

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - UNC Greensboro vs USC

Friday, March 21, 2025

Los Angeles, California, USA

Galen Center

USC Trojans

JuJu Watkins

Talia von Oelhoffen

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by student-athletes JuJu Watkins and Talia Von Oelhoffen.

Q. Juju, when is the last time you've played without a bun, and how did this become a tradition?

JUJU WATKINS: I love that's the first question. The last time I played without a bun. I don't really know. Probably in high school. I used to wear like a puff.

So I don't know. It just kind of became a thing. I started to realize that I played better with it. So I just started wearing it more.

Q. Whether it's the ritual with your mom and the bonding or just something about the hair itself, is there some power to it? Is there something that gives you added confidence?

JUJU WATKINS: Yeah, for sure. I think that's really our time to kind of talk about the game and talk about different things. I never really take that for granted. It's just a cool thing for me and her.

Q. Juju, I know you talked before about the idea of don't move, improve and how that played a part in making your decision. Did that something that came up throughout your childhood, or is that something that came up as you're thinking of that decision? And what was it in particular that stuck about that that led you to decide that you wanted to continue that legacy, the same as your great-grandpa?

JUJU WATKINS: That saying has been a thing in my family. Really big on community work and trying to better the environment that we're in. That was always a thing for



me growing up.

I think as I came into my own and started to grow up a little more, I started to resonate more with it. Definitely was a factor in my deciding process. But at the end of the day I just follow my heart as well.

Q. Is there any sort of pressure in that sense that when you are staying at home, you have people who know you, who count on you, who look up to you? Did you sense that pressure at all when you made the decision? Or has that changed over the course of the time you've been here?

JUJU WATKINS: No, it's just really been a blessing for me, having my family and people from our community coming to our games. It means a lot. Definitely more a blessing than a curse.

Q. Juju, it's been a big year for you, not only on the court but off the court. Your face is everywhere. Can't turn on the TV without seeing you. What does that mean to be such a big figure in this space when so many dollars are now being spent on women's sports? What's it mean for you to be one of the faces of that?

JUJU WATKINS: I think it's really cool. Always in disbelief and super grateful for the opportunity. I think I wouldn't be in this position without the women that came before me and paved the way for me. So I'm very grateful for that.

And I'm having fun. I enjoy what I do so really never taking anything for granted.

Q. Congratulations Juju on being nominated for defensive player of the year, top four. Congratulations. And with that being said, your evolution defensively has come over the year. How do you feel about playing defense now as opposed to offense, being dominant on offense? Have you had to grow to love it, or do you not love it?

JUJU WATKINS: I enjoy it sometimes. It's a part of the game. I really try to be the best on both ends of the floor for my team. So however I can kind of get the momentum



going in any way, definitely going to do that.

Q. Talia, I see you all the time on Instagram incorporating pilates in your workout routine. I'm curious, as some of the facial expressions you're making, it doesn't look like you love it so much but I know pilates is really hard. I couldn't do it. But how has that helped you on the basketball court this year?

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: I love it. It's really fun for me. I enjoy doing it. I think I've just like connected with my instructor that I go to. He's a friend of mine now.

I just enjoy it. I feel it helps a lot with mobility and things like that. It's hard to find time, for sure, but I think it's a part of taking care of my body and it's become kind of part of my routine. I mostly do it because it's fun for me.

Q. Is there a mental aspect to that because the movements are so tough? Does that help you on the court as well?

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: I think my body just feels better when I'm doing it. It's really like she does specific stuff for athletes. It's not just random pilates. There's a reason -- I'll tell her what's tight, what we've been doing and how many days we are away from the game.

She's really good at what she does. I think just that added aspect of it's like when you get treatment, obviously the treatment is working. But when you know you're doing it you feel more confident in how your body is feeling. I feel like it kind of has a similar effect.

Q. Both of you have a little bit of experience in the NCAA Tournament. Talia, you've participated in four. And you've both reached the Elite Eight. What is the mindset going into game one versus going into those games leading up to trying to make a run going forward?

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: I've only participated in two. But I think obviously having recently, last year, going to the Elite Eight and what that group was able to do. I think one thing I took away that team was picked to finish 11th in the Pac-12 before season and we just kept getting better and better.

We played our best basketball in March. And obviously making that Elite Eight run we were one of the top teams in the country.

Knowing that it's an accumulation of the whole season and getting better and better. Obviously this team has had the talent. But it's going to be about playing our best

basketball this time of year.

I think we've been ramping up to that. Played really well towards the end of the regular season. And so I think we're super confident going into it. And having people from three different teams with experience in the tournament and kind of blending our experience together and just having veterans out there that have been in certain situations, I think, is going to help us.

But, yeah, we're definitely feeling confident and ready to play our best basketball yet.

Q. Talia, can you tell me a little bit about Selection Sunday, what was that like from the team from an emotional standpoint, from the start to beginning, the whole event, where you ended up in terms of the bracket? How was that like as a team, how you took it all in?

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: I think it's a super interesting experience kind of knowing that you're going to be a 1 seed. I've never experienced it before. I think a lot of this team hasn't experienced having been at the top of a lot of conversations all year.

There's an aspect we want to be No. 1, like, we're going for a national championship.

So I think knowing that we were probably going to be a 1 seed is just an interesting thing. I think we're all ready to play.

I don't think we were super impacted by the show because no matter where they would have put us or who we would be playing against, who is on our side, whatever, we're just ready to go out and win six games.

So it was cool to have a lot of our fans there and have them supporting us. But, yeah, I think regardless of how it would have went, we're just ready to play.

Q. JuJu, a lot of people hear from you about you. Do you have anything you want to tell the folks about your teammates about playing with this unit of athletes?

JUJU WATKINS: I think everybody's different. And we all kind of bring something different to the table, which I really appreciate.

And I think just all have a will to win. I think that's really important. And every day people come in here ready to go and it's something that pushes me to be better. The sky's the limit for this team, for sure.

Q. JuJu, what's it going to be like? There's two top seeds in this town. There's going to be two arenas full of fans on each side of town. What's that going to be for women's basketball do you think? It's a unique situation, I think, back east, Raleigh-Durham has a similar thing with a lot of women's basketball. But East Coast/West Coast, what's that going to mean for this city in particular?

JUJU WATKINS: Yeah, it's really cool. I think it's really good for California, specifically. I think, I might be biased, but I think this is one of the best basketball cities in the country. So, yeah, it's really cool to be able to see two arenas here that are hosting the biggest tournament of the year.

Q. Talia, I was talking to Kennedy Smith's high school coach. He described her as having a killer instinct from day one that he knew her. I wonder, how have you seen that come out in her as a freshman here?

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: Yeah, I think she's super competitive in everything that she does. Like you said, it's instinctual she doesn't have to force it. It's part of who she is on the court, off the court.

I think she can be hard on herself sometimes, but she expects greatness out of herself. That's what makes her who she is, what makes her so good, that competitive nature and spirit. She definitely brings that to our team.

A lot of times if we're in a lull or need a run, it's always her getting that steal or just applying a little more pressure. That definitely impacts the team a lot.

Q. Hard on herself in what sense?

TALIA VON OELHOFFEN: I think just any mistakes. Like, she just expects super high of herself. I think a lot of people on this team do. It's been cool to see her navigating that and just continuing to show up and get the best out of herself every day.

She's able to get that from herself. Nobody else needs to challenge her because she wants to be the best and have the impact and just always competing. It's something I definitely admire about her.

Q. Juju, you talked about the importance of Watts and your community. How do you feel looking back on your childhood, that Watts, having grown up where you did shaped you?

JUJU WATKINS: Yeah, definitely was very impactful in terms of like my upbringing. And I think the plan is to

always kind of go back to my roots and always be grateful for where I came from because it's helped shape me in so many ways.

I think as I continue to grow, just incorporating my city and everything I do has been a goal of mine.

Q. How do you feel like you've done that or tried to incorporate Watts in what you do the last few years?

JUJU WATKINS: For sure. Every year I do a holiday give-back sort of thing. We just hosted our second one. So continue to do that every year. And then other things that I'm looking to do as well. But that's been the start so far.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports