Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 6, 2026

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Michigan Wolverines

Coach Kim Barnes Arico

Ashley Sofilkanich

Postgame Press Conference

Michigan - 80, Oregon - 58

THE MODERATOR: Joining us from Michigan are Coach Kim Barnes Arico, Kendall Dudley, and Ashley Sofilkanich. Coach, if you'd make an opening statement.

KIM BARNES ARICO: Oregon is a great basketball team, and they were coming off two really big wins. They have a dynamic duo in Fiso and Etute. So we knew it was going to be a challenge for us tonight.

I was really proud of the way that we played and we defended. We took care of the ball, only had nine assists on the night, shared the basketball, got to the free-throw line, made our free throws.

I just thought we played really well throughout the entire game.

Q. Ashley, Kendall, how did you guys adapt to Oregon's defense, especially in the paint, given that a lot of Michigan's points come from the paint?

KENDALL DUDLEY: I think that what helped spread out the defense was just hitting inside out. Like we had a lot of big time shots from Macy Brown, Syla Swords. I think that opened up the space for us to get post touches and gave us a clear lane to score.

ASHLEY SOFILKANICH: I think we just moved the ball really well on offense. It's a great day when you have someone with 10 assists on your team and four people in double digits.

Just sharing the ball, getting everyone involved, and it makes defenses really question who they want to guard that day.

Q. Kendall, you've really shown a willingness to attack off the dribble. How has your confidence grown in this area, and what does that element add to your game?

KENDALL DUDLEY: I think that I've gotten a lot of confidence from my teammates and my coaches, and I think ultimately it helps continue to move the offense. We need everyone to be aggressive, and that's kind of my mindset. Just keeping aggressive, hitting people who are open, and that's kind of allowed me to become more confident.

Q. Kendall, you had 10 points, part of your 20 bench points. How vital is it that your bench is ready to go in big games like this? Can you kind of speak about your mindset about tomorrow's game?

KENDALL DUDLEY: I think it's super important, and we kind of talked about it before the season. We need everyone from bench to the last person, the first person on the court, and that is something that we think that will take us far.

So I think that's just my mindset of just knowing my role, facilitating, getting rebounds, and setting good screens.

I think that will help us go far in this tournament and the rest of March.

Q. Ashley, last time you guys played second chance points, you dominated 20-0. Second chance points were a big deal tonight as well. Was that a big priority coming into the game tonight for you guys? Do you talk about that a lot?

ASHLEY SOFILKANICH: You bet. We really emphasized rebounding, especially looking at our numbers from last game. It was a close game, double overtime with them, and we were up 30 on their boards.

We just knew coming into this game the rebounding battle was something we really had to win, and Coach emphasized offensive rebounding at halftime, and we really went in with that mindset for the second half. Just to get o-boards, those second chance points, and facilitating

the ball once we got offensive rebounds, and we kind of went from there.

Q. For both of you, did you notice -- as Kim mentioned, they played two tough games going into this game. Did you notice them wearing down in the third?

ASHLEY SOFILKANICH: I thought Oregon was a great team, really solid. They have some great players. I don't know if I really noticed a wear down, but we got more aggressive offensively and defensively and fixed our mistakes from the first half, and that really elevated our game in the second half.

Q. How much are you two looking forward to facing Iowa?

KENDALL DUDLEY: We're super excited. Like this, we want to get this back. We didn't feel great about how we showed up in the last game, just off the rebounding battle and a bunch of little things. We're super excited. We're excited to have a good game and have a good crowd and do good for Big Ten.

ASHLEY SOFILKANICH: Iowa is a really hard environment to play in. Any game where you're playing on someone's home court and there's 15,000 fans is really difficult, but I'm hoping with this neutral site and just a better mindset coming into the game and kind of knowing what we did wrong in that last game, we can fix our mistakes and come out with a win tomorrow.

Q. Ashley, your two best scoring performances both came against Oregon. Can you just talk about what in that matchup allowed you to just kind of go and execute the game plan?

ASHLEY SOFILKANICH: I think, especially this game, just confidence from my coaches, especially Coach Arico, always emphasizing like, Ashley get in there, get in the post. Like we want to throw you the ball. Just that kind of confidence from the coaches.

And then my teammates throwing me great passes into the post today really just helped elevate my game. I don't know, you never know when your day is going to be your day, so just stepping up when you're needed.

Q. There is talk about the excitement of playing Iowa and how that loss kind of sat in the back of their minds. I know a lot of coaches want to focus on the next game and focus on not trying to look back at those different things, but for you, though, thinking back to the Iowa game, have you seen your players wanting to play them again? Even for yourself, are you hoping for another chance to face them?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, that was a really tough game for us, and that was a tough environment. Actually, our end of February stretch was really tough. We played 14 ranked teams in a row -- I mean, 4 ranked teams in a row, and 2 of them were on the road at Iowa and at Ohio State. Then it was Maryland and Michigan State. So we had a really, really tough stretch.

For I think everyone, with the exception of two people on our team, they had never played at Iowa. So it was their first time, and we always talk about life in the Big Ten, life on the road is challenging. But that was the first time in that type of environment on Senior Day on a Sunday at 11:00 a.m.

So they jumped on us. They were super physical. The score didn't indicate really how close the game was, but they're a tough team to play there for sure.

I think for us that shook us a little bit because we hadn't had a loss like that in -- I don't know if we have had all season. So we really wanted to respond at Ohio State, which was our next game a couple days later, three games in that week, and we were able to respond at Ohio State. I think that gave us a little bit of confidence back.

We know that they're going to defend. We know that they're going to be physical. We know that they're going to be gritty. We know that they're tough as heck. But our kids are super competitive, and they want an opportunity to play against someone that beat them. I think that's what they want.

So they're going to have another opportunity tomorrow.

Q. After Liv and Mila left with two fouls, it really seemed that the approach kind of was driven through the paint. Could you just talk about Ashley and Kendall, what you saw out of them today. Then also, just what you saw from those minutes that they were playing on the floor together?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, going back and watching Oregon for the first time, Ashley was awesome the first time, and they really tried to play the zone against us. So we knew that she could really attack in the middle of the zone.

That was kind of a point of emphasis for us this week at practice when we were working on our zone offense. We really wanted to get her touches inside. I thought she had a little bit of a size advantage on Etute as well, so that was

something that we were focused on.

I think Kendall just gives a different matchup. You bring in -- Ashley comes in, and she's a back-to-the-basket post player, and you bring in Kendall, and she's a face-up, rip-and-drive player. So I think it gave them two different types of matchups defensively, and it played to our advantage.

But that was definitely a key for us going inside and trying to establish Ashley early.

Q. Ava Heiden is a remarkably gifted player. She poses unique challenges. What can you do specifically to try to limit her tomorrow?

KIM BARNES ARICO: I think we actually did a really good job until the fourth quarter. I think she was very limited prior to the fourth quarter, and then she got going in the fourth quarter. They wore us down a little bit.

You have to be super active. You have to catch her early. She's really physical. She scores very quickly. We just have to have an understanding.

Etute had a great night for them, and she's similar yet different than Ava. Just having an awareness, catching her early, and trying to be physical. And then limiting those around her to -- you know, if she has hers, trying not to let everybody else go off on the outside as well.

Q. Talking about rebounding, especially your offensive rebounding, the last time you played Oregon it was your highest offensive rebounding of the season. Tonight was your third highest in Big Ten play. Can you talk about what worked tonight, especially on those boards, to get the boards and get the second chance points?

KIM BARNES ARICO: We emphasize rebounding all the time. We're not always necessarily the biggest team on the floor, but we're going to pursue the basketball on both ends, on the defensive end and on the offensive end. Brooke Daniels is usually the smallest player on the floor, and she's usually the highest offensive rebounder.

I'm trying to find out if she was tonight. She was for our team. She finished with six and four steals. That's just something we really focus on, we take great pride in, and we always want to make sure we're out rebounding our opponent.

I knew that stat was important after the first time we played Oregon, and it also gave us 20 second chance points to their 4 tonight. So that was key for our success as well.

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Coach Kelly Graves

Ehis Etute

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THE MODERATOR: We welcome Oregon to the dais. Coach Kelly Graves and student-athletes Katie Fiso and Ehis Etute. Coach, if you would make an opening statement.

KELLY GRAVES: First, I just want to congratulate Michigan on moving on. They deserved it tonight. They were the better team; certainly the aggressors.

I think we played with them for a while. I thought we played okay in the first half. Certainly our first shot defense was pretty good, but we gave them too many second chance points.

Then that second half, I think we just ran out of gas. We were three games in three days -- not making that an excuse. That's real, though. We just didn't have as much left in the tank.

Again, I'm really proud of our team, especially these two. I think they showed so well. We're going to use this as an opportunity to now move on to the next tournament and hopefully have a nice run as well.

Q. Katie, can you just speak to with the pressure they bring defensively on the boards -- obviously that's a challenge regardless, but to Coach's point, playing for the third game in three days, just how much tougher is it to deal with the pressure they were putting on you guys given you had two games in your legs?

KATIE FISO: Yeah, definitely we knew it was going to be a mental battle and a physical battle coming into this game. We played two games already, this being our third. We did our best doing recovery, treatment, and stuff like that to prepare for this game, but like Coach said, just got to play through that fatigue, man.

Q. After the three games and how you all played, what's one lesson you both take away from the tourney as you prepare for the Big Dance?

EHIS ETUTE: Well, we'll have to take away from this that we're a good team. We just have to be locked in for the four quarters, 40 minutes. We can't just play for 10 minutes and then quit, and when things don't go our way, quit.

That's the thing we've got to take away from this. We've just got to keep fighting for 40 minutes.

Q. Your team has an incredibly adaptive defense and such a way of like reading the team and forming kind of like a wall around them. What's kind of your guys' tactic and outlook, and how has that brought you to this point in the tournament?

KATIE FISO: We hold our hats on our defense. We know that, if our defense is creating chaos, it helps us push in transition. When we get stops, we find the open person on the offensive side.

When we're communicating, flying around, talking to each other, we're one of the most hardest teams to score on, so yeah.

Q. Ehis, can you speak a little more to given that you two are both pretty young, what winning a couple of events this year can mean for you big picture, in terms of your development, whether you take confidence from it, whether there's other lessons you learn, not just for this year's team, but big picture, what this could mean for you guys in your career arcs?

EHIS ETUTE: We are a pretty young team, I guess, like Coach always says. At the end of the day what matters is winning, so age doesn't really matter. What we took away from this is we have a lot of areas to grow on. We kind of saw where we lacked and what we're lacking and know

what we're supposed to work on in the off-season and also before the tournaments. So we'll see if that translates.

Q. For either of you, the roles are significantly different from last year to this year for the both of you. How does it feel to get to contribute at this level after being with this team for two years and seeing your roles change so drastically?

KATIE FISO: It's always been a blessing to be trusted with these roles. Coach has put a lot of trust in us, a lot of trust in this team to make these big plays when the time matters.

It's a blessing. I'm grateful for this opportunity. We put a lot of work in, both on and off the court. So it was only a matter of time where the work started to show. Continue to grow, continue to learn, continue to get better, 1 percent every day.

Q. KG, can you just maybe speak to my question to Ehis, just given how young those two are, just what winning a couple games here can mean for them big picture and what they can take away from it?

KELLY GRAVES: There's a lot to celebrate. I don't think many people thought we were going to come in here and win a couple. Any time you win in the postseason, that kind of experience goes with you, even into the next tournament and the next year.

I think they're just scratching the surface. Like you said, they had small roles last year, and this year we had to put them in. Quite frankly, they've carried us a lot of times this season. I still am amazed that Ehis Etute, what did she get, three double-doubles here? Didn't get a single, didn't get mentioned on the all-conference team.

It just shows you the greatness of the conference. There's a lot of really good players. I saw a bunch of them on the other team tonight. But I'm really proud of them seriously. They work hard. They're great teammates. They love each other. Seriously, bright future with these two at the head.

Q. Sofie, Ari, and Mia, can you speak to their impact on games this week and just their growth in general?

KELLY GRAVES: They all had their moments for sure. Again, Avery is a sophomore. She has an electric game last night. We probably don't win that game without her. Sofia is one of the better defenders in the conference.

She was big in different moments this year, especially from the 3-point line. She's just kind of our rock, quite frankly. Everybody loves Sofia. She's the smartest kid in the room.

Then Ari, she's one of those that just makes things happen, a glue player that every team needs. So I'm really blessed to have three wings like that. Tonight you could tell those three played a little bit tired, but the one thing at the end of the night I never question the effort that those guys give.

Seriously, I'm really blessed as a coach to coach that caliber of people quite frankly, as well as player.

Q. I know we just spoke downstairs, but if you could just in one word maybe kind of surmise your feelings on, now that the Big Ten portion of your season is over, how you feel that your team has done over the course of this sector of the season? What is one word you could attribute to that?

KELLY GRAVES: One word. That was two, plus three more. Wow. I was actually impressed. I was impressed with our professionalism, impressed with we never complained. Three games, three days, late game each day. Just they're a fun group to be around. They really are.

Like I said, we have great chemistry, great camaraderie on and off the court. They're really professionals. They are. They go about their business. Good students, by the way. Yeah, they're the whole package.

That was a lot more than one word. I apologize. I'm a coach. You've got to remember we know Xs and Os. It's the other letters sometimes we struggle with.

Q. Michigan usually runs through its guards. When Mila Holloway and Olivia Olson picked up two fouls early, that kind of shifted into going through their forwards. Can you talk about the difficulties that Ashley Sofilkanich and Kendall Dudley presented you guys tonight?

KELLY GRAVES: Yeah, I thought they got good production off their bench from their role players. I'm kind of disappointed that we didn't create more with their foul trouble in the first half. We just couldn't ever really get it going. They've got a legitimate Final Four kind of team. I've been there. I know what it takes. They've got play makers. They've got depth. They've got size. They've got the ability to score in different ways from different levels, and they're tremendous defensively.

Yeah, Kim's got a heck of a team, and I'm looking forward to see how far they can go, not just in this tournament, but the next one.

Q. Watching Katie Fiso play on a third game in three days, I was struck by how high her energy level still was. What does that mean to your team?

KELLY GRAVES: I see it every day. There are times we actually have to tell her, stay out of the gym today. You need the rest. She's just that kind of player, that kind of competitor. They don't come along very often. I've been blessed to coach some of those great point guards, and she's got the makeup that they had.

You know, she's a little slight. For her to play as many minutes back to back to back nights as she did just really shows kind of the true mettle that she's made of. I could say that about a lot of players, but Katie is pretty special, and she's great to coach.

You can see she has a strong faith and has faith in her teammates as well.

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