

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Kansas vs USC

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Los Angeles, California, USA

Galen Center

USC Trojans

Coach Lindsay Gottlieb

Kayla Padilla

Kaitlyn Davis

Media Conference



Lindsay always says we've got to win the weekend, so for us, this is the second part of that.

Q. Kayla, you mentioned Lindsay's experience in the NBA. What's it been like -- do you pick up things that she learned specifically in the NBA? How do you identify some of those things, like ooh, this is something you picked up from the NBA, this is something they run in that league? Do you watch NBA games, like we do that?

KAYLA PADILLA: Yeah, I remember very vividly in the summer when we didn't have much film to watch them, we were watching film of like NBA and WNBA teams, and those are kind of sets that we now use to play in.

But I think just like sort of the whole operation of how we work as a team is very pro-like. I think she tries to mimic that as obviously a lot of players are trying to get to that level. I think just the way she treats everything is very reminiscent of her experiences with the Cavs and so on.

Q. Katie, you guys always talk about winning the weekend and how I think every Pac-12 coach is like, we love that our schedule prepares us for the NCAA Tournament. You played back to back every week in the Ivy, right? Has this been an easier schedule for you?

KAITLYN DAVIS: Kind of.

KAYLA PADILLA: As we get older, nothing gets easier.

KAITLYN DAVIS: That's true, yeah. I don't know what to say to that. Yeah, it's prepared us mentally, I guess, for having to play back to back, especially with the scouts, but your body is your body. So playing these games two in a weekend is always tough, but it's tough for them, too. Everybody is playing these weekends. Yeah, it's good that we got the experience, but like I said, everybody is playing this weekend, or whoever is left.

Q. Kayla, there were a lot of 45 jerseys here yesterday, and particularly just from the Filipino community in Los Angeles. We've seen that steadily grow over the

Q. What do you think you guys will be prepared to do tomorrow?

KAITLYN DAVIS: I mean, it was a great battle to watch, just as a lot of games in March are, and I think definitely for us watching that game, it was not necessarily a wake-up call, but okay, this is far, because at any time anybody can come out on top.

I think obviously we're not going to say too much on the scout and the film and whatnot, but they have some great players that we have to be ready for coming into tomorrow, so I think we're just getting ready for that.

For me, this is a rematch. I'm ready for tomorrow. But yeah, they're a great team, and we've just got to bring our A game.

KAYLA PADILLA: I'll just add what's so great about the Pac-12 is there's so many different styles of play, so I think that has allowed us to be ready for sort of anything. Like Katie said, it's March. Any team that's still in it is obviously going to be a tough team to beat.

But yeah, we're ready. I think at this time it's more focusing on us and how we can be excellent as opposed to obviously taking care of the scout. But we're going to do our best to get our get-back for Katie.

Q. Katie, what's your personal mentality with that?

KAITLYN DAVIS: I wouldn't say there's too much going into it. It's another game for me. I'm just trying to treat it just like any of our Pac-12 tournament games. Coach



course of this year. What has that meant to continue to see that representation and just the love that you've inspired from that community here?

KAYLA PADILLA: Yeah, no, it means a lot. I like to say this is not only an experience for our team or individually, but it's an experience for everyone. I saw a post a few days ago that there are like maybe eight or nine Asian-Americans who are starting on their rosters for March Madness, which is a very staggering number, just how little representation there is.

But it means a lot because this is the biggest stage of college basketball, so regardless if there's a young Asian-American who's just seeing this for the first time, being here at Galen, it's awesome to even think that I could be a role model or a sense of representation for people who one day want to be at this stage.

Q. Coach Lindsay has really praised you guys' fitness and it's really shown up late in the season. When you think back to the summer and what Coach D had you doing, what was the hardest thing she had you doing to prepare for now?

KAYLA PADILLA: You can talk about the 22s.

KAITLYN DAVIS: 22s probably, the last round. We worked our way up to how many?

KAYLA PADILLA: 20 22s, so it's two up-and-backs in 22 seconds, but it almost killed us. And we had to do the Santa Monica stairs in the summer, which were intense. But we credit her for -- I think you don't really necessarily instantly see those results, but as you get later in these games, you recognize, maybe if I hadn't done those 22s I wouldn't be standing right now, so shout-out to Coach D.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I'll just get this out of the way. I know I'm exponentially more boring without the little ones today, but hopefully this goes a little more smoothly. Appreciate you guys being here. So grateful to still be playing.

Last night was exciting. It was really fun in this building. But I think our job today is to turn the page, get locked in, and have a good practice in preparation for a really good Kansas team who comes into this tournament as hot as almost anybody down this stretch of the season.

They pose a lot of issues for other teams. They're really good, so we have our work cut out to get ready and have a big game on Monday night playing to get to the Sweet 16.

Q. Lindsay, what stands out to you about the way

Kansas plays, especially yesterday they staged a big comeback in the fourth to end up winning that game?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, they're incredibly capable. There's not a lot of flaws. They have terrific post play, they have explosive guards, they have shooting, and obviously as we saw yesterday, they can turn it on and go on a run, which they did at the most critical point of the season. They're just really impressive. They're athletic. They also run good stuff.

I think they know who they are. They're a veteran team who won the NIT last year, so while they might be new to this particular stage, they're not new to each other. Yeah, they're really dynamic.

Q. Lindsay, it feels like at so many moments this year McKenzie has been kind of an emotional barometer for you guys in terms of big shots, leadership, getting the crowd going. It feels like she has sort of a unique confidence that obviously comes from a long background and playing history. Where do you see that show up with her day in and day out, and how much of that confidence do you see as present and key to this team?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, she's a natural leader. I think she's been our most vocal and kind of our on-court leader from day one. That's not new.

I think her confidence comes from her work ethic and a skill set. She puts the work in.

There's a lot of elements to her game. She's got a lot of game, and I think she's really settled in here to her role, and I think we've all gotten better at playing off of one another, and I think you're seeing her IQ and her skill set and the team chemistry kind of on display. We obviously are better when she makes shots, but she also directs a lot of things when she's not necessarily the scorer or the secondary scorer at that time.

Q. How much did Kenzie's game change from when you were with her as a freshman at Cal, she goes to Harvard, plays in a different system, plays for a while, and then you get her again as a grad transfer? How much did her game mature through that journey?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I think her body really changed. I remember even in the year that she sort of wasn't in college basketball when she was trying to get whatever necessary things to go to Harvard, I stayed in touch with her. She was training with her brother. She was training with a trainer, and all of a sudden I'm seeing videos and her body had completely shifted. She's always had a skill

set. I remember watching her in high school, and you see she's not necessarily blowing by anyone, but she's got every tool in her bag. That's very rare. It's really rare as a high school player and certainly as a young college player, and when I had her as a freshman, I think she was our sixth man on an NCAA Tournament team, she always knew where the ball was supposed to go. She always knew kind of what we were trying to accomplish. She would make big shots.

But she's grown in I think her being in shape and her command and her confidence in her skill set, but it's just an increased version, a 20-something-year-old version of her, not the 18-year-old version, but I don't think she wildly changed, it's just she continued to get better, which is what you're supposed to do, and now she's getting ready to be a pro, and she's capable.

I talked to a number of WNBA people. I think she's going to be drafted, should be drafted, but we obviously have more work to do here, and I think she's uniquely suited to help us accomplish the goals that we're trying to accomplish.

Q. Yesterday you had a little bit of that lull in the second quarter, and then you subbed in Kayla Williams. She immediately started pressing the ball. You went to that press a lot and felt like just kind of the defensive tone of the game shifted a little bit. Have you seen that a lot from her, and how much do you trust her with that, those responsibilities of just picking up full court that she's going to guard opposing point guards, put pressure, and how much of an impact does that have?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I think this last month or two she's really grown into and completely accepted and owned a really important role for us. She's a complete and utter tempo changer. To be able to have the luxury of having someone who's that impactful particularly on the defensive end to come in and shift the game is huge for us. She obviously has a different cadence on the offensive end, too.

As we've continued to improve, it has been -- the focus of let's say our first five really having a chemistry together but also getting key contributions off the bench, and I think Kayla plays her role incredibly well the way that collar ease does in a different aspect, and I think you need that down the stretch, and Kayla has been huge for us.

I actually just said it in the locker room, I was talking about some other stuff, we she came in and impacted the game going all the way back to the Cal game, at Arizona, certainly Stanford. There's just different times when you

know we aren't the team that we are without her whatever it is minutes off the bench.

Q. There's been a lot of talk about growing the game, especially in this market. It's so hard to break through in this market. Having USC and UCLA both host regionals on the same day, tomorrow you guys are going to play essentially at the same time, do you feel like that's kind of -- I don't know if it's a missed opportunity, but now some people got to choose?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Not my decision, obviously. I have nothing to do with that. To me there's got to be reasonings. I know they made a shift to try and get the No. 1 overall seed who is South Carolina to make sure they have the most rest heading into a potential Final Four, so maybe something has to do with when people have to play their other regional. I really don't know. It's certainly a bummer for people in Southern California who would want to go watch both games. I think there were some die hards who saw us at 1:30 and went to see UCLA at 6:00, 6:30, whenever they played, and I don't think you can do that with 5:30 and 7:00 and certainly if they were on two different days, but I really have no idea how those decisions are made.

Our place was packed yesterday. That was incredible. I didn't get a chance to look at the totality of UCLA's crowd, but I think there's enough energy and excitement around here to have people show up for both, but I think in a perfect world we would all want to either be on different days or to be scheduled with enough time in between that people could see both.

Q. I asked a few of the players kind of what you bring to this program, and one of the things was kind of a culture change. What are some of the things that motivate you to change the culture here and kind of show up all the time for these players and bring USC to this point where they're No. 1 seed and whatnot?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, I think when I had the opportunity to consider taking this job, I think my mindset was what a humbling opportunity to be at essentially maybe the greatest brand in college sports, a great history in women's basketball and have the opportunity to revive it, so my motivation every day is to do right by that and to try and reach for the moon and the stars with that and achieve everything relative to women's basketball and represent this university in that way. Like what a great, incredible, humbling opportunity that I try to live up to that every day for the incredible alumni that we have and represent them, for the people, President Folt, to have believed in me, and both Mike Bohn and now Jen Cohen and the leadership that believed in me, and now on a day-to-day basis when

you're not trying for let's say the moon shot every single moment, you're just trying to impact the lives of these -- I usually say 18 to 22, now it's like 18- to 25-year-olds, but trying to make sure that their experience in college basketball on a day-in and day-out basis is as great as it can be, and you do that with small moments every day that hopefully ultimately lead to these big things.

Q. You mentioned yesterday your experience in the NBA and how that just opened your mind a little bit. How does having players like JuJu, having players like Kenzie come into this program change what you're able to do on offense because this team looks a lot different from the NCAA Tournament team that went to the tournament last year?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah. I think for me my philosophy in coaching has always been you have these certain ideas of what you want to run on offense and how you think the game should be played, but then you have to adapt to the personnel that you have, otherwise it's not going to work.

So ultimately coming back from the NBA, I learned a ton, the spacing, the exciting kind of early offense options, not controlling every possession, essentially saying here's the spacing and here's our actions in transition versus calling a set play every time and walking it up. You can't do that unless you have players on the floor who are a threat in the spots that they're in.

So obviously JuJu I think really changed our ability to play that way because she draws so much attention. Kenzie having play-making opportunities, KP. Rayah has really embraced almost being what I would call a vertical spacer. In the NBA that's what they would call it. We don't post-up very much because they're vertical spacers, they rim run, so you get Jarrett Allen's arm to the rim and you just lob it up there. Well, Rayah we use her kind of similarly, her gravity that she pulls to the rim without having to be standing there and taking up space.

Yeah, a lot of the spacing and the action is probably more pro style than they ever have been before. Certainly there are things that don't totally translate from the NBA, but from a spacing standpoint and screening angles and where we can attack defenses, I try to pull that stuff in as much as I can, and then also specific to JuJu, just trying to find the spots to get her on the floor where she can not just be a scoring threat but an assist threat, like where are the doubles coming from and where can we exploit other things, and Kenzie very similar with that because of her skill set.

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