

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Mississippi State vs USC

Sunday, March 23, 2025

Los Angeles, California, USA

Galen Center

## USC Trojans

## Lindsay Gottlieb

Media Conference



She's been a joy. She brings a tremendous energy every day. You almost have to fight the notion for taking it for granted how her motor is and her personality, and literally bringing that intensity level and energy every day. She's done that.

But I think what I've been most impressed about, and she and I have talked about this, is the journey just around the narrative around it. She had an interesting career at Stanford in that she really didn't sort of become a relied upon star, really, until like midway through her last year there. And she came in here with a ton of eyes, a ton of expectations.

People in their last year thinking about the draft and stuff already have a lot on their plate, but she was put in the fishbowl. I was proud of her ability to stay true to the process, and why she came here and what she was looking for.

I've said this publicly and I've said this to her: We are nowhere near the kind of level or echelon or have the goals that we have if she's not here. Like she's an incredible part of that, and she really has grown.

From the defensive end, and I know WNBA teams recognize this, she can guard anybody. We have her switching on screens. We have her guarding bigs, we have her guarding smalls. She can play in the post. She can stretch it. She can handle the ball; her passing. I think she's grown in a lot of ways on the basketball court.

But to me, the maturity of getting out of her comfort zone, when it would have been easier to stay where she was when things worked around her in a familiar system, to say, I'm going to get out of that and I'm to grow myself and go in a bit more of a pro-style system and go play at home with all the expectations of trying to compete for a championship, I think she's taken it all on.

And you know, I really want for her to get everything kind of that potentially can come at the end of the rainbow, sort of thing, because she's given everything to us.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Thanks for coming out. We are excited to still be playing. To have won one game here in L.A. at Galen Center against a really tough opponent, a well-coached opponent, and a team that earned their way to the Monday game just like we did.

So our players are focused are ready, and we're looking forward to Monday night.

**Q. You've played a lot of really good bigs on your schedule. How does Okot compare?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: She was actually much bigger in person than she had seemed on film, which sometimes happens. I think she's got really good hands. She moves well. You know, when you've played Lauren Betts three times, I don't think our players are rattled by the sight of a good big.

But we have a ton of respect for her. She's legit, and we've got to be ready to go.

**Q. I was wondering, has anything Kiki has done surprised you this year? What did you expect from her coming in from Stanford, and how have you seen her grow this year?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Even though you get to know somebody in the recruiting process. But we had a close glimpse of her for the years that she was playing at Stanford, and I had even seen her on the club circuit.

But you never know what someone is going to be like from day-to-day. I don't know if "surprise" is the right word, but she impressed me day-in and day-out. When she first started practicing, I was like, Dang, I only get her for one year? I was like, First world problems, Lindsay. Focus on the fact we do have her for a year.



**Q. You guys really got after it with the press the last game. What did you learn about your team in terms of what they can do well beyond just a result on the court that you're going to be able to take forward going into the rest of the tournament?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: We know that the press is a weapon for us. Certainly when our offense is sputtering in any way, it's a good defensive weapon for us, but also kick-starts our offense. We know that's something that's in our arsenal.

I thought we did a really good job of using that press to give us some energy that then we carry over into every aspect of the game. It's just one of the things that that I think we're capable of doing.

**Q. Last game at Galen Center on the season. Can you give me a recap of what this year has been like for you guys and the home crowd and what they have given to your squad?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, it's unbelievable where we've come. I was telling myself that to the talent that was in there calling the game for us. They said, It's a great crowd here.

I said it would feel even greater if you were here two or three, four years ago.

When really the knock on this place, I would hear all the time in recruiting is, Oh, they can't get fans and can't support women's basketball. Yes, we can. Yes, they can. Yes, they have. It's been incredible to see.

But it's not just that it's full. There's an unbelievable energy. I'm so impressed and enamored by our crowd. They are awesome. They are fun. Throughout the course of this year, it's been like a movie, with the celebrities that have been here, and the people that come all the time. You know, the little girls in their JuJu jerseys, and now we have everybody else's jerseys out there, too. You know, Rayah jerseys and all of that.

There's just an unmatched energy. I think you have to be here and experience it to really understand it's different than other people's crowds, and I'm really grateful for it. And I'm really proud of how we've built it and how L.A. and the community that's shown up. I think we are very much the community's team here, and it's cool to just be a part of that. And I'm hoping that it's a big factor on Monday night because we need a great crowd and I know they will show up for us.

**Q. On the men's side, there's talk about possibly**

**expanding tournament field. And I'm wondering, on the women's side, what your thoughts are on the possibility of making this a bigger event with more teams?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, you know, to be honest, I like to read a lot of stuff about sports from a global perspective. But I haven't spent much time thinking about that just because I'm so locked in on what we are doing.

You know, typically, I'm always like open to change and progressive ideas. But I think we all think we've got a pretty good product, and it's a pretty unbelievable tournament. So I don't really have a strong feeling. But it's hard to think anything gets better than what we have.

But you know, I'd have to do a little bit more studying to see what I really think.

**Q. With the growth of the women's basketball, is it time to change to neutral sites for the first and second rounds?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I don't know that we're there yet. I mean, I think that the energy you're seeing across the country, we have now built it to where all the home sites, I think, really are great crowds.

I thought it was an incredible crowd for the second game yesterday. I think our fans are savvy basketball fans and stayed. I thought Cal traveled great, and I thought Mississippi State brought a contingent.

I think you lose something if you go to neutral site, and you just never know, right. You just never know what that's going to bring. I think there's a ton of growth in women's basketball, and ultimately you want to get sold-out buildings on neutral courts, and then it really is the most even kind of tournament.

But I'm not quite sure that we're there yet. But we're getting there.

**Q. Can you talk about Malia, the things she does off the court that's not necessarily shown on the scoreboard?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, we've talked about this as a staff. I think every player at every level from middle school to high school to college to the pros, to study the way that Malia has really handled her role. I don't know that there's someone better at being ready for what they are supposed to do and coming in and doing it well.

And I don't think that's just something that you wake up



and say that's what I'm going to do. I think you have to buy into that and feel that and find a way to be ready in big moments, when maybe it's not necessarily 30 minutes every game, in every moment that your name is called and she's a huge part of what we do.

Her defense, particularly at the point of attack and stopping and pressuring the ball is huge. Her ability to run an offense as the point guard, pick her shots, use her explosiveness to get to the paint, but also set us up she's been really impressive.

She's been a really important part of our depth, and we rely on our depth in a lot of different ways.

**Q. You talked about the press being a weapon, kind of on both sides. I wonder how that's progressed over the time that you've been here. Has Beth been constantly adding more to it or is it a matter of the personnel changing, or how has that gotten better?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Since I hired Coach B we used what we call this "mad dog press." There's times and flow of how much we use it or not as much or what-have-you. Sometimes it depends on us and our personnel. Sometimes it depends on opponents.

But I think what has happened is the personnel has grown into those roles. We talked about Rayah yesterday. Rayah has been one of the mad dogs, her spot on the press for a couple years but she's really evolved to now where she could teach a clinic in it. She could be in the video for the mad dog, how you play the mad dog.

And I think what we have learned over the course of this season with all of our personnel is how to feed off one another. I think you see in the halfcourt, too, people have learned how to feed off Kennedy's defense or Malia's defense at the point of attack or what Rayah can do, or what JuJu can do protecting the bass she tell with her shot blocking.

With our press, it's the same kind of thing. You tweak the press, but more so you figure out who can do what and how can you feed off other people.

**Q. Playing Mississippi State tomorrow, but it could have been Cal. You guys have seen Cal a bit over the past few years in Pac-12 play but for them to get it the tournament, what have you seen about the way they have grown?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Cannot be more proud of Charmin and that group.

Charmin and I talked a lot when I was in the NBA, and they had the COVID year and the struggles. People don't really see what it takes to get to the other side. And I think Charmin and her staff really weathered that storm, got creative, figured out how to be good, and then coached the heck out of that team.

You know, I nominate her in a WBC Award for Coach the Year. I think she have been in conversations for ACC Coach of the Year, National Coach of The year. I think it's easy to look at teams that are 30-3, and coaches have done great jobs but sometimes teams that are picked to finish whatever they were in their conference, 13, 14 and end up in the top half and a solid tournament team don't get talked about enough.

I also think, again, I watched them and know them there before they were in our bracket, right. For someone like Michelle Onyiah to stay five years and improve as much as they did, and you know figure out the new people that are coming in; and I was super proud of Kayla Williams stepping in there and playing great for them. She's a USC graduate and did amazing things for us.

I think that group did a lot of great things. And like I said, it would have been hard to face them here. That's why you never want to -- but just to sit back and watch, their scouting, I don't think they were at their best.

But I also wrote Charmin a text that said they should only be thinking about how proud they are of what they did, and I thought they really brought Cal Basketball back to what we all known it to be, and root for them to do so. Just to take a moment to say what a great year they had is really important.

**Q. Just to go back to that conversations about hosting sides, what do you think about the women's tournament going back to four regionals?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I've thought a little bit more about that recently. Look, this year, having two regional sites, hypothetically, could be an advantage for a team like us if UCLA, let's say, was the top team in the west. Then you know we wouldn't have been in the west, right. So okay, you give yourself a chance.

But when you look at it, just as I've thought about a little bit to have a Spokane and a Birmingham, and the Final Four is in Tampa, just seems a little bit -- there's a lot of travel involved for most people, right. You know, you get teams that will make it to Spokane, are coming from the east, are having have to go really far west, and then go back if they were to go to Tampa.

I don't know. I don't have all the answers. I don't know why they did it, to focus on two places and try to build up fans there. But you also kind of leave out sections of the country that find it harder to get to certain places. I'm not the expert on that.

When they make me czar of women's basketball, I'll delve more into it. But I think there's pros and cons. But the more I'm hearing from colleagues, I think people like the two sites less.

But we've got it for a while. So to me, wherever they tell us to go, we're going to go. We're obviously focused on winning a game tomorrow. I haven't really thought too much about locations at all. But all of us that when you are in it, we're going to go where they tell us to go.

I think the two sites, I think it needs a little bit more time for people to decipher whether it's the right thing.

**Q. I asked all the players about pace. This year, this team has had really good pace in the fast break. Yesterday in the first quarter, of course you guys didn't play as well as you wanted. I noticed that you told them to push the ball up a lot. How important is having a good pace and getting the ball up and starting the offense going forward through March Madness and all these games?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Yeah, I mean, we just when we are fast, there's not a lot of teams that are as fast as we are. Like any other thing, if you have an advantage if you're a great three-point shooting team, you'd be silly not to shoot threes or if you're a great X, Y and Z.

For us, playing fast is something that we do well. So we do like to generate pace. You can do that off missed baskets, and you go, and you can do it off made baskets and not walk it up; and you can certainly do it off turnovers and pressing when you're trying to create tempo. So we try to do it in all different ways. We do feel like we would rather play a faster game than a slower game.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports