

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Southern California vs Clemson

Friday, March 20, 2026

Columbia, South Carolina, USA

Colonial Life Arena

USC Trojans

Coach Lindsay Gottlieb

Kara Dunn

Jazzy Davidson

Media Conference

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Thank you for having us. Excited to be here in Columbia, South Carolina. It's always an honor to be in the NCAA Tournament. I certainly never take it for granted. It's the best sporting event ever and to be part of it is really special, but in particular to do it with this group. We have a senior year, Kara Dunn, who's been incredibly impactful in her year with us, and our freshman of the year, Jazzy Davidson, and I think the two of them kind of represent a program and other women in that locker room who are really excited to be here and worthy to be in this spot and just a joy for us to be here competing at this level.

Q. I'm just sort of curious your early impressions on being in South Carolina and Columbia, obviously Jazzy for you, you'll be back in November in Greenville and you both have faced South Carolina, but just kind of the environment so far with Clemson and South Carolina and all that's bringing in the state?

KARA DUNN: It's exciting. Obviously we are traveling further than the other teams, but I don't think that really matters to us. We're excited for this opportunity and to show that we've been working on the past couple weeks.

JAZZY DAVIDSON: Yeah, kind of just what Kara said. I think we're just all really excited to be here and play against some really elite teams.

Q. Jazzy, I wanted to ask about the transition to a guard-led offense in light of Juju Watkins' injury. Can you talk about what it was like to switch up the offense and approach it a different way this season?

JAZZY DAVIDSON: Yeah, I think just coming in not -- this



being my first season here at USC, I think it's kind of all I've known, so I didn't really have to make much of an adjustment. I think my coaches and teammates did a great job kind of acclimating me to just college basketball in general, so I'm very grateful for that.

Q. Kara, just being a senior, what do you tell Jazzy as a freshman what she can expect and kind of what this means to you as your last go-around here?

KARA DUNN: Yeah, I know this is the end of the season and stuff, but I feel like Jazzy, what I would say to you is treat it like every other game. Just because she's come out here, she's shown exactly what she can do. We don't want Jazzy being too high, too low. We just want Jazzy for who she is. She's a great player. It's a really exciting time, and it's time to put everything that we've worked on this entire year into play.

Q. Jazzy, for you, senior leadership, kind of last go-around for them, you want to send them out obviously on a good note and finish the season strong. What's your mindset going into the tournament?

JAZZY DAVIDSON: Yeah, I mean, just playing for my teammates, playing for my coaches. Yeah, just trying to do everything that I can to help the team win.

Q. Kara, I believe you've played Clemson before. Is there anything you can bring from those previous matchups, or is it a whole new ballgame?

KARA DUNN: There's a few players I've played against on the Clemson team, but yeah, I would just say that going into this game, we just need to match passion with passion. We need to give it our all.

Q. Obviously the Big Ten gives you a lot of challenges. Is there any team that you have played when you look at film of Clemson that there's some similarities maybe, that you can take some things that you learned earlier this season?

KARA DUNN: Yeah, I feel like they're a good three-point



shooting team. We played a lot of good three-point shooting teams, whether that's Nebraska, even UCLA, they shot well, Iowa. So I think just making sure that we match up in transition, take away that, is really important.

JAZZY DAVIDSON: Yeah, I would agree. I think the Big Ten has a lot of really good three-point shooting teams like Iowa, Indiana, UCLA. Like Kara said, just taking away the three-point line as best we can and just sticking to our scouting report.

Q. Kara, this being your last year, is there any constant standout that you can see at the USC program that's been consistent with your time there, about the USC culture and program, that people should know about this program?

KARA DUNN: Yeah, this program is absolutely amazing from the support they get from the fan base to the alumni. I think that is one of the biggest things that I've appreciated this year because I've been here for one year and it feels like I've been here for like four. It's just a really great program.

Q. Jazzy, sort of a cheesy question, but how has March Madness been? You grow up thinking about it. Is there any element of this tournament that's surprised you? What's your biggest takeaway in your first couple of days getting acclimated to March Madness?

JAZZY DAVIDSON: I don't know if there's anything that's really surprised me so far. It's kind of been just business as usual with practices and scouting and all that kind of stuff. But no, I'm really excited to play my first March Madness games. You grow up watching the tournament every single year, so it's really surreal to finally be able to play in my first games.

Q. When the bracket popped up and you saw you were playing Clemson in South Carolina, any thoughts about that? Did you even know where Clemson was? A lot of people maybe across the country may not know that they're in South Carolina. It's certainly not going to be a home-court advantage. I don't think the South Carolina fans will necessarily pull for them. Curious what your thoughts are on playing Clemson in South Carolina.

JAZZY DAVIDSON: I'm really excited. They're a great team, really well-coached. I think it'll be a really fun challenge for us.

KARA DUNN: Yeah, same thing that Jazzy said. We're really excited. It's not the typical environment, obviously,

but we're ready for whatever challenge faces us.

Q. And the travel aspect of it, you guys have been back and forth across the country numerous times. What do you do on the plane for five hours or six hours --

KARA DUNN: I personally enjoy it because I'm a TV show watcher so that gives me a lot of time to catch up on my shows, which I love.

Q. And studying, of course?

KARA DUNN: Yeah. (Laughter).

Q. Just kind of your thoughts on being in Columbia just from a regional perspective, and how would you describe your relationship with Dawn Staley?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, I mean, we've known, I think, for, I don't know, a week or two here relative to what our seed would be that we were not going to be on the West Coast. So we figured it would be one of these sites.

A ton of respect for the South Carolina program and their fan base. You mentioned -- I have no idea how South Carolina feels about Clemson. I should probably read up on that. But I know they're a fan base that's going to show up for an 8-9 game no matter who it is. We'd love for them to give us some cheers, but either way, they'll show up.

Obviously Dawn Staley is an icon in so many ways, beyond just the winning. The way that she has advocated for women, has advocated for African-American coaches, has stood up for our game in so many ways. That's just, I think, the most admirable thing.

I don't know her very well, but the fact that she's continued to do that, and I still think reach back towards other coaches, even as she's won a ton, seems like just an incredibly steady leader and has built something really, really special here.

Q. Lindsay, you have to be kind of proud of -- I'm guessing you're proud of what your team has done this year. Given how things could have spiraled one way or the other, yet you're still here and talking about an NCAA matchup, given some of the difficulties that you've had, that's got to make you kind of proud about this team.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Sure. You know, I've said this a couple times, more with our local media. I don't know that I'd change a thing about this year. It isn't necessarily our standard in terms of what we've done the last couple years,



and of course I would change this or that loss, or this or that play. But on a totality, I think we've had a group of players who have committed to what we're trying to do. They've stayed sort of ten toes down with us the entire time.

I think I've really been cognizant of trying not to look back and not look forward. It has played out, I think, how it was supposed to, and I think for Juju, she has poured everything she possibly could have into this year, and I think it's a credit to her that we haven't talked about not having her on the court, we've talked about having her with the team in all the ways and all the ways she's grown.

I think for our players, they've tried to just continue to pour into our culture and who we are and what we're about kind of separate from every win and loss, and they've also tried to be as competitive and locked in on this year as we can be. That's something that I am certainly proud of.

Obviously we think we have a level of basketball that we can play at that we're hoping to achieve on Saturday afternoon and beyond, and that's always going to be what we're striving for, but in terms of overall, I think there's a lot of really positive things, and we've got a great group of young men that do really compete for one another and for the USC on the front of their jersey, as well.

Q. I'm just wondering if you've had a chance to catch up with Wendale yet or if you'll talk to him this weekend at some point, and also I guess it sounds like you've forgiven Dawn for poaching him?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I did get to catch up with him a little bit yesterday. Daley is like my family. He's Uncle Dale to my kids, so obviously that relationship always goes beyond basketball. He's just a great human, and proud of what he's doing in his career and as a person.

You know, I wasn't shocked to be necessarily sent here, but definitely when it popped up, that resonated for my son, who said, oh, you're going to South Carolina, is that Uncle Dale? Obviously that's what comes up first.

Q. How quickly did you see Juju adjust, and what has it been like to have her as a personality on the sideline?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I mean, there's not enough things I can say about Juju and how she's handled everything. There was a moment in the training room, I think, when she was in the training room maybe over the summer, where I just had a moment and we were reflecting -- I was reflecting a little bit kind of on what could have been if the injury didn't happen, and she just looked me straight in the

eye and said, Coach, it wasn't our time. When it's our time, it'll be our time.

The gratitude I have for how she's approached everything, I think the silver lining of it is that she's been able to be a part of this team and pour into people without having the weight of the world on her shoulders in terms of performance. Her body, her workouts, what she's been doing, the work speaks for itself. She's just such a diligent worker, so to see every rep she does in the weight room or on the court now has been inspiring, but more importantly she's shown up for her teammates, and I think that's been really important for this team, and ultimately, it's positive for this team, and I think we're going to see the fruits of that moving forward, as well, in what we do moving forward, but obviously for her, as well, I think she's going to come back stronger, better than we ever thought possible.

Q. I saw a lot of South Carolina fans on Twitter really excited to see Southern Cal in the bracket because they like watching your players play. I can guarantee you there won't be a lot of rooting for Clemson from them tomorrow. What are your thoughts playing so far away from home but likely having a lot of support from an opposing team's fans?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, the playing away from home, it really has become somewhat of the norm. Obviously we've hosted the last couple years, and that's a great honor in and of itself, but the Big Ten really does prepare you to get on a plane, to go two or three time zones and to play an NCAA Tournament team.

We've played a number of teams -- whether or not they're similar in style to Clemson, they're similar in kind of just being teams that are really good, if you let them do what they're good at doing.

So I think that kind of thing being away from home isn't too different for us. I hadn't really thought about the South Carolina fan base thing. Obviously we appreciate that, if that's something that they do bring to the table.

But I knew, obviously, that they're a fan base that's going to show up for sure. So we did not feel like in any way it would be an empty gym. Like I said, we'll be looking forward to a great atmosphere one way or another.

Q. Kind of an up-and-down season, finished on kind of a down note. Do you talk to your team about this being an opportunity to reset and the slate is clean?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, 1,000 percent. We took a couple days off after a disappointing Big Ten Tournament loss, and when we came back in -- it's an interesting kind

of week of practice at that point. You don't have an opponent. You don't have a scout to do. So it's really just about getting yourselves better.

We focused on getting back to what we do really well and what the things that are difficult for other people -- I said, while we can't prepare for another team, let's do all the things that will make us very difficult to prepare for. We also wanted to improve. I think we were a little chippy, a little edge in us, a little chip on our shoulder because we hadn't performed at our best.

So I think we've had some really good practices, and even before we got the bracket, and then once we saw the opponent we could lock in on a really good Clemson team, so I think you'll see a team that's very, very hungry to play.

Q. I know we've mentioned Juju a couple times here. How is the rehab going? There's no chance of a surprise start or anything coming out tomorrow --

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: There's no chance of that. There was a point where she was doing something and I think we were heading into a big Big Ten game. I said, if we just put her in a warmup, just to see the reaction of the other coaches would be funny. But no, she's doing what she's supposed to do. I think we've played the long game with it. Obviously her career and her overall health is the most important thing. She looks great. She's doing great.

It's been a good year for her. She had a chance to go to the USA Basketball camp. Obviously she didn't perform, but to be around those players and that culture was really good for her. I think, like I said, she's tried to get everything she can out of a situation that I don't one would have chosen a year ago at this time, no one would have fore seen it, but given the circumstances the only thing you do is battle through it and that's Juju's mentality and she's attacked every piece of rehab like the star that she is.

Q. What do you do on the plane? Do you watch film the whole time or do you almost over-coach to a point where you can just overthinking things by watching too much?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Well, this week, I think the most fun thing I did this week with prep, my son is in third grade, and he goes to a really amazing school, shout-out the Willis school, and they have something called Intercession the week before spring break, so they do experiential learning so they got to choose different segments. There was one called March Mathness, so I don't know that any other coaches were doing this, but I had to prepare -- they asked me to prepare a presentation for third through fifth graders on the analytics, how math and basketball are interrelated.

So that was a good, like, break for me from Clemson specific, to talk to third to fifth graders.

The only issue I had -- so yesterday my kids are at home yesterday, go on Instagram and the school posts a thing and there's a kid from the class that I talked to, it was like a snippet and the kid is standing up to do a presentation, and it's why Joyce Edwards is the most efficient player in the tournament and why South Carolina is going to win the National Championship, and I said, okay, I must have taught him something. That's not exactly what I said.

But no, they've been doing a ton of stuff. It's just awesome.

So that was one cool thing to kind of -- not distract me but have as a separate thing, but watch a ton of film, obviously, try to do some bonding things with our team. Once in a while I can break myself away from film and watch a show, but just trying to do as much as I can to help our team be prepared to win.

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