

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Western Illinois vs North Carolina

Friday, March 20, 2026

Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA
Carmichael Arena

Western Illinois Leathernecks Coach JD Gravina

Addi Brownfield

Mia Nicaastro

Allie Meadows

Media Conference

North Carolina 82, Western Illinois 51

JD GRAVINA: Seeing a lot of purple in the media room here. It's great to see. Really appreciate all the coverage. It's a special really about three weeks for this team, and it all kind of builds up to the game.

But that three weeks I think will be some of the best memories I've ever had in my career, especially with this team and this group. So just having the band at the hotel, the cheerleaders at the hotel seeing us out, all the parents there, it's just such a cool experience.

And so many people back home watching, there are so many watch parties in Macomb and really around the country. And I told the team in the locker room, our community and our university, they really needed this, and it just really uplifted us as a group. That makes me really proud.

Tonight's game kind of went like you hope it doesn't, but you're prepared for. Their athleticism was just too much for us defensively. We tried to kind of swarm them around the basket, and we did force them to take 40 threes, and made ten of those, so I thought that was a small victory. But they were just too good around the basket and, again, too good defensively.

I thought we played hard the whole game. It's nice to get everyone in the game and give them that appearance.



Shed a few tears when the seniors came out because they've just been such a special group. But I know they'll be in my life and my family's life forever. So that's a good feeling.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. You talked about the purple, the big group of supporters that you had out here today. What did it mean to see them there supporting you and to have this experience playing in March Madness in Chapel Hill?

ADDI BROWNFIELD: I mean, their support means everything to us. They're standing up the entire game. My grandma is out there standing up the entire game. They're so supportive. And we're going up against North Carolina, a school that is a lot bigger than us, their home court advantage.

But just knowing that our crowd is over there cheering us on. They have our backs with every call. It was almost like a safety, knowing that our crowd is there for us and they have our backs through it all.

So just shout out to them. They're the absolute best. They made this experience even more special.

Q. Mia, I'm sure you work hard for your points all the time, but did you have to work even harder today? Was it harder to come by the offense in general?

MIA NICAastro: I mean, props to North Carolina. They're a great defensive team. Obviously I was a bit undersized at the five position. I'm not a five in the Power Four conferences.

So, yeah, I think I did have to work a little bit harder than maybe I normally do just because of their athleticism and their size. But I just tried to be as efficient as possible, tried to take good shots and just tried to do what my team needed me to do offensively.

Q. Your coach just talked about your defensive performance tonight around the arc. Can you speak to



that? You did keep them to 25 percent, which was about 10 percent lower than their season average. Can you each talk to that?

ALLIE MEADOWS: Yeah, they always say defense travels. Same here. We didn't shoot the three ball very well, but our job out there today, we knew we were going to be undersized. We knew we were the smaller team coming in, but we were going to frustrate them.

And if that was ball pressure, if that was getting through the passing lanes -- we had over 10 steals. That says a lot for a Power Four school to turn the ball over against us. I just think that really shows how good defenders we are. And I couldn't be more proud of this team for getting on the floor, getting those loose balls and putting our bodies on the line.

MIA NICASTRO: I think kind of along with what Allie said, 14 turnovers, which I'm impressed with against such a talented and athletic team. I thought we were really scrappy. I thought we fought hard even though we were undersized at pretty much every position.

When that's the case, you just -- you got to fight and you've got to be scrappy and you've got to get those 50/50 balls and fight for steals. I thought we did that.

Even though they took -- ended up taking about 13 more shots than us, I think they weren't as efficient as they wanted to be. And I think a lot of that was largely due to just our pressure and kind of being everywhere and scrambling and recovering really well.

ADDI BROWNFIELD: Yeah, I just loved getting to play defense with this team this year. Everyone just gives it their all. If you get beat off the dribble, someone is going to be there stepping up. You know if you knock a ball loose, someone is going to be on the ground going for it.

So that's just really fueled our success this season I think. And I think we did a great job today defensively. Unfortunately offensively we couldn't quite get going. Yeah, just so proud of the effort that each and every one of us puts in out there.

Q. I know JD just mentioned the last three weeks, the best three weeks in your career, and I guess for you three, what were those experiences like, winning the tournament in Evansville, the bus ride back, the escort, the selection show, and now the opportunity to play here on this court?

ADDI BROWNFIELD: Sorry. It gets a little emotional to think about. I mean, it's just meant so much to me. Coming in as a freshman, at times it kind of felt impossible

to get to this point. Sorry.

And we've built connections that are going to last a lifetime. I mean, these two up here are my literal best friends. JD and his family, they're my family.

So just getting to experience this with all of them and just seeing how proud our community is of us and how proud we are of each other. It's so special. And it's something I'm definitely going to remember the rest of my life.

MIA NICASTRO: Yeah, it's just hard. We keep saying it over and over. And it's just hard to understand if you're not a part of it. But this is just such a special team. And I've never been a part of anything like this in my life.

Like Addi said, this is truly a family. I mean, these are the people and coaches that will be bridesmaids at my wedding, and I'm sure JD will be there, hopefully behaving himself.

But, yeah, no, I mean, these are people that are going to be in my life forever. And you don't have that at every school. So I'm just really honored to have been able to wear Western Illinois across my chest for the past two years.

And so then just being able to experience everything with this team and accomplishing all of our goals and doing what basically every mid major team dreams of is just the most special and unique feeling, and there's really nothing that really can replicate that.

So I'm just incredibly honored, incredibly proud of everyone on this team. And there's no one else that I would want to do any of this with.

ALLIE MEADOWS: We've talked a lot about the past three weeks, and those three weeks have been a dream since I was a little girl. And being able to do it with my best friends and the coach of my dreams and his family and all our community behind us has been truly just the number one goal I've had since I was little.

And we've started this back this summer too. And I always say that, this summer JD said multiple times in practices that this was going to be a special team. And, you know, we've just rode with that, and we kept it and listened to his word, and he led us here. And I couldn't be more grateful to do it with my friends and family and all the Macomb supporters that we have.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much, ladies, and congratulations on a great season. Questions for Coach.

Q. How hard and difficult is it to overcome a tough shooting night that you had when you probably need to -- to pull an upset, you obviously probably have to hit a pretty good rate.

JD GRAVINA: Yeah, probably, a game like that. This has been the less our team has depended on three-pointers probably in my career here, and mostly that's due to Mia and Mallory Shetley being able to score around the basket and our guards that like to attack.

But in a game like this, you have to stretch the floor a little bit. I think I said we needed to hit 10 or 11 threes to have a chance to win, and we hit two.

It's fun talking about them going 10 for 40. We did mention we went 2 for 15. A lot of that I think is probably more than just a bad shooting night. It's being rushed, it's shots being challenged. It's hard to get good open looks, kick-out catch-and-shoot threes. So I think that's as much about their defense as anything else, unfortunately.

And when you are struggling to score inside, and then that puts more pressure on those three-pointers. Luckily we did get to the free-throw line. To get the free-throw line 20 times against a Power Four team I think is a good thing. That helped us at least get a respectable score.

But, yeah, not being able to knock down threes is definitely not going to give us a chance to win.

Q. 10 for 40, already mentioned, from three for North Carolina tonight. This season your defense has been really balanced and it's been really good. What have you liked tonight out of the effort that was made?

JD GRAVINA: Yeah, I think you're right, it's probably more about the season than the defensive effort. I think this is probably the best defensive team I've had here at Western, and really a lot of that was the experience.

If you watch those guards, Addi, Allie, Kaylen, Madison Davis, they just know what each other is going to do and rotated so well and helped them recover and played really hard, had really good motors.

And so I think some of that translated tonight. Again, like they talked about, we turned them over 14 times, we only turned over 15 times. Those are some numbers that are neutral that you feel good about.

But I think the reason we're here is because overall we're a pretty good defensive team. You look at our efficiency numbers, that shows our defensive. That's a good learning point for the younger players too, that it's a lot more

important than just being able to put the ball in the hole. Although offense is important, as you saw tonight.

Q. How impressive is it that Mia was still able to pretty much match her normal production tonight?

JD GRAVINA: Yeah, that's the thing about Mia, like I think you said, everything was hard for her tonight. They're showing her a lot of attention. She's playing against a 6'5" player, and like Mia said, she's really probably more of a three-four type of player than a five.

So you put that height on her, it not only bothers her around the basket, it bothers her in the midrange, and even at the three-point line. I thought she made some really good moves especially early and got some good shots that she missed. But she did a good job of settling in.

Like you said, she gets to the free-throw line really well. She's one of the best free-throw shooters probably at her position in the nation. So she still kind of did her thing. I was proud of her for sticking with it and not getting frustrated.

Q. JD, you've been with Western for the last 15 years. I mean, what are you going to remember the most out of this season? Was this your favorite season coaching at Western? What are the memories going to be for you?

JD GRAVINA: Hopefully the 2017 group isn't listening when I say it was probably my favorite year. I think a part of that, and I think they would understand, is this is the first year that my family, my kids were really a part of it.

Maryn was on the bench with us for almost every game as water girl. The kids were crying for hours when Raegan got hurt. Miller cries every game when we get down. Like Addi said, our family is their family. So I think that does add to it being special.

And then I think there was kind of a question in my mind, you know, four or five years ago, could we ever get back to this level, could I ever get to experience that again. And so I'm very thankful for this group that they were able to get us there and I think continue to give us and Western Illinois kind of the taste of what it feels like to get there and want to go back and do it again.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thanks for the time. Congratulations on a great season.

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