

IRISH INSIDER



WOMEN'S FINAL FOUR

FRIDAY, APRIL 5, 2013

SKYLAR

THE OBSERVER

Photo Illustration by Steph Wulz and Kevin Song

THE HOMETOWN HERO

Skylar Diggins closes out illustrious Irish career by reaching a third straight Final Four



By VICKY JACOBSEN
Sports Writer

“GAAAAAAAAAAAAAME DAAAAAAAAAAAAAY!!”

It's how senior guard Skylar Diggins greets her 331,035 Twitter followers before each contest. She has, at most, only two more opportunities to send out that tweet as a Notre Dame player. Two more times to put on an Irish uniform. Just one more college road-trip. And one more chance to win a national title.

“I want to bring home the national championship so badly,” Diggins said. “Not just for myself, but for Notre Dame and the city of South Bend. People know how high I hold this team and this university, I hold it on a pedestal. And the city of South Bend, how proud would they be? I know they would be proud of us regardless, but you know I want to go out winning our last game.”

Just don't think the pressure will keep Diggins from enjoying her last weekend as a college athlete.

“I'm super excited,” Diggins said. “I kind of don't want it start because that means it's going to end even quicker. I'm just trying to take it all in and really enjoy the moment.”

Hometown Girl

The recruitment of Skylar Diggins, the proud South Bend native, has become a familiar story for Irish fans. But assistant coach Niele Ivey, who was charged with bringing Diggins to Notre Dame, said she wasn't sure she had made the sell until the then-high school senior made the announcement in the Washington High library.

“I was sweating it out to the end,” Ivey said. “I always felt like we had a chance, you could say. I always felt like this is home for her, it would be hard for her to leave. I guess I was always nervous.”

Ivey and Irish head coach Muffet McGraw were successful in recruiting Diggins to Notre

Dame, but it was Diggins herself who brought a new crew of fans to Purcell Pavilion.

“I feel like I met everybody in the crowd,” Diggins said. “There are so many fans that have been familiar faces that I've been with since Washington, since my middle school days. And it's just a great feeling, to be from here and to see the support knowing people have are in your corner and want you to win.”

McGraw said the increased support from local fans has been palpable.

“I think people like the home talent. They appreciate that kids stay close to home,” McGraw said. “When we went to Indianapolis for the Final Four [in 2011] we got a huge crowd. The entire state was cheering for us. So I think it's a bonus to have a player like that stay close to home and help us grow our fan base and create more interest in the women's game.”

It was during that NCAA tournament in 2011 that Diggins, then a sophomore, began to attract attention outside of Michiana.

“Probably my biggest moment [from Diggins's career] was when we beat Tennessee in the Elite Eight and made our first Final Four since 2001,” Ivey said. “It was a monumental stage for us. It was the first time beating Tennessee, first time beating [then-Tennessee coach] Pat Summitt at the head of the program. That was the year Skylar became a household name.”

Of course, Diggins isn't the first player in program history to accrue widespread attention. Ivey herself was a member of the Notre Dame team that won a national championship in 2001 along with Ruth Riley, who won that year's Naismith Award and was named the Associated Press Player of the Year.

But while Riley, like Diggins, also played with a signature headband during her college days, a virtual “headband nation” has obsessed the legions of little girls who try to emulate Diggins, a unique result of athletic success in the age of social media.

“I think it's a tremendous burden to be placed on a player at

that age, and somehow she has embraced it,” McGraw said. “I think she talked to Ruth Riley years ago, like after her freshman year, maybe, just about what it's like to be the one that everybody's talking about.”

“I've been so impressed with the way she handled it. But I haven't really been surprised because when she was going into ninth grade, I sat her in my office and offered her a scholarship and she was so poised and mature at that point, I thought ‘This girl is just going to be special.’”

While Diggins is careful not to put her own accomplishments in front of those of her team, she also hasn't shied away from the media. Last summer, Diggins worked for ESPN instead of staying in South Bend for summer classes and she continues to write her own blog for ESPNW, a website dedicated to covering women's sports.

“I've always been a huge fan of sports and things like that, and I just fit right in the atmosphere,”

Diggins said of ESPN. “I think that company embodies some of the same values that I have, the teamwork and integrity and what have you. I thought it was a great experience for me to see the job opportunities that I have in the future.”

McGraw says Diggins stands out just as much away from awards shows and ESPN shoots as she does when the lights are focused on her.

“I just enjoy her so much, the way she pops in the office every day and staff meetings, sits down and asks what we're working on,” McGraw said. “I think she's just been so involved in what we're doing at every level, that it's been really fun.”

“She's a very different type of player in that I could see her being a coach. I would really look at hiring her one day because she has that kind of basketball IQ, and I think we relate in a little different way than with most players.”

Even if Diggins doesn't decide



KEVIN SONG | The Observer

Irish senior guard Skylar Diggins dribbles upcourt during Notre Dame's 64-42 victory over Cincinnati on Feb. 2 at Purcell Pavilion.

to use her basketball IQ as a member of McGraw's staff at some point down the road, she's certainly making life easier for her coach right now.

"I think the Princeton offense gives my players a chance to use their own creativity," McGraw

come to Notre Dame. "I knew that that piece of the puzzle for us was basically program-changing. She draws so much attention, even from other recruits.

"Recruits want to come here because they could be a part of this with her. Like anyone who

"Recruits want to come here because they could be a part of this with her. Like anyone who looks up to LeBron, they want to go play for the Heat. That's what she brings for us."

Niele Ivey

Irish assistant coach

said. "I don't like when the point guard looks over and says 'What are you going to run?' And fortunately I don't have to worry about that because Sky pretty much can make up her own mind. So we've been blessed there. "

Senior Leader

On the statue of former Irish football coach Dan Devine, the inscription reads: "Leave the field a better player. Leave Notre Dame a better person."

According to coaches and teammates, Diggins is taking that motto a step further, leaving the program itself stronger at her departure.

"I try not to think of it," Ivey said when asked what the team would be like if Diggins had not

looks up to LeBron, they want to go play for the Heat. That's what she brings for us."

Diggins has also been instrumental in the development of the players who will try to fill her place after she graduates.

"She's always a competitor, and it helps a lot," freshman guard Jewell Loyd said after being named national freshman of the year Thursday. "She makes everyone around her better, and that's something I always want to have in my handbook to do as well."

Diggins is as effusive in praise of her teammates as they are of her.

"I'm so proud of Jewell," Diggins said. "She's somebody that I really tried to take under my wing



KEVIN SONG | The Observer

Diggins sets up the offense during Notre Dame's 79-68 victory over Syracuse on Feb. 26 at Purcell Pavilion. Diggins played all 40 minutes and tallied 24 points, eight assists and six steals in the win.

and just her growth this year has been so amazing, and she's done so much for our team and for our program. I know next year that I can kind of pass the baton to her and (juniors) Kayla McBride and Natalie Achonwa and this team is going to be okay for years to come because of her."

Loyd says teammates will remember Diggins as a teammate,

not as a celebrity or iconic player.

"At my second workout or something me and her were in the gym and she was like, 'Want to work on your ball handling?' I was like sure, I've got nothing better to do," Loyd said. "We worked out and joked around and listened to music, and that's how we really started our bond. And that's something that I'll cherish forever,

because not a lot of upperclassmen will embrace the freshmen, but she definitely does."

Of course, with two more wins, both Loyd and Diggins might be left with an even sweeter memory to cherish, and a legacy to go with it.

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ROAD TO THE FINAL FOUR

BY MATTHEW ROBISON

NOVEMBER 9TH

In the program's first ever outdoor contest, Notre Dame beat Ohio State aboard the USS Yorktown in Mount Pleasant, S.C., by a score of 57-51. Junior forward Natalie Achonwa scored 17 points and grabbed 10 rebounds aboard the aircraft carrier. The game was played as part of the Carrier Classic, a series honoring America's armed forces.

JANUARY 5TH

Junior guard Kayla McBride scored a then career-high 21 points as Notre Dame shocked No. 1 Connecticut in Storrs, Conn., 73-72. Diggins hit two free throws with 49 seconds remaining to put the Irish up one and Notre Dame never relinquished the lead. It was the first Big East win to start at 16-0 regular season conference campaign.

FEBRUARY 5TH

Irish coach Muffet McGraw became just the 13th coach in Division I history to hit the 700-win mark. McGraw did it in her hometown of Philadelphia by beating Villanova 59-52. Natalie Achonwa scored 19 points and grabbed 11 boards to secure the milestone for McGraw.

MARCH 10TH

After earning the No. 1 seed in the Big East tournament and a double-bye through the first two rounds, Notre Dame beat South Florida 75-66 in the quarterfinals. Achonwa scored 20 points and grabbed a career-high 20 rebounds in the effort. It was the first time a Notre Dame player had reached those numbers in a single game since 1988.

MARCH 12TH

In their final Big East game, Notre Dame captured its first ever Big East tournament championship with a 61-59 win over Connecticut. With just a few seconds left, Diggins stole the ball and found Achonwa near the basket for the game-winning layup, securing a No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament.

MARCH 31ST

Diggins became the program's all-time leading scorer in the second half of a 96-69 win over Kansas, passing current assistant coach Beth Cunningham. Diggins had tallied 2,323 points in her remarkable career at that point. Notre Dame advanced to the Elite Eight for the third consecutive year.

OCTOBER 18TH

Coming off its second straight appearance in the national championship game, Notre Dame was picked to finish second in the Big East behind Connecticut, who received 12 first-place votes. Notre Dame received the remaining three. The league's 15 coaches also senior guard Skylar Diggins the preseason conference Player of the Year.

DECEMBER 5TH

In a rematch of the 2012 national championship game, Notre Dame fell to 6-foot-8 Brittney Griner and Baylor at home, 73-61. Freshman guard Jewell Loyd led the offensive effort with 24 points. But it was not enough to avenge the title game loss. Griner finished with 24 and 14. Notre Dame would not lose another game during the rest of the regular season.

JANUARY 28TH

In front of a crowd of over 13,000 people at Thompson-Boling Arena to honor legendary Tennessee head coach Pat Summitt, Diggins and the Irish stole the show. Notre Dame beat No. 9 Tennessee 77-67. Diggins scored a career-high 33 points in the effort.

MARCH 4TH

To cap off a perfect 16-0 Big East regular season, Notre Dame beat Connecticut 96-87 in spectacular, triple-overtime fashion to clinch the outright conference regular season crown. Notre Dame found itself on the brink of defeat in the first overtime period. But after missing all her previous attempts from long range, McBride stepped up and drilled a 3-pointer to tie the game with eight seconds left.

MARCH 11TH

In the tournament semifinals, Notre Dame breezed past Louisville, 83-59, to earn its third-straight appearance in the conference championship and seventh showing overall. McBride scored 17 points and Diggins added another 14. But the Irish had work left, as they had lost in their previous six appearance in the title game.

MARCH 26TH

Playing a rare true road game as a No. 1 seed, Notre Dame beat Iowa 74-57 in Iowa City to advance to the Sweet 16. McBride stepped up once again, scoring a career-high 28 points. Diggins scored 16 points to give Notre Dame a perfect 13-0 road record.

APRIL 2ND

Diggins was named a unanimous first-team AP All-American. McBride was named third-team All-America and Achonwa was an honorable mention. Against Duke in the Elite Eight, Diggins sat much of the first half with two fouls. But Notre Dame rallied from behind to beat Duke 87-76 in Norfolk, Va., to advance to its third straight Final Four. Diggins had 24 points and nine assists to earn the regional Most Outstanding Player award.

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34-1

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33-4


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NOTRE DAME

The Irish are back. Notre Dame is now in its third straight Final Four under the tutelage of coach Muffet McGraw and the leadership of All-American senior guard Skylar Diggins. The last two trips ended in heart-break. Last year, after a heroic finish in the national semifinal by Natalie Novosel, Brittney

Griner and Baylor dismantled the Irish. The year before, Texas A&M stole the show. But after what seemed like the depleting departure of the triumvirate of Novosel, Devereaux Peters and Brittany Mallory, three new stars arose. Freshman guard Jewell Loyd burst onto the scene, averaging 12.5 points and starting all but one game. Junior guard Kayla McBride has turned into a dominant scorer. She's averaging 15.9 points and has

proved her ability to hit shots from anywhere on the floor. Junior forward Natalie Achonwa is one of the best post players in the game, and her post presence down low has improved tremendously. Just as they have been the last two years, all the pieces are in place. There's really no fitting way for Diggins to end her illustrious career other than finally winning that coveted national title that has eluded her in the last two seasons.

CONNECTICUT

One of the most talented teams in the country, the Huskies have arguably the best pure shooter in the country and a dominant center. Sophomore guard Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis is shooting 49-percent from behind the arc. Junior center Stefanie Dolson is averaging 13.8 points and a team-high 7.2 rebounds. Dolson will undoubtedly challenge the post presence of Achonwa, junior forward Ariel Braker and sophomore forward Markisha Wright, as she has all season. Achonwa is Notre Dame's best post defender, but she has a tendency to pick up early fouls. If she is relegated to the bench early, Dolson has the potential to dominate. Mosqueda-Lewis stretches perimeter defenses with her range, so Notre Dame cannot pack the paint. Notre Dame has beaten Connecticut in all three matchups this season, but winning a fourth will not be easy. Diggins must control tempo, the forwards have to keep Dolson and freshman forward Breanna Stewart off the glass and the Irish have to find a way to disrupt Mosqueda-Lewis.

Louisville. On the men's side, the Cardinals were dealt a crushing blow with the horrific injury to sophomore guard Kevin Ware. But they advanced to the Final Four, as did the women. There's a great deal of pride in Louisville right now, and the Cardinals would like nothing more to top their wins over Baylor and Tennessee with two more and a national title. Coach Jeff Walz has turned the Cardinals into a national program. Still, this is Louisville's first Final Four trip since 2009 during the heyday of Cardinal great Angel McCoughtry.

CALIFORNIA

The only non-Big East team in the Final Four is California, who lost only to Duke, Stanford and UCLA. Junior forward Gennifer Brandon and senior guard Layshia Clarendon were both named AP All-America honorable mentions Tuesday. Clarendon is averaging 16.4 points per game and is the Golden Bears' emotional leader. Brandon averages a double-double with 12 points and 11 rebounds per game. The Bears have a third weapon in sophomore guard Brittany Boyd, who averages 12.6 points. All in all, the Bears are a dangerous team. They've proven they can beat any team in the country on any given night. With two scorers who can slash and shoot from the outside and a dominant post player, they can be a nightmare for opposing defenses. They also turn other teams over, creating easy baskets in transition. Should Notre Dame face the Golden Bears on Tuesday in the national championship, the Irish will certainly have their hands full.

LOUISVILLE

After shocking No. 1 Baylor in the Sweet 16, Louisville could have become complacent with the historic win. But the Cardinals went on to beat the No. 2 seed Tennessee to earn a berth in New Orleans. Junior guard Shoni Schimmel leads the Cardinals in scoring with 14.4 points per game. If any team in the Final Four has the momentum, it's

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COMMENTARY

Irish still have a ton to prove



Cory Bernard
Sports Writer

Notre Dame finds itself in an unfamiliar position as it prepares for another Final Four showdown with Connecticut. But don't expect that to matter come Sunday.

With Louisville making its second appearance in the Final Four and California appearing for the first time, most attention has been paid to the Big East blue-bloods on the other side of the bracket.

Unlike past years, the Irish enter Sunday's game against Connecticut without a loss to the Huskies earlier this season. Including last year's victory in the Final Four, Notre Dame has won four straight games against one of college basketball's great programs. The Irish currently have the upper hand in the rivalry, something they have never had.

Indicative of the recent trend, Geno Auriemma even fielded questions during his Final Four teleconference Wednesday about Notre Dame's unprecedented success against Connecticut. He was asked, "With all your experience, to what degree do you worry about there being a mental edge that Notre Dame has here or mental obstacle that your team has to overcome?"

Notre Dame doesn't simply hope to beat Connecticut anymore. They expect it.

So, it appears the Irish have flipped the tables, right? Given their clean sweep of the Big East and recent triumphs over the Huskies, the Irish should clearly be favored Sunday.

Not quite.

With so much focus on Notre Dame after three consecutive Final Four appearances and four years of Skylar Diggins, it's easy to forget the program has only one national title. 12 years ago. The Huskies have won five titles in that span.

I am not saying the program's past success makes this Connecticut team unbeatable.

They are a far cry from squads with former stars Maya Moore and Tina Charles. And the Irish are undoubtedly closer to Connecticut, talent-wise and confidence-wise, than they have been since that 2001 national championship.

Every game this year between the two rivals has been decided in the waning seconds of regulation or overtime. Notre Dame has matched and exceeded Connecticut's intensity in each instance and earned the victory.

Make no mistake, the Irish are an excellent team. But this is still Geno Auriemma and this is still Connecticut. And last time I checked, national championships provide a far better "mental edge" than regular season victories.

Auriemma summarized the difference perfectly when asked about the matchup between Connecticut senior guard Kelly Faris and her Notre Dame counterpart Diggins.

"It's been a heck of a rivalry, I think individually maybe less so than team wise," he said. "But Skylar's gotten a lot more attention and certainly a lot more accolades for what she's done for Notre Dame."

"But I don't think Kelly would trade her national championship for anything in the world."

Notre Dame has many things Connecticut doesn't have, most notably an edge in recent head-to-head matchups. For the first time in school history, Notre Dame has strung together an impressive winning streak against the Huskies. It truly is in uncharted territory.

But none of that matters without a championship. Only if the Irish win Sunday and again Tuesday will they be in an unfamiliar position that does indeed matter.

Contact Cory Bernard at cbernard@nd.edu

The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of the *The Observer*.

FINAL FOUR PREVIEW

ND to face UConn in Final Four for third straight year

By SAMANTHA ZUBA
Sports Writer

They've punched their ticket to the Final Four once again.

Despite No. 2 Notre Dame's past success and Irish coach Muffet McGraw's strong track record, few predicted in the preseason the Irish (35-1, 16-0 Big East) would make it to the Final Four in New Orleans.

But it's off to the Big Easy for Notre Dame. For McGraw, the season has been quite the experience. She has enjoyed watching her players expand their potential and defy expectations.

"This has been a dream season for us," McGraw said. "I think when you looked at us in the beginning of the year, nobody predicted us to be in the Final Four and certainly the improvement we've made throughout the year. But how well we've played throughout the year has been just so fun to watch."

Notre Dame has succeeded on the strength of contributions from many corners. The Irish have counted on trusted veterans like senior guard Skylar Diggins, improved performers like junior forward Natalie Achonwa and new faces such as freshman guard Jewell Loyd. All of these pieces combined to propel Notre Dame to the Final Four for the third consecutive year.

"Skylar Diggins leading the team in just about every way possible, but great performances by Kayla McBride and Natalie Achonwa and [freshman] Jewell Loyd," McGraw said. "We've had some fun along the way and we're so blessed to be back for the third time."

Three is an important number for Notre Dame this season. It is also the number of times the Irish beat No. 3 Connecticut on the year. Notre Dame will try to repeat the feat for the fourth time in the Final Four on Sunday.

The Huskies (32-4, 14-2 Big East) have quite a history with the Irish.

Connecticut and Notre Dame have developed a fiercely competitive rivalry in the Big East. According to McGraw, it is one of the best rivalries in the sport.

"I think it is the most heated rivalry in women's basketball and it's a game that everybody enjoys watching," McGraw said. "And we enjoy playing. I think it's a fun game."

Part of the fun and competitiveness comes naturally from pitting two quality programs against each other. McGraw said she has respect for Connecticut coach Geno



JOHN NING | The Observer

Notre Dame junior guard Kayla McBride shoots a floater over a UConn defender during the Irish victory over the Huskies on March 4.

Auriemma and the program he has built.

"Well, all his teams are really talented," McGraw said. "I mean, they get great players. ... He's a very good coach offensively. I think the way their team moves and the style of game they play I think really fits what he has. He tinkers with it year to year, based on what he has. ... They're a very good defensive team. They rebound. They do everything really well. He's a really good coach."

Connecticut sophomore forward Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis will challenge the Irish from beyond the arc with her 48.9 percent 3-point shooting mark. McGraw said she respects Lewis and freshman forward Breanna Stewart as two of the best players in the game.

"They've had No. 1 players, they've got Lewis and then Stewart," McGraw said.

Despite this season's success, the Final Four matchup with Connecticut will be no

cakewalk for the Irish. Notre Dame can draw confidence from the knowledge they have a winning streak against the Huskies, but McGraw cautioned such assurance can only go so far.

"Yeah, it's tough to beat a team three times," McGraw said. "It's tough to beat a team two times. And the battles we have had this year have gone back and forth and down to the wire. Every one of them. So we've really done some really great things at the end of the game to win the game. We've made some huge plays. When you look back at every game, whether it was a defensive stop or a huge basket or something good, we've been able to make something happen at the end. So we would certainly hope that the karma continues."

Notre Dame will test its karma Sunday against Connecticut at 8:30 p.m. in New Orleans.

Contact Samantha Zuba at szuba@nd.edu

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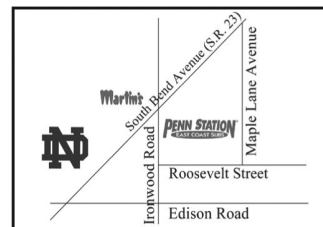
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Irish prepare for fourth round of rivalry

By **BRIAN HARTNETT**
Sports Writer

On April 3, 2011, the balance of power in Big East women's basketball began a gradual shift.

On that day, Notre Dame not only advanced to the national championship game for the first time in 10 years, but the Irish also did it by defeating conference foe Connecticut, a team that had beaten Notre Dame in three prior meetings that season.

"I think that game just gave us the belief that we could win," Irish junior guard Kayla McBride said. "I think, over the years, a lot of people would lose the game before it even started, just looking at their jersey and thinking about the legacy of [former Connecticut guard] Diana

Taurasi and the people they've had in their program."

Two years later, No. 2 Notre Dame finds itself in the opposite position, looking to top the No. 3 Huskies for the fourth straight time this season and secure its third consecutive championship game appearance. Call it the latest twist in what has become the sport's most intriguing rivalry.

"I think when [Connecticut] had the momentum and were beating us so many times in a row, it took a toll on us," Notre Dame senior guard Skylar Diggins said. "I think maybe we've switched the tables — maybe they think about us a little more when we step on the court."

Since that Final Four matchup in 2011, Notre Dame has dominated the series between the two

teams, winning seven of the last eight meetings. The record, however, belies how close the games between the two teams have been — the Irish have won by an average margin of five points per game, and three games have gone into overtime.

Irish coach Muffet McGraw said her team's narrow margins of victory in the series make it difficult to give a discernable advantage to either side.

"In the last couple of years — I guess the last two years — we faced them and came out with the win," McGraw said in a teleconference Wednesday. "And I think we just — we go into the game with a lot of confidence, and we know it's going to be a battle. But I don't think there's an edge really either way."

Connecticut coach Geno Auriemma said he agreed with McGraw's assessment, stating his belief that the Huskies have never been at a mental disadvantage.

"I know we have beaten [Notre Dame] 12 times in a row, and I'm not sure all of that was physical," Auriemma said in a teleconference Wednesday. "I think some of that was that we had a decided mental advantage when you know you can beat someone."

Notre Dame built on its 72-63 victory in the 2011 Final Four by defeating the Huskies in both regular-season meetings last year. And although Connecticut knocked off Notre Dame in the Big East championship final, the Irish took the second consecutive Final Four meeting, winning 83-75 in overtime last season.

This season, Notre Dame has won all three matchups with Connecticut. The games, however, have all been won in the final seconds — a one-point victory in Storrs, Conn., in January, a triple-overtime thriller in South Bend on March 4 and a two-point win in the Big East final just eight days later.

"I think we've been smart at the end of the game," McGraw said. "We've made a big play at the end of each game to win it."

Set to play Connecticut for



JOHN NING | The Observer

Irish senior guard Kaila Turner drives past a Connecticut defender during Notre Dame's victory over the Huskies on March 4.

the ninth time in 24 months, McGraw and the Irish are more familiar with the Huskies than any other team in college basketball. For McGraw, that sense of familiarity extends even beyond the series' recent history, as she's known Auriemma ever since the two first crossed paths at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia in the late 1970s.

Auriemma served as an assistant under former Hawks and current Ohio State coach Jim Foster from 1978-1979. When Auriemma left to coach boys high school basketball, McGraw, a 1977 Saint Joseph's graduate, took his spot on the bench.

"We've never worked together, but it's funny how we both got our start with Jim Foster at Saint Joe's and both have our own programs," McGraw said. "I think [Auriemma] is an excellent coach. ... We've really studied their offense and seen some of the things they do well."

Auriemma said the relationship between him and McGraw

is built on competition.

"We play golf together a couple times, and [McGraw] gets all fired up about driving the ball further than me, which is a big deal when your teeing off 50 yards in front of me," he said. "That goes to show you how competitive Muffet is. She's incredibly competitive. But I think the competition between us is about Notre Dame versus Connecticut, not necessarily about Muffet versus Geno."

McGraw agreed and compared the relationship between the two schools to another famous sports rivalry.

"You've got the Yankees and the Red Sox, and I think there's always big games that attract the casual fan to the game," she said. "And so I think that's what we're doing for women's basketball."

"You know it's going to be a battle. It's going to be a war, so I think that makes it even more fun to watch."

Contact Brian Hartnett at bhartnet@nd.edu

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