



2014 NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Semifinals · Practice Day · Notre Dame vs. Oklahoma State
Purcell Pavilion at the Joyce Center · Notre Dame, Ind.
Friday, March 28

SEMIFINAL PRACTICE DAY QUOTES – Notre Dame

Muffet McGraw, Notre Dame Head Coach

On playing back at home...

"It's really exciting for us to be home and we're thrilled that we have a sell-out in advance. Hopefully the fans will be able to get behind us tomorrow. They've been great all year and we are really, really happy to be playing at home."

On Tiffany Bias of Oklahoma State...

"She has incredible quickness and is so fast in the open floor. She can be behind everyone and still beat everyone down the floor. She's one of the leaders in steals in the Big 12. She's a great guard who gets a lot of assists; I think she had over 200 assists on the season. She is just a really difficult match-up for us because of her speed and quickness and the way she runs the team. She's a great player who's had a great year."

On defending Tiffany Bias...

"It will be really difficult, especially in transition. We've seen in the past, with teams trying to do the same thing to Skylar [Diggins], that it's really difficult to defend a player like that in the open floor. We're really going to have to focus on matching up and finding her."

On first two games of NCAA tournament and tomorrow's game...

"I thought Natalie Achonwa had a really great game in the second round of the tournament. Jewell Loyd and Kayla McBride also played very well. Everyone had at least one game where they really played well, so I feel good about that. Defensively, I thought we played pretty well in both games. Rebounding-wise we could do a little bit better, but I think that's always a concern."

On coming into the tournament as an undefeated team...

"I think we've taken it one game at a time all year. We've embraced where we are in the journey and we've enjoyed each step of it. I think the most pressure was getting back home; that's difficult when you know you'll get to play at home so long as you win."

On players off the bench...

"I really thought Madison Cable was the X-factor in one game and Michaela Mabrey in the other. I think we expect to see someone off the bench step up and make a difference. It could really be anyone off the bench. I am really happy that we have such a deep bench and I'm excited to see who is going to rise to the occasion."

On transition game...

"I think the key is always rebounding. If you don't rebound, you can't run. You need to have the ball. I feel like we need to rebound better and handle the ball better, and that will give us better opportunities in transition."

On teams hosting regionals...

"I'm still opposed philosophically to the idea. I think the top 16 deserve home-court advantage in the first two rounds because they've earned it, and that means the regular season means something. When you get to the regionals, you really want a neutral court and neutral fans. You want to have the opportunity for any of the 16 teams to advance. It's difficult to beat someone at this time when you play them on their court."

On Notre Dame's dominance at home...

"Well, we've been pretty good on the road this year too. I think that our fans know and understand those really important points in the game—when we need a score, when we need a stop. They really make us comfortable and give us support, so we really want to win for them. It gives us a little extra when they're standing and cheering us on."

Kayla McBride – Senior – Guard

On Muffet McGraw's coaching this season...

"The biggest thing that Coach brings to this team is her competitiveness. She doesn't let us settle and it doesn't matter what the score of the game is, and I think she is always pushing us. That was something that we needed as a team. We needed to find our identity and I think with her competitive nature and the way she pushed us, we were able to find that."

On the team's identity and how it has developed this season...

"I would say this team is passionate and fast paced. When we're playing at our pace that's when we are at our best, whether it's defensively or offensively. It took a while to develop and I think that it's something that is continue to develop because we are always pushing each other to get better."

On playing at home...

"Like [Natalie Achonwa] said, it's a sense of comfort but also a sense of protection. As a senior, I don't want to go out losing on my home court and I know [Natalie Achonwa] and Ariel [Braker] feel the same way. It's also a feeling a comfort. When you look up and see green in the stands, it's always a good feeling."

On Notre Dame's defensive identity...

"We have a great coaching staff that gets us ready. They put in so many hours to find out what the opponent is going to be doing, so it's our job to go out there and do it on the court. I think we rise to the challenge when we need to. We take a lot of pride in being the best on every possession and not letting people be comfortable. When you play great scorers you have to bring that every night."

Oklahoma State has a lot of good guards, like Tiffany Bias, so it's something that we have to take pride in."

On staying focused this season...

"This is probably the most mentally tough team that I have been a part of. Coming in, a lot of people doubted our ability but we shut that out and focused on what we had to do, how hard we worked, and things we were doing in practice. We've focused on the little things and that's something that has made us so successful."

Natalie Achonwa - Senior - Forward

On Oklahoma State's interior play...

"The biggest thing for [Oklahoma State] is their rebounding. I know that some of their players have had 15 or 20 rebounds in the last couple of games, so it's about how we're going to box out and how we are going to execute on defense to make sure we're keeping them off the glass and only allowing them one shot."

On playing at home...

"At the very beginning of the season, one of our goals was to protect home court. That goal from the beginning of the year, plus it being a sweet sixteen game, gives our team more motivation to go out there and win. Being a senior, along with Kayla [McBride] and Ariel [Braker], I know we don't want to go out, especially not at home, which adds motivation. I think just being at home in front of our fans and having the green in the crowd, or when you look up and see that clover above you. It's going to be great for our motivation to come out on our home court and play good Notre Dame basketball."

On players besides Jewell Loyd, Natalie Achonwa, and Kayla McBride scoring points...

"The hardest thing about guarding our team is that we have so many options. It may have been [Jewell Loyd, Kayla McBride] and me who score around 60, but in the game before I think our bench came out and scored more than the starting lineup did. When you have so many options to score, I think that's the hardest part to defend about us. Depending on the day, Kayla [McBride] might have 30, somebody else will have 20, so there are so many options that if [Jewell Loyd, Kayla McBride] and I don't score 60, others will rise to the challenge."

Jewell Loyd - Sophomore - Guard

On Notre Dame's transition game...

"Definitely boxing out and getting back to the fundamentals and being ready when the ball is pushed. We do a really good job of getting the ball out to our guards. At times, when you play so fast you're going to have turnovers, but we have focused on not making those turnovers. Lindsay Allen does a good job of making sure she doesn't turn it over. She makes sure she protects the ball."

On playing at home...

"You don't want to let anyone come into your own house and take anything from you. We're definitely focusing on protecting our court now"

On guarding Tiffany Bias and Jewell's improvement as a defender...

"Tiffany Bias is a very good guard and a very good athlete. Our biggest thing is to make sure we stay in front of the ball and to make sure that she knows that we're in front of her. For me as a defender, it's been me taking more pride in my defense. I don't like getting scored on, so taking that into

consideration and knowing that I want to be the best defender, because our defense motivates our offense.”

On teams trying to slow Notre Dame’s offense...

“It’s not necessarily frustrating because coach has made sure we’re prepared for a lot of things, and our seniors have been through a lot, so they had a lot of experience and knowledge to pass on to the younger players. If things don’t really go our way we huddle up, talk about it, and find a way to execute.”