

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Monday, October 5, 2026
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Louisville Cardinals

Coach Jeff Walz

Imari Berry

Elif Istanbuloglu

Women's Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2026 ACC Tip Off Q&A. I am happy to welcome Louisville to the stage. Head coach Jeff Walz, Imari Berry, and who is sitting next to you?

IMARI BERRY: E, Queen E.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to refer to her as Queen E, but it's Elif Istanbuloglu. Mom is watching from home, so hello to mother.

IMARI BERRY: Hi, mom.

ELIF ISTANBULLOGLU: My mom.

THE MODERATOR: You've become the third fastest coach to .500 wins last season behind only Kim Mulkey and some guy named Geno. The Cardinals returned seven players, including four of your five leading scorers. From a team that finished 29-8 marking your 16th straight season of 20 or more wins, that's the longest streak in the ACC and the third longest in the nation.

Your seven newcomers will join this season, four which are transfers and three freshmen. In this day and age of constant athletics change, it feels like you are returning a core group when a year ago you seemed so young. Any major changes or pleasant surprises so far with this group, and what should we expect?

JEFF WALZ: It's just what you said. We are very fortunate to be able to retain four of our top five scorers, five of our top seven players. It's hard to do, but I think they understand the value that they have to our program and how we value them as well.

They want to be pushed, they want to be great, and that's



what we try to provide for them. We're going to be honest. Sometimes they like it; sometimes they don't. But it's a great group.

We're really, really excited about the returners, and then they had a big part as well in the transfer portal and getting those three in the portal -- four now. But, you know, with Zam, Carys, and Prawl, those three, a lot of the input that came from our returners was really important to us. Very, very excited for our team.

THE MODERATOR: Imari, a summer spent playing a ton of 3-V-3. How has that experience made you a better player and will help you come ACC play?

IMARI BERRY: I feel like the defensive end I feel like just staying connected to my man and just not watching the ball and just being able to move fast and run at a fast pace, I feel like it just kind of prepared me and made me look at the game very differently.

THE MODERATOR: E, your summer spent playing FIBA Worlds in the World Cup. Had a lot of success in that. How has that experience made you a better player?

ELIF ISTANBULLOGLU: Obviously being there was an incredible opportunity for me. I saw the level and I saw the physicality, and I saw the level that I wanted to get to, so that was a reality check for me.

Yeah, be there representing my country, it's a unique feeling. It's hard to put into words. Also, Coach Walz was there with me. I remember, I'm, like, Coach, this is something else. They are, like, pulling you from your jersey, and you have to be physical.

Also, having Coach Walz there as well, I was, like, I need you to push me for this, because I want to get there. I thought that was a great, great experience for me, and I saw the pros, you know, how they act outside of the court, you know, like in the breakfast. We were staying in the same hotel, so it was also a unique experience for me to like what are they doing outside of the court.

Q. What are you most excited about this year as you

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prepare for the season?

JEFF WALZ: Well, you know, for us I think our depth is something that's going to be really strong. Our ability to score the basketball. You know, when Laura Ziegler graduated, you know, was a four player that could shoot the three, could really stretch the floor, and it was something that we thought we needed to fill that void with Laura graduating.

And when Carys went to the portal, Carys can shoot the basketball. She rebounds the ball well. So that was great addition for us.

Then, you know, we add Zam, which she's an explosive player. It's something I think everybody on our team would say for the last year, I thought Reyna did a really nice job for us at the point. We were looking for that. You know, we're down to four or five seconds on the shot clock. Somebody's got the ball. Can they get by somebody and get a shot up?

That's something that Zam can do. Zam is really, really good at practice too. She wants to learn to be a point guard, learn to distribute the ball more, and that's been a challenge for her. It's been a change, but she's really adapting well.

So I like all the pieces we're going to have at the offensive end of the floor. I've just got to see if they'll play at the other end now. Imari says she will, so I was excited about that.

Q. Imari, feeding off of that, coming off of the ACC Sixth Player of the Year, does that motivate you, or what does this season look like following that kind of a season for you?

IMARI BERRY: Slightly. I feel like just watching the game, being on the bench and watching the game and getting in and knowing what I need to do, I feel like me being able to step up and Coach Walz being able to call on me when the game got close. Just going in, I know what I can do and what it takes.

Q. Coach, Louisville has been one of the ACC's most consistent programs. What has allowed this program to maintain that level of consistency and how has the team prepared to bring that into this season?

JEFF WALZ: It's the players. I mean, you're only as good as your players. I always say, you know, we were blessed in 2009 to play for a championship, and then in '09/'10 we didn't make the tournament. I think we won 12 or 13 games.

We ran the same stuff, but we just didn't have Angel McCoughtry and Candyce Bingham on the floor. So we've been able to do a really good job. I've had great staff that have come through this program to help continue to get quality players and individuals.

It's the one thing I'll say. It's been so much fun to coach at Louisville because of the caliber of people that we've been able to recruit. Yes, they're great basketball players, but they're even better individuals off the court, so that's how we've been able to maintain and sustain our success, because it is something that we take a lot of pride in.

I think in all the years that we've been in the league, I think our worst finish has been fifth, and that speaks volumes for how talented and competitive the ACC is.

THE MODERATOR: Imari, what or who will be the X factor for Louisville to take the next step this season?

IMARI BERRY: All of us. I feel like it's going to take all of us doing whatever Coach Walz says, whatever the coaching staff say, watching film. Just us coming together as a team and just being able to produce on the floor.

THE MODERATOR: What's that area that Coach Walz has said, we have to be better at? Is it defense? Is it rebounding? What's the messaging right now?

IMARI BERRY: I would say everything. Just whatever you do, just go hard. I feel like if you just go hard, you'll be able to play for him. Just go out there and do your best and just rebound the ball, play defense, shoot the ball whenever you're open, and just knock down shots.

ELIF ISTANBULLOGLU: I feel like everybody has a role on this team, and if they do their job, we're going to be successful. I think he really emphasizes that. Do your job 100%, yeah.

JEFF WALZ: We were very blessed last Friday to have General Fenton, a four-star general, come in and talk to our team. I think one of the most powerful statements he made to us and I think it really resonated with our entire team was to be able to have true evaluation and to have candid conversation when you're finished.

I think it was powerful for all of us because normally -- we talked to him about when we watch film after a game, we're showing four minutes of good before we show anything bad or they won't pay attention. True?

ELIF ISTANBULLOGLU: That's true.



JEFF WALZ: He was very honest and said, if you want to be great, if you want to be the best, you know what you did good, so let's correct what we didn't do well and get that on the forefront.

I think it was very impactful for our team, and I think it's a message that we're going to be able to carry forward through this entire season. And that's -- I think it has a chance to make us the team that we want to be.

THE MODERATOR: Players, I want to ask you to move farther along with that engagement. What is the development for you as women and as leaders that this coaching staff does for you?

ELIF ISTANBULLOGLU: First of all, he pushes you so damn hard, but you know it's coming from a good place. So I feel like he does it in such a way you just -- and then one day you can, like, oh, my God, I feel strong. Like I'm on my two feet. That's what happened to me.

I was, like, telling that, I feel so strong. I'm not talking about the basketball. Outside of the court I feel a strong woman. I know -- he always, like, hold the door if someone is coming behind you. Like, that type of stuff. Normally we always talk about basketball, but he's really doing a good job about life too, because obviously we're going to stop playing basketball at some age, but the lives just going to keep going on.

From that point, the basketball is going to be in the past and it's going to matter the friendship that we build, like all the strangers we meet, like how we treat them.

I think he's really doing a good job about that.

IMARI BERRY: Yeah, I agree with what E said. I feel like whatever he says comes from the heart, no matter how he says it. He might cuss you out, but he might give you a kiss at the end. It's all love. (Laughing).

Q. Which opponent or match-up are you most looking forward to this season and why?

IMARI BERRY: All of them.

ELIF ISTANBULLOGLU: Me too. I want to start playing so bad. All of them.

IMARI BERRY: Start to finish.

ELIF ISTANBULLOGLU: Yes.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to wrap up with this. E, we'll start with you. Give me a one-word answer to this.

The one word to describe Louisville women's basketball this season.

ELIF ISTANBULLOGLU: I want to say energy.

IMARI BERRY: I'm going to say strong.

JEFF WALZ: Passionate.

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