

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Illinois vs Vanderbilt

Monday, March 23, 2026

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Memorial Gymnasium

**Vanderbilt Commodores**

**Coach Shauna Green**

**Jasmine Brown-Hagger**

**Berry Wallace**

Media Conference



they pushed a lot in transition and tried to score off turnovers. We could have just done a better job taking care of the ball, as well.

**Q. There's a clear established standard for this program. Could you just give me your thoughts on what it means to you both to be a part of this new standard?**

JASMINE BROWN-HAGGER: For me, it means a lot to be a part of this program. The reasoning is just because there's no excuses, and kind of what our standards are. I think with this group that we have, I think we're all starting to learn and understand that and just know that our standard is going to get us to where we want to get to, and we just have to consistently do that at a high level, and just knowing that there's no one else I'd rather play for just because she stands for everything I truly want to be when I leave college.

There's just no excuses. Everyday women, knowing that's what this program is about. Kind of at the end of the game, that's how we have to play, too. Like the whole game, think of the second half when we were down, it's just kind of like, okay, but who are we at our core, and that's just kind of what we have to go out there and represent, and we just weren't consistent in that enough tonight. But I think moving forward, we're truly starting to understand what it really means to play for Illinois.

BERRY WALLACE: Yeah, we talk about that all the time, everyday women. I think that really is who we are at our core, and Coach Green models that for us every day, and her leadership showing up every day and giving us her best and our whole staff, as well, and I think we worked hard every single day this year, and like she said, no one made any excuses.

But I think we're just going to use this as motivation going into the off-season. We're everyday women all year-round, not just in the season. So we're going to work every day in the off-season and in the preseason, as well, and just prepare for next year.

**Q. Despite this loss, you still had a really great**

Vanderbilt 75, Illinois 57

SHAUNA GREEN: Obviously disappointed in the outcome. I thought we had so many good looks and just couldn't make shots tonight. Went on a run, got it down to nine, then gave up those threes in the third. So I thought our first quarter just -- the first and the end of the third kind of got us.

But give Vanderbilt a lot of credit. They're obviously really good. They made it hard for us in a lot of different things. So again, credit them.

But with a young team, there's a lot of optimism. We talked about it in the locker room, we're going to learn from this year. There's a lot of great learning opportunities for us, and we're going to come back, and I told they can, let's run this back and take everything and use this feeling as motivation going into next season and keep this core group together.

**Q. For either player, Coach referenced it, but that first quarter or first half, what did you see there that the shots weren't falling? What was going on there that led to that?**

BERRY WALLACE: I think they were just being aggressive and getting a lot of offensive rebounds, which was something we knew that they were going to try to do, but we just weren't executing, getting those box outs and grabbing the rebounds, which I think killed us the most. They were missing some shots earlier, and I don't think our defense was that bad, but it was those second chances where they were scoring off of those, and then obviously



**season. What can you each tell us about each other this season?**

JASMINE BROWN-HAGGER: I kind of said this to Berry back in the locker room, but I'm so proud of how she's stepped up this year. For this only being her second year in college, she plays like she's been here in another lifetime, and just knowing that she's grown so much, used her voice so much, and that she's never too high, never too low, you're going to get the same thing from Berry every single day. I love that so much about her.

One thing, she can always make me smile. She's just a really good person to have in your corner and to have on your team because you know she's going to play for you and that there's no question about that.

BERRY WALLACE: Yeah, we kind of talked about it in the locker room already, but just the way that Jaz shows up every day, as well, she's our best defender and she comes out every day and she wants to guard the best player and she executes that every single game and just brings that same drive for all of us.

I think this year she really stepped up as well in her leadership. She was talking to us every single day and leading our team huddles and leading our practices, and people didn't see that stuff. I feel like sometimes people don't notice the things that she does as much, and she is a huge part of our team, and I'm really grateful for the way she shows up for all of us.

She truly cares for us. She plays this game for her team and for all of us, and we all just really appreciate that, and we love her a lot. She does make me smile a lot, too. She makes me laugh the most on the team.

**Q. Obviously the disappointment of the season ending, but then, too, with that promise of what could be the future and how NCAA Tournaments have become a norm when they weren't for this program, how much are you weighing that as you end this season and look forward to the next one?**

BERRY WALLACE: Yeah, I think it's really cool how we have kind of -- and the people that came before us have really changed the culture of Illinois basketball, and Coach Green coming and just really making a difference means a lot, and we all bought into that.

I think it's just -- there's so much optimism looking into next year. Although we wanted to win this game and make it even farther, we know and we all saw the potential that we have, and we know what we're capable of. I think there's a lot to look forward to. We're all so young, and we have a

lot of really good players, so yeah, it's exciting for us, as well.

**Q. Berry, after a really solid freshman year, your sophomore year you really turned it on. What did you learn about yourself being at the top of scouting reports this year?**

BERRY WALLACE: Yeah, I think I just learned a little bit more so what I'm capable of. It means a lot, the confidence that my coaches and my teammates have in me, and they try to put me in the best possible situations on the court to succeed.

I think it's been really fun for us to continue to grow as a team and just have a lot of ups in the season and just accomplish a lot of different things.

I think I just learned that I can lead in my own way, and I've had to step up as a leader on the team this year in different ways, but I think I learned just more of what I'm capable of, which is super cool.

**Q. Specifically in that third quarter, I know you would hit some big shots and they would kind of respond. Take me through that feeling of those runs back and forth and how maybe that made a little bit of a difference in the game tonight.**

JASMINE BROWN-HAGGER: I think for myself just knowing that we came out in the third quarter and we were getting the stops and we were getting scores, as well. I think we just kind of have to find the discipline to know what they're trying to do in those next possessions after we've made a run or something like that because I think they ripped off like four threes or something after, and just knowing when we change a defensive coverage, just kind of echoing it and just being there and just being aggressive and kind of being very aware of what they're trying to do to stop our runs, and I think we just lacked that a little bit today.

**Q. What's the biggest thing the players can take from this season and the NCAA Tournament run into next season?**

BERRY WALLACE: I think the biggest thing I take from this season is just, like, your response to adversity is the most important thing. I think we learned a lot about ourselves as a team, and I know I did, as well. If we're not hitting shots, we can continue to be confident and continue to take shots that we know we take all the time. When we make up or maybe we start slow, if you have a great response, that can propel you for the rest of the game. Bouncing back even just from losses throughout the year, I

think we did a really good job just continuing to be more and more together as a team and just learning from them.

I think we can take that, just this loss and the season overall, and propel tell us into next year.

JASMINE BROWN-HAGGER: Yeah, kind of to piggyback off of that, looking forward to next year, just kind of putting ourselves in the best position going into the tournament. I think there was a couple games during the season that we should have capitalized on that we kind of fell short on, so I think kind of knowing that we have this year under our belt but just kind of knowing what it takes to be in the best position going into March Madness for these kind of games, whether that's hosting or whether that's just having a higher seed.

I think we're learning all the little things matter, every single game matters, and I think that's what we can take from this March Madness tournament.

**Q. Coach, what did you learn about your team over the course of this season?**

SHAUNA GREEN: Man, I don't have enough time. I learned so much about these guys. Coming in, I knew that there would be some ups and downs with such a young team, young freshman point guard, two freshmen starters. I told myself my word was patience. I need to be patient.

Then I don't want to say surprised, but they actually -- we didn't have as many probably bumps in the road as I probably even prepared myself for mentally coming in with such a young team. I just thought that they learned very quickly, and they were just so hungry and coachable and so bought in right away that they were willing to do whatever it took. They're just hard workers. They love basketball. They're constantly in the gym. They're constantly watching film.

As the season went through, we started learning from some of the mistakes we made. You could see it in real time, their growth, and then we started believing, and then we started just really starting to figure stuff out, getting more connected, and I think it was just really all part of the process.

We ended up having a great year. I told them in the locker room, we need to be really proud of this year. It didn't end how we wanted. Obviously you want to win, you want to get to the Sweet 16, but in the big picture for such a young team with so many new guys, to do what they have done this year, all the big wins, winning another game, two times back to back, hasn't happened at Illinois, I think, in 20-something years.

We're moving in the right direction, and that's what this is all about. So right now you're mad you lost, but you've got to look at big picture, and I'm really proud of these guys.

**Q. Berry mentioned this and you just mentioned this. Getting a team to buy in isn't guaranteed and a lot of times it doesn't happen at all. What do you do? How do you make that happen or how does that exchange happen between you and the players?**

SHAUNA GREEN: Yeah, I think it's the culture you create, and I know culture is probably the most overused word in sport, but it's about relationships. It's about really getting to know these guys and understanding what's important to them and building true genuine relationships. That's what our program is built on.

It's what we do. It's what we've always been about. That's why a lot of these kids decided to come to Illinois was because of relationships and vision. When Illinois wasn't the cool place to be, a lot of these guys believed in it before we were even winning at a high level.

To me, it's all about the relationships and the culture, and when you have that, when they know you really care about them and love them and I'm going to coach them hard, but I'm doing that because I want them to be the best that they can possibly be and be the best version of themselves, and then you get that, you get that buy-in. They're a super tight, connected team, and it's been fun to watch them grow and get even more together throughout this year.

**Q. You talked yesterday about Blakes as a scorer. Today she just missed a triple-double and had four steals. When a player that can score is doing all those other things, how much more dangerous does that make her and make her teammates?**

SHAUNA GREEN: Yeah, she's one of the best players in the country, and she can do everything. That was one thing, you have some players that they're just scorers or they're just -- no, she can do everything. She can pass, she rebounds, she defends. She's very impressive. Obviously you see her on film, then seeing her in person, she's an elite player, one of the best there is.

We knew she was going to get hers, but like I told the team, our thing coming in was we can't let anyone else go off. Pissott just had a -- we let her get way too many shots wide open and had some mistakes defensively on her, and I thought that was who really hurt us in the first half.

Blakes got going late. Blakes only had 10 at half.

I just thought overall, there were some times we had it to nine, and they hit four threes in a row off of just one-pass three kick-outs, like urgency plays, and that can't happen. You're making a run, you get it into single digits. We've got to understand, you need a stop and you can't have them just drive, one pass, three. We were in a switch and we didn't switch aggressive enough, give up another three.

Those are some of those moments that they were talking about that we've got to learn from because you can't give the best player -- one of the best players in the country open looks like that off of our defensive miscommunications and lack of urgency. Give them credit; that's why they're great. They make you pay.

**Q. Could you speak to the evolution of Berry and also Jaz as leaders on this team?**

SHAUNA GREEN: Yeah, they've come so far. Both of them have come so far. Berry is only a sophomore. To do everything she's had to do this year, be the leading scorer, be at the top of the scouting report. Now we need you to lead. She's starting to -- she's figured out her own way to lead. Same thing with Jaz. Jaz has had some ups and downs in terms of her leadership and stuff like that, but she really figured it out this last month, and she has been so impactful for our team as a leader, as a player, as a voice, and now they get it. Like, they understand it.

I just think this whole year has just taught us so much, and now we've got to use this and take all those lessons and put it into next year. Now we won't be the youngest team, we won't be any of that, but now we are an experienced team that can reference back to remember when this happened, and this is what we did, and we did that even at our last few games. We had learning moments that we could go back to.

Both of those guys have just done an unbelievable job in terms of learning themselves and learning how to now be that vocal piece because they didn't have to last year. We had five seniors. Three of them were 23 years old. Now they're figuring it out, and that's where the season has been so valuable.

I think now they're confident in their voice. They're confident in their leadership. They understand how important that is to our success.

**Q. How important is that experience for the team to have a season, going on a run in the NCAA Tournament, and what do you take going into is next season?**

SHAUNA GREEN: It's everything. Experience matters.

You don't see many teams young winning in the NCAA Tournament, men or women's. You need veterans. You need people that have been there before. Having that experience now, now they know what it's like, and same thing; they're going to know what it's like in the Big Ten Tournament. They're going to know what it's like -- I told them in the dog days of January, every game matters, every game, because we need a better seed. We need a better seed. So this has been our highest seed in our four years here. We've got to continue to bump that up so every single day, every single game, every single possession, that's how you take that next step.

All those things now we can talk about, we can reference back to, and then they've got to go and they've got to put it into action.

**Q. Shauna, I know you referenced, too, just feeling some shots that you really liked, them missing those. How do you not let that affect other things and lead to a balloon like it was able to for Vanderbilt?**

SHAUNA GREEN: Well, against a good team, you've got to make shots. You just have to. Your defense -- what did we allow, only 75? These guys are scoring a lot more than that points. I don't think our defense was awful. We had that stretch in -- our start wasn't good. They got too many -- we gave up too many, 21 in the first, and then we made that run in the third, and we went boom, boom, boom, and they scored, and we were not scoring.

But at the end of the day, you can only hang your hat on your defense so long, then we made too many defensive mistakes, but you've got to hit shots. You can't come and upset someone on their home floor shooting 13 percent from three and 29 percent from the field. It's just not going to happen. I don't care if our defense was -- like you have to be perfect defensively.

But my thing is with them, the controllables are our defense, our urgency, our communication, our effort. Offense, sometimes the ball doesn't go in. We got wide-open shots. They are handsy and physical, but we missed point-blank lay-ups. We've never shot 13 percent and 29 percent I don't think all year. It's just a bad time to not shoot it well. So I think it was a mix of both. But you've got to hit shots; simple as that.

**Q. Coach, obviously not the way you wanted the season to end, but what excites you going forward with your program?**

SHAUNA GREEN: That we've got everyone coming back. Last year I was crying like a little baby after that last game because you just had guys that had been with you for three

years and that had literally changed everything about the narrative and everything about Illinois basketball. It was that group.

Now we have this young group, so I obviously hate to lose more than anything, so I'm pissed about that. But I have a ton of optimism right now, and I'm very, very grateful for this team and I'm really optimistic and really excited. I've probably never been more excited in this moment to be able to say that for next year because of how young we are and because of all the experience and everything that we've learned and listening to our team in that locker room and the tears and them talking to one another. That has me even more optimistic and more excited to get back with these guys and get back to work because they're ready to go, and they're committed, and they're hungry. The thing is they're very grateful for what we've established here, and they're very excited about the future, as well.

So when you have all that stuff, that goes back to the culture and everything, I can't wait. I know we've got to take some time off, but I'm ready to get back to practice and get going and preparing for next year.

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