

# Pac-12 Conference Basketball Media Day

Tuesday, October 25, 2022

San Francisco, California, USA

## Utah Utes

### Coach Lynne Roberts

### Gianna Kneepkens

### Kennady McQueen

Women's Head Coach



They were not just happy to be there. I was trying to get some emotions and I was just getting deadpan stares back, tears, which is a little awkward as a coach when you're up there and you can't even get -- it was like there was no pulse out there.

But they were so upset, and as I left the locker room I thought to myself, oh, this is good. This is really good. Because we were so young, we still are pretty young. We don't have any seniors on this year's team. But they're so motivated.

That's kind of how our off-season started, was just kind of this little bit of piss and vinegar about not just happy to be there, we want to do more.

They've been working hard, and I know as well as you all that a lot has to go right and you've got to get a little lucky to get back there, but we're looking forward to hopefully taking that next step.

**Q. Coach, just wanted to ask, last year you guys came into the season as the hunters, picked 10th, no one really had high expectations, finish sixth, go to the Pac-12 Championship. Now you guys are sort of the hunted. People know who you are. How do you have to try to change your mentality or do you continue to be the hunters even with these higher expectations?**

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, I think we lean into the expectations. We want that. We don't want to always be overachieving, right. So I'm thrilled that we're making those steps, but we still haven't arrived. We're still very much the hunters.

We have a lot to achieve. You look at some of the teams in our league, Stanford and the consistency with which they have had this excellent level; that's the level I want to get to.

It's also in my temperament that just kind of prove people wrong. I'm still very much resonating in that mindset, and I think that'll continue for a while.

LYNNE ROBERTS: Thank you all for being here. We certainly appreciate the coverage and you taking the time to be here for our Pac-12 media day. Your support of our sport matters, and your care and time for us and how you provide our game and our sport and our league, it matters, so I really appreciate you all being here.

We're excited to be back. I'm proud of these two joining me today. They've heard me tell this story, but I do want to share just as an opening statement of where we're at as a program.

Last year had a great run, made it to the Pac-12 championship game. We weren't picked to be there, obviously, as the 6 seed, but we did, and just kind of ran out of gas against an incredibly talented Stanford team.

Made it to the NCAA Tournament. Went down to Austin and played Arkansas in the first round. Got a great solid win against Arkansas. It was really fun. It was a great experience not only just to make the tournament, but to win your first game in a convincing fashion.

Played Texas. Played tough. They were the better team that night. Playing at Texas, too. Very physical, very aggressive, as has been documented.

But when we walked off the floor after that loss, I was really proud of our players and proud of our team, and just so wanting them to have some perspective as to what they achieved and what we accomplished last season.

And so I walk into the locker room and I'm trying to kind of pump them up and just talk about how proud I am of them and look what you've accomplished and look at all the things you've done, and I got nothing back from emotion. They were ticked off, for lack of a better way to say it.



**Q. For the athletes, what changed after that loss to Texas? What's different this season in terms of mentality, the work you guys are putting in based on that opening anecdote that Lynn told us about?**

KENNADY McQUEEN: Yeah, I think after, like she shared, we weren't just satisfied to make it to the tournament. None of us wanted to lose. We thought we were going to win. We went in thinking we were going to win.

So just keeping that little bit of hunger in us and wanting more, I think that's what's driven us all off-season and starting of this preseason, and just knowing that we're not done. That's just -- we're not satisfied where we ended, and we have bigger goals and bigger plans that we work every day to help us achieve those in the end.

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: Yeah, I agree with that. It's a great spot for us. Since we are so young, being able to build off that, and we are -- I feel like we were super motivated this past summer. So just seeing those, having, like Coach said, those expectations and not just talking about March right now, but focusing each day and getting better so we can get back and build off what we did last year.

**Q. Lynne, especially when we talk hype and expectation, there's only one first place vote that doesn't go to Stanford this year when we got the pre-season poll this morning, and it was voted for you guys. When you see that and see the schedule that you guys have accumulated, do you feel you're going to be able to test how high this team can get before you get to Pac-12 play, which tends to test teams pretty thoroughly?**

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, I think scheduling is a science where you want to push your team to prepare for the rigors of Pac-12, but also provide some confidence and figure out who you are and your identity on the court.

I think we've taken the next step in our non-conference, as well. So we play Oklahoma at home, we'll play a tournament where we'll play Ole Miss and Alabama, and all three of those are NCAA Tournament teams, big teams, athletic teams.

It was time to do that. We will definitely see what we're made of early and what we need to work on. I'm sure there will be a list of those things.

The one thing about the Pac-12 is every weekend is like an NCAA Tournament game in terms of the competition of your opponent. I think that's why you see so many Pac-12 teams do well in the NCAA Tournament. Look at our

winning percentages is over 70 percent in the last 10 years. It's because every weekend we're preparing ourselves for that.

It's also time for us now to upgrade our non-conference to where we're playing teams that can kind of show us how ready we are for the rigors of the Pac-12.

**Q. Who's going to be your point guard?**

LYNNE ROBERTS: Do you have eligibility?

**Q. I haven't checked.**

LYNNE ROBERTS: We have two right now. We have Isabel Palmer, a transfer from the University of Texas, from Australia. She's playing great. She's a true point guard.

And then we have Ines Vieira from Portugal, one of the quickest guards in the country. Those two are battling it out right now, but I don't know that it's going to be one play takes the whole role entirely.

We did lose Drew Gylten, which was a big loss, and you don't replace someone like that. It's not zero sum, one for one. We've got to pick it up to where other people fill in, and I think we'll be just fine in that category.

**Q. For the players, I loved watching your team last year. It was fun to watch. Why is your team better, and is it better than a year ago?**

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: I'd say we are definitely better, and just because our experience now. Last year a lot of us hadn't been in a position of making it -- actually none of us had been in the position of making to the Pac-12 Championship, making it to the NCAA Tournament, so I'd say experience is definitely going to help us.

But also just with our new players we have some more athleticism. We're going to have a lot of strength inside, which will be really exciting and fun.

But yeah, so I think we are going to be better.

KENNADY McQUEEN: Yeah, I'd definitely say the exact same thing. Just the experiences that we all got to have as a young team last year and being able to build off those, and just taking what you learned and know when those big moments come again, you've been there before. It just gives you another edge of confidence, I feel like.

Then the new players we have, our freshmen that we got and transfers, I think they're going to help us all around the board and help us continue to build what we've been

building.

**Q. Gianna, Lynne, Kennady, 75 points a game; pace is super important to what you guys do. Can you talk about what it takes to have that commitment to run? It's not just a mindset, you've got to condition yourselves in the off-season, as well. Can you just talk about that commitment?**

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, so we always want to -- we had an incredible year offensively last year in terms of efficiency and points and pace of play. It's the style I like to play.

But you do, you have to be in good shape. There's a lot of variables that go into how we train, and our practices are fast and they're not super long. Try to make as game-like as possible.

But we also try to recruit players that fit that system, and versatile athletes that can score. That's kind of my tag line.

But being able to run, you have to have the ball to run, which sounds silly, so big emphasis on rebounding, offensively and defensively, and this year, honestly, for us to take the next step, we've got to get better defensively. That's the reality.

So how can we create more chances for ourselves to get the ball because we score it at a pretty high clip, so how can we create more turnovers, and that's what we're working on right now.

**Q. Your appearance in the championship game last year, I listened to the Utah broadcast, and it felt good. Just kudos to your broadcast team, and obviously the accomplishment of making the tournament championship game. Stanford picks you guys to win it, the coaches. Is that a compliment or is that a slight? When you see them, are you going to want to bust a three in their face in the first 10 seconds of the game? Or are you going to comp them a quick fast break at the start?**

LYNNE ROBERTS: I don't know that getting voted first is ever a slap in the face. I'll take it.

I wasn't in the room when they did it, so I'm not really sure the motivation. But we made it to the championship game last year. I think we're pretty good. I think we have a chance to make it again.

Like I said, a lot has to go right, and we've got to get lucky, stay healthy, but I'll ride with these guys anywhere, and I don't think it's out in left field for us to get that vote.

**Q. Gianna, last year you took the Pac-12 by storm, freshman of the year. Was there a point where you could feel the opposing team game planning more to stop you? And for this year, now that everyone really knows real for real that you are one of the players to stop, what are you doing to try to combat that and continue along with a great sophomore season?**

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: Yeah, I'd say just for me, it's more just focusing on what I can do to help our team, whether that's making the extra pass, getting a stop on defense, rebounding, scoring, just finding things that I can do. I never want to just like focus on what happened last year. I know I have things to work on, getting stronger, being more aggressive.

So I focus on those on the off-season, put a lot of time in. But it's always going to be about how I can help the team.

I think we have such a strong overall team, everyone can score, so other teams, they have to worry about stopping everyone.

**Q. To the student-athletes, Kennady and Gianna, first of all, is G-money cool for a nickname? I tried that out last season. It felt good to me. Did it feel good to you?**

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: Yes. Love it.

**Q. To you guys specifically, what did you do over the summer to improve your game?**

KENNADY McQUEEN: Yeah, I think I've established in the Pac-12 that I can shoot, and just being able to expand to just not be one-dimensional. So being able to get to the rim, be a better passer, just focusing on how I can get my teammates more involved that way, and then be a threat on other levels.

And then I'm just surrounded by teammates that are all committed to that. It makes it a lot easier knowing you're surrounded by people that have the same goals you do, too.

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: Yeah, I also just get in the gym, but working a lot on me being the first contact, just being aggressive. I liked working on my mid-range, as well.

And then I put a lot of focus in on defense, as well.

LYNNE ROBERTS: I will say these guys, too, as is the culture with kind of our core group, we have to get them out of the gym. It's a constant. Like, no, today you cannot

do anything. It's a day off. The culture right now is that they are so hungry to be better -- again, it's not the I want to be better because it's about me.

It's like, we want to take the next step. As a coach, it's really cool to just always know they're in the gym even when they shouldn't be, and just the amount -- they're underselling all the work they did this summer. They put the time in.

**Q. Well, fill in the blanks!**

LYNNE ROBERTS: We don't have enough time. They got after it. They really did. They're not alone in that, so it's exciting. But like I said, a lot of things have to go right. We've got to stay healthy. We've got to stay together. Everybody is feeling good in October.

Everyone has a game plan until they get punched in the mouth is the Mike Tyson quote. But that's where you get your true confidence, so what you do when no one is watching and you get punched in the mouth and you get back up but you have intrinsic confidence because put you work in. I think that's where these two sit today.

**Q. With the Pac-12 networks, Lynne, the addition of Pili and what she will mean to your team? And Gianna, did you ever see Tara on the lake this year? I know she's got a lake house not too far from where you have a lake house.**

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, Alissa has been a tremendous addition to our team. I think transferring, it always comes with -- there's always some question marks as to buy-in or culture fit or -- because the recruiting process is just in a microwave. It happens so fast.

I certainly remember watching Alissa in high school and just coveting, wishing that I could have coached her. We recruited her. I teased her because she didn't return my calls that time out of high school, but got in on her this time.

But just an incredible kid, and she has worked really hard to improve, and if she was sitting up here, she'd tell you the same thing, just work on her fitness and conditioning to play at the pace we want her to play at, and she's doing a tremendous job.

We all know that if you get a motivated and in-shape Alissa Pili then she's just a force.

Kennady alluded to it, the inside presence, and she can get going in practice where everyone just kind of looks around and smiles. It's a great addition, and she has really bought

into what we're doing and our team. It's been just really fun to have her and a joy to coach her.

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: I have not seen her at the lake, but she's about I would say less than an hour away from where my cabin is, but Minnesota is a great place, so you should all visit.

**Q. Lynne, obviously a year ago a lot more question marks than this year. Culture has changed, as you mentioned. I want to ask the players a question. You have no seniors on your team. You have a young team, but a team that's now expecting to win. Who are the leaders on your team this year?**

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: Yeah, I think we all -- obviously last year Drew I'd say was our dominant leader, but now that she's gone, I think it's not just going to be one person.

I think we're all going to have to step up in this role. We all have our own gifts and talents, so just all of us bringing forth those. Naturally there are some louder people on our team, so just kind of trusting each other is going to be the biggest thing, and we all have the same goals, so it's all going to be -- it's just going to be about all of us.

KENNADY McQUEEN: I would add to that, just I think our team is made up of a bunch of different kind of leaders, leading by example, leading by voice, and when we can combine all that together, I think we can be really good in just trusting each other like that.

**Q. Who's in the locker room talking, and who is going to be on the floor saying in a huddle, we need to do this or following what your coach says?**

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: I'd say probably our most dominant speaking leader would be Dasia. She's the loudest on and off the court, so probably there. But I think we all -- I've really seen an improvement in all of us speaking and speaking up when we see something.

**Q. It's okay to say you are, too.**

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: I'm working on it. I'm not saying I'm all the way there, but I'm working on it.

KENNADY McQUEEN: I would attest to Dasia, too. There's been times in practice if we're slacking a little bit she'll pull us aside as a team and why the coaches are meeting and kind of be like, we're better than that. We've got to show up for the next drill.

So I think she's a great example to lead vocally that we look up to.

