Indiana Wesleyan men's and women's basketball prepares to host and compete in the opening round of the NAIA national tournament.

The Lady Wildcats finished the season with the No. 4 ranking in the NAIA and knew for a couple of weeks that they would be hosting the first and second rounds of the national tournament.

On the other hand, the men's team was expecting to go on the road until they found out they would also be hosting.

Junior Luke Brown said the team had a get-together in the locker room, and everyone went crazy.

Assistant coach Caleb Muthiah added, “It was just kind of a shock. We were not expecting it at all. We are excited to be able to stay home.”

The men's team received the No. 5 seed in the Duer quadrant and will face off against the No. 12 seed Madonna University on Friday at 3 p.m. The Lady Wildcats received the number one seed in the Liston quadrant and will take on No. 16 seed Philander Smith at 5:30 p.m. on Friday.

Graduate assistant of the women's basketball team Emily Detmers says the Crossroads league champion Lady wildcats will have to make a team effort in order to avoid an upset against the HBCU Athletic Conference champions in Philander Smith.

“They're playing their best basketball right now. They have won five straight,” Detmers said. “They are going to be really hungry coming in here.”

The Lady Wildcats are known for their intense defense, which forces teams to turn the ball over an average of 20.5 times per game and score the ninth highest points per game in the NAIA at 81.1. But the Lady Wildcats will have their hands full facing the Panthers, forcing the sixth most turnovers in the NAIA at 23.8.

“They are probably going to try and press us, so we have been having to do some press break [in practice],” Detmers said. “They are a really good rebounding team, so we have had to focus on doing drills, taking care of the ball, making sure our offense is ready to go.”

Indiana Wesleyan Men’s team played Madonna once already this season at Gainbridge Field House, where they beat the Crusaders 113-75. Coach Muthiah does not think this game will be as easy

“They finished the regular season 10-1, they have some pretty elite scorers,” Muthiah said. “This is not a game to take lightly.”

The men's team has dealt with injuries, resulting in a rotating lineup and a lack of consistency. But they feel like they are back on pace and hitting their stride at the right time

The Lady Wildcats lost All-American and leading scorer Lilli Frasure to a wrist injury late in the season, sidelining her for a month. The Lady Wildcats lost their only two games of the year during that time frame.

“Both of those losses were pretty close conference games,” Detmers said. “I think we have learned how to play in the end of games, which is going to be needed for the national tournament.”

Winning the conference tournament was one goal for the women's team. But Detmers said the senior class has the dream of bringing a third national championship home.

“These last couple of weeks, the seniors have done a good job of encouraging our team to stay hungry,” Detmers said. “Yeah, we achieved one of our goals, but that is not the main goal.”

How a team plays in December or January is not a predictor of how a team will perform in the National tournament. Luke Brown said it is about getting hot at the right time.

“We are catching fire at the right time, "Brown said. “If we can make it to Kansas City, we can make some noise.”

Coach Muthiah added that they need to take things one game at a time.

The other teams visiting Marion, Indiana, for the national tournament are Olivet Nazarene University and Grandview on the women's side. Life University and Johnson University are on the men's side.

The winners of the first-round games on Friday will play each other on Saturday. The women’s winner on Saturday heads to Sioux City, Iowa, while the men’s winner heads to Kansas City, Missouri, for the NAIA National Championship Round of 16 and beyond.