

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 4, 2026

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Oregon Ducks

Kelly Graves

Katie Fiso

Ehis Etute

Postgame Press Conference

Oregon - 82, Purdue - 64

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Coach Kelly Graves and student-athletes Ehis Etute and Katie Fiso.

Coach, if you could start with an opening statement.

KELLY GRAVES: Well, happy we won. I do want to say how much I look up to Coach Katie. She had that team ready. They continued to fight the whole time. So I give Purdue a lot of credit for making that second half interesting.

We played a great first half obviously. One turnover, we shot the ball well, we distributed the wealth, so to speak. It was one of our better halves. But we're still a relatively young team, and we've got to learn how to close teams out when we've got them down. We just kind of putzed around a little bit -- I don't know if I can use that word here -- in that second half, and they tightened it up a little bit.

Real physical game but we are excited to be moving on.

Q. Ehis, not unusual to give up a little bit of size in the post. What were some keys to be productive tonight in those specific matchups?

EHIS ETUTE: Before the game, I had film with Tre (Simmons), and he told me that I should square up and use my speed against them rather than try to power them up, and that would be much easier for me. So I think that was one of the key factors I changed in this game compared to the last game we played against them.

Q. Katie, as the floor general, what were keys you think to starting so well as a group? Then maybe what



are some things that you look back on the second half you guys could have done a little bit different to maybe match their intensity when they counterpunched?

KATIE FISO: Echoing what Coach said, when we move the ball and distribute the ball to all players on the court, we're a dangerous threat. We have a lot of threats on the floor. So utilizing those threats, finding the open person, finding the hot hand, whoever's hot, continuing to feed them the ball.

Into the second half, I felt like we dimmed that a little bit. It started to stick a little bit more. So just moving the ball a little bit more.

Q. Katie, something I thought that was especially impressive about your game, especially in that third quarter, was your ability to get two feet in the paint and use your footwork to kind of finish. Can you talk about how important that aspect of your game, your footwork is for you and how you kind of build upon that over the course of your career?

KATIE FISO: Yeah, obviously I feel like it's not on the scout. I'm more of like a get downhill, finesse type of player. But slowing down, being patient off two feet, finding the open person or finding the open cup has been key for me. Coach always says finish off balance, making the plays on balance.

It helps me. It makes the game a lot more easier for me.

Q. Katie, this is the second time you've faced Nya Smith, a former AAU teammate of yours, limiting you to two points compared to the first matchup. What was it like going back and forth, being former AAU teammates, and what was the key to getting comfortable shooting against her tonight?

KATIE FISO: It's great facing a former AAU teammate on a big stage like this in the Big Ten tournament. The Big Ten is the best conference. Seeing former teammates, I'm just proud of her. She's come a long way. She's developed such a great game.



Just the key was no catch-and-shoot threes, no downhill. She's a great ballplayer off the dribble. So taking that away really helped the team get this win today.

Q. Can either of you speak to the accomplishments Mia Jacobs had tonight, 14 points, 9 rebounds, pretty much on the floor, and she really helped you guys out?

KATIE FISO: Having her back in this game, obviously we didn't have her for the first matchup, it kind of was showing in the game. Having her today, she's just another threat on the court that the defense has to scout on. So many players, so many threats, Ehis, Mia, Sofia, Ari, Sarah. All these people have all these threats, and I think that's what makes our team so versatile and so dangerous when we tap into those threats.

Q. What was it like playing this game, knowing potentially you could play several days in a row, you'd like to play several days in a row? Did you guys try to manage your energy level at all, or did you just have to think one game at a time?

EHIS ETUTE: That's a great question. Did we try to manage our player load, Kelly?

KATIE FISO: You go hard. Every time we step on the court, you got to go hard. That's just our motto. I feel like that's the type of players we are. Ehis right here, she never takes no breaks.

EHIS ETUTE: Never.

KATIE FISO: Most hard-working person on this team. (Laughter).

Q. Could you speak to that as well, just how you approach the game like this, particularly as you start to open up a little bit of a lead. Do you have to stay focused on this one? Do you start to think about the rest of the week?

KELLY GRAVES: That's where our immaturity comes into play. I wish we could have come out the first five minutes of the second half and kind of put our foot down and build on the lead we had, so that we could give them some rest. If we hope to win this thing, it's a five-game gauntlet, for crying out loud.

Any minutes you can give your kids on the bench, you take them. But again, credit Purdue. They really battled and fought back.

Rest at this point. I already told them we're not going to

use our shootaround tomorrow because we've got to sleep in. It's West Coast time. They ask you to have a 9:00 a.m. shootaround. Yeah, good thinking.

Q. Ehis, since we got into conference play, has come around and been a lot more productive. She does a lot of things for you guys that doesn't show up in the box score -- setting screens, her passing, her knowledge of the game overall. When you look at how she's grown from the beginning of the season till now, what are some of the things you like the most about that growth?

KELLY GRAVES: It's a great question, and if you've watched her growth, you've seen her grow right before our eyes. Last year just didn't play a whole lot. Even earlier this year she was kind of a role player and continued to work hard and get better and be productive on the court. I think now you're starting to see the realization of all her hard work.

It's a shame she didn't receive any kind of mention in our All Conference, and she averaged 15.1 and 9.7, top five in field goal percentage and number one in rebound percentage. She's a heck of a talent.

So it's really been fun, and I think she's just scratching the surface, I really do. Once she develops a perimeter game, she still struggles sometimes against length -- not necessarily skinny length, but broad length. She's an Adrian Dantley type -- look his name up if you don't know who he is. Our generation does but these young ones.

He was 6'3", 6'4", and able to get it done around the basket. She's got a little bit like that. She's a warrior. She really is. We have to keep her on the floor, keep her out of foul trouble.

She'll have her work cut out for her against Maryland. They're long and skilled inside.

Q. Since you mentioned Maryland, the last time we saw you guys play Maryland, Ehis did have a really good game against the length and the size. When you look at this matchup that you guys are going to have tomorrow night, what are some things that you think that you guys can do differently to make sure the outcomes are the same, so you guys can move on to the next round of the tournament?

KELLY GRAVES: Yeah, we'll try to anticipate what they're going to do differently and counteract that. Where we did a great job the first time we played them, we took the two and three ball away from Poffenbarger and Garzon. I think they made one between the two of them.

Now, we didn't do a great job on their penetrator. We'll have to do a little bit better there. We certainly did in the second half. They come at you in so many different ways. They've got five or six different players that can get you 20 on any given night. So they're really difficult to guard.

We'll have to be on point, do what we always do. Try to mix up the defenses a little bit to try to keep people off balance as best we can.

Like I said, we're not playing with house money. We're here to win games and do the best we can, but we're just going to go out and let her rip tomorrow. That's all we can do.

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want to put your best foot forward. KP, Lana, Mads, McKenna, they gave us something to play for. So it was definitely motivating.

Q. Lana, when you kind of reflect on your second year at Purdue, where do you feel like you've made the most growth from your freshman year, and where do you feel like you can still improve moving forward?

LANA McCARTHY: I think my biggest areas of improvement have definitely been IQ and on the court. Coming in as a freshman and being able to get that playing time, being able to play against some of the best post players in the country really taught me a lot about where I can grow, what steps I need to take in order to be great. With that same experience, just being able to see myself succeed and being able to know that what I do is important and I'm good at what I do.

Q. In that third quarter is where you guys just really went off. How did you adjust and make those things that really made the difference where you got to outscore them 25-17?

TARA DAYE: I think just coming out of the halftime, we just wanted it more. We had to clean up a couple of things. We really focused on getting stops on defense, trying to score and then not go bucket for bucket with them. That was our goal coming out of the halftime.

Q. Katie, does this game in a way sum up your season as far as --

KATIE GEARLDS: Some of it, yeah.

Q. Two different halves --

KATIE GEARLDS: Actually, something I think I said to the staff about a minute ago, it just kind of was this microcosm of kind of the way things were for us. We make eight shots, 8 of 33 or whatever it was in the first half. I felt like they weren't -- not all of them were rhythm shots, but a lot of them feel like they were open. I'll go back and watch them again. You say this all the time, I feel like we've got some really good shooters on our team when their feet are

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THE MODERATOR: Joining us for Purdue is Coach Katie Gearlds and student-athletes Lana McCarthy and Tara Daye.

Coach, if you would make an opening statement.

KATIE GEARLDS: Just congrats to KG and Oregon. They were really, really elite in the first half on the offensive glass, and we didn't make a whole lot of shots there.

Really super proud of my team in the second half the way they competed, the way they didn't back down. Love the competitive joy and competitive passion they played with each other in the second half.

Q. Lana, how do you reflect on your first Big Ten Conference tournament after being left out of the postseason last year and getting a first taste of that?

LANA McCARTHY: I think it was a great first experience. I'm super happy to be here. Just feeling so grateful that I'm able to play in my first Big Ten Tournament. Obviously I wish it went a little differently. I would loved to go a further and get another shot at Maryland, but I'm grateful for where I am.

Q. Tara, what was it like this year just bringing this group along and knowing that this team had essentially a generation of players that had missed out on things that you'd gotten to experience, two different schools, and getting to experience that conference play?

TARA DAYE: I feel like just being a newcomer, you always



set. And it didn't go in.

I thought we felt confident coming into the game, watching the previous game against Oregon and kind of the self-inflicted turnovers that we had. We did a good job of taking care of the basketball for the most part today. Just the ball didn't go in.

Then third quarter you find a way to go 11 for 15 and win the quarter by eight. Had a chance to -- I think we cut it to 11 and had a chance a couple times to get it to under 10 but just couldn't quite get over the hump. Every time we got close, I felt like Katie Fiso made a jumper or turnaround baby hook over her left shoulder. That kid was pretty elite today.

Q. I thought you guys did a really good job the second half of the game putting the ball in the paint. That's something you talked about at halftime about attacking that?

KATIE GEARLDS: I thought if we could, even in the beginning of the game, we wanted to be intentional about throwing the ball inside. KP and Lana picked up a couple fouls, so it was hard to kind -- disrupted some rhythm there. I thought they did a really good job in the second half of getting deep on seals, and Oregon decided to play them one-on-one a few times, and they were able to take advantage there.

It's hard to imagine, as much as we want to play it inside, that we only shot 13 to their 29 free throws. That one is really hard to swallow just because of how intentional we were about throwing the ball inside. So I'm excited to go back and watch and see where we've got to get better with those guys of finding a way to not just score, but put pressure and get the other team's post players in foul trouble.

Q. I just wanted to ask what's the next phase in the development of Lana, of Kendall, and of your bigs after facing a player like Etute who just seems so strong and so quick on her first move?

KATIE GEARLDS: I think Etute is a very, very good player. She's elite getting in and out of a ball screen, but all day every day I'm riding with Lana, KP, and Ave.

Q. What do you think was the show with defending the left side when their guards would get penetration on the left side, do you think?

KATIE GEARLDS: When we talked about it at halftime, I thought at our place our guards were very, very good. A lot of sense of urgency getting under ball screens or getting

over the top of ball screens where we needed to, and our bigs didn't have to come up to switch onto Fiso or switch to contest. Then Etute's rolling a guard to get an offensive rebound.

I thought in the second half we were a little bit more physical getting through those ball screens, and that way it really kind of slowed her down a little bit.

Q. Hila has really been struggling from three the last eight, ten games. Just to get the lid off the basket for her and have that kind of performance there in the second half, how can she build on that?

KATIE GEARLDS: Nobody in our locker room stopped believing in No. 8. There wasn't a kid that shot more on days off or shot more outside of practice trying to find a rhythm. It comes with a lot of grace. You look at -- I know she's 21 years old, but she's a freshman and in our country for the very first time, away from her family for the very first time. I can't tell you the last time she saw them.

When you think of someone who is a true Israeli, Hila is a true Israeli. She kept her head down and kept working, never made excuses, and I was really, really happy to see the ball go through the net for her today.

Q. When you look at where this program can continue to develop and continue to grow, what are the most important things you need to do to continue to push this thing forward?

KATIE GEARLDS: I think the biggest thing is just keep moving the needle. I think we made progress this year. Obviously not the progress we want to keep -- obviously keep playing in the Big Ten Tournament, find your way into the NCAA Tournament, those are the next steps.

But finding yourself on the outside of the Big Ten Tournament this year and then finding a way to get in and really facing what we faced -- I mean, we're out there with potentially three starters on the sideline in those white T-shirts. Taylor blows her Achilles first day of practice. We anticipated her being our starting 3. Taylor Feldman goes down with a back in the summer and tries to fight through it. We anticipated her being our starting point guard. And Mads kind of has the freak thing.

So not ideal situations, but I can't think of a team that I would want to roll out there with any more than those girls and those women in our locker room because they never made excuses, they just kept working.

I know the wins don't show it, but there's not a doubt in my mind that this was probably one of the most fun teams that

I've coached here just because of their competitive spirit and their competitive joy and love for each other that carried over every single day, and for that I'm really proud of them.

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