

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Maryland vs North Carolina

Saturday, March 21, 2026
Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA
Carmichael Arena

Maryland Terrapins

Brenda Frese

Addi Mack

Oluchi Okananwa

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and open the floor for questions for the student-athletes.

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ADDI MACK: It's so much fun. I think having that ability to be so versatile and to know that any single person on the court is such a threat. I think that's something that makes us really special.

And I think like you saw in the game yesterday, just everyone stepping up at different times, everyone playing to their strengths, it's really beautiful and really fun to play in.

Q. For both of you, playing under a coach like Brenda Frese who's made 16 straight tournaments, what does that do to you guys and what words of advice does she have for you guys in the locker room going into a game like tomorrow where it's win or go home?

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OLUCHI OKANANWA: Yeah, I mean, she's one of the reasons why we came to play for Maryland. And her experience is just so evident. And the way she's able to stay level-headed and calm and collected, her and the whole coaching staff, because they've done this before, they've been here before.

So it's just as important for us to follow whatever it is that they have planned out for us.

ADDI MACK: I would say the same. Just knowing you have a coach with that much experience, and obviously we have great -- Coach B is great. We have a great coaching staff. They give us a lot of confidence.

And when that comes from the top down, it makes us basically want to run through a brick wall for them because we don't want this season to be over just because we have so much fun, but we have so much fun with the coaches as well. And just like I said, that confidence really instills a lot of trust in us and helps us play a lot better.

Q. You're familiar with this area, lived here for a couple years playing for Duke and have a lot of experience playing against North Carolina in this gym. How are you going to lean on that emotionally and on the court tomorrow to get you in the right headspace



for the game?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Our coaches have drawn up an amazing game plan, one far better than I could have ever drawn up, despite playing two years. So just sticking to the scout, sticking to what it is that we have planned in terms of guarding them, offensively how we're going to run our sets. So that's really exciting.

Q. You lead this team in points right now, but you had five players in double-digit points last night. Does having that kind of depth take some of the pressure off of you going into a tournament game this high level?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Yeah, I'm so incredibly confident in my teammates. And I think last night shows our depth and how dangerous we are, with so many people that can step up, especially our freshmen, who were so incredibly fearless. It just instills in me a lot of confidence and gets me really excited because depth is what you need in order to go far in this tournament.

Q. This is a team that's had a lot of success on the road this season, a lot of Quad 1 wins, a lot of the best wins have come away from home. So being able to play in a place where fans can come down and see you, but you have that road energy, that routine, how much excitement is there around knowing what you've done this season and being able to add on to that?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Just with the Big Ten Conference in general, it's already rough. And then think about going into their environment. So, I mean, it's built a lot of experience for us, and it's built a lot of trust, which is why we've gotten a lot of questions don't we wish we were hosting, X, Y and Z.

But we're just so excited to be a part of March Madness. And knowing our success on the court, we have no reason to drop in any level of our confidence.

Q. I spoke to you in the preseason about watching last year's round of 32 game against Alabama, being at home, being excited to get here. Now you're here. You're in the same spot. Can you talk about your journey, and how do you feel about how this season has gone?

ADDI MACK: Yeah, I think this whole week has been pretty surreal. I'm so blessed to be in this position, just watching March Madness throughout my whole life.

It's an awesome feeling to be here now. And getting that first round win, great feeling. But staying in the moment and taking one game at a time.

I have such great teammates around me that have helped me prepare, and feel confident and ready to be here. So I'm really excited to just continue on and hopefully continue to push out our season as long as we can.

Q. I asked the North Carolina players this same question. Us old-timers remember Maryland as an ACC school. Do you guys have any awareness of that? And, Oluchi, at least you know what it's like to play an ACC rival in an NCAA Tournament game.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: So funny story about that. Obviously last year when I was playing for Duke and we had Maryland on the schedule, that was the first time I heard about the big rivalry. And I was like, There's a rivalry? And everyone looked at me like I was crazy. So that's when I got the whole history, not just about Maryland being in the ACC, but their dominance in it.

ADDI MACK: I've heard stories. I think there is one time that Maryland played UNC like four times in a season. So I'm really excited just to be down here, and obviously it's a great opportunity for us to go back and bring back that little ACC rivalry. So I'm excited.

Q. I remember in Birmingham last season you were a big reason that Duke beat Carolina. What do you remember about that game, and what is it that you have to do -- that you did in that game that you have to do tomorrow?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Well, for one, I remember the excitement that I was feeling and my team were feeling for having the opportunity to be in the Sweet 16. I think that's something that this team is really chasing and why we're so hungry or starving, like my teammates and me said yesterday.

All I have to do is keep playing me, keep doing what I'm doing and relying on my teammates. Because I really think it especially showed yesterday that any, if not multiple, of us are going to step up to get us to where we need to get to.

Q. I heard in practice today Coach Frese said that you respect everyone but fear no one. Has that been a mantra throughout the whole season, or is she starting to say that now just to kind of get you guys rallied?

ADDI MACK: I think that's just a mindset that we have. I think we've been working so hard this whole season that we have that confidence within ourselves.

But obviously every opponent that you play is a great



opponent, and you can't take anyone lightly. And I think that our whole Big Ten schedule has really prepared us for that.

So I think just looking forward into tomorrow, like they are a great opponent, but we know that we are a great team too. So just sticking to our game plan.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Yeah, I think that's the mindset that we had preseason, honestly, just understanding that, okay, our nonconference schedule is a little lighter. But it doesn't matter who we play. Every game is preparing us for the next tough battle, so we shouldn't take it lightly, and we shouldn't take it for granted.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thanks so much for the time, and good luck tomorrow.

We have Coach Frese. We'll open the floor for questions.

Q. You have been no stranger to success on the road this season. You've been no stranger to playing in tough environments. What have you learned and what has the team learned this year about how important it is to start the game hot when you're on the road playing in these tough environments?

BRENDA FRESE: I think that's why your body of work prepares you to go on the road. They know how important it is to be able to set the tone early. I think at this point of the year, everyone knows what the stakes are, and you want to be able to win that game so you can advance.

So I know they'll be ready to play tomorrow.

Q. Only 16 schools have ever won a national title, and two of them are going to meet tomorrow. So much history between them. Almost 20 years ago exactly you met them in the Final Four, almost eight years ago to the day you met them down the road in Raleigh in the tournament. This sport has changed a lot in all these years. Can you speak about the legacy and staying power of both programs despite all those changes?

BRENDA FRESE: Yeah, it's incredible. And you go back to our ACC days and all the battles that we had between the two teams, as you've alluded to, and the Final Fours and, you know, both games home and on the road, and I think for both programs to be able to sustain that consistency, it's really hard to do. And especially in the ever-changing landscape that we have now.

So I think it continues to show the support that you have, the resources within your administration is vital to have that

success as well, and the trust that they have in the coaches of both programs.

Q. I heard you telling your team today in practice that now is the time you want them to lean more on instinct in games and not be overthinking things. Why do you think that's the most effective way to approach a high-pressure game like March Madness?

BRENDA FRESE: We've just kind of learned the identity of our team. And I think really with any team, you don't want them when the ball tips to be overthinking anything. That's why you put the practice in and go through the film so when you tip it off, you're really kind of playing to your identity.

I mean, yes, there's a lot of things within game and personnel and scout tendencies and sets, no question, but when you're playing at your highest level, you're kind of humming and you're doing the things at this point of year of what your standard is and then being able to lock in to those tendencies that matter.

Q. You and Coach Banghart have some history in the NCAA Tournament. I think yesterday she mentioned that you guys knocked her off when her team was undefeated at Princeton. I think. Can you talk about just your relationship with her and just the battles that you've had with her over the years?

BRENDA FRESE: Yeah, we really have. We go all the way back to her Princeton days. Here's what I'll say about Courtney, just a great human being, we spent a lot of time having conversations on the road. But I'll say her teams are always well scouted, really prepared.

I'll also say the committee got it wrong. I think they should have been higher than a 4 seed. It's a typical North Carolina roster. They're loaded. They're deep. They have a ton of pros on that roster. They can play inside and out. They're big, they're strong, they're physical. So I think they should have been a higher seed.

Q. For some of the Maryland fans that are really taking a trip down memory lane this week, and this will only be the second time that these two programs have ever faced in an NCAA Tournament, a lot of fun memories from the first. What do you remember from that 2006 run and those big games against North Carolina?

BRENDA FRESE: It is ironic that it's on the heels of the 20th anniversary, and there's no question when you talk about that '06 year and beating them in a Final Four. And for us in the ACC, you couldn't have scripted it any better between playing UNC in the Final Four and then Duke in

the championship.

But there have been a lot of epic battles. That same year Ashleigh Newman hit a buzzer beater when they were ranked No. 1 for us to be able to win that game on the road. Same thing when we had Alyssa Thomas was able to come in here and force with her buzzer-beater layup to send that to overtime for that win.

So those battles have gone back all the way when Sylvia Hatchell was here, and it's just true ACC battles at that time. But it's exciting now that you're going to get the matchup between a Big Ten and ACC battle.

Q. You've made the tournament 16 straight times. In 15 of those 16 times, you've made it past the first round. What can you attribute that success to?

BRENDA FRESE: Well, you hope just, again, that level of consistency is by your habits of every single day. And I think for us, we're in tune to our process. We understand it's a marathon, not a sprint, and we want to be peaking in March. I think we do a really good job between a really long season, both physically and mentally, to be able to have our players peaking at the right time.

Q. I noticed some similarities in the construction of the roster between your two teams and that they also have maybe four players that can score in double figures on any given night. They're really deep, don't necessarily have a traditional No. 1 option. How does it affect the preparation and the scout as you get ready to try to slow them down defensively?

BRENDA FRESE: Well, I think, like you said, when you watch both teams, you don't know who's -- I think when you watched us yesterday, you would have probably tuned into Oluchi, and I think you've seen the growth in this team and the double-digit scores that we have, having to scout that. And for UNC, it's the same thing.

I think the beautiful thing is we've seen this in our conference play where we've had to guard multiple players that can really score the basketball. So I think nothing changes in that regard. I think defensively we just have to continue to be really solid. That's who we've been all season long.

Q. Yesterday you won the first game, North Carolina and Western Illinois played after you. Does that help you at all just to watch the team that you assume you're playing, and knowing that you're going to play one of these two teams, being able to be there in person and watch that game?

BRENDA FRESE: I think anytime you can -- whether it be watch in person, be able to scout, there's so many things that you can be able to pick up. Preference, yeah, I love the fact that after you win a game, then you can be able to start your preparation on whichever team it's going to be.

But, yeah, I think any time you have that live action, you can pick things up. And we were already prepared as a staff with our different scouts to be ready to play anyone.

Q. Do you miss those old games in Carmichael and those battles with Sylvia Hatchell, and what do you remember about those? And also I noticed you had some crowd noise during your practice. I'm guessing you're expecting to deal with that a lot tomorrow.

BRENDA FRESE: Those were epic battles. I think it's just shifted now. We have those same battles now in our conference, in the Big Ten. So that's a beautiful thing when you want to be a competitor and you want to play against the best. We get to have that in our conference.

But so many when I was reflecting on our battles with them. I mean, you talk about Ivory Latta, just how hard she was to contain, especially within that time that she played. Or Erlana Larkins, my husband and I were joking, had four fouls at halftime and then for some reason never fouled out of a double-overtime game down here.

So it was games that just continued -- and if anyone knows Erlana, she was big and physical and really aggressive. And then you've got Sylvia that was just always unique, great staff that she would have. I mentioned this the other day, one time she left at halftime chasing one of the officials to get the right -- get the call right.

But she always had, like I said, very similar to what Courtney has, just loaded roster of pros and players being able to play inside and outside and having a thread, and very similar to this roster that every single player -- I mean, they bring up players off their bench, and they all can score. So it's a really deep roster.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thanks so much for the time, and good luck tomorrow.

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