

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Princeton vs Oklahoma State

Friday, March 20, 2026

Los Angeles, California, USA

Pauley Pavilion

Princeton Tigers

Carla Berube

Skye Belker

Madison St. Rose

Fadima Tall

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. It's a home coming for you to play in Los Angeles, also for Ashley and for Emily as well. Talk a little bit about how much fun it is to actually have games in Los Angeles and having hopefully a lot of friends and family come?

SKYE BELKER: Yeah, the three of us are all really excited, especially because we don't get a lot of our family out to our games usually. So we're going to have a lot of support at the games. Definitely he feels like a home game for us. So we're really excited. It's going to be fun.

Q. Speaking of that, you guys had a game here a couple of years ago, it's not your first time playing here at Pauley Pavilion, it was obviously an incredibly memorable game. They were No. 3 ranked, you guys led with a minute to go, almost pulled it out. Does that give you some confidence tomorrow knowing that you have played on this very court and you have played very well on this very court?

MADISON ST. ROSE: Yeah, I do agree that we are familiar with this place even though we did have one game. But we're just super excited in general. We know we have a really big game coming up. I'm just happy to play with the good group of girls, so, yeah.

Q. This is your fourth NCAA tournament. Of course last year you had to watch the game from the



sidelines. But you've had, this will be your third time playing. You won a game your freshman year, you played a big role in that game. The other times you've lost. But can you just talk a little bit about your mindset as you know you'll be coming into your final tournament appearance in a Princeton uniform?

MADISON ST. ROSE: Yeah, it's just super exciting to be here and we worked so hard to get to this point. March Madness is a really fun tournament to play in. The environment's always really loud, the competition's always really good. So just being back here one more year to play with these girls, like that's all I can really ask for.

Q. The Oklahoma State team was talking about how y'all run kind of similar offenses, really balanced scoring. What's it like to go up against a team that has sort of a similar style to you just in terms of how they move the ball and score from different positions.

FADIMA TALL: Yeah, I think it's fun to see a team play the same play style. You don't see that often. I think that sort of takes a little bit of stress off because now it's like who is going to work harder, who is going to make those extra rebounds, who is going to get on the floor more. It adds a different level of complexity to the game. It should be fun.

Q. How does your preparation change for an NCAA tournament game versus say your regular season in the Ivy League?

SKYE BELKER: I would say the only change is that we're in L.A. for a couple more days than we usually would be. But for a way game. But I think the biggest thing is sticking to our game as a team. We're not changing up our whole style of play. We're sticking to what's been working all season and trusting each other, trusting the coaching staff, the coaches trusting us. I don't think a lot changes, other than get a little more free time checking out Los Angeles, which is fun.

Q. Can you guys talk a little bit about the hunger factor here. Because you lost the last two times in your opening games, had leads at halftime in both of those games, couldn't hold on in the third quarter. I'm



talking about West Virginia two years ago, last year of course in the First Four against Iowa State. So how hungry are you to reverse that trend and notch another big tournament win for Princeton basketball?

MADISON ST. ROSE: This game is just another opportunity for us to play a really good team and, yeah, even though we did lose our first round in the past two years, like a good thing we are here now so we can get that opportunity to hopefully win this game against a really good team. But it's not going to be easy, like you said, like we had our leads but then at the end of the game we just fell short. So just making sure that we play our hardest until the end and just making sure that we still keep our composure and hopefully learn from the past few years on what happened, not even what like the other team but with ourselves, like what made us breakdown and how can we grow from that and have a better mindset when we are losing a lead.

Q. Picking up on the last answer, I remember this time last year your first experience really getting a lot of minutes in the NCAA tournament, and then had you that quote tend about how you never wanted to lose ever again. I'm just wondering how different this year feels coming into the NCAA tournament with another experience or another season of experience under your belt and that NCAA tournament experience.

FADIMA TALL: Yeah, just honestly happy to be here. Last year is full of a lot of emotion, just trying to avoid those losing habits this time. Try to find new steps to get us that win in this game hopefully. But, yeah, I would say everyone's ready to go, hopefully ready to put a full 40 minutes of basketball together and see what tomorrow holds.

Q. You mentioned having some time to explore L.A. a little bit, saw on social media you guys went to In-N-Out Burger. Can you tell us a little bit about that and anything else you guys have gotten to do and then just how many friends and family are you expecting personally tomorrow?

SKYE BELKER: Okay, not sure exactly with the number of friends and family, but I've been told a lot. And In-N-Out Burger was great, I loved it, the girls loved it. They said that the fries are okay, but the burger was really good, which I can respect that. I think the fries are kind of a little healthier vibe for fast food, which I actually really appreciate. But that's also me being an L.A. native, talking about In-N-Out. Then we also got to check out some of my favorite spots like Third Street Promenade. We went to Venice Beach, saw the court there. So that's been really fun seeing my teammates check out the spots that I grew

up in playing basketball in and everything.

Q. You guys have a penchant for pulling out games late this year. By my count I think eight fourth quarter comebacks. You've had other close games that you pulled out, including last weekend. The game is tied, you go on a 12-2 run to cut down the nets in Ithaca. Knowing that you have that ability to come back, hit that big shot, does that give you confidence in knowing that tomorrow it could be a really close game, it could come down to a final possession to a final shot?

MADISON ST. ROSE: Yeah, I think with these really close fourth quarter games what it taught us is that if we stick together, stay poised and go back to what we know, I feel like that is how we pull out a lot of games. It was never easy but we just had to stay focused, even through fatigue, even though like if the refs, we weren't agreeing with the calls, we just had to stay with us, stay locked into what we know, stay locked into who we are as players, make really good plays. I feel like yeah honestly when clutch time comes around I feel like that's when we're really focused on getting each other the ball making sure we set each other up for success and winning those 50/50 balls we also know that's tremendously important down the road.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll excuse the student-athletes and take questions for Coach in a few moments.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Coach. We'll start with an opening statement.

CARLA BERUBE: Thanks so much and yeah, just really excited to be here. Thrilled to be in the NCAA tournament and at UCLA for my California players. We don't take it for granted making it into the NCAA tournament. We had a wonderful Ivy League tournament last year that gave us the AQ and just really, really grateful and happy to be in this tournament and can't wait to get going against a really strong Oklahoma State team tomorrow afternoon. We're going to have to be at our very best but I think we've put a great, yeah, season together and a great week of practice and I think we'll be ready to go.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. The big narrative coming into this game is that these are two look alike teams that are very similar in many ways in terms of having very balanced scoring and very efficient scoring as well. You find that narrative to be basically valid or there's some

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

significant differences that we're overlooking here?

CARLA BERUBE: Yeah, I guess if you look at the stats they look similar, but I think the players are very different. They have got strengths where we don't and vice versa. But they're a good defensive team, they're a good transition offensive team and they can really spray the ball around because they have scorers at every position. They have got a good inside presence with Akot and Heard, and then they have got great shooters, they have got Wooten is a great pull-up jump shooter and distributor. Just really balanced. We've been really impressed with them watching film. Yeah, I mean, I think stats-wise looks similar but I think I guess we run some of the same stuff, but just kind of I think different skill sets.

Q. Talk a little bit about the challenge your team's going to face in limiting Stailee Heard and then also Micah Gray.

CARLA BERUBE: Yeah, I mean it's going to be a challenge with all of them. Heard is tough, she's strong, she can really spread the floor because she can shoot the three well and then she can bully you inside. She finishes well at the rim. She also distributes it well. Yeah, she's tough. I think she's by far one of their best players. Of course we have seen Micah Gray before because she played at Seton Hall so we know what she can do from beyond the arc. So there's a familiarity there with her and, yeah, I mean you can't give her any space. So, yeah, two tough players. You can't just focus on those two either because like I said before, they really have great players all around. But those two are tough.

Q. One thing they hang their hat on is they're a good offensive rebounding team. Although you had a sensationally good record this year only losing three games. When you have struggled sometimes it's been a little bit of failure to protect the defensive rim. How much of a point of emphasis have you made that in preparation this week for playing this team tomorrow?

CARLA BERUBE: Yeah, it's on the scouting report over and over and over again. We need to find bodies, we need to push back, we need to pursue. Yes, you can make contact but you really got to get after the rebound and those loose balls. So huge emphasis. We've been talking about it a lot. Yeah, it's just something you need to be locked in on, because that's a controllable. You can find the bodies, but are you willing to just put your body on the line to push back, to drive them back. Sometimes you have to tip it to your teammate or tip it to yourself. Akot is phenomenal on the boards, so we've got to really do a great job of all five pursuing the ball.

Q. Wanted you to talk about Fadima, her season and what she brings to the table both on and off the floor?

CARLA BERUBE: Yeah, Fadima, yeah, has had a phenomenal year. She had been battling injuries, sicknesses throughout. She's finally feeling 100 percent, which I think watching the Ivy League tournament you could see that she's, that she feels great. She's a tough guard, right. She can spread you out, she can shoot the three. She can get down hill and get to the rim and use her body. She's strong. She can score in the paint. She has a good feel for the game. She's been coached well in high school and so we got a pretty good product when she got to Princeton. When she is ready to play and she's all out, she plays with a great fire and passion and I think her teammates feed off of that too. It's been just awesome to see what kind of season she is having and playing at her very best at the best time of the year.

Q. You mentioned the California players. What's kind of been the reaction or the emotions that you've seen from them since Selection Sunday while you've been out there too. What's that been like for you as a coach seeing your players have this moment?

CARLA BERUBE: Yeah, when we saw on Selection Sunday that we were heading down to California and to specifically L.A. there were a lot of cheers and screams and I think, you know, it was great seeing who we're going to play and then we're like oh it's UCLA and we're like -- so it was a lot of emotions. But they were just excited to be coming home to play in front of their friends and family. Talked about just playing in Pauley, which we did just a couple years ago, so there's a familiarity playing here. But they have been I think just on top of the world seeing their family and showing us around the L.A. area.

Q. You were talking a minute ago about all the excitement about being in California, spring break, NCAA tournament. What's not to be excited about? And yet I think we talked at times this year and in previous years where your team has had a very sort of business like mentality to these tournaments, just getting the job done, cutting out the noise, cutting down the nets. Is that the mentality this weekend as well or is it inescapable that the hoopla, the bright lights and the California sun are going to kind of tamp down that business-like mentality?

CARLA BERUBE: I think when you get to this point you really got to have a balance. You got to enjoy this process. You got to enjoy the trip. But when it comes down to time to work and time to watch film and time to get your bodies ready and practice, like they are locked in. And that's the business part of it. But you're out here, you're not going to

sit in the hotel and just do that all day long. You've got to I don't know, just enjoy the journey. I think that's what we've done this year. We went to the Bahamas and we've had a really great run. I think it's because we have such an experienced group that knows the difference between water slides and beating Penn State. So I think it's also the difference between being at Venice Beach and also being locked in and ready to win tomorrow afternoon.

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