

Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament: Florida vs. Minnesota

Sunday, March 30, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinckle Fieldhouse

Minnesota Golden Gophers

Dawn Plitzuweit

Sophie Hart

Grace Grocholski

Semifinal Pregame Press Conference



DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, our young ladies are excited to be here, and we are looking forward to our matchup.

We know we have a lot of challenges in facing Florida, but I think overall, our young ladies are really excited to continue playing and looking forward to getting after it tomorrow.

Q. Just the message that you guys have had as a team. It could be through the year or even just through this postseason, how you guys have approached each game and just the overall kind of message.

SOPHIE HART: Yeah, I think it started in the summer for us. Trying to do small things really, really well. Simple basketball.

So for us, you know, we've been able to stack our days, and I feel like it's kind of showing now in this postseason of all the work that we've put in, and, you know, kind of trust ourselves. We've done the work to get here, and now we just get to go play and have fun.

Q. I'll ask Coach this but what do you think is going to be key for tomorrow against Florida?

SOPHIE HART: Yeah, I think kind of like not to sound too redundant but like the simple basketball. Making good passes. Not trying to do too much; penetrate too much in the lane; go up against two players.

And then to play our game. I feel like we've been having good chemistry amongst ourselves, and so just coming out

strong and being ourselves.

Q. What's your relationship like with Amaya?

GRACE GROCHOLSKI: Well, we're really good friends. I think just being in the backcourt with her, I think it's really fun because she's able to do amazing things on the basketball court. I think we have all seen those crazy plays that she makes. Sometimes you don't know how it happens.

Yeah, it's really good friends. So it's fun to be able to play on the backcourt for her.

Q. What's something you've personally focused on for this year to get better at, and do you feel like you've been able to do that?

GRACE GROCHOLSKI: Again, like Sophie was saying, the little things, for me, I feel like I was trying to get better and grow myself on offense to try and be a threat in three levels, and also trying to on defense be able to be in the right spots, helping each other on defense and just cutting people off one-on-one.

Q. What have you thought about the WBIT overall? This is the second year it's been around, but just the level of competition and being able to make it to the semifinal game.

GRACE GROCHOLSKI: Yeah, it's been really fun. I think all of our games showed that it's great competition. All of our games have been close and they have been really fun ones to watch. I believe the WBIT has been awesome, and we're just excited to still be playing.

Q. All year, you had played teams all the way to the fourth quarter, a lot of really good teams, not quite gotten over the hump against some of them, and Gonzaga could have gone that way and it didn't. I'm wondering, what was the difference, and what's the lesson you learned out of that?

SOPHIE HART: Yeah, I mean, I think we were all a little tired of the heartaches that we had had after those games,



but then, you know, it's March. It's either win-or-go-home.

So I think there's just a little bit of extra urgency that we have found. So the lessons that we have learned is how to win, how to kind of do that stuff. Dawnie-P has talked about, she calls it her "nerdy facts," but she says once you kind of get through some of those situations and have good outcomes, it's easier.

So hopefully next year and then through these next couple of games, we've kind of learned kind of how to get through that..

GRACE GROCHOLSKI: Obviously nobody wants the games to go the way that some of ours went this year. But I think every time we are in those situations, like Sophie said, it prepares us for the next ones, and I think that's what helped us in the Gonzaga game.

Q. You were at the Championship Game of the WNIT last year; it's two different tournaments. But are you looking at it the same way, and this year you guys obviously want to make it to the championship game, or is it two totally separate tournaments, and you're taking-it-one-game-at-a-time type of thing?

GRACE GROCHOLSKI: I think just March tournaments are kind of the same type of deal, win-or-go-home, like Soph said. We're kind of looking at it the same way.

Obviously excited to still be playing in a Final Four area, and obviously there's some really good teams. Yeah, trying to get over that hump, get back to the Championship Game and hopefully be in a good position.

Q. We talked to Coach about the MC Hammer song and all that. Can you tell me from the players' perspective, just what this song has done for you guys?

SOPHIE HART: Well, she only mentions one song, but Dawnie-P actually curates the playlist for us.

So that is -- we do really enjoy -- because you put a lot of time and thought into it. You know, she'll be like, "Okay! This song is for you, Sophie!" "This song is for you, Nia!" And she knows! I'm like, How do you know that I enjoy that song? Because I only mentioned it one or two times.

But the "Gaining Momentum" one is fun, and I think it's a good reminder to us that every game we win kind of puts the next foot forward for the next game.

Yeah, I think it just kind of reminds us it's March, it's win-or-go-home, and it gets us excited.

Q. Your shoulder is all iced up. Too much shooting out there already? Scoring too many baskets already? I'm only kidding with you.

GRACE GROCHOLSKI: (Laughing).

Q. Based on in the Big Ten, is there any teams that might remind you of who you're playing tomorrow, Florida? Any teams in the Big Ten kind of like Florida?

GRACE GROCHOLSKI: Go for it.

SOPHIE HART: I think a lot of teams can be similar to them. They are very athletic. They have a traditional post, I would say, more of a center that we see in the Big Ten. Their guards are super, super talented, great drivers, can kind of do everything.

So I don't know if there's one team that primarily sticks out to me that like, oh, They are exactly like this. But I think you could probably mesh them in with a couple of them in the Big Ten.

GRACE GROCHOLSKI: I agree.

Q. I'm wondering after a performance like Amaya had, do you pull her aside and talk to her about that, or do you let her marinate in what she's done? How do you approach that, if at all?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, I think what we did is we showed some film of some really good things that she did during course of that game, to help her see it again and remember it and get back to playing at that same level.

But I thought what Amaya did a really good job of in that game and I think these two young ladies talked about it is Amaya played simple basketball. She made really good reads. She penetrated early in the game and kicked it and created a lot of opportunities for her teammates, and then recognized when she has opportunities at the rim or to pull up and made really good decisions with it.

She and Grace had to play, I think, all 45 minutes of that game, and to be able to make really good decisions for so many minutes is something that shows a great deal of toughness from Amaya.

Q. There's a lot of kids in Minnesota that are homegrown and a lot of kids in Florida also from Minnesota. Can you talk about the influence of Minnesota on the game and this game in particular?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: I think obviously you're referring to

Liv McGill, who has just had a fantastic freshman season, and is from Minnesota, obviously.

So I think we are very fortunate, we have 11 of our 15 young ladies who are from the State of Minnesota, and I think it's been just absolutely incredible, not only for our program but for our community.

The special thing about them is they are just incredible role models at the same time. It's really been fun to watch them continue to grow but also to continue to grow the game in not only our community but beyond.

Q. Talk about what the opportunity to play more games means to your program and the momentum that carries forward to next year and being part of an event like the WBIT.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: I think it's really important. I remember talking to Amaya Battle, actually, when I first got to Minnesota, and one of the things that she talked about was it was really hard when their last game was in the Big Ten Tournament, I think it was on March 1st. And now for the rest -- and then that year, her freshman year, our program didn't go on to the postseason.

So it's really hard because then you spend the entire month of March watching other teams play, and so what's been great for our program and certainly this year is that we are on -- what day is it today, March 30th, I think it is, right? So we have time to continue to practice together and to see these experiences, have these experiences together.

I thought last year playing in the WNIT, we had a stretch where we were on the road and I thought that really helped us understand better how to be road warriors and how to be tougher and more resilient in road game situations.

Now this year we start off the WBIT in the same way, but then had a chance to come home. And I think that's really important, not only for our team to continue growing and practicing and developing; I know we're getting better right now, but also to help grow our fan base. I think that's something that really is important for us.

So you used the word "momentum." That is the MC Hammer song, "Gaining Momentum." So well-played. Well done.

THE MODERATOR: Unintentional.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: See, that's why it's a good song. I'm just saying. I'm just saying.

Q. I don't want to make too much of this because you did win 21 games before the other night. But I guess I was just really impressed watching the end of that game and then the overtime. I'm wondering, was that a culmination for you -- you mentioned smart play, right. Did something click there that maybe wasn't always clicking before? What did you see there?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, I think we've been in those situations, and we've come out on top in a couple of those games, and we did come out on top in some of the other ones.

And I just think our players' resilience, our defensive resilience was really high when I think we were down six at the media time out of the game and found a way to kind of rally. But it starts with getting stops. And came down and hit three straight threes, and I think that was really big for us.

We've been in situations where in those type of scenarios, maybe we overpenetrated and took a tougher shot at the rim, or we didn't hit it. But ultimately, I think it started from us having a chance to get some stops.

So again, that's a tribute to our players. Because what was really neat I think so far about this tournament, is that all three games have come down to crunch time. They have all come down to making plays late in the game. And all three environments, while they are different, it was loud. At Toledo when we played at Toledo, it was almost deafening.

So our players couldn't hear us as coaches. They had to do it on their own. They had to trust themselves and they had to have great chemistry and toughness and togetherness and that resiliency factor to find a way.

Then we go to Missouri State, and it came down to this exact same type of situation, and they couldn't hear us at that point in time.

And then it came down to this exact same type of situation Gonzaga. And again, our young ladies found a way to unite and figure those things out. That's what's really important about us moving forward and building right now, not just this team but in the future, is that they have the understanding. Because players have to make plays, really, and they have to have the confidence to do that. And they have to have the confidence in each other to do that. And they have to kind of know when someone is going to go make a play that they have to cover up for each other.

I think those are the things that are really important for us moving forward and to continue building upon. But I'm glad

that you're impressed. That's fun. Keep going.

THE MODERATOR: Do you have a comparable team that you've played this season to Florida, and maybe what kind of unique challenges does Florida present to your team?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: I thought Sophie Hart answered the question in an incredible way, actually probably better than I would have answered it on the spot and probably will answer it now.

But I do think one of the things that Florida is really, really good at is they are so good at getting out in transition, right. They make so many plays. They make things happen fast. But a lot of times, they get into transition because they turn teams over, or they block shots at the rim or they force tough shots, and so now they can get going.

So one of the things that we learned, I thought, when we were out at USC this year is how your offensive, either shot selection or what you're doing on the offensive end, really kind of dictates a lot of times your ability to get stops, especially in transition.

So I think there are some lessons we learned from that game. I thought Sophie's answer with the traditional post. Liv McGill is someone who -- we have some dynamics guards in the Big Ten, but man, she's an incredibly dynamic guard.

So I do think they are a team that is playing on fire right now. They are playing great basketball. And watching them, they are playing at an incredibly high level.

So I think there are a lot of different lessons throughout the course of the year finishing plays. We didn't necessarily do a great job of finishing plays against Gonzaga, against Ejjim. And certainly Florida is a very good offensive-rebounding team; so we have to take some lessons and learn some lessons pretty quickly before tomorrow for that.

Q. You watched your daughter hoist a National Championship trophy. When you're watching that, are you thinking, Okay, we have this opportunity at Minnesota; we can get some of that, for lack of a better word, let's get that "juju," let's get that momentum?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: There's that word again, gain momentum.

Q. Gain momentum. Do you feel excited about that? Because you have that opportunity now with your team?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Well, absolutely. There's no question. I think any time -- so it was a really neat moment to watch our daughter's team hoist a National Championship trophy. That was a really special moment in time and it's really kind of surreal; and it's surreal as a parent to be able to do, but it's equally surreal as a coach to do it.

Because you really try to put your team in a situation. But ultimately they have to have the understanding, the ability, the confidence to make plays. And that's what this is all about. Watching young ladies excel at the highest level and have fun doing it is something that's really, really special.

So yes, it is something that we hope to continue playing but we know we have a great challenge ahead of us in Florida, and that's all we're looking at this point in time. Because we have to find ways to slow them down and find ways to keep them away from getting offensive rebounds, and we have to find ways to score because they are a team that can really influence you in a lot of ways that way, too.

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