

Pac-12 Conference Basketball Media Day

Tuesday, October 25, 2022

San Francisco, California, USA

USC Trojans

Associate Head Coach

Beth Burns

Rayah Marshall

Kadi Sissoko

Women's Head Coach



because Kadi has a speed and a skill and skill with her silver medal in the French National Team this past year that gives Rayah someone to look up to, or I should say chase after, because Kadi was in front of her all the time.

It made Rayah change her tempo.

Destiny Littleton is a big piece for us because she just won a National Championship. And if you want to build a culture, it starts with the details, and she knows it. She knows it better than I know it, and she can start with our squad with winning habits and has been another big piece of what we're doing.

Q. For the players, what is the biggest challenge do you think for being on the court with a lot of players you've never played with before? I know you guys are getting used to each other, but nine new players, what's the biggest challenge in that?

RAYAH MARSHALL: Well, first thing I'll say, the biggest challenge is just the field. The chemistry is something new for all of us, but I feel one thing we all do is go hard. So we do know kind of what to expect. I know that every single one of my teammates are going to go hard, but I'd definitely just say getting comfortable with each other.

Does player like a handoff, does this player like a screen-and-roll. Just getting used to what each individual is really more comfortable with.

KADI SISSOKO: Yeah, building off of what she said, it's very important to kind of know who does what best and try to put them in the best situation possible for them to succeed. Yeah, working on our chemistry is definitely something that we need to work on, but I'm excited for it.

Q. Beth, you were talking about the chemistry. Rayah, I know you're a really talented player. I love watching you. Kadi, obviously your inside game is pretty good, but you've got to get the ball to you guys. Who are the guards that are really stepping up that you guys trust right now?

BETH BURNS: They think they're guards, Joan, so they

BETH BURNS: First I'd like to say the most important thing on my mind is that Reese Gottlieb Martin is 12 days old today, and we are all about babies and basketball, and USC and would be remiss if I didn't give some gratefulness to Lindsay Gottlieb for giving me the opportunity to be in this position, and thank you to you for gracing me with allowing me to do this.

I think the greatest honor a coach can give someone is to give them their team. It's their life. It's what they do. I take that responsibility very seriously.

With that said, we are an interesting group like no other that I've ever had and been associated with, and I've been doing this for a minute. It's exciting as can be.

We have nine new faces from I believe six different countries. We're older. We have an old roster. We only have one true freshman on the roster in Aaliyah, who's not playing this year, but we don't have obviously any kind of experience together.

Our challenge is to put it together. I couldn't be more pleased with and appreciative to our players for their efforts. Our effort has been sky high since day one. We have had no effort issues. Our activity level is really high. Our productivity is where -- we're a work in progress right now.

But starting with these two young ladies to my left, we have a really talented front line. They'll speak for themselves, but I think Rayah Marshall you're familiar with for the things that she did coming on late last season, and I think her running mate here, Kadi is a reason why Rayah is a new and improved Rayah. Not just because she put in work,



ain't worried about that at all.

RAYAH MARSHALL: Kadi is going to feed me high-low every time.

KADI SISSOKO: I think Kayla, Destiny. I mean, all the players who are experienced are carrying the team right now, and they're like really good players. They're skilled enough to pass the ball inside, and yeah, like we said, passing the ball to each other to the connection in the paint is really important. For sure.

RAYAH MARSHALL: I love all my guards really. Bella, that's another one, Destiny. Literally I would say I love their passes. They're going to throw it in an area where only I can go. They make me comfortable leaving my feet, so I'm really appreciative of that.

Q. You mentioned the nine new players, but you've got a new one here in Beth, so why the move back to the West Coast? Was that it? This is a big move for you to come back to the West Coast and California.

BETH BURNS: Well, Rayah wanted me to say it was because of Rayah, but I really hadn't met her yet so I can't say that. I would be the first person to tell you that I thought I was going to finish at Louisville and had a fantastic experience and am eternally grateful for it.

I think a combination of things. Lindsay and I are probably about as diametrically opposite of people as you can get, but I think we have a great similarity in that we both think outside the box and we both like to color outside the lines, and when she first approached me, I said, you know, Linds, if you just need a recruiting coordinator, then it would be silly to get someone like myself.

She said, have I mentioned I'm six months pregnant? And I said, no, not at the time.

But I think for her, she really wanted some experience on her staff. Mike Bone ironically, our athletics director, hired me to my first head coaching staff at San Diego State a few years ago, and I always had good rapport with him. Enjoyed him, appreciated him, stayed in connection with him.

So to me, the combination of an administration that gets it, that wants the team to be successful, and how cool is it for me to help Lindsay -- we know we're not where we need to be. SC should be, and we're not, and haven't been since a really long time.

A challenge like no other in the most beautiful state in the United States, why not?

Q. You talked a little bit about it in your opening statement, but what are some of the biggest challenges of trying to implement nine new faces most of whom are transfers to this program and trying to fill it in, and what have you some of the surprises or enjoyable moments of nine new faces?

BETH BURNS: I think the biggest challenge wasn't -- our world now is a portal world. Our world is every year is a new year. Every year is a new roster. It's not as much that.

I think it's really because we knew Lindsay -- we tried to do as much as we could while we knew she would still be there, and then I would sometimes tell her, remember, tomorrow you're putting in your press breaks or tomorrow we're putting in mine. There's so many parts of the game, and for their development, it's hard to do in September when you have four hours a week when you're going on recruiting trips.

I really appreciated the players' patience as we had a really unorthodox September. We put a lot of stuff in in September that I have never done to try to help me so I can help them as we get to this really important month of October.

They're all -- everybody has challenges. What a great opportunity. We're from so many different countries. I've learned more in the last month than I can even begin to tell you. They're good kids, and they're good people. Everybody is about second chances. We have some on their second and third chance. How cool is that? So let's see if we can make something happen with it.

Q. With all that, you're the other shoe here. Another year or so, you're going to approach that transition point to the Big Ten. Kind of just speak to that a little bit.

BETH BURNS: Well, you know, I probably learned about 10 minutes before you did, and I think that we are great, loyal, long-term members of the Pac-10 into the Pac-12 Conference, and we intend to do everything we can to be a wonderful partner for the next two years until we move forward.

Q. How can this club surprise some folks? How can this club integrate the personalities and as coach said getting second and third chances and knowing the freshmen are going to get their time? How can this club surprise some folks? From the outside looking in I'm not sure much is expected of USC this season.

KADI SISSOKO: Honestly I think we're underdogs and people don't really expect us to do such great things this year. The pressure is on us, but like not really at the same time. I feel like jumping off what Coach B said, some of us it's like our second or third chances, so we're just like hungry and we want to prove a lot of things, but we also have experience and we want to show it.

We want to prove that we can turn this program around, and I think that that's what it takes to be great this year.

RAYAH MARSHALL: For me, also, I agree with what Kadi said. For us I feel like it'll be showcasing our talent as a unit, just being able to show everyone how far we've come as a program with such -- even Coach Beth, our addition, she's amazing by the way, and all the new faces, it'll be fun to watch us.

BETH BURNS: Well, being great is really hard, or else there wouldn't be such a line. I think our challenge in building what Coach G aspires to build is that every day they work -- I have no effort issues and then I get to be the one to tell them that wasn't enough or we have to do it again tomorrow. Because that's what separates, right?

I just told them yesterday at practice that if you can do it and if you can sustain it and if you can hang together through the ups and the downs, pretty soon it's less crowded because as it gets harder, people drop.

I just think we have a wonderful opportunity in front of us. To me, I've been every -- like I've been really happy, really sad, really in the middle. I think I've been picked every seed in every conference that there is. They're nothing like the come-up. They're nothing like that. Who in this room that's been on a really good team likes to play someone on the come-up? Nobody does.

It's an opportunity not only for them to experience something, but it's an opportunity to say, yeah, we can. I think we've got a group that -- and how motivating. Your head coach just had a baby. We're all trying to do our part, so when she gets back, it's better than when she left it.

Q. Rayah, for you, I feel like for your team and the core returners that are coming back, the lightbulb went on for you in what Coach G wants to do with this program at Arizona State on Alyson's buzzer beating three. I remember the joy on everybody's faces and you busted your tail that day. Was that a seminal victory for this team?

RAYAH MARSHALL: Oh, most definitely. I felt like that set a tempo for us, just proving that we're capable of a lot of things that season. It was also very exciting because we

proved to ourselves that whatever we work for we could accomplish. It was a great moment for Alyson. She's a really good shooter, also. Don't get me started on Aly.

But it was a really exciting moment for us, and as a freshman that game meant a lot for me, being able to like showcase my talent at that level.

Q. For both of the student-athletes, who is your favorite player in the WNBA?

KADI SISSOKO: I mean, she retired now, but I would say Seimone Augustus. That's someone I look up to. Her game is just crazy. One who's currently playing I would say Breanna Stewart.

RAYAH MARSHALL: Me personally, it's so hard to just pick one, but I'm probably going to go with Candace Parker. She was actually at the Galen Center not too long ago. I got to wave at her. Coach G is also a great friend of hers. She's a really good person, and yeah, probably Candace Parker.

Q. Coach Burns, I read an article recently that Coach Gottlieb was staying super involved just days before giving birth, firing off text messages, emails while dealing with a newborn. How closely involved has she been in what you guys are doing? How much have you been able to talk and communicate on a daily basis about what's going on with the team?

BETH BURNS: Well, she kind of trended that you sit on a physio ball in practice, and I told her she should keep it, and she said, well, I won't be pregnant anymore. And I said, yeah, but who else sits on a physio ball all the time when they're in practice. She is super involved. She gave us a great blueprint.

I would tell you this: I don't call her because I let her call me. Obviously report in, she's an email person, and I'll see that she wrote me back at 3:14 in the morning or some such with that. But she gets video. She watches video. She watches every practice. So she tells me and things like that. She is very much like I'm a gate keeper here, and so I'm trying to do what she wants us to do, but she is very involved.

At the same time, there's nothing more important to her than raising that little baby girl and getting her family organized, and as I alluded to earlier, she's put great trust in us.

One of our assistants Dale Farrow, has worked with Lindsay for a long time. Worked with her at Cal. And he's been a great help to me because he knows -- just as we

can't think through every scenario to teach them, I couldn't have thought through every scenario that's going to come up.

How do you think Lindsay would prefer, X, Y, Z, and at the end of the day we do our best. But she's very much involved.

RAYAH MARSHALL: If I could add on to that also, I thought Coach G was actually going to give birth in practice. She did not want to leave us, and I was so grateful for that. So I remember asking our trainer, I said, hey, Erin, have you ever gave childbirth? She was like, absolutely not. I was like, well, be ready just in case. Yeah, it was really great having her up to the moment she stayed.

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