

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

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Los Angeles, California, USA

Galen Center

**Kansas Jayhawks**  
**Coach Brandon Schneider**  
**Holly Kersgieter**  
**S'Mya Nichols**

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Kansas.

**Q. March Madness is really known for a lot of really wild moments. That's what makes it special. Yesterday you kind of experienced one with Zakiyah Franklin hitting the wild 3 at the end of regulation. Just kind of take me through how you guys were feeling in that moment and how you're going to remember that for the rest of your lives?**

HOLLY KERSGIETER: When we called that play, I figured the shot was going to go to her. My first thought was, use your legs, because it's the end of the fourth quarter and we're exhausted, and we'd been fighting back for a really long time.

And just when I saw that she got the bounce, I don't know, obviously we were just really happy. Then the fact that they called a timeout and we kind of got a moment to celebrate.

But I think just, like I said, we never stopped fighting. It took us the entire fourth quarter to make that comeback. Kind of the fact that it all culminated into that one moment was really special for our team and definitely for her.

S'MYA NICHOLS: I know that obviously the game went into overtime, but it just gave us the momentum to guard for that last 13 seconds and just come out with a bang in overtime.

**Q. Holly, obviously you're a fifth-year senior. You've had a lot of experience playing and playing with a lot of this core of players of you, Zakiyah, Taiyanna. How**



do you think that that experience of playing together can be leveraged against a team like USC, who hasn't had necessarily that time and experience playing together?

HOLLY KERSGIETER: That's a good question. I think it's just having that trust in each other. There wasn't one moment yesterday where we weren't on the same page throughout that entire sequence of being down and coming back, and play by play by play by play. It's not like I needed to look at them and go, you guys okay? We're still in this.

We just knew. We just trusted each other that we're all going to make plays. We're all going to be on the same page about different things.

So I think just having faith in each other. And when times get tough, it's difficult. But knowing that you're facing it together. And I know that they're a young team. And they faced adversity, but I agree, adversity is different this time of year. So it will be great for them. I think they're going to enjoy it and we're going to enjoy it too.

**Q. S'Mya, for you, being a freshman and the Big 12 was loaded with good freshmen and USC has a star freshman. Talk about your freshman class within the conference and nationally. Did you know seeing this group you played against in AAU that this group had a chance to be a pretty special freshman class in college?**

S'MYA NICHOLS: Yeah, 100 percent. I feel like there's a whole bunch of dogs, I feel like, especially in the freshman class, because that's what we were talking about, really, right?

Yeah, 100 percent, just playing AAU against them, and it was never easy. Star freshmen that we are about to play, JuJu, I played her in AAU. It wasn't easy as well.

But I feel like the freshmen this year really broke out, proved their points, proved themselves and was a great addition to the teams that they're on.



**Q. Obviously you've watched some USC film now, during the course of the season did you ever catch USC on TV, get a chance to watch them at all until the last day or so?**

HOLLY KERSGIETER: I think here and there throughout. It's obviously easy to catch highlights of people and see when things are going good for everyone. I think the last kind of full game I watched was the Pac-12 championship against Stanford. USC won, yeah.

Obviously it was a high-level game. The Pac-12 is competitive. So here and there throughout. Obviously we know what they're about, probably the same thing for them. They'll be a tough team. They're fun to watch, though.

S'MYA NICHOLS: I watched the same game she's talking about, the championship game. Honestly the Pac-12 Network is hard to reach. It's really hard to reach. So it was here and there, just seeing highlights or the championship game.

**Q. You guys have some fans here. Obviously it's at USC tomorrow night. You guys got to watch a little bit of the game yesterday and see the crowd. What do you make of the atmosphere? And how excited are you to play in front of this crowd tomorrow?**

S'MYA NICHOLS: We're excited. We've played in front of many crowds, especially in our conference. And I guess we just need to make sure we come out with energy, with our own energy as well, and just play for each other.

HOLLY KERSGIETER: I think everything we do tomorrow has to come from within ourselves. Even though we're going to have a lot of fans and a lot of support, as a team we can't necessarily rely on that. We've got to be internally motivated and just know and not take into consideration that the crowd may or may not be a barrier.

That's okay. Like she said, we've been through it before. It's just part of the environment. Embrace it. It's part of it. It's a lot of fun. We're grateful that everyone was made the trip out and we have the fans that we have.

**Q. Women's basketball has seen a popularity explosion and in recent years. Could you speak to growing the game to each of you?**

HOLLY KERSGIETER: I would say, because I've been here a long time, from the moment I stepped on campus as a freshman to right now and just seeing where this game has been, whether I've been a part of it or not, playing in the tournament or not, it's been huge.

And someone asked me the other day, are you sad that you're leaving? Now the game is where it's at, you don't get to be a part of it anymore. Honestly, no, because just knowing that I was a small, small part of it is kind of memorable and sentimental to me.

And leaving it better than kind of where I found it is really important. Seeing it grown to where it is now, I think it's awesome. The fact that we play on ESPN tomorrow is crazy. There will probably be celebrities at the game. That's crazy.

S'MYA NICHOLS: Yeah. As a freshman coming in and I think it's exciting, for sure, because it's just the start. It just started, honestly, about two years ago where people started really noticing just women's sports in general. And just seeing where it's at right now and knowing that there's still so much future ahead when it comes to women's sports, basically, I think it's exciting to see.

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: Obviously advanced in pretty exciting style yesterday. And we're really looking forward to playing one of the top teams in the country, with some unbelievable talent.

**Q. March Madness is kind of known for having exciting moments, and you guys had a pretty unforgettable one with Zakiyah Franklin's 3-pointer bouncing around and going into the basket with little time remaining. Kind of walk me through the general emotions of the team in that moment and how you'll kind of remember it?**

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: Well, I think everyone remembers those moments differently. I know as a coach, I'm going to remember the execution of a play we work on all the time, not just the player who made the shot, but the young freshman who made the pass and was willing to really bypass the first two options and wait on what was the best option.

**Q. So obviously sort of the elephant in the room, when you're thinking of the match-up tomorrow with JuJu Watkins, how do you prepare for a player like JuJu Watkins?**

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: Well, I think no team ever won a big game running from a challenge. And JuJu's an incredible player with a really, really versatile skill set. And just like any other opponent or preparation, we'll put together a scout and we'll do everything we can to be assignment-correct and execute at a high level.

The trouble with great players is they make it very difficult to execute. But fortunately, I think for our team, is we've

played some really good players throughout the year in the non-conference as well as the conference season, who've also had some really, really good players.

**Q. Looking at the similarities between JuJu and S'Mya, in that they're both highly touted recruits local to their program who came in and immediately made an impact in year one, how can you sort of see that comparison on the court?**

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: You know, I was just thinking about this. Here's the comparison I see, is they're both surrounded by veterans. We were fortunate to have three fifth-year seniors stay with our program and really be there to bring S'Mya into our program.

And I think what Lindsay's done is brought in some transfers with a lot of experience to aid in JuJu's transition into the college game. So those are some of the similarities I see.

**Q. Two great freshmen in this game tomorrow night. There's great freshmen in the Big 12 and around the country. When you're recruiting over the last few years, did you kind of get the sense that this class, as it was coming in, would have this many impact players their first year in college?**

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: I've been a head coach now 26 years, and I can't remember a freshman class that's playing at a level like this. I mean, you look just in our conference, you know we had to pick an all-freshmen team of five players, and there were probably eight or nine that were deserving of making the team.

Every conference, I feel like, you can immediately name an impact freshman. And that's something that has not happened a great deal in my time in collegiate women's basketball.

**Q. Was it a surprise to you, especially with COVID fifth-year players still playing, that freshmen were able to come in and do this? What's that say to you about the talent level, maybe, of the group that came in this year?**

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: There's so many more opportunities for young people now in terms of development, not just with their skills, but also with sports performance and strengthen and conditioning.

For a freshman to come in and make an impact, not only does their skill set have to be ready, but their confidence has to be elite. But then their bodies have to be ready.

And that's the thing that I think is really impressive, is there's so many young women who are coming into the game now that they're physically and mentally ready to compete and play at a high level.

**Q. You've always talked about atmospheres and how a crowd really creates energy for players. You were there yesterday for USC's game with a full house out there. What's it going to be like tomorrow night? How excited are you to coach and have your team play in that environment in the NCAA Tournament?**

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: Again, we're fortunate in our league to play in some terrific home-court atmospheres, whether on the road or at home. And the thing we always talk about when we're playing in a tough environment on the road is there's a lot of energy created. But it doesn't have to belong to the home team. We can take some of that energy and turn it into use for us as well.

**Q. You've been around the women's game a long time, and in the past few years the years the game's really seen an explosion in popularity. Could you just talk about what it means to you to see the game grow like this in recent years?**

BRANDON SCHNEIDER: Well, my dad spent 46 years in women's basketball. So growing up around it, it's come a long, long way. And to now be able to witness it firsthand and compete against so many of these great coaches and players, it's really special.

I think it's not going anywhere. When you think about -- arguably, Caitlin Clark right now is carrying the torch -- but it's going to be a pretty seamless hand-off to the next great player, whether -- it's probably JuJu.

And hopefully there's a young girl out there right now dreaming of being the next Caitlin Clark or the next JuJu Watkins or the next S'Mya Nichols or whatever. It's been cool to witness.

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