

# Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament: Florida vs. Minnesota

Sunday, March 30, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinckle Fieldhouse

**Florida Gators**

**Susie Gardner**

**Laila Reynolds**

**Liv McGill**

Semifinal Pregame Press Conference

SUSIE GARDNER: Well, first of all, we would like to thank the WBIT for putting on such an amazing event. When the brackets came out and we saw the 32 teams in there, I'm like, Oh, my gosh these are some big-time basketball teams. We knew that we had a challenge ahead of us.

We have a unique makeup of players on our team. We have six seniors and we talk about them all the time leaving a legacy, which is what they are doing this year. And then we have freshmen and one sophomore, and we talk to them all the time about how awesome for them as we grow this program to be playing this late in March.

So we are just happy to be here. We are excited about our opponent, Minnesota. We have worked hard to get here. We have had some very, very close games, buzzer beaters. Our last game we won because of free throws.

So we're excited, but we know we have a challenge ahead of us.

**Q. You're a Minnesota native. Tell us about your background and what you know about the Minnesota team.**

LIV MCGILL: As you guys know I'm from Minneapolis, Minnesota, and a couple of my former high school players play on that team, Taylor Woodson and Amaya Battle, and just familiar with a lot of the roster being that I played them in high school. So a great opportunity to come back. It's full circle. Play with my former teammates and connect with them and play them on the court.

**Q. Coach mentioned the close games. You guys used**



**strong second halves to come back in those games. Talk about how that helped the team.**

LAILA REYNOLDS: For sure, I think it can only help us at this point in the season for us to have those close kind of games. It prepares us for games like this playing in the Final Four. I think it's all going to be a tough battle. So just have those early games where we're winning off buzzer beaters and stuff like that, it prepares us.

**Q. I was able to talk to Taylor a little bit about you; she wanted me to tell you "Hi." What were you guys able to do in high school at Hopkins, how far did you guys make it, and whatever it may be? And also, do you feel like it gives you a little bit of a leg up because you know their playing styles? Taylor said you played AAU together as well. Just really a full-circle moment.**

LIV MCGILL: Yeah. So we had -- well, me, specifically, I had four State Championship appearances. Won two. Taylor was at Hopkins two years, or her whole life before me. So I think she went there her whole high school career, middle school career.

Taylor is my dog. You know, it's good to connect and see her. But just looking forward to playing her and Amaya, so yeah.

**Q. Minnesota in general, you said you're familiar with a lot of the roster, but did they recruit you hard? Obviously that's your hometown. Are you familiar with the coaching staff and everyone around there, as well?**

LIV MCGILL: No comment.

**Q. Just what you've been able to do this year. How easy has it been to adjust from high school to the college level, and would you say it's been easy? Do you feel like you set high expectations for yourself and you've been able to meet them so far?**

LIV MCGILL: Yeah, I'd say I set pretty high expectations for myself and going to Hopkins is one of the reason why is I chose Hopkins is that school prepares you for college, prepares you for the next level. Just the way we train, the



way we had practices.

So I feel like I adjusted pretty well. And you know, having Kelly Rae and all my coaching staff and my teammates help me adjust, and having six seniors just helped me lead the way.

Yeah, I'd say it's been pretty smooth.

**Q. Just wanted to know what this postseason run has been like for you guys having started off at the SEC Tournament and now you're in the Final Four in the WBIT; upsetting Alabama and getting the big win over UNLV and advancing to Minneapolis?**

LIV MCGILL: Again, it's a great experience. This is a great tournament to be in, and just to have this opportunity, we're going to take advantage of it and we're going to give it our best shot.

LAILA REYNOLDS: I agree with Liv, just being able to play in March is such a blessing, and it rolls over to the next season, of course.

**Q. I want to just start off with a question for Laila. Last year, you guys made it to the WBIT, fell in the first round. This year, you sparked up a run and now you're in the final four of the tournament. What would you say -- where would you say this team has grown the most in that regard in terms of being able to gear up for a postseason contest like this?**

LAILA REYNOLDS: For sure. I would say we are just super grateful to be in the tournament. And then when we figured out we're going to be in the tournament, we just went, hey, go right in and just got to work.

**Q. What culture has Coach Finley brought in this first year for Liv and the second for Laila?**

LIV MCGILL: The culture, winning culture. Always to have fun. Play for each other, and just try to be the best version of yourself. Kelly Rae Finley, she's a great coach and a great person, firstly. She wants you to succeed off the court just as much as off the court, and that's what really got me to Florida.

LAILA REYNOLDS: I think the culture is really big on selflessness, just being able to be there for one another and just being like the best teammate and best player and best person that you could possibly be here in Florida.

**Q. Is there a player that you model your game after who taught you even growing up, did you have a parent figure or sibling or someone teach you how to**

**play?**

LAILA REYNOLDS: No.

**Q. It was just you?**

LAILA REYNOLDS: It was just me.

**Q. You just learned on your own?**

LAILA REYNOLDS: Yeah. All my siblings, they played sports. But my sisters played volleyball and my brothers played football. So it's just basketball, I was the only one that played basketball collegiately.

**Q. Why basketball for you, if all your siblings played other sports?**

LAILA REYNOLDS: : I was just good at it, I don't know. I wasn't that good at volleyball. Like I had the option, but then, I don't know, I just stuck with basketball. Probably just wanted to branch out.

**Q. Any player in particular you like to model your game after?**

LAILA REYNOLDS: I would say, player, I really watch Paul George a lot and then my trainer at school, he's a one-on-one player, so I just like to watch them, too. I was the first person to play basketball in my family, as well.

**Q. What do you like about Paul George's game?**

LAILA REYNOLDS: He's a three-level scoring. He's, like, a tall guard like me, yeah.

**Q. And Coach, this matchup in general, if you can talk about a couple keys that are going to be important for tomorrow. Right?**

SUSIE GARDNER: Well, it's a different style of play in terms of Minnesota, and Dawn has done a great job everywhere that she's been.

I don't want to give too much away about what our strategy is, but we want to play our game; Florida Basketball is what we call it, and our players know exactly what we're talking about.

We do a great job with our scouts, and we know what they are going to give to us, and it's going to be a challenge of some sort. But without saying too much we know that -- we feel like there's two different style of plays, and it's going to be which style comes out on top.

And it could be another close game, and they just came off of an overtime win, as well. This is the time of year when a basket here or a box-out there, a steal here, could win the Championship.

And so we're prepared for that, and as we know we have a challenge ahead of us with Minnesota. They are very good.

**Q. What has Liv meant to this team and this program in her first year and what she's been able to do? Has she exceeded your expectations from a coaching standpoint?**

SUSIE GARDNER: I've only been at Florida for nine months, and so I did not recruit Liv. But her legend was -- preceded itself and was very excited.

When I talked to her on the telephone I knew how motivated she is, this girl, and the whole entire team. But she gets in the gym all the time. Like she wants to be in the gym. She wants to be a pro. She wants to lead.

Sometimes it's very difficult for a freshman point guard to come in, especially when you have six seniors, and be the vocal point and the leader of the team in terms of on the floor. I'm not saying she's our only leader. Obviously we have our seniors, as well, but I think from day one she's one of the most competitive players I've ever coached; I've ever been around.

She loves to compete. She hates to lose in anything, in any drill. She has to make all of her shots. She wants to defend the best player on the team. And so I just think her competitive juices just come in every single day that she's been a part of our program.

**Q. You're back in the saddle, for this game.**

SUSIE GARDNER: For this game.

**Q. Are you nervous? How do you feel? And is there any team in the SEC that reminds you of Minnesota?**

SUSIE GARDNER: Yeah, I'll answer the first question -- I mean, the second question first.

I feel like Missouri would be the closest team to Minnesota in our league.

And then, you know, the scenario that we're in right now is just, I mean, I found out after practice yesterday that I was going to be, you know, the whatever it's called, Coach, whatever I am, right now.

I'm not nervous. I mean, this team is so prepared. I'm just going to be there, you know, maybe make substitution, encourage Shay to be cool with the referees, those types of things.

I've been preparing for this ever since we knew we were coming to this tournament, and I knew Kelly's due date. So I'm not a genius, but I knew that the possibility of this happening might happen.

So I've been preparing for this, obviously, for two to three weeks. I've really been intentional watching Kelly, how she -- how her substitution pattern is; what plays she likes to run in this situation. I've been really taking a lot of notes and watching and talking to her. Because my job is not -- the focus is not on me.

My job is to make these guys feel just as comfortable as they have all the other games that we've played this year. I'm not nervous at all because I know these guys are prepared, and they are going to play their butts off.

**Q. Coach Gardner, I wanted to know, how do you describe the leadership that Ra Shaya Kyle has brought this year?**

SUSIE GARDNER: Yeah, Shay is the loudest voice in the room. When she walks in, you know that Shay is there. But she's been through the trenches. As we all know, she tore her ACL last year and she fought her tail back to be healthy and to play for us, and came back a little bit early in all honesty.

But she knows what's going on. When there's a question, when there's a huddle, Shay is always talking to the team. She knows what plays we're trying to run, what we're trying to get out of it.

I can kind of sometimes just look at her because when we're talking about defense, for example, we may be making an adjustment on defense, and I'll just look at her and she'll say, "I got you," and I won't even have to say what we're trying to do.

She's just been a great blessing, and we are so excited for her and the fact that she's coming back home, as well, to get to play in this arena. She may have a few fans tomorrow, from what I hear.

**Q. You touched on it in your opening statement but talk about how these extra games kind of helps your team gain some momentum moving into next year and what this means to you as you kind of build a program as you talked about with a lot of younger players. Yes, you got some seniors, too, but with younger players,**



## how that helps build momentum going into next year?

SUSIE GARDNER: We had kind of an up-and-down nonconference season. Shay and Laila both did not participate in the summertime coming back, and so it was an interesting summer in preparation.

I think we kind of had to reinvent ourselves a little bit along the way, and we absolutely -- and credit to the players. They held the course. They are playing their best basketball. In the SEC Tournament, it was like a switch was flipped and we played great against Auburn. We played great against Alabama. We played great against LSU.

I think when we realized we were in this tournament we had a little team meeting that was very poignant, very honest, and you know, they have been on fire these last three games. I think the excitement of being here, and like we said earlier, with Shay and Jeriah and that group, leaving a legacy. We talk about it all the time. Leave that legacy. Leave it better than you found it.

And then we have these young kids that really -- I mean, I look at it right now, and I'm like, wow, there are so many teams that are not still playing right now, and here we are playing in almost April.

So this is great for our program. It's great what Kelly has done for the program and I just want it to continue. That's what everybody wants to do. You want to have momentum going into the next year, but right now we are where our feet are, and we know that we have Minnesota tomorrow.

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