

Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament: Columbia vs Wisconsin

Sunday, March 29, 2026

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Charles Koch Arena

Wisconsin Badgers

Robin Pingeton

Ronnie Porter

Destiny Howell

Semifinal Pregame Press Conference



It sounds good in June, but how much can you lean into that when adversity strikes? I've just got so much respect for the way they've been able to continue to be resilient, to be who they said they were going to be when life was easy and there's no stress and pressure and adversity, but they continued to show up and do things the right way and really, I think, have embraced -- they've taken great pride in helping us lay a foundation for our program.

Q. For both of you guys, obviously it's not easy when you go through a losing stretch there like you guys did. How were you guys able to stay as confident as you've been, kind of even when the final outcome wasn't going your way?

THE MODERATOR: I want to welcome everyone to the NCAA WBIT press conference. From Wisconsin, we have Coach Robin Pingeton, student-athletes Ronnie Porter and Destiny Howell.

ROBIN PINGETON: Just really grateful and blessed to be here. It's just been a tremendous tournament. I think the WBIT staff needs to be commended, just first class organization in everything they've done and just appreciate that.

Really happy for our players. I think they've worked extremely hard. As we all know, there's not a lot of teams playing at this time of the year. We don't take that for granted. It's a really special group of young ladies.

We know it has to come to an end. I'm not ready for it too yet. They've impacted my life greatly in a short period of time. Just trying to really be where our feet are and enjoying every moment together.

Q. Robin, you're mentioning this team impacting you so greatly in a short amount of time. Kind of how have they impacted you?

ROBIN PINGETON: I would just say they're just so uncommon. We had a vision we talked about in the recruiting process with all of them, even the returning players because we had to re-recruit them, but the importance of we wanted to build something special at Wisconsin and the most important thing is the foundation, and what they were going to do was going to really impact years to come.

RONNIE PORTER: Really just staying together, believing in each other. Obviously, like you said, we didn't have a great stretch to finish out our conference season, but we had more games. We waited to see if we got into this tournament. We got in, and now it's time to play ball, do what we've been doing the whole season and, you know, just sticking together.

We started that in June. It's March now. Our goal was to be playing in March, and we're playing in March. Just being happy about the fact we get to dribble the ball together again, get to go out with a bang again, us seniors. Any chance I get to play basketball again with the Wisconsin name on my jersey, I'll do that over and over again, especially with the sisters I have and the coaching staff I have next to me.

Just very happy that we get to do this again and compete to see some confetti at the end of this.

DESTINY HOWELL: Just trusting the process, that's been a really big part of it. It says a lot about our character, being able to stay together in a time like that. When Coach was recruiting us, a big part was our heart posture and who we were internally. I think that goes to show how connected we really are and how much we really care about each other.

Put that practice jersey on every day and come in here and grind even though we're not getting the results we want. It



definitely was tough to go through. I'm not going to sit here and lie and say it wasn't hard to stay motivated and it wasn't hard to go through. But like Ronnie said, we wanted to play in March, and that was the goal. Being able to be in this tournament is just a blessing for myself.

I don't want my collegiate career to come to an end. She doesn't either. So just pushing game by game and being able to take the obstacle that's in front of us and advance to the next one.

Q. Along those lines, did your confidence ever waver kind of throughout that process?

RONNIE PORTER: Honestly, I think I'd be lying if I said no. Just, again, believing in myself and having people around you that believe in you, like family, friends, everybody around us. We were all in it. There was not one person that went right; there was not one person that went left. We stayed looking forward and being where our feet are for sure.

It definitely got to a point where we're like sit down, we've got to have some real conversations, like we want to win. Again, like I said before, our connectivity is where it needs to be, and that's exactly why we are where we are right now.

Q. For Robin, what does this do for you in terms of year one here to be able to be playing at this stage, first postseason semifinal appearance, I think, since 2007?

ROBIN PINGETON: It's not about me. It's about our program. It's about the University of Wisconsin. It's about the young ladies who are in that locker room, and that's really how I see this.

I'm just so excited for their experience. I think we've all learned from each other. We've grown. We've created some really special relationships and bonds. For them to just help us lay this foundation was everything.

It's not like when we were in that stretch, we weren't competing. We were really resilient. We were coming up short, but man, we were in most of those games.

I love the opportunity to teach life lessons, and I think that really revealed a lot about our character again. We talk about life is hard, relationships are hard. You're going to go through more, and just the importance of staying true to who you said you were going to be and just getting yourself up and fighting every day because you never know when you're going to have that breakthrough.

For me what this year means is the joy in my heart and the gratitude in my heart for them and their experience they get to have. Do I think it helps in regards to recruiting and that next season and having some momentum? For sure, that's what it's all about.

You look at just the trajectory of some teams that have played in the WNIT, the WBIT, and how that's just helped them propel their program in the next few years. Really I am so where my feet are and so excited to try to enjoy every moment with this group.

Q. Ronnie and Destiny, I want to take you back to the Harvard game. With 46 seconds, down by eight, you talk about how you guys are all staying connected through the ten-game slide, but what's going through your guys' heads as that game's going on? Does that belief get bigger and bigger as you guys start to get closer and closer? Can you take me through that? Then overtime, Ronnie, you took the first charge, you said, maybe of your career. I want to talk about that too.

RONNIE PORTER: We've been there before multiple times. Obviously we don't like to be in that situation. All our fans are like my heart, my head, everything is just hurting because the position you guys put us in in these games, but like I said, we've been there before.

In that huddle, I just remember saying believe. We've been here. Be where your feet are, believe, believe. There's 40 seconds on the clock, eight points. We've been there before.

So just like believing in each other, believing in what we're capable of honestly. Just going in there with really nothing to lose. Obviously we all wanted to win our last game at the Kohl Center. We're done. We're not playing there again. That was another thing that was heavy on us. We're going out with a bang, so if we've got to score eight points in 40 seconds, we will, and that's what we did.

With the charge, yeah, first ever. It was kind of epic, I'm not going to lie.

ROBIN PINGETON: It was very epic.

RONNIE PORTER: I was sore after for the rest of that night and the next day, but I look forward to taking more if it's to go to the next place in the tournament for sure.

DESTINY HOWELL: I definitely feel like in that moment our belief didn't waver at all. You would think with 40-some seconds on the clock, down by eight, if you just take it by possession game, we didn't even have enough

possessions to be able to come back. It's crazy when you think about it, but just how connected that we were, how the huddles got tighter, how that belief got even stronger.

When you have that, you're really not losing, even in life. I think just us having that extra hunger, that extra belief, and wanting to do it for each other, especially me, Ronnie, Gift, Lily -- who am I missing on the seniors? Leena. That's our last game in the Kohl Center. That was really weighing heavy on us.

I remember with maybe a minute left thinking -- I was just telling Coach P this, I can't go out like this. We can't go out like this. I think that was something that was definitely extra motivation to be able to figure out how we were even going to score those eight points and also stop them from scoring as well.

Just testament to us, shout out to us for being able to do what we said we were going to do and be who we said we were going to be in moments that were definitely hard.

Q. Robin, you were saying after Harvard you're going to need to win with defense and rebounding against them. Another team that's good at defense and rebounding, how do you see that playing out against Columbia, and what are some things that stand out to you on film about what they do?

ROBIN PINGETON: I'm really proud the last couple games how much I think we've elevated ourselves on the defensive end and taken some more pride from that standpoint. We had some possessions where maybe we didn't execute as well as we would have liked, but I think overall those last three games have been much better for us defensively, and I think the Big Ten has prepared us for that. The Big Ten is a tough, tough league.

For Columbia, I think Megan's a great coach, really impressed with that squad. They've had a tremendous year, have a tremendous history. Just fundamentally sound, high basketball IQ, unbelievable connection when I watch them on film. Because it's so important to us, I notice that in other teams, super connected group of young ladies on that court. They're really talented.

So we know we're going to have our challenges for sure. I think it's always so important defense can travel. When you get caught just focusing too much on offense -- sometimes you just can't control it. Sometimes you can be one of the best shooters in the country, but you're just having a tough night. Don't let those 10 to 15 seconds that you actually are shooting the ball impact the next 30 minutes. Sometimes you can do that as a shooter if you're not really, I think, dialed into your thoughts and controlling

your thoughts.

Defense and rebounding, I think, are always critical in March to help you advance, but we know we've got a tall task in front of us.

Q. From a practical matter, how helpful is it to have these extra three weeks you wouldn't necessarily have if you weren't still playing in March?

ROBIN PINGETON: It's huge. It's been so fun. You go through that little stage of -- the season's going to end no matter what. We've just got to face the fact that this doesn't get to go on forever. When you're a senior, that's really hard, those emotions that you deal with. You can't fight it. It's going to happen.

So it's really important that you are where your feet are and you make the most of it. I think, when you go from the Big Ten Tournament to the unknown period is a really challenging time. It's hard. You're mad, sad, frustrated. You've got a lot of emotions that you're dealing with. So you try and fight through that.

Then when you finally get the call and find out you're in postseason, it's like, okay, you get locked in again. I just think for our seniors, the experience of what this feels like is awesome, and they deserve it. They've earned it. They've done it the right way. They've helped us lay a foundation.

I think for returning players to be in environments where it's one-and-done, survive and advance, the pressures of playing under the big lights, I think, is huge for them from an experience standpoint.

Then like we talked about, it's just momentum for our program moving forward and an opportunity to do things that hasn't been done here at the University of Wisconsin for a very long time. These guys are going to look back and say, we were a part of moving that needle, a big part of moving that needle. They get to come back as an alumni and have those kinds of conversations. That's really cool to me too, and they've certainly earned and deserved every minute of that.

Q. Coach, if I can start with you, looking at Columbia right now, Weiss, Page, and Broom are averaging 59 points a game in the WBIT combined. What concerns you the most or stands out to you when you scout that trio in particular?

ROBIN PINGETON: If I'm going to be honest with you, everything. Really good team, like I said. I think Megan and her staff have done a tremendous job. They've

battled. They're battle tested. They're a well-oiled machine. You can see their connectivity, I think the discipline they play with. They're phenomenal on the offensive glass, do a really great job defensively, very stingy, forcing a lot of turnovers. Just offensively they find a way.

They've got a couple kids that obviously have the ability to make tough shots, tough shot takers, tough shot makers. They've got a good blend of inside-out. They've got a post presence, but they've also got some that can create off the bounce, and then the ability to shoot the 3 ball.

There's a reason teams are playing this late in March. We've got a lot of respect for them and understand that it's going to certainly be a dogfight for us.

Q. For both players, Coach mentioned the defense improving as of late. Just curious, along with what you all said about how you guys have really stuck together, are there things that you can pinpoint on either end, offense or defense, that you feel like you've made a lot of progress in during the WBIT?

DESTINY HOWELL: I think, one, trusting in each other. I think we've been able to do that a lot more. Not saying that we haven't before, but it's definitely grown as we've gone further into March.

I just think the way we talk to each other when we're on the floor, notifications have definitely been improving, trusting our instincts and just being even more connected. This is a time, especially in March, where you have to be as connected as possible, and we've been doing a really good job at being connected almost at all times.

Q. Ronnie, I wanted to follow up on what you said that you'll take any opportunity to keep wearing Wisconsin across your chest. Destiny, you can answer too. I wanted to just double-check on what makes putting on that jersey feel different this time of year now?

RONNIE PORTER: Really like the school basically raised me. I got here at 17. I'm now 21. So like just giving back to them. I love every aspect of school, the fans. I've learned so much here. Like I said, I've grown up here.

So just being honored to wear that name across my chest, and every time I do, just going out there and showing up for not only myself, the school, my teammates, my coaches, it's just a great feeling honestly. Again, I decided to come back to the school because of how much I love the school and how much I would love to keep representing the school.

Like I said, if I got to take another charge, if I got to do something that makes me put my body on the line, I will just as long as I can keep putting this name across my chest.

DESTINY HOWELL: I would say with me making the decision to come to Wisconsin, me and Coach P talking in that transfer portal, I chose Wisconsin because I wanted to be as uncomfortable as possible. I'm from Queens, New York. I was just in D.C. for five years. This was definitely a change of scenery, but I had no idea how much Wisconsin was going to impact my life and impact me as a player.

I think just the team, especially the staff, has done a really good job pouring into me as a woman, as a player, and just speaking life into me all the time.

You guys do a really good job of just changing my perspectives on basically everything, but especially how I want to move forward in life, how I want to be a leader, how I want to be a woman. I have a lot of honor putting Wisconsin across my chest. Coming here and believing the vision that we were going to do something special and we were going to do something different, that's been something that other people wouldn't be able to buy into like that. I think it shows a lot about who we are and what we have as a team.

That just being something really special to me, and loving every single moment of it. Especially now, being where my feet are and just embracing being here and knowing that my time is winding down, it's a bittersweet moment. So as long as I can keep putting that jersey on, I'm going to keep doing it.

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