

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Indiana vs Utah

Friday, March 21, 2025

Columbia, South Carolina, USA

Colonial Life Arena

## Utah Utes

## Gavin Petersen

## Gianna Kneepkens

## Kennady McQueen

### Media Conference

Indiana 76 - Utah 68

THE MODERATOR: We're joined now by the Utah Utes. Coach, if you would please make an opening statement.

GAVIN PETERSEN: Yeah. Hats off to Indiana. Really good game. Really hard-fought battle, tied at halftime. They took advantage in that third quarter, and we just weren't able to push through in that fourth quarter.

But extremely proud of our team. Not only for this season and what we have accomplished, but our graduating senior class and the legacy that they have left. A scoreboard for one game is not going to define their success and how much they have impacted our program at Utah.

So I am just forever indebted to this group, this team, the collection of all these young women that lead the way by being great role models, great examples. My daughter is here, Brooklyn, as well as my daughter at home, Breagh. They have great role models to look up to, and I am forever indebted to them for that.

So one game will not rain on my parade, even though I hate losing more than I like winning, but I'm going to focus on the positive, and these two sitting next to me are part of that positive.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for the student-athletes at this time.

**Q. Indiana kind of got out and made that really strong push in the third quarter. What is it that you guys saw that kind of allowed for them to have that success at**



**the start of the second half?**

KENNADY McQUEEN: Yeah. I think they came out aggressive. I think they were getting to the paint a little bit more than we were, just being the more aggressive team there for a bit in the third quarter. And then, like you said, we started fighting back the second half of the third quarter, but I think we just dug too big a hole to start that.

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: Yeah. It's hard to know right this second what exactly basketball-wise. I think they were getting a little bit easier looks than us, and so they were falling a little better. But, yeah, we tried to make a run back in the fourth. It got pretty close, I think. But, yeah, I think just their aggressiveness like Kennady said.

**Q. Gianna, that last stretch in the second quarter where they came back and tied it up right before, how critical was that to giving them a springboard in that third quarter?**

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: Yeah. I think that probably helped giving them some momentum going into halftime. But basketball is a game of runs. Theirs just happened to be a little bit bigger than ours tonight.

**Q. Congratulations on a great season. This being you guys have been here for so long, what does this program mean to you? Is there anything specific that happened today that maybe was a culminating moment?**

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: Yeah. Gosh. Yeah. That's a hard question, just because I came in with (indiscernible) and Jenna, and Kenn was here the year before. But those girls mean everything to me. They're my best friends, and so I'm just grateful I have had the past four years to play with them. And, yeah, it's going to be weird knowing that we don't play basketball again together, but I know that they'll hear from me and I know I'll hear from them, no matter where we go in our next -- or their next steps of life. So grateful of the relationships that I've built.

KENNADY McQUEEN: Yeah, I think the program just means everything to me. I mean, this was my dream all



growing up to be in this spot right here with Utah across the front of my jersey, and then just to do it with these type of people like Gianna and my senior class that's with me, and then us collective as a whole, I mean, truly, like, she nailed it. Like they're my best friends, and so it's just been awesome. Our conversations off the court, just beyond basketball have just been incredible here.

The staff at Utah is incredible, support staff. I mean everybody just really supports women's basketball at the University of Utah, and I think when that happens and you bring in a great group of people, you can do things like this and be consecutive at it for the past four years. So, yeah, it's just meant everything.

**Q. Gianna, a little opposite note. That four-point play, there aren't too many of them in the NCAA Tournament. Do you feel like I put together something special there?**

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: Yeah. It was a good play. I was just hopefully using that as a momentum, and I think it did because we cut the lead to like four, I think. So, yeah, I guess that's a positive.

**Q. Specifically for Gianna, obviously you come back, you didn't have a full season last year. You had a full season this year. Anything different about that? Anything that you were able to instill in your teammates that was able to springboard your team to a very successful season this year?**

GIANNA KNEEPKENS: Honestly, just looking back, I'm just grateful that I got the opportunity to play one full healthy season with these girls again. It was hard. Obviously season-ending injuries are tough. But I think I just have to take a moment to realize how grateful I am for C.J., Lindsey getting me back, and then my coaches and teammates supporting me and getting me back where I was. So, yeah, I'm just grateful in this hard moment.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let the student-athletes go at this time. We'll open up for questions for Coach Petersen.

**Q. Coach, these are two teams that really like to shoot threes. You took some late trying to get back in it. They only took 17. You took 30 something, but most of those were late when you were down double digits. Why do you think that is that two teams that like to shoot and make a lot of threes went inside a lot today? Was that strategic?**

GAVIN PETERSEN: I think for them they did a great job in that third quarter getting downhill, getting to the paint, getting some high-percentage shots.

We had some missed communication on defense on a few possessions and gave them some open looks. But, yeah, I think, you know, we were trying to emphasize getting the ball inside. We got Mayé going there late.

But we just needed a little bit more inside presence, and we could have played a little bit more inside-out and maybe got eight more clean-look threes. But that's kind of the way it goes.

And credit to them. Their third quarter, and even the fourth quarter, to put the game away, they were taking some mid-range jump shots that were contested and they made them.

That's part of basketball. You kind of gotta take what the defense gives you, and we were trying to protect the three-point line, as they were as well, but we got up a lot more. And that's been our bread and butter all season long. So we weren't going to run away or shy away from that.

**Q. This is kind of a similar question, but like when you look at it on paper, Indiana and Utah are very similar teams. Is it kind of difficult preparing for the opponent in that way, or is it maybe difficult or easier preparing for the opponent considering they are so similar to how you play in a way?**

GAVIN PETERSEN: Kind of a little bit of both, to be honest. I think it's -- I guess you can gain confidence because you see it every day in our drills and practice. So we know what it takes to be able to get some really good looks from three. I think the physicality component sometimes we can't duplicate in practice so that kind of takes a period of getting used to.

But they do a tremendous job of executing. And by that I mean they're patient. They wait for screens. They set them up. They use them. And they really caused us to have some mishaps on the defensive end, and that's the difference of the game. And when you're playing in March, it just takes a few possessions and a team goes on a big run, and then it's kind of hard to stop.

And like our players alluded to, we spent a lot of energy clawing back and coming back, and then we just kind of ran out of time. I know we cut it to four.

I'm going to kick myself for not calling a timeout, but at the same time I thought we could get a three off in transition, and I didn't want them to set up their defense. But that's something I gotta live with.

**Q. Coach, overall I would say that you've had a pretty successful first year as head coach.**

GAVIN PETERSEN: Thank you.

**Q. What moments or memories will you cherish for the rest of your lives in this new chapter?**

GAVIN PETERSEN: All of it. I'm just humbled and honored to be able to lead that locker room. I think you have lifelong bonds that will never go away. And that's what I'm most thankful for.

**Q. Gavin, I was going to ask something along the similar lines. You talked about it yesterday, the pride, that this team could have said, you know what, I didn't sign up for this, so we don't have to do this. And now you've got a springboard, I would imagine, in order to keep the program at the level it's been and go beyond that the next few years.**

GAVIN PETERSEN: Yeah. That's the plan. Our coaching staff is going to strive hard to live up to the new standard which we've established. It's not going to be easy, but we welcome that. We're going to roll up our sleeves.

Our player development is second to none. We take pride in that, and we're going to hit the off season with those returning and our newcomers coming into our program.

So, yeah, we are -- you know, I want to give this group something in five years to come back to, and hopefully we're hosting, and it's just something that they can continue to be proud of. And that's just my charge, in charge of this program.

We have all the assistants from our administration that have been so great to me and our program that, you know, we're going to take what they give us and we're going to run with it, and our charge is we're going to be here to stay.

**Q. Coach, obviously this being the culmination of your first season as a head coach, how did you and your players respond to this adversity with you being first-time head coach in an NCAA Tournament game?**

GAVIN PETERSEN: I mean they hit it in stride. I mean, again, it's an expectation now, which is so cool to see, because you know, in year one we're playing in front of 600 people. Now we're playing in front of 6,000. We're going to the NIT three years in a row. Now we're going to the NCAA Tournament four times in a row.

So it's the new expectation, but that's what drives them in the off season. That's what drives them in practice. So it

was -- we didn't skip a beat in that regard.

Now, the season was challenging because it was new to them and how we handled adversity in terms of losses. We still didn't lose more than two games in a row all season long, and that's a credit to their resiliency and their just commitment to each other and our program. And that, I am extremely proud of that. We never let adversity get us off of the next task at hand. And that's a life lesson, man. Life is going to knock you down. Dust yourself off and get back to work. And that's this crew leads that way, and they live that way. So they're winners in my book.

**Q. With your relationship with Gianna, obviously her being a leader on this team, coming back being full season with this. Anything that happened pregame, post game that you're going to remember from this run?**

GAVIN PETERSEN: No. I mean, somebody asked her a question about the four-point play. I can tell you the competitor in her, she's like, I missed one free throw. Like that's what she's focused on. And we have a lot of similarities in that regard. We focus on what we did wrong, and it might be a small glimpse. It might be outweighed 20 to 1, but we'll dwell on that one, and I think that's why I think we have a connection. And that's what makes her so good, though.

She will not rest until -- I mean, if there was an open gym, she'd probably go shoot free throws, to be honest. But that's the competitive fire and that nature that I love about her and how that feeds off into our program.

So, yeah. She's just an ultimate competitor. Love every one of those kids in that locker room.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Appreciate it.

GAVIN PETERSEN: Yeah. Thank you guys all.

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