

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Four - Mississippi State vs Illinois

Tuesday, March 14, 2023

South Bend, Indiana, USA

**Illinois Illini**

**Kendall Bostic**

**Makira Cook**

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome the Illinois student-athletes. We have Makira Cook and Kendall Bostic at the podium.

**Q. Kendall, you saw where this team has come from last season to where you are now. What's the feeling being here and getting prepped for an NCAA Tournament again?**

KENDALL BOSTIC: It's definitely really cool. This was kind of something we had thought about at the beginning of the season when Coach Green first got here. One of the things we wanted was we wanted to earn respect. Having this year kind of be a rebuilding year and getting to this point is huge.

So obviously like -- and Coach Green and I were actually talking before this. Like this year we just wanted to get in the tournament, and next year we can kind of dissect some of the games during the season, hey, this is going to help us get a higher seed, stuff like that.

It's just a really cool feeling just being able to be here and kind of experience a postseason run.

**Q. For both of you guys, you've both been in the tournament before. When you look at this core, there's a chance it can stay together for a little bit. What can this experience do to maybe kick start that or bring you guys together who are going to be around for a while?**

KENDALL BOSTIC: I definitely think it gives a lot of people experience and having that experience in the tournament will help us down the road and next season it will bring us together.



March Madness, the games are completely different. You're playing people you've never played before. So just having that cohesiveness and going through that experience together will really help us come together.

MAKIRA COOK: Basically the same thing that she said. Just like any other game, it's a learning experience for everybody. The more time we spend with each other, the more our team cohesion gets better. So it's just like a positive. It's going to be a fun experience as long as we go out and do what we usually do.

**Q. Makira, just those two games in the Big Ten tournament, having those games that you did, what does that do for you confidence-wise going forward into March here?**

MAKIRA COOK: I think it just -- it just shows that I need to have the same mindset going into every game. Nothing's really going to be different. It's a different opponent, but we still have the same things that we stick to. We still have to be disciplined and just do what we do.

**Q. (No microphone). What's been different for you guys this year than you thought?**

MAKIRA COOK: It's been different. It's been a good year. It's been a good journey. But it's a new thing. So every new thing comes with different things. Like each year you just have to come ready and clear the plate from last year and look ahead, you know what I mean?

**Q. To build off that a little bit, you were with the conference champion and then follow your coach to a team that had won two conference games the season before. Now being here again, does that decision to follow Shauna feel a little bit redeeming to get to this point once again?**

MAKIRA COOK: Yeah, I like that word redeeming, but I just knew like following her was going to be a good idea, like the trusting part. That's where trust comes in. It was just like I kind of knew.

I know Coach Green, I know how she coaches, and I know



how good she is. So I was just like let's follow Coach Green, and I already knew it was going to be a good idea.

**Q. The program hasn't been to March Madness in two decades, but you both have NCAA Tournament experience. How beneficial is it to be in the tournament kind of helping your teammates out at this level?**

KENDALL BOSTIC: I definitely think it's very beneficial, just having some people with that experience. It just kind of helps -- we can kind of help lead the team during this time. Like I said earlier, it's very different than the regular season and during those games and stuff.

The quick turnarounds. You have practice in different gyms. So just being able to lead this group through it and kind of share our experiences. How we can help them during treatment, during practice, off days, just kind of help guide them through this, I think it's pretty beneficial.

**Q. You said you and Coach Green had a talk before the season about being here?**

KENDALL BOSTIC: Yes.

**Q. Looking from the outside, that seems kind of early. Why was the time right? What did that mean to you to put those expectations and ideas on the table at that point?**

KENDALL BOSTIC: I know a lot of us from last year, when we first kind of met with her, that was one of the goals that we had, like we wanted to make a tournament. It was one of my goals when I came to Illinois, like I want to make a tournament by the time I'm done here.

But I think it just kind of helped us set the bar for where we want to be. I think it's a lot easier to work for something when you kind of have a goal in mind obviously. So just kind of everyone being on the same page and having the goal to get here and having that in mind kind of pushed us to the season. Obviously next year I feel like we can really build off of that and kind of dissect it a little bit more.

I think it was really beneficial for us from the start, like everyone being on the same page, like Adalia and all of us. So it was big.

**Q. Makira, coach was talking about last year just sort of the big games is where you really like to shine. What is it about these big opportunities that you really enjoy in March Madness?**

MAKIRA COOK: I think just playing in big games gives

you the opportunity to rise to an occasion. In our minds, our mindset is always like we're the top team. So just rising to the occasion and doing what you have to do.

**Q. Kendall, how do you feel like playing in the Big Ten has prepared you for the big you're going to see tomorrow night against Mississippi State?**

KENDALL BOSTIC: I definitely have thought about that a little bit, especially -- you know, I think for me being undersized and having to play against people that are constantly bigger, stronger than me, I think it's really, really prepared me well.

I'm going against Mackenzie Holmes twice during the season, Monika Czinano, Taiyier Parks from Michigan State, Emily Kiser. I think it's really prepared me because the Big Ten is so diverse. Everybody is different. You don't just have bigs that turn and shoot. You have bigs that can drive. You have bigs that can shoot threes.

So I think it's really prepared me well and just kind of helped me kind of have a lot of tools in my pocket to be able to handle the bigs here because the SEC, there's some big bigs. So just to have those tools in my tool belt and just be able to use what I can.

**Q. You talked about trusting Coach Green when you came over here. How did you build that trust, and what was your first impression of her?**

MAKIRA COOK: My first impression from before I was in college?

**Q. Yes.**

MAKIRA COOK: My first impression of Coach Green -- so I was -- when we met, I was young, and I was going through the recruiting process. So I was in contact with like just a lot of different coaches and staffs. The thing that set them apart and Coach Green apart was just like they -- like they didn't sell me anything, any false hopes.

So when I went to Dayton and I visited, I could just tell it wasn't a facade. Things were genuine, like they cared. I knew I was going to come in, have to work, like it wasn't sold to me, like, oh, you're going to be a freshman. You're going to do this, this, and this. I knew I had to come in, work, earn my spot.

I like that they tell you up front what they want, what they need, and if you can't give them that, then there's not going to be a spot for you. That's what I wanted. I feel like I was being sold a lot of false hopes, false dreams, so genuine.

**Q. Makira, you told me before the season you were looking forward to the opportunity with this team to kind of prove some people wrong about what this group could do. What's this kind of meant to you to be able to put this program in this position and do it with this group of players?**

MAKIRA COOK: It means a lot, but it's taken all of us, like all 13 of us, the coaching staffs and everybody around the staff and stuff like that, every single day it's an effort that we all have to put in.

Like it's a hard job because we all had just kind of met like ten months ago now, and we just have to continue coming together and getting through it together is what's really taken us to where we are right now.

**Q. Your teammates kind of told me that warmups are a big deal for you because they kind of know if you're going to be on really early in warmups. Is there a process that you go through to know whether you're on on any given night, or do you have to go through the flow of the game?**

MAKIRA COOK: I think in warmups, if I'm having fun, if I'm loose, and if I'm missing a lot of shots, that I'm going to have a good game.

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