

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

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Los Angeles, California, USA

Pauley Pavilion

## Oklahoma State Cowgirls

Jacie Hoyt

Achol Akot

Micah Gray

Media Conference

Oklahoma State 82, Princeton 68

JACIE HOYT: I just want to start by giving a lot of credit to Princeton. They had an amazing season and I told this to their coach before the game, but I truly felt like they were the hardest team to prepare for of any team that I've seen this season long because they are so well-balanced and they just do a heck of a job.

I've got a lot of respect for them but I am so proud of our team and the way that we came out and just really imposed our will from start to finish. I thought it was such a great team effort. We had a lot of players step up in really big moments, two of those players sitting to my left here that I am so proud of.

But I've said all season long that I think our depth and our balance is what makes us such a great team and today we got to see that on display.

I also think that I saw a team on display that understood that the expectation was just not to be here but to win here, and I'm really proud of our team for the way that they executed in big moments and especially when Princeton made that run at us in the third quarter, like we knew they would. I just thought our team responded really, really well.

### Q. What's it like to deliver your coach's first March Madness win?

MICAH GRAY: It feels great just with this team I'm super proud of us. Our mentality coming into this game was win and not just be here. I'm just super excited and looking



forwards to another win.

**Q. You guys had a rough start in the third quarter, I believe you missed your first six shots. What helped you clamp down in the fourth when they got within five?**

MICAH GRAY: I think just getting stocks and bonds and rebounds. We like to play fast and aggressive. That was one of our keys today. Getting rebounds, staying poised and getting quality shot.

**Q. They had that run there and then you killed that run. How important was that sequence for you?**

MICAH GRAY: Super important. Like I said, we wanted to play fast and aggressive, getting rebounds, we can run in transition and like you said, just end their stop.

**Q. Tonight when you get going down LOW and they are open, how important is that?**

ACHOL AKOT: It's important to have shooters all around me. That allows me to do what I can do and have a one-on-one matchup. Having shooters that are able to knock-down shots is just important.

**Q. What is it like for you to have this game, a career-high in scoring, double-double, great on the defensive end, and best performance of your career in this big of a spot?**

ACHOL AKOT: I think it's just a start. I think our team is just known for when we have good starts, we have good finishes.

So I think just having a good start to March Madness, I expect more down the line.

**Q. Yesterday we talked about how these two teams look really similar on paper, and one component of that was neither team is particularly big, but it really did work out that way today. Your team really dominated on the boards. Really seemed to dominate in the paint all game long. Can you talk about the role**



## that played in the game?

JACIE HOYT: I think for us, our paint points don't look like most teams' paint points. Obviously her having her career-high, she was unstoppable. She was phenomenal and her teammates were great at getting her the ball. I thought she was so good in space.

We are not a team that's going to like run a traditional high/low and try to pound it inside that way, per se, but just getting that ball screen and letting her get into space and roll to the open spot and then like I said, her teammates finding her.

I just think she fits like a glove in what we want to do, and I think that what we saw today is really just the beginning for her. She's been progressing all season long, and I've said this, but the last few weeks she's really been playing her best basketball.

And just super proud of her because she came here to do exactly this. She wanted to play in the tournament. That was her goal on her visit, and we talked a lot about that. I'm just grateful that she believed in me and the program and everything we're doing and she got rewarded in the biggest way today. I could not be more proud of her.

## Q. How would you describe your team's defense in the first and fourth quarters?

JACIE HOYT: Yeah, it was such an interesting matchup for us because we're not really very familiar with the Ivy League, right. We've never played anyone in their league. That was one of the tricky things I thought about preparing for them is just not really knowing how athletic, or how athletic they were or were not.

But we decided we just wanted to really bet on ourselves and use our athleticism to be disruptive. I thought our team was really good at that. Our ability to switch, our versatility in switching was really solid. But we felt like we wanted to impose our will.

I think that's when we are at our best and our kids understood that assignment and executed it really well.

## Q. How excited are you for your first tournament win?

JACIE HOYT: It's been a long time coming. I've had to sit up here twice now, and I didn't get to have this feeling. I was on the other side of it. I just remember both times, everyone kind of telling me, well, you know, no one thought you were supposed to be there. Like the first year, we lost in a heartbreaking game to Miami who goes on and goes to an Elite 8. We lost by one point.

And then last season it was also a very similar feeling and a close game. And what everyone told me: No one thought you would be here. You should be proud.

I was proud but for me I'm so competitive. I want to win every game and it never been enough for me to just get here. I want to win. That's the expectation that I have for myself.

No one will ever have a higher expectation for me than me, and this just feels so good to kind of get that monkey off my back, and I'm so proud of our team and I'm grateful for a team that brought me here.

## Q. Y'all had control the whole game but they would go on runs and cut into the lead. How important was it to put those runs to an end before they got out of hand?

JACIE HOYT: Again, I have so much respect for Princeton. I have seen games where they are losing -- I watched them beat a really good George Mason on team. They were down like seven points with 40 seconds, and come back and take it to overtime and win the game. Those kids are winners. They know how to win.

That's why I'm so proud of our team is because we found a way to win against a team that's very comfortable in those situations. I thought Micah was huge in stepping up. She made a contested three that gave our team a lot of momentum, and defensively we were able to make stops and get some run out layups that made a huge difference.

I'm very proud of our poise because we haven't really been in a situation that we were in today this season, and you know, last year's team, we had a very similar thing happen. We had a lead and then we lost it and never could regain it.

Today we took the punch and punched back, and I think that says a lot about the trajectory of our program and how that experience has played out for us and will continue to play out.

## Q. Similar to the last question, you mentioned they had the game against George Mason, down seven and to come back, the last minute and a half they cut it to five. How proud of your girls to take over and have the grit to fin tissue out.

JACIE HOYT: I thought it was a total team effort. I thought everyone kind of played their part in that. Micah made the big shot. A2 finished around the rim any time she got it there. Stailee hit the huge dagger three. Made our free throws when we got to the line.

I thought our seniors were really good. I thought Micah and Timmy both gave us kind of a different level of poise and composure that we needed, and again, I thought that everyone really stepped up in their own way.

**Q. Curious about the adjustment when they started doubling A2 in the second half. Was that from you or something she was doing as far as making the reads on her own?**

JACIE HOYT: She's an elite facilitator. That's one of the things she does is pass out. Again, I think she fits like a glove within our offense because she's so good at understanding where the double are coming from and then kick-outs. We saw that the whole game.

Like you said, they made the adjustment that they needed to make, and I thought she was really poised and just kind of took her time to find the open man. We worked on that a lot this week knowing that we were going to see congestion in the paint but she's just really good at that.

I know everyone is going to talk about her scoring today, but it's really been her ability to facilitate in that position that I think has set her apart this season.

**Q. Stailee didn't necessarily have her biggest day in terms of scoring, I think only eight points but can you talk about the job that she did defensively on Tall who she held to only eight points and really didn't allow her to get going in this game?**

JACIE HOYT: I could be wrong but I think that Tall is their X-factor. I think she's the one that makes them go. You've seen that down the stretch in close games. The job that Stailee did is really just phenomenal, to be able to shut her down that way.

Stailee, the great thing about coaching her, is whatever you ask her to do as a coach, she's going to do it, she doesn't scare if it's offensively, defensively. She's a great leader in that sense and a great competitor in that sense. Whatever it takes to win, she's going to do it and she's not going to ask questions. She's going to run through a wall for you.

For her to have that defensive assignment was huge, and she handled it beautifully. I thought Stailee's leadership today was great vocally. When they made runs or in time-outs, I saw her being that leader that we needed, and that's just who Stailee is, though.

**Q. It looked like when you guys were in the handshake line that you paused briefly to talk with Madison St.**

**Rose. Are you willing to share what you said or her impressions overall?**

JACIE HOYT: She's a heck of a ballplayer. I actually did that with a couple of their players. Again, I have so much respect. I could go on and on about Princeton. I think that she is a great competitor. I think she's obviously very skilled. She's athletic. She was a player that we sat around as coaches and probably spent the most time discussing how we were going to guard her.

She's just the type of player who forces you to be at your best as a coach, and it was important for me to tell her how much I respect her for that.

**Q. Jadyn Wooten had ten assists today. What did you think about just her creationability and freeing up some offense for you guys?**

JACIE HOYT: I think one thing about Princeton is that conference doesn't seem like they are a very heavy ball screen team offensively, and that's all we do. We set about a million ball screens throughout the game in different ways, and Jadyn is a huge part of that. We felt like if we could get her in a ball screen with A2, that was going to be a really good thing for us.

And she did a great job of getting the ball to A2 in that pick-and-roll action and finding the open shooter, like she always does. And A2 had to finish. I mean, all those assists, they had to make big shots or tough shots out of that. I thought she was really good at doing what she does in a ball screen, really good at that.

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