

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Southern California vs South Carolina

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Columbia, South Carolina, USA
Colonial Life Arena

Southern California Trojans

Lindsay Gottlieb

Jazzy Davidson

Londynn Jones

Media Conference

South Carolina - 101, USC - 61

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, I mean, first off, I want to congratulate South Carolina for going to the Sweet 16. They're obviously really, really good and incredibly difficult in this environment. Just a well-balanced, well-equipped team, and wish them luck as they continue on.

For us, it's a hard way to end. Obviously, wish we had competed better, but I'm also really proud of some of the things that we did this year. It's been hard, obviously, not being exactly at the level and standard that we've set, and at the same time, I wouldn't change anything because that's part of it, right? It's the journey and the growth and the learning.

I told them in the locker room that there wasn't one day that I wasn't excited to come to work. There wasn't one day I wasn't excited to work with this group. I think tonight is really a good thing for us to understand where we need to get, where we will get, what it takes to get there, and at the same time, not trading any of the experiences. In particular, I said this on our senior day, we had two seniors who chose to spend their last season with us, and to their credit it never felt like a one-year thing. It never felt temporary.

So Londynn and Kara will be wearing other jerseys next year, either in the W or overseas, but they will always,



always have a place at USC, and that's something that makes me feel really good. I think the rest of our team will benefit from having had them and will benefit from these experiences. Jazzy has, in particular, taken on every single thing this season and grown from it. That's going to be part of her greatness. I think she and I will look back at this day when we took a butt kicking her freshman year in an NCAA tournament, and it will be very, very different at some point, and I think that's because of how she's handled every single situation she's been in.

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

Q. Londynn, you've obviously been to the tournament multiple times now, but what made this trip particularly special?

LONDYNN JONES: I think just the group of girls, I think the relationships that I've built. I mean, I decided to come here my last year and there was no doubt that that's what I wanted to do. Obviously, me and Coach Lindsay had a relationship. But just the staff, the relationships that I've built with the girls, how connected we are off the court, it's so much more than just basketball, so it's meant so much.

Q. Jazzy, they had you guys on your heels early. What were they doing or were they doing anything specifically to kind of take advantage of their strengths and not allow you guys to get where you wanted to be?

JAZZY DAVIDSON: I think just the rebounding. They're an elite rebounding team. We let them get too many second, third, fourth, fifth chance opportunities and we know we knew if we wanted a chance to win, we couldn't do that.

Q. Jazzy, I noticed you getting emotional when Londynn was talking about coming here. How much has she meant to you being that senior leader? I know it's only been one season, but obviously you guys have a pretty close bond. So how much has she and Kara meant to you this season?



JAZZY DAVIDSON: Oh, my God, they mean everything to me. They have gotten me through some really hard times this season, and I'm just so grateful to have been teammates with them even if it was only for one season. They're just genuinely amazing people and I have no doubt that they're going to crush whatever they do next.

Q. Jazzy, I know it's probably really tough to look ahead right now, but what do you think this season has meant to you as a person and for your development too as a player?

JAZZY DAVIDSON: Yeah, it's meant a lot. I've grown so much not only as a player, but just as a human being, just about myself, and I'm really excited for the off-season to get back in the gym, get better. Yeah, I'm excited to come back next season, yeah.

Q. Londynn and Jazzy, I know you guys talked about the rebounding, but if you could just expand a little bit more on the physicality of South Carolina, like, how tough is it to just score against a team like that. Obviously, they're pretty big, they're pretty physical, and how tough is it?

JAZZY DAVIDSON: Yeah, they're an elite defensive team, there's no doubt about that. They have been all season. That's definitely a huge part of their identity. We just had to be tougher with the ball throughout the game. The turnovers were another big thing for us just as a group.

LONDYNN JONES: Yeah, I mean. I think when you play a really good team, you do scout, you know how they're going to come out and play. I think it kind of just mattered on us, like she talked about, turnovers was a big thing for us. It started early, and I think just kind of trying to gather ourselves and trying to figure that out through the course. But I think that was a big factor.

Q. In reference to scouting this team's defense, Londynn, I know Agot Makeer had a strong defensive performance tonight. She came off the bench. Was that something that you guys accounted for or practiced for or was not on your radar very much?

LONDYNN JONES: We have a really good staff. We're prepared for everything that gets thrown our way. Like I said, it's kind of just on us. We were prepared, our scout was great, so I just think just coming out there and not executing it.

Q. Kennedy was kind of a spark plug for you guys early on. What did her leadership and just her toughness mean in this game tonight?

LONDYNN JONES: Yeah, I mean, I think Kennedy's very consistent in what she does. We know what we're going to get from her, and I think that that helps. You don't always have to be vocal to be a leader. I think can you lead by example, and that's kind of what she does. So just stepping up when we need her and kind of just following after that.

JAZZY DAVIDSON: I think exactly what she said. She's been a great leader for us all season and that didn't waver in this game. She always puts her hundred percent in every possession and, yeah.

Q. Jazzy, what do you feel like playing a team like South Carolina showed you as you head into the off-season? Like you said, you're excited to get back into the gym. What are you trying to work on?

JAZZY DAVIDSON: I need to get better. That's kind of the bottom line. I think, obviously, it's hard to lose in general, but losing this way really sucks, and I think I could have done a lot better for my team today.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse you to the locker room and take questions for Coach.

Q. It looked like after -- you guys had absorbed that first blow, and it seemed like you were stabilizing a little bit. There was still a big gap, but at least were you going toe-to-toe with them for a little bit. What changed? Did they find another gear? Did you guys --

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, I think you're talking about when it was 31-15, we felt like we had won a couple possessions in a row. I think, as Jazzy kind of said, it started out and it was the rebounding. I think they didn't score on their first shot attempt for several possessions early on, but they were scoring off second-chance points. So I thought we stabilized the rebounding thing for a minute, and then we turned it over just in bunches and bunches.

So I want to say that it was 31-15, and then they went on, like, a 16-0 run. I think it was turnovers and -- I mean, you can't compete that way. They're physically kind of superior just in terms of size, and so you got to box out. And then once we, kind of like you said, absorbed that blow, then we threw it to them a number of times. Again, credit their pressure. They're really good. It's not like we were doing it to ourselves. They were making a concerted effort, I think, to just deny Jazzy as much as possible, heat up other areas, sag off certain areas to kind of take away the gaps on the floor, and, yeah, they were just better at it than we were at handling it.

I was disappointed at halftime. You know, you can lose and you can not necessarily be as good as a team, but I thought we were conceding some things. You don't need to throw the ball to the other team. We had some careless things that I wasn't pleased with and just wanted to see a different competitive level in the second half. I thought we tried to do that in times. Obviously, I thought we were trying to put up a fight, but we weren't good enough, and that's a good lesson for us as well.

Q. How did you see Londynn's previous tournament experience pay off tonight?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, I mean, she's obviously unafraid of any moment. We were trying to get her free for shots even against Clemson. Like, I knew that that was a weapon for us. I thought we got her some good looks against Clemson. They didn't go down. But we have a ton of confidence in her ability to make shots, so was trying to get her as many looks as possible because we knew to upset a No. 1 seed we're going to have to hit a bunch of threes and try to open things up a little bit.

Obviously, it got her going later than we wanted to, but we know what she's capable, and she can put up double-digit points in a hurry.

Q. Agot Makeer had four steals and a block off the bench. What did you see from her working against your starting lineup?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, just tremendous defensive energy. She obviously plays that role extremely well. Then I think sometimes when you're young and you're coming off the bench, you can hone in on one role. I'm not saying -- look, she had 15 points or something as well, but you can lock in on what your job is and just in kind of watching their media availabilities, clearly that's something that Raven has tried to pass on to her, being a lockdown defender. Her length, her ability to get up and get in passing lanes was really disruptive for us.

Q. You said the other day in order to be the best you have to beat the best. As you continue to move the program forward, what do you still feel like is needed in order for you guys to now beat the best?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, we had conversation about that in our locker room a little bit. I think this year -- this season there's been four, five, six teams that have sort of been in an elite group, and then there's been, like, 7 through 35, maybe, who people could beat each other, and they're all kind of tournament teams. Obviously, some teams are closer to 7 and some teams are closer to 30.

But I think that I was really proud of the Clemson win because we've been in that mix against good tournament teams in our conference. We've lost some and we won some, right? And then there's a gap between the elite, and that kind of was us last year, and that's what our standard is now and that's where we want to be. So for us, obviously, that's, you know, figuring out from a roster construction standpoint -- we know what we have coming in next year already. We know, you know, what we have returning and we're excited about that. But you also kind of figure out is there anything else we need? Like, from whatever, everyone now looks and says, okay, how do we get to that and is it roster construction or is it working on improvement? When you have a lot of returning players, you have to focus on improvement.

And then there's -- obviously, you're always continually working on culture and what it takes to win. So all of the things. It's why I wouldn't trade anything from this year. I think we did a lot of really good things, and I think we learned a lot of really good lessons that will help us, will help me ultimately get us where we want to be.

Q. Something I noticed on the bench was that anytime she didn't really agree with a call, JuJu was the first one up like, Oh, what? How important has she been for the team? Even though she hasn't played, obviously, she brings a lot of energy, I think, especially to the bench. So how important has JuJu been for team, even though she hasn't been able to lave up her shoes?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, it will be 365 days tomorrow since that kid got hurt. She was the National Player of the Year. Like, she's transcendent, right? And just to see a young person take a negative thing, you know, and a devastating thing and essentially -- you know, her shoes are called the Silver Linings, right? Like, essentially pour in in every way to this year. I actually said that to her in the locker room. You know, I remember feeling an extreme amount of pressure heading into that game. We were a 1 seed, we were at home, and then the unthinkable happens.

And I think it will probably change my perception of pressure for the rest of my life because when that happens, you kind of cede control of what -- you know, of what it is and you just try and get yourself ready. And I told her, I just think we all, because of how she's handled it, are just going to see an incredible amount of silver linings from it. So that's how she's been all year. It's extremely authentic.

I mean, I see everyone puts her on camera all the time. That's just her being who she is. She's poured into the team in quiet moments. She's poured into the team in

public moments. She has worked her ass off in rehab. I mean, every rep is with precision in the weight room and rehab and shooting and stuff now.

So, you know, no one would have chosen it for her, but I think 365 days later I've learned so much more about her and just everything that she is as a human. I think, you know, we're just excited to get her back. But, you know, again grateful for every moment we spent with her this year, even when she couldn't play.

Q. You've been able to land a couple high-ranked recruits this season in this crazy season. So what makes this program attractive for recruits right now, and just what let's you know that this program is on the right track for the future?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I mean, it obviously starts with an administration that when I got hired was more of a partner than like a boss situation. Like, hey, let's make USC women's basketball relevant again. Let's do this together. And that's what it's been. We had a change in administrations, but similar mentality the entire time. There's an investment, and that doesn't just mean money, it means emotional investment to women's basketball to say, hey, in this new era of college athletics, let's do something special. So we've been building that since the day that I came there and that our staff came there. We've been able to attract really, really good people, staff and players, to want to be part of something. We've had some really good success the last couple years and I think we've shown people that we can be a player, you know, in this elite level of women's college basketball. And that's what I think great players are drawn to, a place where they can have a great education, be in an area that is just unbelievable for sports and women's basketball in L.A. now, and be with people that are going to hopefully help you on the court and off the court reach as many goals as they can individually and as a team. So we feel like we're on the right track. I wouldn't even call this a setback, I would call this a part of the journey to get where we're trying to be, and I think our time will come. But not without work. Not just we show up next year. Like it's going to take a lot of work by a lot of people. But we know where we want to be, we have seen it. We've been there almost, you know, two Elite 8s, and now we've not been there, and that's going to be a driving force to getting us to where we want to go.

Q. Talking about that game, I mean there was a point late in the third quarter they had I think 19 foul shots and you guys didn't have any. I'm guessing it's very frustrating, but was some of that maybe -- was it your team not getting in positions where, you know, some of those fouls could be called because they weren't at

the basket, you know?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, I mean, whatever it was, whatever it was to zero, it was unique. But they play through the paint and they play through the post and we are more perimeter oriented. I still think contact is contact, but I'm not going to comment on the rest of it, other than to say they got to the free-throw line a lot more, but, you know, that wasn't obviously the difference in the game, but you know, I would have liked to have seen something different, but...

Q. After the first round or first regular season matchup in the neutral site Coach Staley called it a win for women's sports, being able to see two great programs. I know the season didn't end where you wanted, but in this arena, with your fans traveling as far as they did and the event space, do you feel the same way, was it a win for women's sports here today?

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I think it would have been better if it was a closer game. We're coming here next year to play them in the second half of that thing, I believe it's in Greenville. Everyone's saying on the men's side it's such a great city. But look, the way that they packed the arena, the type of atmosphere it was, is a positive thing. I think closer games in the second round is where women's basketball should be heading. The 1 seeds and 8, 9s aren't quite there yet. But obviously anything we can be a part of to continue to grow the game, move it forward, I think that's what USC women's basketball's about. We have really exciting players, we try to center the team and play a brand of basketball that will continue to help grow it. I think along with South Carolina, we want to be one of those teams in these marquee matchups that draws a lot of attention. I know when we come next year there will probably be a lot of excitement around that as well.

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