

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Four - Southern vs UC San Diego

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

Los Angeles, California, USA

Pauley Pavilion

Southern Jaguars

Coach Carlos Funchess

Aniya Gourdine

DaKiyah Sanders

Media Conference



Q. Earlier in the year you played a lot of Power 5 schools. What did you learn from those matchups and how do you think that helped you prepare for the tournament going forward?

CARLOS FUNCHESS: Well, we played against a lot of different styles of basketball. That's the main thing that really helped us. I don't think it's anything we hadn't seen this year.

University of Texas going to pick you up full court, put a lot of pressure on you, try to turn you over.

University of Washington going to play zone defense. So we've seen a little bit of everything, so hopefully that helped prepare us for this moment.

DAKIYAH SANDERS: I think the teams from earlier in the year, they taught us how to persevere and stick together. They were really talented teams, as are we. I just feel like they allowed us to play a little bit harder and play with a little bit more grit.

ANIYA GOURDINE: I would say they prepared us for this moment playing the big teams. In our conference the teams are big, but it wouldn't be the teams we would play coming here, so I think it just prepared us for this moment, and for us to be confident in this moment knowing we can win.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2025 pre-NCAA tournament press conference.

We are joined by Southern University, winners of the Southwestern Athletic Conference Tournament and regular season champion; seventh NCAA tournament appearance this year.

On the dais with me is head coach Carlos Funchess and Aniya Gourdine and DaKiyah Sanders.

Coach.

CARLOS FUNCHESS: Well, we just happened to have the opportunity to represent Southern University and the SWAC Conference in the NCAA AA tournament. This is our second time in two years, and the young ladies came out and worked extremely hard to get wet to this point, and I'm just happy for them.

Q. Welcome to the tournament, guys, and Coach Funchess, welcome back. How does it feel to be here, and what did you learn from your last appearance that helped you prepare for this year?

CARLOS FUNCHESS: Of course it's great to be back. Just to see the young ladies who work extremely hard, started last summer, June the 4th as a matter of fact, getting ready for this moment to have an opportunity to win a championship and play in the NCAA tournament.

I thought the last time we played Sacred Heart we had the opportunity to win the game. We were a little tired. We are looking forward to the challenge tomorrow night.

Q. You guys are both upperclassmen and there are a lot of upperclassmen on your team. What does this opportunity mean for you guys, and is there anything sort of extra motivation now that you're all seniors?

DAKIYAH SANDERS: Well, this is my first year at Southern being a grad student. This moment means everything. Just being able to win the championship and make it this far is such a blessing. I'm just really grateful to my team and just having great teammates alongside me to make it here.

ANIYA GOURDINE: Like DK said, means a lot. Just paving the way for the younger players, showing them the



work that has to be put in to get here. So it's fun.

Q. Coach, what has that senior class meant to you as you got watch them grow over the years?

CARLOS FUNCHESS: Well, we have a lot of transfers on the team, but last summer we did a lot of team building. I thought that that really helped, and it showed down the stretch. Through a lot of different adverse situations, they stuck together.

It's really a sisterhood, and I'm proud to see them grow, not just on the court, but also off the court.

Q. One of UC San Diego's best players is Sumayah Sugapong. What have you noticed about her game and what do you think the key is to slowing her down?

CARLOS FUNCHESS: She's a really talented lady. She uses a lot of hesitation moves and things like that to keep you off balance. We are going to get back tonight to watch some film on them and do some more breakdown stuff tomorrow and shootaround.

But she's a really talented young lady and she's going to be hard to stop.

Q. Congratulations.

CARLOS FUNCHESS: How you doing, Rob?

Q. Doing great. This is for the student-athletes. Can you just -- ya'll pretty much answered the question I was going to ask about what this moment means to you. Take me through the process of sacrificing a vacation that Coach talked about, and anything specific you can talk about during the summer that you knew that this moment would happen.

ANIYA GOURDINE: Like Coach Funchess said, we been here since June 3rd, so if you really love the game, sacrifice is going to come with it. So just knowing the sacrifices, having to be out there, so just working. (Smiling.)

DAKIYAH SANDERS: Well, me and Aniya, we're both students that stay pretty far from Baton Rouge, so just coming in the summer, sacrificing being away from our families, coming in day in, day out, weight room, practice, being around our team all the time, it just meant we kind of had to stick to a certain routine, not be around the people we love in order to do something we love just as much, if not more.

Q. For Aniya, obviously we spoke way back in

November and I love your spirit, underdog mentality. How much does, one, playing ball in Baltimore help you with your mentality? And, two, because of the type of team you all have, because everybody steps up, will you feel overlooked? How does that feel when you feel like you're overlooked?

ANIYA GOURDINE: I never really feel overlooked. Our team, we have multiple players that can do a lot of different things. Everybody can pretty much do everything. I think that makes it easier for me to do what I have to do.

Coming from Baltimore just built toughness. You have to be tough. I feel like instill that in my teammates, and most of them already had it. It's really just a family oriented team. Nobody really feel overlooked or anything like that. Everybody do their role and hope we can come up with the W.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

