

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

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Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Louisville Cardinals

Coach Jeff Walz

Mykasa Robinson

Kianna Smith

Hailey Van Lith

Media Conference

Q. Since you've had a good amount of time since your last game, what have you been doing individually or a team to stay sharp?

HAILEY VAN LITH: I think our team personally, we have been working on cleaning up things that we feel that we need to get better at. Obviously, the AC Tournament didn't go how we wanted. So we learned from that game. And we worked on those things. And we plan to carry it over for this tournament.

KIANNA SMITH: Just different actions defensively we worked on that we had miscommunications during our losses and then a lot of end game situations as well.

MYKASA ROBINSON: Just to piggyback off them, making sure that we stay together as a team in the fourth quarter, making sure we huddle, keep our composure.

Q. Mykasa, is this a situation where you all want to play your game and make them adjust to you, or is there specific things that you are going to be looking at?

MYKASA ROBINSON: We want to focus on us, make sure we play all four quarters and make sure we have good chemistry and teamwork throughout the whole game.

Q. Is there a tendency when you get up 15, 16, 20 points to let up and how do you guard against that given what's happened twice this year?

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, you know, I think it's common



for everyone, really. It's just a natural tendency. When you get up maybe to relax a little bit. I think it's good we learned our lessons early, now we know going into the tournament that we have done that before. And so we have been through it. And yeah, all of our practices have been built to put us in situations like that so that we can continue to improve, but I'm very confident in us going into this tournament.

Q. Mykasa, for everyone else, can you describe it since you've been through it, what the atmosphere is like for an NCAA tournament game here? You have a great home atmosphere.

MYKASA ROBINSON: The atmosphere that we have here, I think we could compare it to all season. We have the best fans in the country. I think they are going to show up for this March Madness for us. The intensity of the game changes. I'm excited for the rest of my teammates to see.

Q. Hailey, you mention how confident you are in this group, what about this team you think will be able to carry you guys deep into a tournament potential final four round?

HAILEY VAN LITH: We play all facets of the game. We can score, we can defend, we can heat a team up, we can make a team execute, we can score in multiple ways, we are deep, we have a lot of talented players. I think that's something that's important going into the tournament. Just to make scouts harder, make it harder for teams to take away what you want to do. So I just think our overall makeup of our team and how we play all different types of basketball is what's going to help us in the long run.

Q. Mykasa, what makes this one different or better suited to make a really deep run?

MYKASA ROBINSON: This year we have a good chance because of our competitiveness and drive. We have the same goal and we have a lot of passion to put our egos aside and get to the same place, and that is a national championship.



Q. Kianna, your thoughts, too on what you think will allow this team to go deep into the tournament.

KIANNA SMITH: I think it's our versatility. We have a lot of people that can cause mismatch problems. Emily being one, and our guards. So I think our versatility will allow us to make a deep run this year, too.

Q. I'm wondering if you can give us your perception on where the strength is in the country beyond the seeds, just what teams that you look at as the teams to beat.

KIANNA SMITH: I think the ACC is one of the strongest conferences in the country, and I feel like that's why we are prepared for the NCAA tournament so far. But obviously every conference has people that can make deep runs in the tournament. And we have to take each team one by one instead of looking ahead.

HAILEY VAN LITH: For me, there's a lot of great teams at the tournament. That's what all the great teams make it here. But if we were worried about other teams and who we think is great, we're taking focus away from ourselves and really, all of our losses this year have been because we have taken the focus away from ourselves. Going into this, there are a lot of great teams and we'll take them seriously and give them the respect they deserve. At the same time we are the main focus for us and we are not really too focussed on any other team here.

MYKASA ROBINSON: Yeah, I agree with Hailey.

Q. Mykasa, for you. This is a group that haven't lost multiple games this year. You didn't lose multiple games last year. Usually bounce back from a loss pretty well. What is it about this group that allows you to do that? And do you feel like you have something to prove after the AC loss coming into the tournament?

MYKASA ROBINSON: Yeah, this group is coachable. We are willing to do whatever it takes to win. We're going to come out, we're going to execute, we're going to change things and be successful in whatever we do.

Q. Hailey, can you talk about your journey as a basketball and the physical distance traveled to get here and what it means to you? Did you follow cashmere in the state tournament this year?

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, I did come a long way to play basketball here. That's what I wanted. I wanted to play at one of the best schools in the country. And a lot of them happen to be far away from Washington. I really didn't have much option. I'm not a homebody or nothing like that.

I love it here and I love my teammates. And it is hard sometimes, but my family is great. They will be here for these two games. And yeah, I mean I did keep up on the Cashmere girls and the tournament. My high school coach texted me a few times. Yeah. So that's it.

Q. Talked about before priding this team on being really good on a scout and being able to dive into that. I feel like in a tournament setting that really changes you have to be able to do it quickly. How does that affect preparation in a tournament and having to turn around so quick?

MYKASA ROBINSON: I think for us, I don't think we'll find it difficult because I think we have the best scouting coaches in the country. So I think if we follow the game plan and trust what they say, we will be good.

KIANNA SMITH: I love that part of the game. The X's and O's and the chess match between different coaches. And we trust in our coaching staff. And they have us prepared before every game, and we feel ready to play whoever because of that.

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, like Mykasa, we definitely have the best coaching staff, scout-wise. And they prepare us as much as we can. They give us everything we need and it's up to us to go out on the court and follow through with that scout. There's no reason we shouldn't be prepared.

Q. Hailey, take you way back to do you remember your very first contact with Louisville's coaching staff. If you remember that, what was your impression as you came away from that? Initial impression.

HAILEY VAN LITH: Maybe like eighth grade was the first time I talked to Louisville. But it was a long time. I think I got a lot more serious about a year before I committed when I actually played for Coach Walz with our U-19 team down in Thailand. And I was in a spot where I was trying to feel other schools out, and I really liked his coaching style, and I thought I could be successful here and I wanted to win, so I took it.

Q. What did you think of the news that Sam was taking another job and will be moving on?

KIANNA SMITH: I'm just super happy for him. Obviously, as assistant coach that's what you want is to be a head coach. And he deserves it. He works his butt off. And super happy for him and the opportunity to go from one Power Five school to the next, and I know those girls are going to love him and his personality and his energy, so I'm super happy for him.



HAILEY VAN LITH: Purcell. Yeah, he's my guy, man. Everyone on the team knows that's my coach. And we're really close and we have a great relationship. And he treats me like family. And he puts up with me when I want to work out all the time and rebounds for me and all that. I'm going to miss him a lot, but it's his time and he's worked really hard for this and he deserves this opportunity. I'll clap for him, and I'll keep up and we'll keep our relationship, but it's time for him to take the next step.

MYKASA ROBINSON: We love Purcell. He deserves this more than anyone. I'm super excited for him and his family.

Q. Could you talk about last year's tournament and the unequal treatment of women's players compared to this year?

MYKASA ROBINSON: You know, I think just as a women's game, we're growing a lot. And last year I think it really put the women and the men on a different platform. And it showed that we as women deserve just as what the men do. I think this year we're looking to see a lot of improvement. I'm excited for that.

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, I think it's sad to say that last year, it's not like we were surprised. It happens a lot. And we were very used to it. We were very used to being treated as less, not being invested in the same. And I've heard there's supposed to be a lot of changes this year. And I really hope they happen, because we deserve it. And our game is very excited. And we're fun to watch and we work hard. So I hope that things are followed through with this year.

KIANNA SMITH: Yeah. I guess it's unfortunate that it had to happen that way last year, but I'm glad that it's been -- like it was eye-opening for a lot of people that we are treated a little bit differently, and I hope that we can see some changes in this tournament. I know we're now labeled as March Madness as well as the men. So there's a start.

Q. Adding to that, how were the swag bags this year?

KIANNA SMITH: We haven't really got to see it yet. We just got here.

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah. We haven't seen it.

Q. Is there a need for a killer instinct with this team given what's happened in a couple of fourth quarters and how do you cultivate that if there is?

KIANNA SMITH: I think naturally all of us are pretty competitive. Like Hailey said, it's natural for when you're up

20 or 15 to kind of, not relax, I guess relax a little bit. But we have learned from it. If we see that situation again, I can guarantee you that we will be better for it.

MYKASA ROBINSON: Yeah, I agree. Just practices have been different. When you practice that, it transfers into the games. And I think we have a sense of urgency to us, with this being our last hopefully six games. I'm excited to see what we do. The intensity in practice has been different. A lot of fourth-quarter scenario things. Really working on our basketball IQ in late-game situations.

KIANNA SMITH: Yeah, and we have been focussing on winning every drill. And if we're down a drill, we relate it to the game. This is the last 30 minutes of practice. We have to finish strong. Not let up our intensity and stuff like that.

Q. Going back to the Sam Purcell, changing jobs is there, maybe, a sense of urgency isn't the word but. Is there an added goal to send Purcell out with hardware with this tournament run?

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, I mean, any kind of press around us is going to be good for Purcell and help him do well at his program and people buy into what he can do as a coach. So I think, yeah, him leaving definitely added a little more of -- this is our one time. But we're really in this for each other and Purcell is a part of that group. But every single one -- we got seniors that aren't coming back, too. There's a lot of people that this is their last run and we want to make it memorable for them.

KIANNA SMITH: Yeah, Purcell is one of the most passionate people I have been around. The man has "Final Four" on his licence plate. So he adds a little bit of motivation for this Final Four run.

MYKASA ROBINSON: He puts his blood, sweat and tears into it. Not only does that show in him, but he pushes that towards us. His passion and drive motivates us. I think he deserves that as well as the rest of the team.

COACH WALZ: Just first want to say thank you to everyone that's here, thank you to all of our volunteers, from our athletic department that are giving their time to make this an unbelievable event for all four teams. And just really looking forward to getting this thing started and having the opportunity to be back playing in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Jeff, Mykasa said that practices, the intensity has gone up. I imagine that's purposeful and how much have you seen growth from them, from that perspective?



COACH WALZ: Our practices have been really good. I have been proud of them. I was out on the road recruiting for a few days, the week after the ACC tournament. And they still had really good days of practice, which makes you feel good. And I don't think it's just from that Miami loss. I've said it, guys. It's my fault. I had bad combinations on the floor at the end of the game. I would have never had those combinations out there if we weren't possibly looking at playing three games in three days. The kids did a great job for 35 minutes, and I sucked for 5. So it's reality. So our practices had nothing to do with that. They are excited, we are looking forward to the opportunity to compete again. You know, it's what you play the entire season for is to have the opportunity to play in this event. Now, at the same time I always tell them, your season is not going to be determined by one game, because it is a body of work. But what we have put out there has given us the opportunity to be a one seed, host for the first two games, hopefully. You have to get past the first one. And the players, you know, we have a lot of veterans back that had the opportunity to play in Elite Eight game that would like to get back and see if we can't go a little bit further. And it all starts with how we prepare. And we have prepared what I think is really well.

Q. It's such a long layoff from that last game to your first tournament game. Are there special challenges? Have you changed over the years -- I know the tournament format changes some but what challenges does that bring?

COACH WALZ: I don't think it's bad for us. You know, it is a two-week layoff between games, but it gives you time to get kids healthy. You have bumps and bruises and now you are able to sit there and taper practice back some. So now I feel really good where we are health-wise. You are never going to be perfect. At this time of the year, if you have a player that doesn't want to play because they are sore, they shouldn't be playing. You can't play 29 games and be practicing for as long as we have to not have some bumps and bruises. We don't have anything that's a nagging injury that's going to keep somebody out of the game. Then we are able to work on situations -- you spend a day working on sideline out of bounds, 20 seconds to go in a game, advancing the ball up the floor. Fouling in the last 20 seconds of the game if you have two fouls to give. Things like that. And that's what we were able to do is to work more on situational things. And then as soon as the draw comes out, then you're back to practice, you're back to working on exactly what you always do. We're preparing for our first-round match up. And I'm supposed to say U of Albany. I stutter on that all day. I hope it's okay if I say Albany. I'll never get U of Albany out very smooth. That is what we have put our time and effort into is working on them.

Q. We remember you in Lincoln very well. And I think it's very interesting to hear that Paul Sanderford has been named to the women's basketball hall of name. You have a potential in Nebraska and Gonzaga falls to play Amy Williams. I wonder if you could reflect on your time in Nebraska and what Paul has meant to you in your career.

COACH WALZ: I'm blessed to have been given the opportunity by Paul. To start off back in '95 as a GA at Western Kentucky. And then at that point in time you had two full-time assistants and then a restricted earnings coach. And year two the restricted earnings coach at Western got a head coaching job at Walford. And Paul moved me up from the third assistant. You were a GA to making \$12,000, it was incredible. I did that. And Paul got the job at Nebraska the following season and asked me to go, and it was the best decision that I've ever made. Being able to work with him for six years and learn from Paul is something you can't even put a price tag on. He really -- when it came to the game of basketball, he would break things down in a different way. He watched the game as the game was going on. I learned from him. When you run something at the beginning of the game, don't worry about if they score, watch how they are guarding it. At the end of the game you might have to run that same action and you might have a counter because you know they switched there. I loved my time there. Met a ton of great people. Still have really great friends out there. I bought my first house there. Yeah. It's times like that you can look back now and realize if you do things right and you're a good person and you treat people right, you continue to keep friendships. And to me that's what it's all about. And for Paul to be able to have the opportunity to finally get the recognition that he's deserved for so long, and that's to get into the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame is pretty special. Him and his wife, Yvette, hopefully will be up here tomorrow. They are coming to watch both games. Amy was a senior our first year there, and she had a tore ACL. She had a bunch of injuries that she had overcome. And just excited to see what she's done throughout our career as well. I mean, just done a remarkable job. And it's going to be fun. It's going to be fun to just have Paul here tomorrow to be able to see, you know, yourself and Jeff Griesch and Amy. It's what it's all about.

Q. Could you provide us from what you have seen on film an overview of what you are seeing from the University of Albany team?

COACH WALZ: I'm very impressed. I've told our kids the three years we have had the opportunity to be a one-seed, this is by far the best 16-seed that we will have faced. We faced a really good Boise State team a few years ago. Very well coached. Very disciplined team. They shoot the



three well. They play hard. I mean, they are scrappy. They are not going to roll over. It's not going to be a game where you just show up and, hey, it's our home floor. We're supposed to win. We're a Power Five from the ACC and expect them to quit. That's not going to happen. So we have spent a lot of hours breaking film down. Our kids are prepared for them because we have a ton of respect for them. It's not a game where we've sat here for two days and prepared for a Gonzaga or Nebraska match-up because I have too much respect for their coaching staff and their players to do anything like that.

Q. You have a veteran group with some pretty strong leaders. Do you kind of not have to worry about them? Obviously you are preparing for this game and focussed on this game. Sometimes teams can look ahead on their own. Do you have to worry about that with this group?

COACH WALZ: I'm not sure it's that. My foot has been in their tail for three or four straight practices. Our staff has done a great job to make sure they understand what's at stake. We have a fifth year senior in Chelsie Hall who has never played in the NCAA tournament. Emily has been fantastic for us, has never been past the first weekend. We have some kids that are playing a lot of minutes for us who really have not had a bunch of NCAA tournament experience. You have Mykasa, you have Hailey. We have some obviously that have from last year. I'm not going to sit here and say we are experience-wise in the NCAA tournament. God, I have five of them that have been to the final four and a couple of elite eight. We are relatively young from NCAA tournament side.

Q. I don't know how much film you have watched. I imagine it's quite a lot. But how do you explain a six-foot guard averaging almost 10 rebounds a game. Is that a level of competition or special skills?

COACH WALZ: It's pretty impressive. It's something that we're going to have to continue to get. We're going to have to defend, we're going to have to rebound. I need all of our kids to play at their best. There's no question about that. And that's at both ends of the floor. We have to rebound, we have to defend. I know everybody is expecting this game tomorrow to be a piece of cake, I'm not. And then I've said it for three months now, I truly believe we are good enough to get to a Final Four, but we can also lose any game along the way. We've got to be at our best. And that's going to take every single one of us.

Q. You talked about the relative youth of your team when it comes to the NCAA. Last year the tournament was all in the bubble. This year the pomp and circumstance is back, the March Madness branding is

here. There's some concern with that youth that maybe you have to bring them back from the spotlight and the glitz of it and turn the focus back to the game?

COACH WALZ: No, I'm not concerned about that. I think this is great. I tell them all to soak everything in. This is what you've worked so hard for all year is to get to this. I've never been one to say, you know, you have to roll things back, don't get too excited. No. I want to be that way. I can remember in '13 when we beat Baylor in the Sweet Sixteen and everybody is asking how are you going to roll your kids back? I'm not. Are you kidding me? You want them to be excited. You want them to continue to play that way. I want them to enjoy this. They should. And I think when you realize what's at stake, you also come out a little more focussed and play a little bit harder. We have to take good shots, take care of the basketball, and then realize you are not going to win any game in the first five minutes of it. You have to be patient and just take things as they come.

Q. You talked about the potential of this team as possibly bound for Final Four. Players mentioned competitiveness, depth, and versatility is the strengths that can push them there. What trait about this group has you more confidence than years past?

COACH WALZ: Each team is different. Every team gives you a different perspective as a coach and you find out what your strengths are, what your weaknesses are. Now, I like the versatility that we have. I like the fact we have five or six kids that can score the basketball. You have to guard us pretty much at all spots. And if everybody is playing at their best, we are really hard to guard. And we are a pretty darn good defensive team, too. We can't have lapses. I'm extremely confident in this team. I would never say I have more confidence in one team than the other team because each year is different. We have goals in front of us. We take one game at a time. I'm not going to worry about who our second round match up might be. That's foolish to do.

Q. I was wondering if you could reflect on Hailey Van Lith's development from year one to year two. To make that jump to an all ACC first teamer.

COACH WALZ: Hailey has played some really good basketball. I'm really proud of her. I have a ton of confidence in her. She works. She puts the time in. It's not an accident that she's as good as she is. You know, everybody was talking about, oh, she's struggling shooting the ball. Just wasn't going in. She's made shots in practice. Guys, nothing has changed. The ball is just going in. In practice though, it went in. I get concerned -- I'm fortunate enough to be at practice everyday. That if I see it going in in practice and then just doesn't go in in the game, I don't worry about it. Keep doing what you do, keep your routine.



She's playing really really well right now. And we're going to need that from her as we continue to get ready for tomorrow night's game. And I'm really proud of her. I mean, she's fun to coach. She's got a passion and she's got a fire that separates her from a lot of people. And that's why she's going to continue to be great. I mean, it won't surprise me if she's an All-American next year. If you look at what she's done this year, it's been damn impressive.

Q. I guess in terms of the seeding, it's not the first time you have been a number one seed, obviously. But how much more appreciative I guess in light of the early exit from the ACC are you to still get that kind of respect and does that help this team be motivated by that to really fulfill those expectations?

COACH WALZ: Gary, I think it just comes down to our body of work throughout the entire season. You know, it's obviously a great honor to have the committee consider us a one-seed. But at the end of the day, you know, with the early reveals that they show -- I mean, the only difference was going to be what color jersey we would wear. Who is wearing a white jersey and who is wearing a dark jersey. We weren't going to change regions because as you looked at everything, you knew whoever was going to be the one was going to be the fourth one. And that team was going to be the first two. You are going to play each other no matter what. We kind of knew what region we were going to stay in. And Baylor got beat that game, I don't know what they do. Our kids weren't concerned about it. It's an honor. There's no question about it. You put an entire season of work, and that's what you're given credit for. So really, really impressed by our group and excited for it. And now we have to go out and prove that we were deserving of the one-seed.

Q. Just your thoughts on finally things equalling up with the March Madness branding and the men's and women's tournaments on if not the same similar footings?

COACH WALZ: I think it's great. I think it's great. I have always been a big believer in -- everything doesn't have to be the same. Okay? And I'll say that from day one. And I truly mean that. Everything doesn't have to be the same as long as we're given the same opportunities, okay? I mean, I'm not afraid to say it. I watched the first four games. The women's first four and the men's first four. I know we're talking about going to neutral sites next year for the first four. I personally don't know if that's a good thing. I looked at the games Iowa State last night and wherever our second was, our attendance to go to a neutral site for our first four, I don't know if that's a good thing. The men it's sold out, I think that's great. I think it's great we have first four games now. I think we should. That is something that

should take place. We should have 68 teams in, but it doesn't necessarily mean we have to go to a neutral site. Depending on where that site is, will those team's fans travel? I think you try to get it like they did. It's at the site they are going to play and hopefully get those local fans of basketball. I challenged our fans come out for the 3:30 game. Come out for the 3:30 game tomorrow so we can show people, that hey, it doesn't matter who is playing, we love women's basketball here in this city. I think the branding, the signage is fantastic. The gift bags, that's great for the kids. But I'm not going to say it's always been bad, because it hasn't. The experiences that our kids have had over the past 15 years here have been pretty darn good in the NCAA Tournament. I think March Madness, personally I think that's wonderful. To use the branding. We would all say it, but it wouldn't be out there on the floor somewhere. But now I think that's smart. It's what it is for all of us, it's March Madness. Women, men, it does not matter. I'm excited that some changes have been made. It doesn't have to be the same. The same isn't always good. I'm excited about things. I'm not sure what I can say. My whole philosophy is, if nobody tells me anything, I can't lie about anything. I like to be in the dark. I'm looking forward to it. Looking forward to if it is -- to have someone on the men's side to be able to work with and collaborate with, you know, I'm looking forward to it. I think it can really be a good thing.

