

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 3 Semifinal - Louisville vs Michigan

Saturday, March 28, 2026

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Louisville Cardinals

Coach Jeff Walz

Tajianna Roberts

Elif Instanbulluoglu

Mackenley Randolph

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Michigan 71, Louisville 52

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to today's press conference featuring the Louisville Cardinals. We have head Coach Jeff Walz and our student-athletes Mackenly Randolph, Tajianna Roberts, Elif Instanbulluoglu. We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach Walz.

JEFF WALZ: Just first like to start off and congratulate Kim and Michigan and her kids. They really competed and played hard.

Unfortunately, it wasn't our best day by no means. I thought in the first quarter we came out. We executed. We defended extremely well. Then uncharacteristically we missed a lot of wide open shots. Instead of being a 15-9, it could have been 20-9.

Then you've just got -- it wasn't our day. I mean, there's not much to say about it. Michigan did some really nice things, but we also missed a lot of open shots. At this time of the year you've got to be able to knock down open shots.

Unfortunately, we struggled in doing that. That's why we're sitting here right now.

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



Q. Tajianna, you and your other two fellow leading scorers, the three of y'all were in double figures. It was a tough shooting night. When you are having a tough shooting night like that or a tough shooting day, what do you try to do? Is it a conversation with yourself, just keep shooting? How do you try to stay in the moment?

TAJIANNA ROBERTS: Yeah, I think you definitely have to stay present and trust the work that you put in all year, because the work you put in is going to show in. You just got to tell yourself to keep shooting, but I think most of all you got to do the things you can control. Like when the ball is not going in for me, I can't control that. I know the work that I put in, and I got to continue to trust that, but it's little stuff like rebounds, 50/50 balls, playing with heart, competing.

So the things that you can control, that's what you got to hone in on when the ball is not going in the basket and try to be impactful in different ways and not focus on in the ball is going in or not.

Q. For all of you, obviously this is your first time at the Sweet 16. What will you take from this experience moving forward to help next year?

MACKENLY RANDOLPH: I think this is going to be fuel for us. I mean, we did it this year, so we know what it looks like and we know what it takes to get here and how hard we have to work.

So starting in June getting in in the summer and just making sure we're focused in on what we need to work on.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time. We'll open it up to questions for Coach Walz.

Q. Coach, definitely a physical battle on the glass today. What did you see down there? What did you see especially on the offensive glass for your team?

JEFF WALZ: No, I mean, it was a very physical basketball game, and it always is at this time of the year. I've been a proponent for 19 years I wish the officiating would be called



like it is now during the entire season, because it lets the players play. Instead of a foul being called every second like we do during the regular season, the kids get to play.

They'll sit there and say, it's not true. Just watch the film. It's true, but it's okay. That's what I tell them. They also spend time in the weight room. That's what you are supposed to do.

Who is working harder and putting the time in to get stronger and working on her ball handling, it shows. Today we missed a lot of shots we normally don't miss. Then we got passive. We got frustrated. We had opportunities against the press to attack, and we just pull it out and try to run an offense.

You know, we've played teams that have pressed like this, and we've carved them apart. We've attacked and shot layups, kept looking to score, and for some reason today we didn't have that mindset.

That was really the issue for us. Then when it comes down to not making shots, they then started to control the glass, because we were spread out trying to get some threes up. Then you've got to give Daniels a ton of credit. She impacts the game in so many ways without really scoring, but it's her ability to continually go to the offensive glass. She had seven of them.

When we were starting to make a run there in the third quarter and we took a lead, she's the one that came up with the offensive rebounds to get them back in the lead.

Q. Coach Walz, you have gone against Kim a few times in the NCAA Tournament. I wonder if there's something that really stands out to you about this particular group that she has maybe in terms of especially the kind of offensive runs they can go on?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Well, you know, Olson and Swords can really shoot the ball. They're really good at pull-up jump shots. They're aggressive. They're strong.

Again, it's one -- it was not a good performance at all by us. It was actually the worst we've had all year. It's they did, but a lot of it was because what they didn't do.

They're a team when they're going to press, and we knew it -- again, we played plenty of teams that press. You can't put the ball on the top of your head, which we did that a lot. You are getting trapped. You've got to look to attack the scorer, and we didn't do that consistently enough.

Again, it was just you can't shoot the ball the way we did and expect to be able to be in a ball game. Besides Elif,

who I thought was outstanding today again, we just didn't have really an offensive threat.

Q. Huge run second quarter. Another huge one third quarter. What do you try to do as a coach when you are sort of in the middle of those trying to sort of --

JEFF WALZ: Well, you are trying to score. When the other team goes on a run, your goal is to try and stop it and score. For us even during those runs, we had some good looks. We had some layups that we missed. Then we hang our head and we don't get back and then they get an easy one. Those are the plays you have to be able to make.

The number of 50/50 balls that we did not come up with was a dagger as well. When you get to this, to the final 16, you have to win the 50/50 balls.

Q. Jeff, just kind of going off of that, the energy just didn't seem to be what maybe it has been before. Was it just the missed shots you feel like got to you guys, or what do you feel like was kind of the reason for maybe some lethargic or not getting --

JEFF WALZ: I really wish I could tell you. Our first quarter I thought our energy was great. I thought we were playing at about 175 miles an hour in a 35-mile-an-hour zone, but our effort was just unreal. We missed some layups, I think because we were going so fast.

Like I said, it should have been 20-9, because I thought defensively we did really a lot of good things. Then you start to miss some shots. We had some breakdowns on communications. We go over a screen instead of trailing them off of it, and they make a nice read and fade to the corner and hit a three.

Yeah, then we went zone to start the third quarter. We make a nice little run. Then we give up offensive rebounds. That's what killed us. The offensive rebounding when we started to make a run there in the third quarter, in March you have to rebound the basketball. You've got win the battle of the boards. Our Alabama game we won the battle of the boards. We dominated it.

Then our free-throw shooting, it's pathetic, and it hasn't been. We were a team that was shooting close to 77, 78%. Our last two games I think we're 8 for 16, 8 for 17, and we're 3 for 9 today, and they're in crucial times.

When I say crucial, I'm not talking at the end of the game it's when the other team is making a run, when Michigan is making a run, we get fouled, we go to the line. You got to make two free-throws, and we don't.

We get opportunity for and-one; you miss. Then they come down the floor and get an and-one. Things like that that hopefully -- you know, I brought these three up here today because those three are going to be our core, and as crazy as it all sounds, they've all signed to come back. They're going to be here. I'm not going to be worrying about them going into the portal. Imari Berry, Grace, we've got a really good group.

Now it's going to be up to me and my staff. We're going to have to get two or three more kids out of the portal depending on who else on the team might go on the waiver wires or whatever you want to call it. If that happens, then we'll get three or four, but you know, we'll hopefully know more about that here in the next week.

Q. Speaking of that, when you have such a young core returning, how crucial is that for continuity with them getting this experience and building on that for next year?

JEFF WALZ: Well, it should help. It should light a little fire under their butt, you know? I told them I was sitting there back when we were waiting to come out, and I told them in the locker room -- I said, identify got Imari, Mack, Taj, our three sophomores that played considerable amounts of minutes.

I'm, like, guys, if I can have one of you, two of, or all of you, make the improvement that Elif made from her sophomore year to her junior year, we're going to be in business because she was by far the best player on the floor for us. And it's not just the fact that she goes 8 for 12. It's 7 rebounds, the way she competes.

She does so much for us on the defensive end of the floor. She's gotten hit in the face more than any kid I've ever coached in my life, but she keeps competing. She plays through pain, which at this time of the year if you expect not to have something hurting, you're crazy. You know, you've played 30 whatever -- 37 games, whatever we played. You're going to have something that hurts.

But there's a difference between hurting and being injured. If you are injured, then you can't play, but if you expect to not be in some type of pain, you're playing the wrong sport.

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