

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Alabama vs Louisville

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Louisville, Kentucky, USA

KFC YUM! Center

## Louisville Cardinals

## Jeff Walz

## Tajianna Roberts

## Laura Ziegler

### Media Conference



But I think this shows that we're serious, and also we get to spend more time together. We can watch film whenever and get treatment. We just get to prepare in a way that's good when you are in a hotel like that, still having the benefits of hosting. So I like the way that we have that balance. It's been good foundation. I like the way we've been doing it.

TAJIANNA ROBERTS: I think Coach Walz made it a point to let us know it is a business trip, and we're here to get the job done, and I think that's what our main focus is. Being able to host we're still familiar with the arena and stuff like that. We have the best fans in the city, so it's great to have them. We definitely felt them yesterday. They were there for us. They showed up, and they showed out like they always do. So we appreciate the fans and always being there for us.

**Q. Kind of a two-part question, one for each of you. Laura, what's this experience been like for you being in March Madness for the first time? Taj, for you what has she brought to the team this season?**

LAURA ZIEGLER: I think it almost makes me -- almost makes me a little emotional talking about it, because it is a little girl's dream playing March Madness. It was one of the reasons I wanted to come here with the legacy Louisville has, Coach Walz' record, the way that Louisville just wins.

I was a little emotional after the game. I tried to hide it a little bit, but it just means a lot. I think playing, coming from mid-major, we know how difficult it is to get here. I've been around so many great players that never got the chance. So I'm just really, really grateful that I did it.

Talking to my family yesterday, I was saying -- it was just almost a little surreal, so I just really appreciate the opportunity for being here, and also just winning, you know? Not just going in here being happy playing one game, whatever it is, but going in here with goals of going really far and winning and hopefully tomorrow and moving on to the Sweet 16 and everything.

It has been really special, and I think I'm very grateful that I

THE MODERATOR: We welcome Laura and Taj and open it up for questions.

**Q. Laura, seeing Essence yesterday make I think it was three or four 3-pointers yesterday, does that change anything in your mindset about how to possibly go up against her, or does that change anything about attacking Alabama's offense?**

LAURA ZIEGLER: I think her hitting three threes yesterday obviously shows she can do it. We know she can shoot the ball. I also think we still look at the scouting report as a whole, you know, conference play, everything, see where she is most efficient. We know she's very efficient in the paint when she catches the ball.

So obviously her shot is something we have to respect, and we have to know that. I think whenever you go into a game like that, you also look at what would be the most dangerous, like, what are you expecting? You see a little bit over more games than just that one why yesterday and just understanding the match-up in that way.

**Q. While this is a home pod, Coach Walz has set up in hotels to try to simulate the road environment. You have a couple of home losses you would like to have back. Has that helped you guys from a mental preparation standpoint?**

LAURA ZIEGLER: I think the way we did that just shows it's a business trip for us, even though we're still Louisville. We still feel the city of Louisville. We go out to eat last night. We have people stopping us everywhere, talking to us, saying they're coming to the games.



get to end my college career in that way. I'm very grateful for Coach Walz bringing me here and giving me that experience.

I think I'm around a lot of people who are used to winning. Whether it's my coaches or my teammates. They have been here. I lean on them. They know the experience, but I think it makes it a little more special for me being the first time and only time as a player, but it means a lot to me. It has been a dream for a long time, so I'm very grateful.

TAJIANNA ROBERTS: Laura, I think she's brought so much for this team, not only on the court, but off the court as well. For me personally, she's a pressure release, you know, helping me bring up the ball, but off the court she has taught me to be a leader in so many different ways.

I don't know if she knows it, but I'm going to take what she has taught me to next year. The way she can communicate and get things across to each and every one of us, I think she's able to bring out the most in everybody.

When I'm a little bit down, I think I can lean on her and let her know that I need you a little extra today. She's going to do nothing but bring positivity, encourage me. You cannot be around Laura and not smile. That's just the person she is, and I think that's the most important thing that's helped us with this team.

She's just a great person to be around, a great positivity. You know, when things are going hard, the coaches are hard on us, she's always there to let you know this is a game of basketball, to still have fun. But I think she has taught me so many things that she doesn't even know, and I will always appreciate her.

**Q. Following up on that, Laura, what were some of your favorite childhood March Madness memories, dreaming of coming and playing on this stage?**

LAURA ZIEGLER: Some of my earliest memories of watching basketball is watching March Madness. Just being at home with my dad, you know, talking about everything, having the dream of going overseas and playing college. Watching every team play and kind of being, like, Oh, you could do that or you could do that for them, trying to figure out what it takes to get here, because as I said, not a lot of players get to do it.

So I think we always have Arike Ogunbowale doing her thing. With her, the buzzer beaters. But for me it's always been watching people win, but also even now being a senior. When I watch the games, I tend to always watch the people who lose too, because you see emotions and see how much it means to everyone.

Right now there's a lot of seniors where their college career is ending in these weeks. I think to me it's always been the emotion, like how much it means to everyone, because it's not just that one year together. You know, it's so many years of work before that when you come and you are with your team, all the people that worked before that.

I was talking about Louisville's legacy. That's not us creating that. That's all the players that came before us, all the coaches. I think for me it's always been watching the emotion, watching all the hard work, and seeing how much it means to people. That's really what I remember the most when I think about March Madness.

**Q. Taj, Jessica had a big game for Alabama yesterday too. What is it about her game that really kind of makes her stand out? What will Louisville need to do to keep her from having a game like she did on Saturday?**

TAJIANNA ROBERTS: Yeah, she's a great player. We watched it live in person. She had a great game.

Alabama, as a whole, they're a great team, and I think we got to stick to our game plan and our identity, which is continue to pressure the ball, get up and in them, deny passing lanes, and guard your yard. So it's one-on-one defense, so the posts don't have to step up and they can drop it off to Essence.

I think our biggest thing is just keying in on what we do best, and that's get up and pressure the ball and defend well.

**Q. Alabama is a team that likes it shoot the three. They shot I think about 23 a game. Only shot ten yesterday and made it a point that if they were challenged, to drive to the rim. In this facing a team like that, is it a pick-your-poison-type of challenge there, or is there a way that you can keep them from getting good looks at the three while also keep them from making drives to the hole?**

TAJIANNA ROBERTS: I think we have to play, like Laura said before, the scouting report and players' tendencies. They love to shoot the three. There are certain players who are shooters, so we're going to try to run them off the line, and we have to rebound.

But I think it's just playing straight-up defense, because we saw their capabilities of being able to attack and get to the basket. They did a very good job of kicking -- getting in the gap and kicking it, which usually they will shoot the three, but yesterday they decided to drive. So I think we just got

to play them straight-up and guard them for what their tendencies are.

LAURA ZIEGLER: I think too right now it would seem this year is a great team, and as much as I would love for us to completely stop Alabama tomorrow, they're probably not going to score zero points. So I think it's about choosing too. It's about making it as difficult as possible.

As Taj said, knowing the tendencies. We know the top players, their one, two, three top tendencies, and just knowing we can't let that happen. We got to make them get in their bag, do something they're be not as comfortable doing and takeaway threes, but also knowing is it right-handed drives, who likes to get in the lane. Just make it as difficult as possible for them to do what they want.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for your time today. Welcome to Coach.

JEFF WALZ: We're happy to be able to play tomorrow against a really good Alabama team. Coach Curry has done a great job putting together a very, very good team. They've got good guard play, great post play, so we're going to have our hands full, but our kids are excited and looking forward to the opportunity to compete again tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. After Essence hit three 3-pointers yesterday, did that affect anything about your game plan moving forward against the Tide, or is that just something that may be a one-off or outlier type thing?**

JEFF WALZ: She's made a few during the season as well. Obviously three of them in one game was a season high for her. She's got a very nice stroke from out there.

We're going to know where she is on the floor. I can't say we'll face guard her at the 3-point line, but we're not going to allow her to just sit out there and not at least contest the shot. I'm sure it's similar to E for us and Laura at times. You have to know where everybody is on the floor, but at the same time, we know where she does most of her damage, and that's in the low block.

**Q. I asked Laura and Taj this as well. Them only shooting ten threes yesterday where they normally have shot about two and a half times that, is it a pick-your-poison-type thing where you make sure that they don't dash inside if they're guarded on the perimeter, or how do you look to get that kind of happy medium, I guess?**

JEFF WALZ: Well, I mean, we played some really good teams within our league, so there are scouting reports out on each one of their players. Our kids know, hey, here's what their tendencies are. Alabama does a great job. Their guards get to the basket well. They are going to attack.

You've just got to do the best you can to play one-on-one defense, try to keep them in front of you, and make them score over you. I think in yesterday's game Rhode Island was really trying to turn the heat up some, which was I think making Alabama drive more, and they did a great job of finishing.

For us, we're going to keep playing the way we have. We have to make sure we know where Timmons is at all times, especially with the way she can shoot the three and score the basketball. But Collins played extremely well. They've got a lot of players. You aren't playing in the Final 32 if you don't have a good team.

We've got a ton of respect for them, and we know we're going to have to be dialed in to make sure defensively we're on point.

**Q. Alabama, most of their production yesterday came with their starting rotation, which has been the theme for them all season. When you are matched up against a team like that, considering the depth that you guys have, are you motivate to do try and maybe speed up the pace a little bit to try and get them worn down?**

JEFF WALZ: You know, everybody has said it all year. We have depth. What we have is we have seven kids that can score the basketball. It's not like we're playing a 13 or 14 of them. So we're going to keep playing the way that we have. At times we'll press. At times we'll play some zone. We're going to try to mix things up as much as we can to keep them as off balance as possible.

Vermont was the same way. If you let teams get comfortable in what they do, they're really good at it. If you play us one way the entire game, we're probably going to have a lot of success as well. We're just going to have to try to as the game goes, make our adjustments both on the defensive end and the offensive end.

**Q. Jeff, you were talking yesterday about Mack's performance and her way of playing bully ball. It might be unfair to compare players from past teams and so forth, but is she probably the closest you've had to Myisha Hines-Allen since Myisha was here?**

JEFF WALZ: It's hard to compare. Mack has made more

threes, obviously, than Myisha did, but Myisha was as good from 15 to 18 feet of any player we've ever had here. Then because she was really good from that area on the floor, she could put the ball on the floor, she could score at the rim. Then she rebounded the basketball. I think she's one of the top four or five rebounders that we've ever had here.

Then for her, she's developed and continued to grow at the professional level. She's now extended her game out to the 3-point line. If I was Mack and someone compared me to her, I would be flattered because Myisha is one of the best we've ever had here.

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