

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Louisville Cardinals

Coach Jeff Walz

Mackenley Randolph

Olivia Cochran

Women's Press Conference



And then staff. I'll tell you real quick because it's one of these things in our job, today is doughnuts with dad day at school for my daughters. They're 9 and 11. When I told them the news, hey, I'm not going to be able to make it, they both asked, they're, like, can Lamont come? Lamont works for me. He's my video man, takes care of everything. I was, like, I'll ask him.

So Lamont filled in for me because it's what we do. We're a family. I've got one of the best staffs if not the best in the country. Steph Norman has been with me for 18 years. Adrienne Johnson works player development and helps with the players in the community. Been there for 19.

When you get a group of people together that work well together, then all of a sudden our players are able to see it's not a show. They care about each other. They're expecting excellence from us because they expect it from each other.

So I think that's how we've done it. I've been very fortunate. The University of Louisville supports women's sports. Not just women's basketball. Women's sports. Look what Dani is doing with our volleyball program. It can go down the line. Arthur with swimming.

When you have a university athletic director, administration that says, hey, we value women, it's amazing what can happen. We've been blessed here at Louisville for my 18 years to have had that, and that doesn't happen every place.

THE MODERATOR: Let's talk this team, this season. You lost some. You are bringing some great ones in. What should we expect as far as what we're going to see on the floor?

JEFF WALZ: Well, on Monday it's this and on Tuesday it's this. We're trying to get the consistency. The one thing I will say -- and I say it in a positive way -- the old saying, ignorance is bliss. I have freshmen out there that are playing as hard as they can, and it's fantastic.

Are we always doing the right thing? No. But they're doing it hard. That's one thing that we talk about and I always

THE MODERATOR: I'm happy to welcome the Louisville Cardinals to the stage. Head coach Jeff Walz, along with freshman Mackenley Randolph and then veteran Olivia Cochran.

Welcome. Jeff, first question I got for you is, you have a freshman up here on the stage. Is it just because of the cute face, or what is she doing up here?

MACKENLEY RANDOLPH: It is (laughing).

JEFF WALZ: We sat there and discussed ACC media day, and I told them -- I said, you know, Olivia, fifth year. She started every game since she's been here. She decided to come back for that fifth year.

And then as we have gone through our practice, you know, one of our most consistent players we've had so far and not just making shots, but being vocal, being a leader, being positive. Just how she handles herself. I've been very, very impressed with it, and I was, like, okay, come on. You're coming. Just try not to embarrass your family.

THE MODERATOR: Sorry, Mackenley, not the cute face.

MACKENLEY RANDOLPH: It is the face, too.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously, you have been the beacon of success in the ACC, one of the most consistent teams in the country. Why is that? It is hard to win, and your sustained level of excellence is something most people just yearn to achieve.

JEFF WALZ: First, start off with players. You can be away people might say a really good coach, but if you don't have good players, it's not going to matter.

talk about. We can teach you and try to show you what to do, but when we've got to teach effort and coach effort, it's not going to happen.

So I think what you are going to see with this group is we've got a group of very talented freshmen who are going to learn in a hurry because they're going to be thrown into the fire. Then when you've got Olivia, Merissah Russell, Jayda Curry, Ja'Leah, we've got some experience.

Everybody talks about, O and her Elite Eights and Final Fours. Ja'Leah is the same way for Miami. She had that opportunity to play in an Elite Eight, so she's got that big game experience.

We've got some veterans who are able to work with our freshmen to tell them, hey, here's what's coming. Because I keep trying to tell them it's not high school anymore. You know, that one play you take off is one you get scored on, and that's the one on national TV that all your friends are going, man, you got cooked.

We're preparing them for it.

Q. First off, my question goes to Mackenley.

Mackenley, you are used to the lights and the flashes coming out of Sierra Canyon High. I wanted to ask, what it's been like to get into the speed of the college game, especially because, for one, Coach Walz likes to play fast. He's all about speed. Also, number two, my question for you is, what separates you and your game from your father's game?

MACKENLEY RANDOLPH: I would say coming from Sierra and into college, the first couple of weeks were hard. Definitely just learning the pace, learning the difference from college and high school.

But as I practice and, you know, I kept working on my craft and at my game with the coaches and with my teammates, I started to adapt. I'm getting a little bit more comfortable with the ball and with the speed of the game because Jeff has us playing really fast.

I'm definitely adapting now that I got a couple of months under my belt. I would say the difference from me and my dad's game, you know, there's a lot of similarities. Everybody says I play just like my dad.

But I'm starting to learn how to shoot over the basket, not through, and just stretching my game out, out to the three, and being able to create off the dribble.

Q. This question is for the ladies. How has Coach

been able to get you all to buy into his culture, to his identity at Louisville? And when he coaches you all hard, what does that do for you from a mental aspect on the court knowing he wants the best for you in the long-term?

MACKENLEY RANDOLPH: For me just playing for Coach Walz for five years, he definitely has helped me with having a stronger mental health. He's makes sure our mental is good.

He asks us how does he want -- how does he want us to coach us? He asks. That's new for me because a coach never asked me, how do you want me to coach you? I'm, like, get on me, Coach. I need you to push me the hardest for me because I get complacent with myself. But I'm the type of player that I need somebody to be on me telling me what I'm doing wrong or tell me if I'm not going hard. Coach Walz is all that and above, and he's going to give you a hug after.

I think that's what they're going to enjoy from him.

OLIVIA COCHRAN: I can agree too. Just being recruited by Walz and being around him, I know his legacy and he is telling me the right things to do. It's, like, why not listen and learn.

MACKENLEY RANDOLPH: Run through a wall. Okay, Coach.

Q. I was going to ask you about Jayda Curry. I spent some time this summer training in France. Have you seen many differences in her game since she's come back from that trip? What do you need from her this year heading into her senior season?

JEFF WALZ: Yeah, Jayda, she's one that I've talked to for a year and a half now of trying to get her -- she puts in as much work in the gym as anybody that I've been around. For Jayda it's coming with the confidence, her knowing why are you going to put all this work into it if you're not then going to have the confidence to show it on the basketball court?

She shoots the ball extremely well. I need her to play with that confidence. I tell her all the time. She gets so upset when she misses a shot, and it's what I try to tell all of my players. You know, I've recruited them all. Every time I went and watched them play, they've missed a shot, so it's okay.

It's how she handles it after she misses one. If she can -- she's gotten better. Her training in Paris, in France they really worked on the mental aspect of the game, being able

to overcome not letting one mistake turn into two, leaving it behind, and then still being aggressive. Those are the things that we're looking for from Jayda.

I need her to look to attack. It doesn't mean you shoot it every time, but if you can draw two defenders, get it to the person that's open, but I don't want her to be passive. I thought that's how she was last year a lot.

Then talking to her about learning to be aggressive when the game is on the line. I always talk about players, and it's like, okay, you might score ten when we're down 25. That doesn't do me any good. So we lose by 15 instead of 30. Who cares?

I want that aggressiveness when it's a two-point game. Are you still willing to take that shot when we've gone three minutes without scoring? We've defended, but now we have to make one. Those are things I'm talking to Jayda about because she's extremely talented, and that's what I think is going to make our team so exciting.

It's not going to matter who starts for us because whoever is on the floor is talented and has the ability to impact the game.

Q. Jeff, I want to stay with Paris. You had a great opportunity to play UCLA over there. How big is that for the exposure for Louisville, for women's college basketball on an international stage, and how big was it for recruiting and those things as well?

JEFF WALZ: It's not the first year it's been done. South Carolina and Notre Dame played in this game last year. They've added two more teams. There will be two games now.

For us it was an opportunity when I got the call and was asked, would you guys like to play, of being able to get your players out on a world stage and experience. Experiences are everything.

My wife and I talk about that with our kids. It's, like, the more experiences we can give them, the better. That's my whole thing with these young ladies. We have players that have never been to Europe. So we're going over on Wednesday. We'll get there Thursday. We play on Monday.

You know, my first thing when we get there is to make them run the stairs of the Eiffel Tower, and the first five up start on Monday. You know, we'll find out real quick. It's news to them, you know? I just thought it was a creative new idea.

Then we'll get to the Louvre. We're going to do a lot of sightseeing. It's going to be a cultural experience. Are we going to win a basketball game and compete? No question about it, but I always say, the one thing that -- it kills me about athletics at times is, you know, you go to these cities and you go in the night before the game. You play and sit there during the day, go to your shoot-around, have some study hall, play the game, you fly home.

When we used to be in the Big East when we played at Georgetown we would try to go up a day early. It's like foreign tours. I have been fighting forever to try to get pushed through the NCAA that why does it have to be a foreign tour? Why can't I take a tour of the United States? I have kids that have never been to the Smithsonian. Why do I need to spend all this money going to Europe when I could do ten days here in the U.S.? Why not keep our money here, spend it here? You know, the Grand Canyon. You have so many incredible things in our country that a lot of our players have never experienced.

So we try to turn this into a cultural event. I want them when they leave here, when they leave Louisville to be, like, I had great basketball. I loved that. But boy, I had a chance to see the world. That's kind of what we try to do.

Q. Coach, obviously we're missing out on Alexia Mobley and Kiki Jefferson, but you have also got players that are really stepping up like Olivia, Jayda Curry. How much do you expect from them to take over for those girls that have left?

JEFF WALZ: Well, it happens every year. You've got your graduation. I go back to Angel McCoughtry. How are you going to replace Angel McCoughtry? You're not. Just who is the next one?

You know, it was Shoni Schimmel, Bria Smith. How are you replacing them? You're not. Then here comes Myisha; here comes Dana.

We've been fortunate enough here at Louisville to be able to get players that buy into what we're trying to do. We're not always the flashiest. We're not always in the front of every publication, but somehow we've done a pretty good job of figuring out how to be there when it comes March.

Now, last year we laid an egg, where I'll be the first to admit. A lot of programs might be excited to make the tournament. That is not the expectations here. It didn't go as we had hoped, and we're working to change that.

So for us it's the next one. I don't worry about last year's group. Now, I love them. They're great kids. We had a great time. We had a lot of good times, but now I focus on

this year. Who are the players that are going to make an impact? For us we might not have Dana Evans, Asia Durr, but we've got a collection of really good talent.

If they work together, we could have five different leading scorers in five games. I really believe that.

Q. This question is for everyone on stage, coaches and players. Last year Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese seems like women's basketball --

JEFF WALZ: Who? I'm sorry. What? I'm teasing. Go ahead.

Q. Scared me for a second.

JEFF WALZ: Did they play basketball? Okay. Go ahead.

Q. You got me, man. With the emergence of women's college basketball last year, you could make an argument that the women's tournament was bigger than the men's tournament and the WNBA and just that buzz around women's college basketball in general. What can be done to keep that buzz and fire going?

JEFF WALZ: I appreciate that question because I do. It's amazing what's taken place, but I'm going to go back, and I've said it on record, Maya Moore is the best player I've ever coached against, that I've ever watched play in person. I'm not -- Angel McCoughtry is the best player I've ever coached, okay?

The difference is back in '08, '09, 2010 when they did something spectacular in a game, it wasn't able to be seen on a national stage in five seconds. You hoped that ESPN might put it on one of the top 10 plays. Back then that really didn't happen very often.

So a lot of people, unless you went to the games, didn't get the opportunity to see how talented and how good these young ladies are. Caitlin, Angel, great players. We've got so many great players now. I don't think it's going to go backwards because we're able to showcase what we have.

Now, what I'm hoping in our game that I think we have to get better at and I've been fighting this, we will come into a season with a narrative that we want to show. Then we stick with it.

You could have a kid who nobody even knew about starts dropping 25 and 30, and we don't change our narrative. See, that's where we miss out in my opinion.

It's great to have, hey, here who I think is going to be really good, but then when somebody else comes along, we

need to do a better job of going, hey, we got to go showcase this young lady as well because now we're able to go, listen, instead of being ten, God, there's 20 because that's what's taking place in our game.

Now there are so many more players playing at a high level that it's not easy to go, here's our preseason All American list. That preseason list might not even come close to who is your postseason All Americans. For our game to continue to grow, I think we've got to do a better job of making sure we're willing to showcase those ones that we didn't anticipate to be great because they're out there. It's fun to watch.

Overall, the media has done so much of a better job showcasing, promoting our sport, and social media, we're able to get things out instantly.

THE MODERATOR: As part of that media, it's easy when we have young ladies and coaches like you who represent our game. Louisville, thank you very much, and good luck this season.

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