

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

Wednesday, October 2, 2024

Rosemont, Illinois, USA

Women's Basketball Panel

Tina Langley

Washington

Coquese Washington

Rutgers

Lindsay Gottlieb

USC

THE MODERATOR: Our next three teams will be USC, Washington, and Rutgers. We're glad to bring in Coquese Washington, her third year at Rutgers, Lindsey Gottlieb, her fourth year at USC, and Tina Langley, starting her fourth at Washington as well.

Of course, two of you are brand new to this conference. Let me start with you with this question. In what ways has the change in conferences for both of you affected your program?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I'll start. I don't recognize as many people here as we did in Pac-12 Media Days. Really the national I think brand has impacted us greatly. I think a little bit with the resurgence of our program connected together has allowed us to get into homes and be more recognizable across the country, but I would say the number one thing is the exposure and the way that it's impacted us and made us a little bit more national.

TINA LANGLEY: I think just change brings opportunity. It's an opportunity for us to grow and to learn new styles of play, new venues, to go across the country and get an opportunity to be in homes of different recruits and just from a national brand a really great opportunity.

THE MODERATOR: I mentioned already Coquese, you have a great history of being a very good recruiter, but now you're in a conference that is literally a national conference. How does that change things?

COQUESE WASHINGTON: It's so much fun recruiting and being able to talk about our conference and to talk about the new teams that have joined our conference, the fact that we're in the three biggest media markets in the country. You get to play in front of so many eyeballs and so many people. It's so much fun to recruit within the Big



Ten and talk about the strength of our conference. I think it's going to have a big impact for all the schools in our conference.

THE MODERATOR: There are great fan bases. There are great players. There are great buildings. I want you to each give me an example of a venue that you are excited about playing in this year that maybe you don't have as deep of a history of playing in. Let's start with you, Tina.

TINA LANGLEY: Well, it's hard to pick a venue because you want to be respectful of all the student bodies.

THE MODERATOR: No, no, no. Let's get some bulletin board material right now, Tina.

TINA LANGLEY: I think the truth of the matter is the Big Ten has historic buildings to play in with historic teams and fans. What makes college athletics so special are the student-athletes and how they come and show up for their teams. It's why we all coach. It's the people we get to be associated with.

We're excited to play in so many historic buildings and with incredible fan bases.

COQUESE WASHINGTON: You know, I went to -- this past Friday we had Washington come play football against our Rutgers team, and the electricity and the energy in that stadium was amazing.

So I can't say there's one specific venue as I'm just really excited about the new rivalry that is are going to be built, the new opportunities to play against different competition.

Our fan bases are going to support that, and I just saw it firsthand with Rutgers and Washington, and I think those kind of experiences are going to happen in women's basketball night in and night out in our conference.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I'll give you one. Assembly Hall. You grow up as a basketball fan. We get to go to Indiana. I've never coached there. We've never played there. I've heard that the fans are right on top of you. There's a million answers we could say, and we only get to go to half



of them each year, but Assembly Hall will be a cool one for me.

THE MODERATOR: The cool thing is so many of these buildings now, as we were talking in our last segment, are setting records for attendance. So there are more fans being at whatever venue you're at than we've seen in years past, which is pretty cool, even before adding the electric nature of the environment of having a Washington and a Rutgers meeting up. We talked in our last segment about the transfer portal. Let me lump in that with NIL. Those are two big picture changes that we've been talking about for a few years and have been impacting all sports in college for a while. Does it affect the parity in women's college basketball when the transfer portal is what it is right now and NIL is what it is? Do you find that it adds more parity?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I absolutely think so. When I was coming back from the NBA there were people that were, like, why would you want to go back to college basketball? There's all these changes coming. NIL is on the horizon. Player autonomy. I was, like, these are things that should have been happening for years. So it's not something that scared me.

In fact, I've really tried to embrace it, but I think it allows programs who are rebuilding to rebuild a little quicker through the transfer portal. I think that NIL is kind of a hot button word, but it really speaks to opportunity, and I think players can now see the way they can be successful at a number of different programs, not just one or two. Not just one or two that are on TV or one or two that provide opportunity to succeed and become a pro or, you know, figure out what they want to do after college basketball.

So I do think it's really opening the playing field a little bit, and that makes for a more exciting product across the board.

COQUESE WASHINGTON: As our game is growing and our game is changing, these opportunities are really what makes women's sports and women's college basketball special because you have so many opportunities to see yourself in different ways, to see yourself at a different university, to see yourself as a different way as a professional.

So I think all the changes are just growing out of the growth of women's basketball over the course of time, and it's an exciting time to be a part of women's basketball.

TINA LANGLEY: I think we all got into this game because we love young women and want to help them through their maturation years of their life. So it's an opportunity for us

to help them.

Our mission statement is about supporting, encouraging, and developing young women on their journey of becoming who they want to be. One of the things that we talk a lot about is leadership, and so they're businesswomen now.

I'm so grateful that they have that opportunity because they get to sit across from CEOs and companies and having an opportunity to work on who they want to be and, you know, people use the term brand, but I think it is more about your character.

You know, who are you, and who do you want to be known as, and who do you want to help represent? It's a great opportunity.

THE MODERATOR: Like I mentioned, it's not new anymore, either of these things, but it does still feel like in the infant stages of NIL and the new transfer portal. You guys deal with this on a daily basis. The rest of us see it from the treetops. Are there things that should still change? Are there suggestions you think, if we could do this to make the transfer portal or NIL a little more appropriate for everyone, or do you like where it is right now? Stumped you.

COQUESE WASHINGTON: I think because it's such an ever-changing space, I mean, we really don't even know what the space is looking like when you look at the legislation and the court settlements that are still out there. It's kind of hard for me to answer that question because we don't really know what -- there's not enough stability right now. There's not enough -- there are so many things that still need to be settled before we can say, Now we need to really make a change or an adjustment here.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, I think however it changes or wherever it goes and I think all of us would say the same, it doesn't change the integrity of your locker room, right? It doesn't change that it's about creating a winning culture and growing the young women in your locker room and empowering them to be ready to handle all of this stuff that's coming.

I think that's the number one thing. I don't really spend my time as much thinking about what should be changed about the transfer portal or where exactly are the rules going to shift? Obviously if we end up going to revenue-sharing, we all need to be ready for that.

The idea is you have to be ready to shift with the times, center your players, give them the tools to really embrace all of this, and not have it change the integrity of your locker room and what you stand for as a program, because

I think that is like the secret sauce maybe to embrace this new landscape, but still think about what impacts winning and what impacts a positive experience.

COQUESE WASHINGTON: Not only just impacting your locker room, but impacting our game and maintaining the integrity of our sport, and that can't change because women's basketball has long been the sport that has tried to be on the forefront of change, but at the same time upholding the integrity of athletics and women's athletics.

With all these changes coming, we don't want to lose that in our locker room, and we don't want to lose that in our sport.

TINA LANGLEY: Yeah, I think we just want to continue to have a culture of care. In our program we really want to focus on how we take care of our young women. In any capacity that we can create change and opportunity for them and that we can care for them in an elite manner, that's what we want to do.

THE MODERATOR: With all the changes and the fact that rosters have a pretty decent turnover oftentimes on a year in, year out basis, I'm curious about the importance of offseason bonding. Right? There are the rules where every once in a while you can do a foreign trip, for example, or maybe your team just schedules a scrimmage with maybe a cross-town school in the summer, something for fun, or maybe it's bowling that you do as a team. How important are offseason bonding activities for your teams nowadays?

TINA LANGLEY: I think the most important thing in college athletics are the relationship that is we get to have. So the more time we can spend together in our community and traveling across the world is an opportunity for experiences.

We were fortunate enough to take a foreign tour to Italy a couple of years ago. Obviously we're going to travel across the country and play nationally. So it's an opportunity to get to know more people and just build relationships.

COQUESE WASHINGTON: I think those things have to happen year-round. Not just in the summer, but creating a team environment, creating a culture where we care for one another, we love one another, we support one another, we encourage one another. We're there good times and bad times.

That has to happen year-round in order for their experience to be as magical as it should be.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, I mean, they've said most of it. I would add that in this era of rosters being a little more fluid and there's more change every year, a lot of these young players know each other before they come, right? A lot of those relationships are formed because there's a like-minded, okay, I might want to go here and do this with you and let's see if we can do this together. A lot of it begins before they get there.

Then, you know, I think to the points they've made, it has to be organic, and it has to be all the time. It's not one big bonding trip and then you forget about it for a couple of months. It's every day. You know, us having the pulse of our teams and what do they need? Do they need time together off the court? Do we need to watch film and attack something basketball-wise?

I think it's that constant pulse of what the team needs and what you are about and if the players have bought into that, that's when it becomes very organic.

THE MODERATOR: That being said, when there are foreign trips where you are going to Italy or whatever, do you ever need a broadcaster to maybe document it or something next time?

TINA LANGLEY: Yes, absolutely.

THE MODERATOR: That was a yes. You're on record. Each of you give me an example of something you're excited about seeing this upcoming season with your team and with the league in general?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Well, the very easy answer is we are opening in Paris, so I'm excited about seeing our players see the Eiffel Tower, seeing our players experience that.

But then I would just say each and every new venue. It's also very new for us, so I think I'm really excited to see the Big Ten atmospheres across the country that we're going to get to experience and how our players react and respond to that.

COQUESE WASHINGTON: I'm excited to watch the talent in our conference. There's a tremendous amount of on-court talent. I think there's a tremendous amount of coaching acumen that our coaches bring to the table.

So I'm excited to see the talent, see the coaching, and see the games played out because I think Big Ten women's basketball this year is going to be so much -- such an exciting brand of basketball. I'm looking forward to watching it.

TINA LANGLEY: I'm just excited to spend every day with our young women. I thought it started this summer. I love the way that they came into the gym, the way that they just came together as a group. It's a really special group of young women.

Our staff is just elite. I'm so grateful to learn from them. Just to be together daily. We don't want to look ahead to anything. We just want to really be present and enjoy the people around us.

THE MODERATOR: Coquese, you mentioned the league being so good right now. You have such an interesting perspective because I was mentioning in our last segment, you know, 12, 15 years ago there was a time when we would be doing the Big Ten tournament, and we were, like, well, Coquese and Penn State are in the NCAA Tournament. We think two more teams. Now it's like almost every team has a legit shot at doing it, and a whole bunch of teams have a chance to make a deep run. What has it been like watching the Big Ten grow not just in the numbers, but in the talent that the basketball teams have?

COQUESE WASHINGTON: It's been amazing. It's been amazing to watch the growth of the conference. I think the television opportunities has helped that. It's helped us build a brand nationally so that we can go out and recruit the best talent across the country and to see the performances in post-season play and to see the runs that Maryland has made and Ohio State has made and Iowa has made.

Those things have given our conference a lot more pride, and I'm excited to see that continue grow this year with all the talent that we have. The Big Ten season is going to be competitive, and then we get to cheer for each other in postseason play. That's going to be a lot of fun as well.

THE MODERATOR: What has it been like for the two of you to watch the sport of women's basketball? You are new to the Big Ten, but not new to this sport in particular and the leaps and bounds that it has made in the last handful of seasons.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I mean, it's unbelievable to be a part of this sport is now. I think there's this tidal wave, an apex, and it feels like we're only going to grow from here. It's been incredible to see the opportunities grow for women, to see the game take on the exposure that we've gotten, and just really grateful to be where we are right now at this time and be a small part in it.

TINA LANGLEY: Yeah, I think we always want to honor the history, and I think the history of women's basketball is deep, and there are so many great players and coaches

that came before us. But the way that the national media has really embraced women and women's basketball has been so beautiful and honoring I think to the women who have played this game. So we're just excited for that to continue to grow.

THE MODERATOR: One of the most exciting players in the league, in the country is JuJu Watkins, who is going to get a ton of attention this year. What's it like coaching her?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: She's unreal to be around every single day. It starts with her effort and care factor. I've told this story before. Her first workout freshman year was a conditioning workout. She dove across the line to make her time. We're, like, okay, we think we've got something.

When you best player and the one that gets the most attention also puts in that type of effort and has that type of care for the program and her teammates, I think that gives you something special.

She's electric. I had a men's basketball coach stop in the gym the other day and said, you know, he's grown up watching players from Ann Meyers to Sheryl Miller to all the great ones since, and he said I think she's the most talented I've seen.

For someone to say something like that, she carries a lot on her shoulders. She's always trying to improve, and I think Big Ten fan bases and opponents will be excited because she just brings a level of intensity that makes the game better.

THE MODERATOR: What is it like for you two as coaches when you are in that situation where your best player is the one who is trying the hardest? How does that affect the rest of your team?

TINA LANGLEY: Yeah, always just such great leadership, right? We want to make sure that our leaders understand the weight that they carry is not alone and the team comes along beside them. I think we have that environment at Washington. I think we have a servant leadership style of culture. When you step forward to lead, you have a group of people around you.

It's been great to see young women all step into that role.

COQUESE WASHINGTON: It raises the competitiveness of your gym. If your practice gym is competitive and if your practice gym is intense, then that will carry over to game day. When your best player is the one who is raising the competitiveness and raising the intensity level, it just carries throughout the rest of the team.

THE MODERATOR: Last thing, does anyone have a birthday today? Is there anyone out there who is celebrating anything? Oh, look at this video. Oh, that's from USC. They're celebrating someone. Well, happy birthday, Linds.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Thank you. It's today. They weren't going to see me, so they celebrated yesterday, which was really nice. There's nowhere I would rather be. I'll get back to the West Coast and gain the hours and hopefully see my kids tonight, so it's all good. What a way to spend my day.

THE MODERATOR: Happy birthday, Lindsay. Coquese, Tina, great seeing you as well. Thank you.

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