

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

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

Carmichael Arena

**Murray State Racers**

**Coach Rechelle Turner**

**Haven Ford**

**Halli Poock**

Media Conference



So I think super special.

HAVEN FORD: It's huge with the mid-majors. It's hard to get here. When you climb the ladder and cut down the nets and you know this is the next step. It's like a dream come true. To be able to experience that back to back years is hard and rare.

We just enjoy the moment when we get here, and so now the next step is coming here and trying to get a win or two and just keep enjoying the moment.

**Q. What have you done so well here the last couple months where it looks like you barely had any close games. How did that happen?**

HAVEN FORD: It feels like our whole year has been just where we been grinding games, haven't blown out many people. But I feel like doing that has built our team to win those close games when they came, even the conference tournament. We just had to take it possession at a time, and to be able to do that just makes the wins feel even more memorable and stuff like that.

This year was more so just finding a way. We went through so much adversity this year and to be able to come out on the top side of that has been huge.

HALLI POOCK: Yeah, just speaks to the growth of our team throughout the season. We've had tough games and we've always found a way to win them, however that looked, in a lot of different situations.

So I really just think that our team has grown a lot through the year.

**Q. Haven, you mentioned having some lingering injury issues this season. How are you feeling going into the game tomorrow?**

HAVEN FORD: I'm feeling good. The season has been up and down for me. I lean into my faith. I feel like without God's strength I wouldn't be able to do it. The things I've went through I could have sat out most of the year, but to

THE MODERATOR: We have Murray State student-athletes Haven Ford and Halle Poock. Who would like to get us going?

**Q. So back-to-back NCAA tournament appearances and back-to-back champions. What does that mean about this team and where do you guys or kind of how would you describe the sisterhood that you guys have?**

HALLI POOCK: Yeah, obviously it's super special. It's a lot to be proud of. I think this represents that we're building a program at Murray State. You know, to do it one year is you had a good year, but to do it back to back means that you're building a good culture and program.

So I think that is really where it is for us.

HAVEN FORD: I think it goes to your culture. To do it back to back years with two different teams and different ways is special in itself, so we just take it day by day and I feel like our sisterhood grows by the day.

I think that goes into how successful we've been able to be.

**Q. What does it mean to represent a mid-major on this stage and come all the way here to do it, especially at a place with such a rich basketball history?**

HALLI POOCK: Yeah, it's super special to come to March Madness as a mid-major. A lot of people overlook mid-majors at March Madness, us especially. So it means a lot to be able come here and hopefully make a statement, and win a few games if you can.



be able to play through that I just take each game as an opportunity to be able to play.

At the end of the day, there has been -- it's been hard mentally to deal with it, but at the end of the day I'm getting to play and help the team the way I can. Again, we ended up with championships at the end of that, so I'm just blessed and thankful for the opportunity.

But right now I'm feeling great.

**Q. 15-game win streak. What's the key to keeping this momentum and hopefully pick up your first tournament win tomorrow?**

HALLI POOCK: Yeah, I mean, finding a way like it's been all year. A lot doesn't change. It's another basketball game. We have to treat it like that or we'll get sucked into all the hype.

I think the biggest part is really just treating it like another game, finding a way to win the next game.

HAVEN FORD: Also going into it with confidence. With returners being able to already have this experience, now we got to go into it with confidence and just believe that we belong here and we got to just come ready to play.

So treat it like another game. Do the things that got us here and just be ready.

**Q. Being able to be here for the second year in a row, understanding what goes on before that game starts and all the media details, I guess it's probably a little bit easier for you this year knowing what's going on; more comfortable with that?**

HALLI POOCK: Yeah, I think last year was all new. We were really excited. Felt like we were on a fever dream the whole time we were here. I think this year it feels a little more like we're meant to be here. We've done it two years in a row. It's not the first time, so I think there is a little more confidence about being here and knowing we belong.

**Q. When you saw the bracket of the teams coming here do you have any connections with any of those teams? Are you totally outsiders on this?**

HAVEN FORD: I'm totally an outsider. I don't know many people on the teams, but I was excited about being able to come here. This is my first time here. Just to be able to experience what's around it and coming into the building and seeing it for the first time, I was excited about it.

HALLI POOCK: Yeah, I agree. No connections for me but

just the rich culture behind -- I mean, obviously the UNC and Duke rivalry we all know about, so getting to experience that for the first time was a cool thing.

**Q. What has Coach said to you talked about coming in with confidence? Been anything different? You guys have any mantras or mottos that you picked up throughout the season?**

HALLI POOCK: No, she's the same every game I feel like. Doesn't matter if it's one of the worst teams in our conference or going to play Maryland on Friday, she's always the same and tells us to approach the game the same way. That's the message. It's been the same.

HAVEN FORD: Just pours confidence in us. She knows us as well as anybody and knows what gets us fired up and kind of ready to go, so it's just a again believing that we belong here and trusting in our preparation. She's huge about preparing so we start preparation once we got back from the conference tournament.

It's all about preparation and being ready and staying confident in it.

**Q. You guys are chasing that first win in the NCAA tournament. What would that really mean for the Murray State program as a whole?**

HALLI POOCK: Yeah, obviously championships were the first step. That was something that had never been done at Murray State. So we accomplished that first year. Then we did it a second year. We're like, what's next to grow the program?

I think for us it is to come to March Madness and compete and have the best showing. I think that's the next goal.

HAVEN FORD: Yeah, we're all about setting a goal and trying to reach it and do better. So championships like she said was the first mountain we were trying to climb. To do that and get multiple ones in the span of two years was huge.

Now it's what's next? What's next is getting a win here at March Madness, and, again, showing that we belong and that we can compete at this high level.

**Q. Haven and Halli talked about your motto, what you're saying to them never changes. No matter what game it is it's always confident, always play your game. Can you expand on that? What are you telling the girls?**

RECHELLE TURNER: Going into this season we chose

the word "grind" because we knew that that's what it is going to be about, trying to bring our newcomers and returners together to form a team that could do what they've done.

And so the grind is definitely there on a daily basis, but we basically play for 40 minutes but break the game down into five minute segments. I think that's what they mean by it doesn't change. We go five minutes at a time. We focus on winning that five minutes.

I think that that has helped us to be able to sustain runs from other teams, but also to be able to sustain our own runs throughout time. If you look at the big picture sometimes it can be overwhelming, so you kind of just have to break it down.

**Q. To make the tournament once is impressive; twice in a row for a team like Murray State is amazing. What's the main difference between this year's group at this time than last year's group at this time?**

RECHELLE TURNER: That's great question. We just had some veteran players that we leaned on tremendously last year. School's all-time leading scorer Katelyn Young; Ava Learn was a transfer from Purdue. Trinity came from Butler.

So we had some kids that didn't necessarily have the experience that you would expect, but they were ready for that moment. We just hit the jackpot in the portal. Got some great kids to join our lead guards. Briley, our senior, is our glue. I think somehow, some way we put a team together that was going to go out and compete every single night.

They just find a way. I think that's what's uniquely different about this team than some of the other teams I've coached. We bend but don't break, and that makes this group special.

**Q. A 15-game win streak. How are you looking to keep that momentum going into this game?**

RECHELLE TURNER: I think that a lot of teams have to go through experiences of learning, and we have been so blessed to learn through winning. I mean, there have been many times, late-game situations, I've made the wrong call or we haven't ran the play right. It's just somehow worked out.

So I feel like that a lot of lessons have been learned through winning, but that also instills belief in your young women. When you've won 15 in a row then you know you can.

I think belief is a big thing, especially as big as the mountain we're expected to climb Friday. You have to believe it. We're going to just go out and throw some stones and hope that we hit the right targets.

**Q. You talked about climbing mountains. Really your offense has been getting to the free throw line. How are you planning on attacking that tomorrow night?**

RECHELLE TURNER: Yeah, they're exceptional. Brenda Freese, just an idol on the other sideline. Can't say enough about what she's done with that program.

I think this is their 15th straight appearance, so that's a little intimidating in itself.

Size is something that we have gone up against every time. Our two lead guards had to move the mics down for us to be able to see them on the podium. You cannot measure the size of their heart. That's the thing about this team. We're not very big, but we're mighty and we're going to fight and do everything we can to make it as hard as possible on them.

It's going to be difficult and there are going to be lots of challenges in front of us tomorrow, but the one thing I can promise you is these kids will give it their all.

**Q. I'll probably ask this tomorrow as well, adversity has been something we've dealt with on the road couple times this year. Maybe more than a couple. For the second time this year, we've had a fire alarm in our hotel. Can you talk about the adversity part of what the season has been like?**

RECHELLE TURNER: Yeah, we lost some players early to injury pre-season, season ending injuries that we thought would develop our depth this year. That's the one thing we didn't have a lot of last year, and in recruiting we really looked to establish that because of the pace that we like to play.

God had different plans.

And then Haven played with a broken hand since January 3rd. She has a lower leg injury we still haven't identified because she's just going to play through it. The bumps and the bruises that Sharnecce and Halli and Kes and -- all of them that play significant minutes. We play a lot of minutes for our starters.

So for them to be able to just push through that and be willing to do whatever it takes and be selfless in the fact it's going to hurt that are averages at a time. When your

shooting hand is broken you're not going to shoot it as well.  
That's part of it of.

That makes up the culture of our program, the selflessness. It's team first. We over me mentality always.

**Q. Are there any opponents that you played this year that kind of remind you of maybe Maryland or experiences that you had that you think...**

RECHELLE TURNER: Real early in the year we played South Dakota State. They were really big in every position. But it was early and we were not ready for that challenge just yet.

I would've liked to play them later in the year to see if we could do a little bit better. Also played Illinois which is also a tournament team. And so we can pull from some of those experiences.

I think that the thing that makes the Missouri Valley conference unique is all the different styles. You've got some teams that are going to pressure, some teams will slow it down, got teams with two bigs, teams that play five guards.

That uniquely helps us prepare for different situations. Our men's practice team sometimes can compare to the size of Maryland when we have everybody there, but it's just a different animal at the Power 4 level.

We do feel like we belong and we're hoping that we can use the things to our advantage that we feel like we can.

We also know that rebounding is going to be a huge thing tomorrow.

**Q. Can you explain Sharnecce's impact on the court?**

RECHELLE TURNER: Yeah, she's been unbelievable. Had a relationship with Sharnecce out of high school. Continued that relationship throughout and when she went to the portal. Made that phone call and just rekindled that relationship and said, come be a star. You really can come be a star for us.

I don't know that anybody would've expected her to be sitting at 26 double-doubles on the season, especially coming back after not playing a couple years.

We welcomed her and her daughter with open arms because that's who we are. We're family. She has just been an inspiration not on to me, but to our team that she can do the things she can do, be a great student and great mom.

I think our young women can learn a lot from her and they have, but her impact on the court has been immeasurable.

**Q. Speaking of that, can you talk about how you and the team have rallied around her and the community that goes into that?**

RECHELLE TURNER: For sure. I mean, it's just an unbelievable situation at Murray State. Everybody wants to say family, but it truly is. Everybody helps out in every way. We have I believe eight six and under within our staff including Kay'lani, which is Sharnecce's little girl.

We have kids everywhere. Everybody talks about distractions. There would be a distraction if they weren't there at practice or running in and out the drills stretching with the girls before. I just think to relaxes our kids and let's them know one the most important things is not winning.

Win something wonderful and I love winning way more than -- I hate to lose. It's about more than that. For our coaches to be able to show our young women that they can be great moms, dad's, wives, husbands, parents and still really good coaches I think that's what we need to model to the young women in our locker room.

My staff does an amazing job of that. So it was like bring Kay'lani. We're ready.

**Q. Talk about the energy the kids bring the court.**

RECHELLE TURNER: Lots of energy for sure. You know, I look around as I'm getting older and I'm like, man, if I could just pull some of that energy out. I just think it lightens the mood. One of our players can come in from having a bad day or maybe had a test that was tough, and they see those young kids run up to them and give them a hug, it just changes the whole mood.

So I think it's important that you allow family to be family. You can't preach family and culture in the locker room -- as the head coach I'm willing to say come one, come all. You're all welcome. That's just how we do things.

**Q. Who else on your staff is part of the parents of six and under?**

RECHELLE TURNER: Coach Foust has three. His oldest is in kindergarten. Coach Nieja has two year old and five month old. Coach Kayla has a two month old -- I can't remember exactly how old Rumi (ph) is -- and one on the way.

So I mean, we're just adding to the family. Myself and coach monitor kicker are a little older. My children are 21 and 16. Proud of them but they are not running around giving everybody hugs like that. They're a little bit older. I don't think I left any kids out.

We have a ton. That's the one thing is advantage as an older coach. That I have a lot of young assistance around me so that's great.

**Q. Are any of them going to be there at the open practice today?**

RECHELLE TURNER: Oh, absolutely. Not all of them but a few. You know, we include everybody, so I know there will be a few of them. Some of them stayed at hotel. It was nap time this afternoon. But, yeah, they're part of us. They go where we go. They travel on trips when they can.

Obviously they don't miss school if they're in school. But it's just something that it's always been a part of who we are and it's not going to change. Some people would probably think you're crazy to have kids like that running around practice. It's a Division I program. I would tell them no you're wrong.

You got to keep the main thing the main thing.

**Q. How many traveled to Chapel Hill today?**

RECHELLE TURNER: I think our travel party was 41. Our coaches, families, and we have unbelievable people that take care of our program. Leon Owens being, he's in the room. He's one of them. My parents travel everywhere we go, which is awesome to be able to have them with me. My husband came. One of my sons is on the bench with us. He's part of the program.

The other one is straight A student and also involved in the Color Guard and they have a performance this week, so he wasn't about to miss that. Again, we just have a great bunch of people. Dr. David Eaton is our in photographer. He's a professor at our university. Our professors pour into our program so he travels with I was to take pictures and of course we have our SID and ticket people.

We have a lot of people that take care of us. When it's time to go to March Madness you pack them up and take them with you because they've taken care of us throughout the year.

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