

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Nebraska vs Louisville

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Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Schollmaier Arena

Louisville Cardinals

Coach Jeff Walz

Jayda Curry

Tajianna Roberts

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon everyone. We're with student-athletes Tajianna Roberts and Jayda Curry.

We'll open up questions.

Q. Just talk about kind of the reset you guys have had a chance to have over the last couple of weeks since the tournament and just kind of where your mindset is going into this NCAA tournament.

JAYDA CURRY: We had a good week of practice. I think we focused a lot on our defense and cleaning things up on offense. I think we're excited knowing the tougher, more excited team wins in March and just keeping it game by game knowing when you lose, you're done. So that sense of urgency was there for us this week. We feel good and we're confident we're in a really good spot.

Q. I think this week was big for us in kind of like a reset because it's a new season. So everybody is 0-0. Nobody has won, nobody has lost. So the best is to look forward and focus on one game at a time and stay consistent with ourselves and what we want to do as a team.

Q. Jayda, last year was your first NCAA tournament. Obviously didn't end the way you wanted it to, losing in the first round. Olivia talked about what that meant to her. How much has that fueled you? How much does that kind of stick in the back of your mind going into tomorrow's game?

JAYDA CURRY: I think even for the people that weren't here last year, they kind of feel it from us who were here



last year. We don't want that same feeling. It sucked going home in that first round. Like you said, it was the first time ever for Louisville. Being a part of that wasn't a great feeling and we're doing everything we can to make sure that doesn't happen this year.

Focusing on our last week, like we just talked, we're confident in ourselves and the work we put in. So we're confident going into this game, for sure.

Q. Tajianna, for your first tournament, you obviously had the ACC tournament to get ready, but what did you take from that environment to prepare for the NCAA tournament?

TAJIANNA ROBERTS: For me, it's exciting. It's an opportunity I've seen on TV watching as a kid, just being here, just relishing the moment, stay content and stay where my feet are, just kind of take what I've learned throughout the season and just continue to grow on it, continue to listen to my coaches, you know, stay with what we know and, you know, just learn from each and every moment in each game.

Q. Jayda, when the coaches gave you the intro on Nebraska, what did they tell you that you'd have to do really well to beat them?

JAYDA CURRY: They're a really good team. The Big Ten had the most teams out of any conference in the tournament. So we know how good they are. They made the tournament.

Just watching their film, they played with great pace, they move the ball well on offense. They have a good post presence, as well. It's going to take a lot of things. We gotta control the glass, we gotta push tempo and our defensive pressure has to be really high. It's something that we have to be consistent with throughout the whole 40 minutes and not just the first half or just the second half. We have to be able to put a full 40 minutes together.

Q. Looking at Taj and looking at eight freshman on this team, Jayda, how do you think the freshman are playing now compared to earlier in the season and



how much of an impact have they had in getting you guys to where you want to be this time of the year?

JAYDA CURRY: Yeah. I was talking with Coach AB and talking about February is freshman February. They've grown so much from the beginning of the year. We're only going to go as far as they go. They're the majority of our team.

Regardless, they're talented. They work hard. It's been cool to see them grow from the summer till now. IQ wise and skill wise. It's been fun and I'm excited to see them on this big stage. I know they're going to handle it well. It's exciting.

Q. Jayda, you've grown so much as far as coming into your own this season. You talked about just obviously so much prep work and stuff like that, but just where do you feel like you are mentally and game wise?

JAYDA CURRY: Just a lot more confident. Last year, I think was a big transition period for me. I went through the ups and downs of that. This year, still has its ups and downs, but I think I grew more as a leader and a senior and things of that nature. Skill wise, always trying to get better in that department, but I think mentally for me was the biggest area of growth and something I feel like I worked on from last year and it's shown that it's improved a lot this year.

THE MODERATOR: Any more questions for the student-athletes?

Ladies, thank you for your time. Good luck tomorrow.

We have Louisville head coach, Coach Walz. We'll up to questions.

Q. Center Alexis Markowski, when you see her have her best games, what's she doing for Nebraska.

JEFF WALZ: Everything. Scores, defends, she rebounds the basketball. She's just really impressive. I remember her as a freshman when they came and played at our place in '22. She had a really good game against Gonzaga in that first round. That's back before the transfer portal was open or I would have handed her business cards and offered her money. I mean, you can do all that stuff now. So unfortunately, she's just a few years too old.

But yeah, I mean, great, great player. I was actually there when her dad played and he was a really good player, as well.

Q. Jeff, you have eight freshman this year and that's

got to be kind of difficult getting all of those people virgin to your culture. How have they been this year and how different are they now in March than back when practice started in October?

JEFF WALZ: It's a great group. I think anybody can tell you from watching us from November till now, we've grown as a team. We've gotten a lot better. Our freshman have, you know, had some ups and downs, but I think they're playing a lot more consistent right now for us. Taj has had a fantastic year from start to finish. I thought the game started off slow for her, in the terms of being able to process it. It wasn't going 90 miles an hour and you're trying to get a feel for it. That first game, she handled it well.

As a freshman playing the minutes she played, you struggle some and get tired and you get beat up. She's never had that. She's started every game and played in every single game. So it's not like she had a week off, sprained ankle or anything like that.

The rest of them have continued to grow. I mean our Clemson game with playing with out Jayda and Riss in the first round of the conference tournament, we had four freshman on the floor 50 percent of the time. Then in a game that goes overtime. So it's not like they were out there playing with a 20 point lead and you're not worried about it.

So they've all got a lot of experience and hopefully they're able to carry that over to our game tomorrow night.

Q. If I read it right, your first year as an assistant with Nebraska was Amy's senior year.

JEFF WALZ: Yes.

Q. Just talk about your relationship maybe you have with her.

JEFF WALZ: Amy is great. Still be willing to bet she'd win a Horse game with anybody on her team right now.

You know, it was my first year, our first year as a staff and we came in and inherited a really good group of kids. Some talented players. Anna DeForge was the best player on the team at that point in time. Went to an NCAA tournament that first year.

Amy has been around basketball her entire life. Coaching is part of the family and it has not surprised me that she has had the success every place she's been. She understands the game, her teams are very well prepared. I've been very impressed as I've watched her from afar, as

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

well. She makes good in-game adjustments. She has a good feel of, you know, when to get someone in the game, when to get someone out of the game. I've just been really impressed.

So I'm expecting a great game tomorrow, and excited for her because she is not only a good coach, but a really good person.

Q. Back to the freshman for a second, Nebraska has a couple including Britt Prince. What do you see from her when you watch film?

JEFF WALZ: Britt is a fantastic player. We recruited her hard. My wife and I watched her play. Happened to be the same day our volleyball team was playing in the Final Four. So it worked out great for me, had a chance to go watch a high school game and then go cheer on our volleyball team.

She's been special. I mean all throughout her high school career, her AAU ball, she has a really good flare for the game, understanding the game, she's fun to watch. You know, her signature, she plays with her hair down, you know? Our first goal is we've got two kids with a pair of scissors. When the tip goes up we're just going to cut it and see if it throws her off. That's one thing I've not seen anybody try yet. So we're going to see if it works for us tomorrow. You have to think outside the box and we're trying to.

She's a great kid. She was great to talk to on the phone and fun to watch. She's really, really good.

Q. When it comes to Jayda, obviously you talked about how you have to give her the green light or just how much you encourage her to shoot. Do you think she still has another level to her game?

JEFF WALZ: I think she has a chance to continue to improve there, there's no question about it. But it just got to a point where, as I tell her, for a year-and-a-half, I'd be begging her to shoot the ball. Please shoot it. I keep telling here, no coach that I've ever had had to tell me to shoot. They'd be pleading for me to stop. Finally, our Virginia game, I just told her, if you pass up a shot, I'm taking you out of the game and I don't care if it's the first minute of the game, you will not go back in. You can just sit by me for the rest of the game. And she was like, damn he's serious.

We came out and if you go back, she hit her first two shots, both threes. They called a timeout. I think we went on a 10-0 run. I said, damn, Jayda. I'm a genius. Like, it's not that hard, and now she's finally understanding why put in

all this time and work that she has. She works on her game. She works on her craft. She's got a beautiful shot. She handles the ball well. Now it's time to go out and be aggressive. From that game on, she played herself into First Team All League in a league that's pretty darn tough to become a First Team player and she's doing it efficiently.

It's not like she's scoring 15 or 16 a night taking 28 shots. She's shooting a very high percentage for us. She's passing the ball well, she's gotten better on the defensive end, as well.

I'm just excited for her because I really believe she knows she has more in her. As she continues on with her career, she sees that, okay, she can take her game to the next level.

Q. Coach, going back to the connection with Amy, what is your memories of being in Nebraska and that fan base, but then also just does it kind of feel like a full circle moment, the start of your coaching career, the end of her playing career and now somebody that you helped assist in her senior year is coaching against you in an NCAA tournament?

JEFF WALZ: Well, I'll go back. I really enjoyed my time in Lincoln. It was an eye opening experience when we had a snow storm in October. The beautiful thing about the state -- if it's going to be cold, I want snow. Everybody will tell you, I love snow-skiing, I love to be outside, but the one thing I've always said, I've spent four years at Nebraska, one year at Minnesota, and when the first snow comes, it don't leave. It just does not melt. That's the one thing about it.

So when it snowed in October, and Amy will tell you, if she remembers, I was there with Paul Sanderford was the head coach. Everything is shut down because nobody was expecting it. Paul was like, well we're still having practice. Everybody thought we were crazy, I was in my truck picking up players from their apartments, wherever they lived and we just practiced.

I loved my time there. I've still got dear friends there. You know, I was there right toward the end of Coach Osborne's reign with football and that was the first time I'd ever worked at a place where, you know, there was a wedding on a Saturday and it was football game, nobody showed up for the wedding, including the bride and groom. I mean, it was like football first.

But everybody loved the athletics. If you were an athlete, they absolutely loved you there.



So I enjoyed it. Amy, you know, she's a great person, like I said, really understands the game. As you're sitting there as a 26-year old, I think, or 25, I'm not sure how old I was, but it was my third year in coaching, you know, you're not expecting for this day. I always say it, it's -- I've got players now that are getting married, having families and I'm always around the same age person. They're 18 to 22 and then you see Amy and her daughter is a freshman and I'm like, how is that possible? Everything keeps on going.

You kind of stay in one place because everybody around me stays the same age, and now you're seeing someone like Amy and her family and just really excited for her. What an opportunity to get a chance to come back and coach at your alma mater, and then to be able to do what she's done. It's not easy. There's pressure on her. I think she's handled it extremely well.

Q. Keeping in the relationships theme, what was your relationship like with Dani Busboom Kelly, and, you know, how happy are you for her even it's probably bittersweet for --

JEFF WALZ: We're extremely glad she's gone. She's a royal pain in the ass, nobody wanted to deal with her. What you see is all fraud. You just wait for a few months to go by and then you'll get the real Dani. Ya'll have no idea. God bless ya'll.

No, I mean, Amy -- Dani and Amy are two competitors. So they're going to get along extremely well, and I always say this, this is -- you know, I was fortunate when I got to Louisville. They had just built a new practice facility for volleyball, men's basketball then we went into the old facility. So we never had to share anything, which makes things easy. You're not fighting for practice times. They're not going to have to do that either. So everybody has got their own. So it's easy to cheer for each other when you're not trying to fight to get a practice time because you have class conflicts.

With those two leading your volleyball program and women's basketball, I think you're going to see two that are going to mesh extremely well. Dani did an unbelievable job. What she did for our volleyball program, the excitement that she brought in, her entire staff, the players. She's going to be missed, but we're excited that Dan has decided to stay and take over the reign as our head coach and I think he's going to do a remarkable job.

The day and the age of the transfer portal, for him to be able to keep every single one of them and the recruits is pretty impressive. Or they have a healthy NIL budget. Whichever one the two is. You have to laugh, guys.

I'm excited for both. What other program do you have your women's basketball coach and your volleyball coach as grads. I don't know if there's any other program in the country that has that. It's pretty special. Both of them had great careers as players and I've no doubt that it's going to continue for both of them.

Q. Olivia Cochran, what has she meant to your team, your program and how do you feel about what she's doing down the stretch as she winds up her career?

JEFF WALZ: I'll talk about Olivia and Riss. Both of them are fifth year kids. They're both graduates. They both could have moved on after last year if they wanted to, and to be honest with you, with the COVID kids, as I like to call them, and that's the last class of that, you know, you graduate, you've done everything you're supposed to do, I told them, if you want to try something else, that's totally understandable. You're getting a free year. It's a bonus year. O was like, if I do that, where do I call home? You know, when I'm finished, where is the place that I go back to? And I respected her for that. Riss said the same thing.

They have both given it so much. You had kids as freshman played on a Final Four team, or second year? Was that sophomore year or freshman year? '22, their sophomore year. Freshman year was Elite Eight, sophomore was Final Four, junior year was Elite Eight. They both put a lot of work in, a lot of time. They've been great with our freshman trying to help them understand what our culture is about and what they've got to do and prepare them for this game, especially with what took place last year for us.

You know, a lot of people are excited to make the tournament. That's just not what our standard is. So last year was a tough pill to swallow when we're up 18 in the first half, I think up 12 at half, and just didn't finish things out. So they're able to explain to our freshman the highs of the highs, and then also if you're not prepared to play for 40 minutes, how bad it can be.

Q. Is that your essence of pride to see former players going into the same profession, kind of see them come up in the ranks?

JEFF WALZ: It's neat to see them accomplish goals and dreams that they want to have.

The coaching part is great, but also the Tia Gibbs' of the world who are doing an unbelievable job in Louisville, we're not just going to hang our hat on someone becoming a basketball coach. We want them to find whatever they love and do it. The great thing about being an athlete is you do have an opportunity to graduate debt free. So



you're not going to worry about what's that first job going to pay me because you're not going to be paying back a loan.

I always tell them, when you find something you love to do, then when you go to work each day, it's not work, it's a passion. When it's a passion you become great at it and when you become great at it, the financial side will take care of itself.

It's really neat to see they're out there, Kasza. I mean, you've got Becky Burke who's been doing an unbelievable job at Buffalo. We've got a list of them. That's why I hate to forget one or two of them because I'm getting older, but yeah. I mean, it's really neat to see them and cross paths with them, especially during the recruiting times in the summer.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you everyone. Coach, thank you for your time and good luck tomorrow.

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