

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

Sunday, March 22, 2026

Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

Carmichael Arena

Maryland Terrapins Coach Brenda Frese Oluchi Okananwa Mir McLean

Media Conference

North Carolina 74, Maryland 66

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. We're ready to begin the Maryland press conference following today's NCAA Division 1 women's basketball second round game.

We have with us head coach Brenda Frese as well as student-athletes Mir McLean and Oluchi Okananwa.

Coach, if you want to start us off with an opening statement.

BRENDA FRESE: Obviously, we're really disappointed to not be moving on, especially for our seniors. But a tough game. I felt like it was there for the taking for us. We didn't manage enough plays to take it. We had a lot of uncharacteristic missed shots in this game.

I thought the first half, took us a while to be able to settle in. Credit to UNC. Their defense was elite in making us have to play on the offensive end. They took a lot of things from us offensively that we really struggled on the defensive end.

I thought we regrouped at halftime, did a better job at making plays we're used to making. In the NCAA, when you're playing on someone else's home court, it's extremely difficult. We missed 14 free throws and shot under 40 percent for the game. A lot of uncharacteristic plays for us.

The last thing I'll say is when I look back on this team this season, just how they played for each other, the unselfishness, the resiliency, especially when you talk



about all the injuries we faced this season. This group never quit. I thought they played a 40-minute game like that where they were not going to quit.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Mir, congratulations on a great career. I just wanted to ask you if you have any kind of reflections at this time, particularly on your last two years with the Terps.

MIR McLEAN: I'm a competitor by nature. I'm really proud of our team. If this is the way my season is going to end, I'm okay with that because we fought until the very end. Reflecting, just very proud of us and more memories to come for sure.

Q. Oluchi, the third quarter, you were struggling a little bit. You spoke to Coach in an intense conversation. Can you break down what was said there and just kind of what confidence that gave you, even despite the loss?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Coach understands I'm a competitor at heart, and I've told her this before, and I'll keep on telling her this until forever. I love to be coached hard. That's what she does with me every single day.

Really what that was was a regroup moment for myself and her telling me she believed in me. Sometimes that's all you really need to hear to get back out there. It's a long game, lots of ups and downs. I feel like after that conversation, that's when I really went back out and just did what I had to do for my team in that moment. I'm forever appreciative of that.

Q. Oluchi, a similar question we asked Mir. A reflection on your first season with Maryland. Coming in from an ACC foe and having such a stellar breakout season, can you talk about your reflections of your first year here as a Terp?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: There's really no words to describe how happy I am to be a Terp and how happy I am to be coached by Brenda Frese. This was one of the best

decisions I think I ever made, and I'm so blessed to have been welcomed to the program the way that I have. And all I want is to keep on playing for her, for this program, for this name that we wear on our chest as hard as I can.

Q. For both of you, as leaders on this team, when you come into this weekend and you see Addi and you see Kyndal step up in their first ever NCAA Tournament games, how proud does it make the two of you as leaders knowing the impact you had on them and the direction of the future of the program?

MIR McLEAN: You touched my heart right there. Incredibly proud of our freshmen. I know I'm six years older than them, but I'm really proud of them. I look up to them. They've just shown so much grit and growth, and it's amazing to see as a leader. They're leaders themselves, and I have no doubt in my mind where they're going to take this program.

Just very proud that they trusted me to be their leader, and I'm also very happy that they have gone themselves and been able to show us what it looks like to be a fearless freshman for sure. I definitely envy their bravery freshman year. So, yeah, very proud of them.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Obviously, looking towards next year, looking towards the future just puts so much confidence in me. Now that they have this experience, now that they've seen themselves be fearless in the biggest tournament that you could ever play in, I'm excited for what they're going to learn and apply to next year.

Q. We're just not used to seeing that many missed free throws in the game. There's not much you can say because you're obviously trying to make them. Was there anything at the line? Did the rim seem unforgiving, anything that seemed off today at the line?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: I think Coach said it best. That was uncharacteristic of us. That was uncharacteristic of me. I think those are controllable. I think that's something that you look back on and, obviously, we played so hard but it's knowing that, okay, we still were able to make it competitive. Like it was still in our hands.

So, I mean, that's something we're going to continue to emphasize, of course. I know for myself, continuing to work on the mental game within that and knowing that even though I want to be better, don't let it affect the next shot. Once again, all things to learn for next season.

MIR McLEAN: Yeah, you just grow from it. It's something that we practice every day. So like Oluchi said and Coach

said, it's uncharacteristic. It happens. All you can do is pour into your teammates, give them confidence when they step up on the line. When you can rebound from the free-throw line as well, it gives them confidence to make the next shot.

Q. Obviously, it's the end of the road. Characterize what the team meant to you. I know there's a lot of emotions now, but characterize your journey.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: You know it's going to end at some point, but you never want that time to come. I think this team was so incredibly special, and I'm honored to have said that I was a part of it. There's so much that we learned and so much we're going to take for us, not just on the basketball court but in our lives.

I think when you join these teams, you create bonds with these girls that are for a lifetime. So I'm just so incredibly blessed to have met them.

MIR McLEAN: Yeah. I've learned a plethora of things being here in two years. I feel like I've had a four-year experience, and I'm very grateful for my coaches, who have always poured into me, and I mentioned before my freshmen and everybody in between.

Just reflecting back, just very proud of the resiliency we've been able to show this year. Other teams might have fallen or driven apart. We only got closer. I think that's a testament to who we are now and who we're yet to be for next year.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thanks so much for the time. Congratulations on a great season.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Thank you.

MIR McLEAN: Thank you, guys.

THE MODERATOR: We'll now have questions for Coach.

Q. Tough game. I don't know if you would have seen this yet, but the footage of you speaking with Oluchi on the sideline is going viral in a positive way. I want to ask you about the moment what does it say about Oluchi to be a player who can take that on positively from a coach? How do you read the moment when your player is having a tough day from the line, knowing how to challenge her in the right way?

BRENDA FRESE: I think for me, it's always been a pulse that I've been able to have with individuals and players. We do, at times, have to have those tough conversations. You can't have them without a relationship. You've got to

be able to have that. The best of the best, the elite of the elite want to be coached hard.

At that moment, I watched Oluchi struggle within this tournament. She's just too gifted so I wanted to implore how much belief I have in her and challenge her. I know what a winner and competitor she is. Just challenge her, do you want the moment? I knew to give it a minute, get her back in. And you saw she went out, she got a bucket, she got a steal and never looked back.

Sometimes that's where you've got to know your players and the relationships that you have. But, like, again, you can't have those conversations if you don't have a relationship with them.

Q. Coach, when Coach Banghart was in here, she was talking about how the game plan was to spread you out and go at individual match-ups. What did you feel like they possessed that gave you trouble and allowed them to beat you off the dribble more than most teams were able to do this year?

BRENDA FRESE: They did. Clearly, they went to the one-on-one match-ups on the defensive end and were super aggressive. They're a difficult match-up because if you go to help and over rotate, they can all shoot the 3 extremely well. They're very athletic. They've got, like I said before the game, I mean, they've got depth. They've got speed. They've got size. So it was really, really difficult.

I thought on the flip side, when we were driving them and being really aggressive, good things happened, obviously, when you get to the free-throw line 31 times. So that's when you watched both teams and you're trying to exploit the other end.

Q. When you think about a season like this, when you faced and overcame so much adversity, how long does it take the hurt of today to start blending into optimism for next season? What are some of the things, the freshman pieces, the depth of returners that give you optimism for the upcoming year?

BRENDA FRESE: I think it's really important to give your locker room perspective. So immediately, as much as we hate to lose, that's not changing anything. But, also, wanting to share with them like I did in the locker room just how proud we are as a staff.

I mean, so much adversity when you talk about the injuries, the tough January stretch that we had, they never pointed fingers. This was, again, I mean, no one's talking about one of the youngest rosters out there. Yes, we had three

seniors, and they carried a heavy load today.

But the amount of freshmen, which is uncharacteristic nowadays, that we had to play this season. Just to watch their growth. In this tournament, to see where they didn't even flinch, Addi and Kyndal and the moments that they were able to have.

That's why we do what we do. It's all about the journey and just watching they are young women. Because it's not just about basketball. This adversity, they'll be able to carry into life when hard things happen and see they've been able to come through it.

Q. Coach, obviously, this is the end of the road. You have three seniors here, Mir, Saylor, Yarden. You didn't have them all four years, but obviously is a tough day for the three of them. Can you talk about the memories of having the three of them here for as long as you have and talk about their future a little bit?

BRENDA FRESE: I think Mir had an outstanding tournament when you talk about her two games and emptying the tank.

I thought all three of them should be able to live with they tried to do everything they can. I thought, one, it was just awesome to be able to bring Saylor and Mir back home in a full circle moment after recruiting them. And Yarden, the winner and the competitor she is, our staff really enjoyed having her all season.

We spoke to them. They've all got really bright futures. Whether that's continuing on to play or the next move they make, they're going to be extremely successful. So just really proud to be their coach and be able to have that moment in time, whether it be one or two years, to be able to have on the book end, the finish of their career, and hopefully give them the most positive experience that they could have had.

Q. Coach, talking about resiliency through the team, you called three time-outs in the last minute going forward. What were you talking about with the team to push through. And also, how does this carry forward to next season with the young roster?

BRENDA FRESE: You knew the game was going to come down to possessions. So having those time-outs I thought were important for us. We wanted to be able to advance and get some of those quick hits on the offensive end and then being able to know what we wanted to do from a defensive end.

But being able to take those moments, again, like I said,



we're right there. But UNC made more plays than us.

Q. Coach, has anything that's gone on through the course of the season changed your outlook about what you're prioritizing for next year? Is it just a matter of we have players from injury coming back, we're going to retool and regroup?

BRENDA FRESE: That's something we do every year. Our staff sits down and we look at our roster. These are ever changing times so you've got to see what your roster's going to look like and who's returning so they are uncharacteristic times.

I think we do a great job. We understand what we need, where our strengths lie, what areas we need to be able to improve on. We've continued to show that. We continue to evaluate where our roster is because we know we want to go further.

I mean, getting past the first round isn't where we want to be. We know we want to continue to play at the highest level. Again, given the injuries of this roster, they took us as far as they could so I'm really proud of them for that.

Q. Obviously, kind of what I asked Mir and Oluchi earlier. You said a lot of it. How do you describe this team other than, obviously, perspective and what you just said. Kind of how can you describe the specialty of how this team worked throughout this season.

BRENDA FRESE: I've always said this. The resiliency. I think there's a lot of teams, when their backs were against the wall, when they'd lost four games in January, a lot of teams wouldn't have made the tournament. They were right there. It was touch and go which direction they were going to take. I think that's the beauty of this team is they just continue to fight for one another, fight for this program, and you saw it unfold.

A lot of teams, it's really hard to do with all the adversity, losing our entire back court, and they just continued to find a way. And I think that's the beauty of this season is just being able to see just how resilient they were through all the adversity.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thanks so much for the time and congratulations on a great season.

BRENDA FRESE: Thank you.

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