. So it's a really cool thing when you come across it.

**Q. Now that you got 30 games into the season or so, Oluchi, what did you see as her impact throughout the course of this season?**

BRENDA FRESE: Well, it's been massive. You saw yesterday she was named honorable mention All-American. What I love, the best of the best, they athletes we've had come through Maryland they want to shoulder that responsibility.

I think that's been the coolest thing for Oluchi. We knew she was going to come in with a high motor and was going to be able to defend.

Seeing her want to shoulder that load on the offensive end, the responsibility, whether it be score, trying to get other teammates involved in the offense, and obviously she excels in our transition game.

So massive impact that she's had in our program.

**Q. Yarden obviously has roots in Israel. Have you and the team supported her in any way or does that get talked about in the locker room?**

BRENDA FRESE: Of course. I mean, we're a family. I think for us it's always a check in. Just to make sure she's in a good place, how her family is doing back in Israel. Over team we speak they're safe and secure.

Yeah, it's more than just basketball for us. Obviously there

being -- she's been impacted and her family as well. So it's just continuing to make sure that they're in the best possible position they can be.

**Q. I asked Oluchi this question. Could apply to you as well. Coming back here to Carmichael, any memories you've had --**

BRENDA FRESE: Oh --

**Q. -- of your numerous visits here?**

BRENDA FRESE: Yeah, so many. So many. A lot of great wins. You start with the national championship game, right, in the Final Four and beating North Carolina there. Coming back here into Carmichael, overtime win, Ashleigh Newman hits a shot for us to win in that 2006 year.

Alyssa Thomas making a game winner. Of course you have to be able to bring up Sylvia Hatchell. I remember her chasing an official off the court one time at halftime and her great personality that Sylvia had. A lot of fond memories.

You talk about just so many great battle thanks both Maryland and North Carolina had over the years in ACC play.

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