

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 9, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

USC Trojans

Lindsay Gottlieb

JuJu Watkins

Talia von Oelhoffen

Postgame Press Conference

UCLA - 72, USC - 67

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome USC to the press conference. Coach Lindsay Gottlieb, JuJu Watkins, and Talia van Oelhoffen.

At this time, we'll ask Coach to make an opening statement.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: First off, I wanted to congratulate UCLA. This was a really great atmosphere. I thought it was a tough basketball game, and I thought whoever won this game should probably be the overall No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament. They got a win and wish them well.

We've done a lot of celebrating this year, so when it's not our turn and someone else has the confetti and what have you, we're always going to do it the right way and take our pain and our disappointment and channel that into getting better.

I thought our players left it all out there on the floor. I thought we fought. I thought we were tough. I thought we had one bad half of basketball in the second half. We missed shots. Then when we tried to attack and get to the rim, we didn't get to the free-throw line.

It was their half of basketball. The two losses that we've had prior to this, I thought our team responded and really bounced forward, and that's what we'll do heading into the NCAA Tournament. My guess is this is going to make us even better, and that half of basketball will be out of us. We'll look forward that way.

So proud of our group, but we're not done.



Q. For either one of the players, lots of runs in this ballgame. You guys had a 12-0 run there in the first quarter. Finished out the second quarter on a 9-0 run with Howell knocking down the three-pointer. Going in at half with momentum on your side. Then, boy, just a tough second half. Can you put it in words?

JUJU WATKINS: We're always positive. I think that last 3 by Avery gave us a lot of momentum going into the third. We came out with the right energy. I just don't think our shots were falling, and we tried to get it back, but we couldn't.

Q. For both players, everybody had the same challenge obviously, but can you kind of describe the challenge of playing three games in three days and the fatigue associated with that and how you fight through that.

TALIA VAN OELHOFFEN: I think obviously both teams had to play three games in three days. I don't know if that was necessarily a factor in that second half, but obviously didn't hit shots that we usually hit. It felt like every time we missed an open look, they came down and capitalized on it.

I think we just need to do better navigating on the shooting struggles and figure out how to get to the rim and get to the line.

Q. For either JuJu or Talia, how difficult is it to play a team three times in the same season? Especially this is twice in eight days. While you guys were very careful not to say that you wanted to see this game, they were very much wanting to play you guys again. How much more difficult does that make it?

JUJU WATKINS: I think it's always hard. Of course three times, even two times, just knowing that we've already done our scout, they've done our scout. So figuring out ways to tweak it.

But we were excited to play them as well. It's not like we shy away from competition. We're always grateful to play them because they push us and we push them. We were



very welcoming to this game. Our coach has prepared us. We struggled in the second half.

Q. Lindsay, similar question. How tough is it to play any team three times in a row, especially when you just did it eight days ago?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, it just gives it a different feel. There's so much familiarity on both sides. I do think the three games in three days is very unique. You don't do it in an NCAA Tournament. You don't do it any other time in the regular season.

We had a closer game yesterday than they did. We went 2 for 15 in the second half from three, and they were 6 for 9 from the first half from three, so they were more efficient, but still not as good. 2 for, whatever, 6 in the second half. Then you add that to it, and it just makes for a different feel for the whole thing.

It was a heavyweight fight, and I think both teams brought the intensity level for sure.

Q. There was an 11-minute period where the team missed 15 straight shots going into the fourth quarter, late in the fourth quarter. What do you tell the team to kind of get them out of that? If there's anything you can say to try to get them out of that funk.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I thought that the open 3s that we get off of how they're guarding JuJu or how they're guarding Kiki, locked and loaded, shoot it, giving them confidence. But I also told them, hey, let's be aggressive. They're in foul trouble. Let's get to the rim. And we ended up shooting 13 total free throws. So I thought they tried to do what I said, which was get to the rim, and didn't get to the line.

But you've got to make open shots and continue to give them confidence. We know we're a really good fourth quarter team typically. Of course it was deflating to miss all those shots and get a little bit ragged in the third quarter, but I thought we tried to put the foot on the gas in the fourth and just couldn't get to where we wanted to get to, either to the rim or to the free-throw line or just get to our shots and knock them down. It happens sometimes.

Q. I thought you struggled a little bit against Indiana. I thought you struggled a little bit against Michigan and then coming into UCLA. Where do you refocus now headed into the tournament?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I think Indiana and Michigan are really good teams. We came into Indiana and won without our starting center. Both teams pose problems because

they're good. Those are NCAA Tournament teams, second round games for us, maybe third -- Sweet 16 type games. So I thought it pushed us.

Like everybody else, we'll continue to use this weekend to get better. We don't want to shy away from a fight in the competition, but obviously we want to be as sharp as possible going into the NCAA Tournament.

Q. You guys had 19 turnovers this game, seemed to really struggle with them against ranked teams. In the game how do you stop the bleeding? How do you want to focus on making that a priority moving forward into the tournament?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: We always want to be aggressive and play fast but not turn it over. Their pressure had something to do with it. Both teams were playing intense defense. We turned them over 24 times; they turned us over 19 times. But obviously they scored a little more off of it.

We got 21 offensive rebounds. We turned them over 24 times. Our effort was there. We weren't that clean. I don't know, when you play a team a third time, it's ever going to look completely clean, but we never want to turn it over because we think our offense is pretty potent.

We held them to the mid-60s before we had to foul. That should be enough to beat them. We have to take care of the ball, knock down shots, and get to the free-throw line when we're attacking like that, and we'll be better on the offensive end.

Q. The Big Ten does not have a lot of National Championships in women's basketball. With you and UCLA, you're very promising Final Four contenders. How has this conference prepared you for a deep run like that that maybe other conferences don't?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: With the depth of talent in the league, and I think there will be 12 or 13 NCAA Tournament teams, we've faced NCAA Tournament caliber teams night in and night out, all of whom have different styles. And obviously we challenged ourselves in the nonconference with UConn and Ole Miss and Notre Dame to get ready.

It's still one game at a time, but we definitely feel like our preparation is there based on the competition we faced, both in the Big Ten and in our nonconference.

Q. Talking about runs in the ballgame, the 12-0 run, the 9-0 run, the run in the second quarter that got you up by 10. Then at the end of the game, who's involved

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

in it but JuJu? She's involved in all the three, four runs in there. Just your thoughts on how she's the leader of this team.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: The kid is so good and just keeps getting better. I thought she should have been at the free-throw line a little bit more tonight, but I think she commands a presence and an attention from another top, top team that says we've got to do all kinds of different things. They played some box and one. They switched defenders on her.

Yet she can still get to her scoring and we get open looks for everybody else. We weren't our most efficient tonight at any realm of it, but her impact on winning and her heart and her competitive spirit is something else. We've become a real team.

I think my favorite play of the game was probably that one at the end of the half because she raced it down the floor, hit Ken on a dime, and Ken hit Avery on a dime. That's a sophomore and two freshmen. I think they've galvanized around one another. Obviously her excellence is on display and it's got its handprints over everything we've done and will continue to do.

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