

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - James Madison vs Kentucky

Saturday, March 21, 2026  
Morgantown, West Virginia, USA  
Hope Coliseum

**Kentucky Wildcats**  
**Kenny Brooks**

**Clara Strack**

**Tonie Morgan**

Media Conference

Kentucky 71, James Madison 56

**KENNY BROOKS:** First and foremost, I'd like to congratulate James Madison. I'm very proud of that program. Obviously put a lot of blood, sweat and tears into it, and to watch Coach O'Regan and what he's continued to do with that program, it makes me very proud.

To their players, I told Peyton and Ashanti I was very proud of them for the way they represented JMU and really keeping the program on the map.

They had a terrific season. They gave us all we could handle in the second half. But I'm proud of my kids. We came out, we were ready to roll. That was one of the things I was a little nervous about because we hadn't played in two weeks and one day. We had a couple of practices where I felt like they were swimming upstream when they were trying to run down the floor. Just felt like they didn't have their wind. They did a really good job and they were ready to play.

Didn't finish it like we really wanted to, but I thought we took our foot off the pedal. But nevertheless this is the NCAA Tournament. We are very proud. We had a very good win against a very good opponent.

**Q. For the girls, you guys had a fast start, shot over 61 percent in the first quarter. Tonie, what were you seeing? Clara, what do you think the fast start -- why did it happen or how did it happen?**

**TONIE MORGAN:** It's March. We wanted to come out full swing ahead. We wanted to know we've arrived here and



we did not want to go home. So we knew we needed to punch first because that was a really good program in front of us.

**CLARA STRACK:** We just came out with that mentality. It's win or go home, so we have to start fast, we have to do things like that. Millie was hitting shots, everyone was just hitting shots. So yeah, like I said, it's just the mentality that went into that.

**Q. Tonie, there was a minute in the third you went down. I assume it was a cramp or what was going on there?**

**TONIE MORGAN:** You know, like Coach Brooks said, it's been two weeks but we've got a game under our belts. That won't happen again. I'm going to get hydrated and be ready for the next game.

**Q. Clara, this is your 11th straight double-double. What has it been for you? Have you just been locked in? Talk about that a little bit.**

**CLARA STRACK:** I mean, yeah. I guess I always try to be locked in. But yeah, I think I'm just willing to do whatever it takes for the team to win, whether that's rebounding, scoring. Really anything on the floor. I think that just also comes with playing hard, rebounds like that, and just trying to play hard, and like I said, get opportunities for me and my teammates for second-chance points.

**Q. For Tonie, you were plus 24 on the plus-minus tonight. What did you see on the floor, and how did it feel out there for you?**

**TONIE MORGAN:** It felt fun finding my teammates, getting everybody involved. We were happy to be back out there.

So just knowing that I was able to contribute to our big start felt great, and then my teammates also helped bring us all along, so it felt great.

**Q. Clara, one of our reporters out in St. Louis for the men's tournament asked Denzel Aberdeen if you shared advice with each other heading into the**



**Tournament. I was wondering if you all maybe exchanged words of motivation or anything like that heading into your respective tournaments this March.**

CLARA STRACK: I guess, yeah.

KENNY BROOKS: She's better than him.

**Q. Coach, can you talk about the dynamic with coach O'Regan, and was there any friendly banter there before or after the game, maybe some feelings you had with him, that dynamic?**

KENNY BROOKS: No, it's hard. A lot of people don't realize, I've coached at three places, but JMU is home. It's where I cut my teeth. It's where I got married. It's where I met my wife. It's where I had my children. It's a lot. I spent 14 years there. I actually spent 20 years there, a few years on the men's side.

I've known Sean since he was 18 years old. He was a manager on the men's side when I was an assistant coach on the men's side. I was the one that called him to switch him over to the women's side. Immediately he was a terrific assistant. He really worked hard, diligent. I remember he would call me every night, and he would start the sentence by, I got nothing, but -- and then he would talk for like an hour.

He has a great basketball mind. A lot of the things that he runs looked really familiar. He makes no bones about it. We share a lot of stuff.

It was difficult. It was difficult when you play against your alma mater, a place that means so much to you, and the people. I played against him once before and that was terrible because I recruited more of the people on that team than I had on my new team. This year was totally different. This was my team, that was his team, a lot of separation.

But very, very proud of what he's done. Very proud of what he's done, how he's kept the program on a national scene as mid-majors. They go out and they compete, and I'm looking forward to what he's going to do in the future. Very proud of him and what he's done. Very proud of that program.

It was a hard game. It was a hard game. I didn't sleep right. I woke up at 2:30 this morning. It was really hard to get back to sleep just because of the anxiousness. But I'm very proud of my kids for really coming through for me.

**Q. Coach, you talk about taking your foot off the pedal and JMU won 18-13 in the third quarter. Was there any**

**area you could have executed better?**

KENNY BROOKS: You know what, we were very fortunate to get up as much as we were, and we have a game on Monday night, and whichever opponent it is was sitting there watching us. So we were going to be as vanilla as possible. We weren't going to try to do anything.

If that was a normal game and that was the end and we weren't going to play for a while, we would have done a lot of things differently. That's nothing against what JMU did in the second half. Kudos to them. But we kept it very vanilla. When you play in a tournament and you've got Mark and Glenn sitting there watching you and watching your calls, you're not going to run everything, you're not going to show them a lot. So we went very vanilla in the second half.

**Q. Amelia Hassett started off pretty hot for you guys in that first quarter. I know she's always got the green light with you, but what does she do for the team --**

KENNY BROOKS: Everything. Everything. You look at Amelia's stats and Amelia is our unhung hero because not only did we ask Amelia to go out there and knock down shots but we asked her to chase around Peyton McDaniel the whole time. She plays a lot of minutes.

Amelia is fantastic, one of the most enjoyable players I've ever coached in my life and I've only had her for two years, but she is just really team oriented and does everything she has to do, and when she's knocking down shots like that, it gives us the ability to separate.

As I said, also another thing, too, is she's a big, big, big guard, so it really helps us rebound the basketball. A lot went into JMU's rebounding prowess, but our kids took note of that because we can go on a list and talk about who we've out-rebounded, Texas, South Carolina, Vanderbilt, LSU, and we've out-rebounded them. Our kids took that to heart.

I think the rebounding margin, JMU was plus 9, our was plus 8 in the SEC. So they were very, very motivated to do that. Amelia helps us do that because she's such a big guard.

**Q. I assume you're going to stick around and watch the next game?**

KENNY BROOKS: No, I'm going home. Going back to the cranberry.

No, we will. We will. Obviously this is what you do.



This is an event that these kids will remember for the rest of their lives, and so we want them not only to get a feel for this crowd and a feel for -- we're going to see an opponent we haven't seen before, so they can get that, but it's also an event. They've earned the right to sit here and watch and prepare for the next opponent.

So we'll sit down, we'll watch. Wonderful that we get a day off tomorrow to prepare. But we're excited to see who our opponent is going to be.

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