

# Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 6, 2025

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

## Louisville Cardinals

## Jeff Walz

## Ja'Leah Williams

### Postgame Press Conference



Louisville 70, Clemson 68 (OT)

JEFF WALZ: I just thought it was a really, really good basketball game. I was proud of our kids. I thought Shawn did a great job with his group getting them prepared.

I thought they had a really good plan in place. They played hard. He's really done a nice job, especially when you sit there and you look at basically an entire new roster, and I think he's done a really, really nice job.

That's the one thing I say about our league. I really don't care what a record is, but top to bottom I think our league is very, very competitive.

There's nobody that you're just sitting there going, well, we have this team tomorrow, it's a win. You've got to show up and play every single night, and that's what makes it fun. That's what makes it fun as a coach.

I was also really, really pleased with our kids. We did not shoot the ball very well. But we had some kids in situations and playing a lot more minutes than they played during the season with the injuries we have and was really happy for them, the way they competed.

**Q. Jeff, just confirming Jayda and Merissah's injuries; and for Amari to step up there as a starter, what were you seeing from her in practice?**

JEFF WALZ: Well, first, the injuries, they're just injured. They're injured, but I'm not going to go into detail. I think Jayda may have had a hangnail on her third toe, and she was out. 'Riss, what did 'Riss do? Was she trying to get her food and slit her finger or something?

Guys, I'm not going into what's wrong with our kids.

Unfortunately, they're just not able to play.

It's a day by day thing, so we'll see how Jayda is tomorrow, how 'Riss is tomorrow, and hopefully they might be able to play.

Just really excited and happy for all the kids. Taj played 40 minutes, Ja'Leah played 37, and both of them had a double-double. 12 boards, and just great effort by everybody. I'm proud of them.

**Q. Ja'Leah, you obviously picked up that tricky fourth foul in the third quarter, and then played eight minutes of the fourth without picking up that fifth. What did you see that allowed you to walk that line between careful and aggressive?**

JA'LEAH WILLIAMS: I knew I needed to stay on the floor, so I was very cautious of what I did. It was all about being there beforehand, make my job easier. I'm a great on-ball defender. I'm definitely working on my off-ball.

I took heed to that and just stayed on the ball and make sure my man doesn't get it.

We know our refs do a great job of calling stuff, so I just had to adjust to their game.

JEFF WALZ: You know, I thought Izela was fantastic tonight. We were able to move her over on to McQueen, and that allowed us to get Ja'Leah off the ball. That helped, too, because that took a lot of pressure off of her to where McQueen has it in her hands probably 80 percent of the time, 85 percent of the time to make the play, and it was just going to be a matter of time before she would have fouled out if Ize had not done such a great job, and we felt confident to keep her on the ball.

**Q. Hannah from Clemson hits that clutch three, one of the clutch threes to go into overtime, and then you played good defense down the stretch of that overtime. Can you talk about the adjustment that you had from that moment until the rest of overtime?**

JEFF WALZ: Yeah. I thought we defended extremely well



in the entire fourth quarter. We had held them to 10 until we give up the three there.

I had talked about fouling, and I probably should have. But we had so many freshmen in the game. It's one of those -- then you're taking the chance, I'm trying to make sure I tell the officials, we're fouling. We're fouling on purpose, so all of a sudden they're not in the act of shooting, they give them free free throws.

But we had talked about switching. We were supposed to switch every single screen and did not. We got hung up on 1. And give her props. She hit a big shot. That's a pressure shot.

We had done a really good job on her a week ago at our place, and then today she comes out and she goes 5 of 8 from the field, 4 of 6 from three, and there wasn't a bigger one she hit all night than that one that sent it to overtime.

**Q. You mentioned Izela and Taj. McKinley also had 10 points and some key plays. How much growth have you seen from them? And then Ja'Leah having experience in the ACC Tournament, what do you tell those freshmen to get them ready?**

JEFF WALZ: Well, it's hard to tell them much except for it's survive. You just have to figure out a way to win. It doesn't matter how pretty it is.

That's one of the things that we've talked about from our experience over our 18 years here. The best team doesn't always win at this time of the year. It's just the team that happens to play the best that night. That's what makes college basketball so exciting. It's not a best of three. It's not a best of five.

I thought Clemson really competed and played hard, but we saw them do that last night, as well.

We knew what we were going to get.

Just happy for them. I thought Ize really did some good things. Her thing that she's continuing to grow and continuing to learn is she's always gas. I mean, she's going full go, and there's times where I'm trying to get her to just relax a little bit. She turned it over the one time in the first half and we got it back, she turned it right back over a second time, because she wants to do so well. She wants to make up for the first one.

I just tried to keep telling her, it's a game of mistakes, but you have to learn to be able to evaluate, okay, what just happened on that possession before. Now we turn it over, they scored, we've got to get a good shot.

Those are just things that you learn over time. But I thought she competed. I thought she really did a great job, and she came up with that defensive rebound there at the end when we had to get a board.

She's a kid that I think is going to get better and better if she just trusts the process. We enjoy her personality. She's got a great personality. She's fun to be around. Just love the kid, and I was proud of her, because she guarded as well as she has guarded all year.

JA'LEAH WILLIAMS: With me having experience always told not just them two, but the freshmen to have a goldfish mindset. Like goldfish can't remember what happened next. In this game Coach Jeff always told us it's about every possession matters. When we was at the free throw line Ize was upset about her mistake. I'm just like, hey, you're in this -- he has you in for a reason; because he trusts you.

Believe what you did in practice and keep going. Things are going to happen, mistakes are going to be made. It's just about keep going, be there for your teammates.

I think Taj did a really good job of coming in. She probably wasn't hitting in the beginning, but it's not the first time. She did a great job of improving and being there for her team when needed.

**Q. McKinley Randolph goes 5 for 6 from the free-throw line, but she missed the clutch three-pointer that I mentioned earlier and then she had two clutch free throws in overtime. Can you talk about that growth in that short amount of time but also the growth she's had over the majority of the season?**

JEFF WALZ: Yeah. She is a competitor. She's really starting to come into her own offensively and defensively. She wants to learn the game. She's only going to get better and better.

This is what I tell all of our kids. Sure, everybody remembers the free throw she missed there that would have put it a four-point game. But we also missed 11 other ones. It's one of the things I try to keep harping and preaching to our players is sure, everybody always remembers the last 30 seconds, 45 seconds, and they'll forget the lay-up you missed.

We started the game, and we had a beautiful execution and got Olivia a lay-up on the dump pass and she missed it. We missed a few of those. Well, if you make those, you're not in the situation you are.

We got lucky, too. Moore makes a beautiful drive there in the last minute, I think it was in overtime, and the ball rolls off the rim in a one-point game. We got lucky. But the free throw part is where we have to do a better job. You've got to be able to step up early in the game and make the free throws.

Yeah, everybody remembers the last minute, minute and a half, but boy, there's plenty of areas for growth throughout the entire game.

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