

# Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 7, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

## USC Trojans

## Lindsay Gottlieb

## JuJu Watkins

## Kiki Iriafen

### Postgame Press Conference



USC - 84, Indiana - 79

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and start today's first press conference with USC, Coach Lindsay Gottlieb, JuJu Watkins, and Kiki Iriafen.

Coach, if you would make an opening statement.

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Sorry, the walk here was winded. I didn't even play the game.

Thank you guys for being here. Really great atmosphere at Gainbridge. I really appreciate the job the Big Ten does in bringing out fans and media to make this a great event.

We knew this was going to be work. We knew this was going to be a tough one. Indiana is a really good team. They're an NCAA Tournament team. We'll be rooting for them to make a second weekend and keep it going.

I told Coach Teri I thought she's done a great job.

For us, I'm really proud of our group. We found out right before the game that Rayah couldn't go, and everyone stepped up. I thought we played really hard. I think Indiana poses some issues for us guarding them. They give you so much action.

Our two All-Americans played like All-Americans and a number of people stepped up, and that's why we've become the team that we've become.

**Q. Lindsay, what were you most concerned about coming into this game against Indiana, a team that played you kind of close last time? And what do you think your team could have done better?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: They do a really good job. They play essentially four guards who can shoot the ball, and we wanted to defend the 3-point line really well. At the same time, they raised their 5 player high away from the basket. You sell out to the 3-point line and give up some layups.

I think that gives a lot of people problems. I thought early on we did a nice job on the 3-point line and gave up two many easy 2s. We wanted to make them take tough 2s. I thought later in the game our disruption started to play a factor in it. I thought Kennedy Smith was really good defensively. I thought these two were really good defensively. A number of people did a good job, Avery Howell. So we kind of got more into a defensive rhythm.

I would have liked to turn the ball over a little bit less and keep them from getting points off turnovers as well because their action is hard enough to guard in the half-court.

**Q. JuJu and Kiki, 52 combined points was clearly the winning recipe tonight. In those second and third quarters, how can you get your teammates a little bit more involved?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: I think for us it kind of just starts on the defensive end. I think we had some lapses in the second and third where we kind of let them get hot and do what they wanted to do. I think we fouled a lot, myself particularly, and that helped keep them in the game.

I think just making sure on the defensive end we're doing what we need to do, but I think offensively we kind of all know our roles, and everybody is capable of shooting and scoring.

**Q. JuJu and Kiki, how important is it to have these games to give you guys tough tests going into the tournament, that there's not a chance to slack off?**

JUJU WATKINS: I think knowing what's on the line, all the games are going to be like that. We don't expect to just go in there and blow the other team out because there's so much on the line and this conference is so good.



We always go in knowing that we're going to play our best and do whatever it takes to win. Then it comes down to the intangibles and tough plays that win the game.

**Q. JuJu, with this performance today, you move into second all time in 30-point games for a USC women's basketball player. I know you probably talk about it all the time, but as your sophomore season comes to a close, how do you process your position in both USC and women's basketball history?**

JUJU WATKINS: I don't really think about it much, if I'm being honest. Like I said, I just go out there and play for the team, and whatever's needed in me, I do.

Yeah, I think it's just a testament to the long nights in the gym and a team and a coach that really trusts in me. I'm able to play to the best of my ability.

**Q. Kiki and JuJu, you guys really took over in the third quarter but IU kept the game still close during that time. How much does the lack of made 3s limit your offense?**

KIKI IRIAFEN: That's a hard question. I mean, I think we're all very capable of making 3s, and I trust all my teammates. This is also our first time playing in this gym, so I think we've gotten that first win and our first time playing in this gym, so I think tomorrow will be much better.

We're more than capable of making 3s. It was just an off day.

**Q. You alluded to being shorthanded today. Can you talk a little more about that situation, how it impacted you, and Rayah's status going forward.**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: Rayah is a leader for us. She's had an incredible season. She's a great player. We always want her on the floor.

We found out shortly before the game that she couldn't go. She's battling an illness, and it just prevented her from being able to go, so hopefully we get her tomorrow.

We also have a lot of trust in our entire team. You always want to go in at full strength, but you also want the team to be ready to do what they need to do.

Two things happened because she was out, we started small and played Kiki at the 5 and went four guards. Then we came in with Clarice, who I thought gave great minutes as well.

**Q. Coach, a third quarter, two ties, four lead changes, and a young lady named Garzon. Boy, she can knock 3s down. IU runs the offense that you commented about. Just your thoughts on that third quarter and how it affected your ball club.**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: They're really good, they're really well-coached, and they're old, right? Garzon is old. Chloe Moore-McNeil is old. Parrish is old -- veteran. I don't mean old, but veteran. Kids like that are not going to go out without a really tough fight. They're excellent players, and I thought we had to adjust.

I do think moving Kennedy Smith onto Garzon affected the game. She is just an elite defender. I'm really proud of the fact we have 2 of the 5 all-defensive players in the Big Ten in Rayah and JuJu, but I think Kennedy probably doesn't get enough credit for how she impacts the game defensively, and I thought we had to do that because of how hot Garzon got during that time.

**Q. Lindsay, you talked about how good of a shooting team this is and how they keep multiple shooters on the floor. Up until they had to start heaving 3s at the end of this game, they were way below the normal 3-point attempts in Indiana. What did you do to make sure they weren't getting up 3s cleanly throughout the game?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: We watched the game yesterday, right. That was probably the difference in the game. There was a lot of even stats between Oregon and Indiana, but the 3-point line, and over time their wins, the made 3s are really high.

Our perimeter defenders are really good and really athletic, so we feel like we can put pressure at the point of attack. What that did give up then because they have multiple three-point shooters, in the flare screen, they can slip. We went over and they curled again. Again, our basket protection it's not the same when the 5 is high with the ball and they're a shooting threat.

It's an offense that poses problem. I think Teri is a great coach for a reason, and I think they figured out over the course of the season really their identity. I know they played so many years with such an amazing post player who graduated, so I think it maybe took them some time to adjust to not having the dominant low block.

Certainly I think they're playing well at the right time, and they're going to be an NCAA Tournament team that's very dangerous for someone that's not us.

**Q. Just out of curiosity, I think we all know this time of**

**the season every year the matchups are going to get a little bit tougher. It's win or go home at this point. What's one thing you want your team to keep in mind going into the winner of Maryland-Michigan tomorrow?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: This is March basketball. Both of those teams are great teams, that we're going to have to come and win every possession. I've told the team a number of times, we get no bonus points for being the regular season champs. We get no bonus points for what we did yesterday, but we can derive from the success we've had what it is that makes us good. That you can carry forward with you all the time no matter what the circumstance presents.

But we're playing really good basketball teams from here on out, and we've got to be ready to go no matter which team it is.

**Q. It seemed like, especially in the third quarter, every time IU was making a run, JuJu came up with some defensive play, whether it was a steal. She had a block at one point. Do you ever -- I don't want to say take that for granted, but it seems like she does that in every single game for you guys. How much of a luxury is it for you guys to have that?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: How she has developed into the two-way player that she is is really remarkable. Think about what she handles on the offensive end. We get her the ball as much as we can. There's multiple bodies draped on her. She takes a lot of contact. She's a physical player. Then we say, oh, by the way, impact the game defensively too. She takes no breaks. She takes no breaks.

The things that she does, I never take any of it for granted, but we've come to expect what she's capable of. But the ways that she makes game-changing plays and makes something out of nothing for us and takes away something that looks easy for the other team is really tremendous.

Look, you guys probably know how I feel about it. I think she's the Player of the Year nationally for a number of different reasons, but I am glad that her game-changing ability on the defensive end is being talked about a little bit more because you see it.

**Q. You talked about how you would have an NCAA Tournament feel, but you probably didn't know it would have a true road game feel until the matchup came out, right? What was that like, and how do you feel your players responded to the atmosphere today?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I love it. First of all, this is an

incredible arena. I hadn't been in here since I coached with the Cavs and we played the Pacers. When we were on the Indiana-Purdue trip, we practiced here, just to have them see it, not in the main arena, but in the Fever facility. To see it come to life here is great.

I joked about it with the staff, I'd rather have a lot of fans here even if they're rooting against us than not.

I have a feeling the Iowa fans that are here and travel may be rooting for us. Our fans were loud here. Credit to the IU fans who show up at their building. They have like 15,000 people come regularly, and for them to travel and show up for their team, it's great for women's basketball.

Hopefully we can continue to play a brand of basketball here where we get fans from these other Big Ten cities along the way. We want to play a way that make people gravitate towards us and really appreciative of our fans that traveled out here as well.

**Q. Now having spent a year in this conference, have you learned anything about the Big Ten that you didn't know before? Does anything surprise you what this has been like?**

LINDSAY GOTTLIEB: I mean, the depth of talent, the fact that we have teams that are 10, 11, 12 seeds here who might be a better seed in the national tournament is wild, right? Iowa is an 11 seed, because of the depth of talent. Nebraska at a 10. The depth of talent, I think, is really impressive, that we were playing NCAA Tournament teams night in and night out with 12 or 13 teams in this league. I think that's the main thing.

I think the fans that people draw on the road, and I think when we played most teams got higher than their average attendance. We got great fan attendance on the road. The love of women's basketball out here has been very prevalent for us.

Lastly, I would say our players definitely learned there's cold and there's Midwest cold. It hits them different every time we got off of the plane. We had some real deep freezes getting out here, and I think it makes them appreciate living in L.A. just a little bit more.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports



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## Indiana Hoosiers

## Teri Moren

## Yarden Garzon

## Shay Ciezki

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TERI MOREN: I'm extremely proud of our team today. I thought that they battled for 40 minutes. We asked them to do a lot defensively, change up some coverages and whatnot throughout. I thought that their focus was really good.

Once again, we put JuJu on the free-throw line way too much. The 11 offensive rebounds really, really hurt us, I thought, because they were timely, and then the back-to-back 3s -- I think we pulled within two -- were back breakers for us.

Really proud of our group. I know this about these guys. They can play with anybody in the country, and we're disappointed that we don't get to play another day, but as a staff, we're really happy, not -- we're not -- we're disappointed that we lost, but I'm really happy with our effort and our toughness today.

**Q. When you guys took the lead in the third quarter, it was really tight back and forth for a stretch, were you thinking you could pull away, something you saw that made you think we could go now and finish them off?**

YARDEN GARZON: We came into the game to win the game. We didn't say that maybe. We were very confident in ourself to win this game. We thought we could pull it out and win this game, and that was the whole purpose of being here.

If we wouldn't think we could win this game, I don't think we would be here right now.

**Q. Shay, when you look at this season kind of in the**



**big picture, it's obviously been an up-and-down ride for you all. What lessons are you hoping this team learns from the regular season and takes with you for the rest of the way?**

SHAY CIEZKI: I would just say learning from our losses. We had some early ones at the beginning of the season that I thought that we really learned from and grew from. It shows when we play these bigger teams.

We should have had this one. We had it right down into the stretch, but I would just say, yeah, just growing from it, growing from the losses, and just getting better out of it.

**Q. For either of you, not many teams in the country can say that they went wire-to-wire with USC, not only once this season, but twice. Despite the loss what do you want people to know about this Indiana squad heading into the NCAA Tournament?**

YARDEN GARZON: I feel like we want everybody to know we are tough. Every game, no matter who we're going to play, we want to win the game. No matter what's your name, what you have on your chest, we're going to want to win this game.

**Q. Yarden, the cliché is that you want to be playing your best basketball as you go into a tournament. Two pretty good performances here in Indy. How close do you feel like this team is to playing their best basketball now that the games really matter the most?**

YARDEN GARZON: I feel like we all give everything we have. I feel like we left everything on the court. That's what our Coach is asking from us every day. That's the most important thing.

Once we do that -- I mean, like Chloe's awesome on defense. She's one of the best defensive players in the country. I think she did an amazing job. I think Lexy did an amazing job on defense. I feel like as long as we go out there and give everything we can, I believe in us a lot, and I believe we can beat everybody.

**Q. Shay, they really pressured the ball a lot and forced**



**you to kind of start your offense from further out. How did that affect you offensively and especially you guys' ability to shoot as many 3s as you usually do?**

SHAY CIEZKI: It was pretty tough. It's not easy getting pressured, especially full court, like a lot of our guards today. But we just need to find other ways to offset our offense, to initiate it, to keep playing fast. That's just something we're going to learn and just grow from it.

**Q. Teri, Sydney said she'd never fouled out with so much time left in a game. How does that kind of throw a wrench into what you're trying to do at that point? How do you balance it? You try to send her back in, but then she gets the foul right away. What are your impressions of what occurred?**

TERI MOREN: Again, I trust Syd, just like I trust Yarden, those seniors and Chloe that have been doing it a long time to get in there and just understand that they can't pick up any of those cheap fouls.

The one that fouled her out was -- you just can't do that. You just can't do that. She knows that. She knows how important she is to have on the floor. I know that she's disappointed. Syd's a smart kid. She knows that her being able to stay on the floor was going to be really important for us.

Again, Lex had to come in and battle in spite of not having Syd. We were right there. It's just we came down, and like I said, we had a coverage. We were trying to -- I think it was blitz JuJu, and they got the ball out of it, she got the ball out of it and swung it to the corner, and 55 hits the first 3. Then the second 3 was just JuJu rising above, over Lex, and sticking the shot, which is hard to do.

Again, going into March, it's a hard lesson, but Syd will understand that she needs to be able to stay on the floor.

**Q. You just talked about JuJu's offensive capabilities, but it seemed like, especially in the third quarter, any time you guys were starting to make a move, she made a play defensively to kind of reel things back in. How tough is it to play against somebody like that who has a whole bag of tricks?**

TERI MOREN: You were talking about her defensively or her offense? Again, Kennedy Smith, I think, is such a great defender for a freshman. We can talk about JuJu defensively. It's amazing how often -- what I think she does such a good job of being able to get to the free-throw line.

We had some timely turnovers, there's no doubt about it.

Whether it was Kennedy, whether it was JuJu making a play on the ball, I'd have to go back and look, but I think where JuJu really puts pressure on you, how she kind of leans into that shot, right? We're telling Chloe to be vertical, show your hands, and I thought Chloe picked up two kind of cheap ones with JuJu being able to do that.

Nonetheless, she gets fouled 11 times, and I don't think anybody else was close to that. I think one of the recipes in trying to beat a really good USC team is keeping her especially off the free-throw line.

**Q. Similar question I had for Yarden. Do you feel like this team made progress here in Indy in the two games? I mean, they were pretty well played. Are you where you need to be in terms of going into the tournament?**

TERI MOREN: I think I said it, we've had some really good moments where we played good basketball prior to coming to Indy. I thought we played really well yesterday against Oregon. Certainly I thought our fight was there today against USC.

Again, it should give us great confidence. We can take a couple days here to kind of catch our breath and get off our feet. It's been a long season. Again, we can argue ACC, SEC, I think the Big Ten is just so good from top to bottom. It's been a grind of a season for all of us.

I think we're looking forward to maybe taking a couple days here, but once we get back to Bloomington and we get back together, it's going to be another week before we know what's going to happen, who we're going to play, and whatnot.

The great thing about being where we are is that we know that there's another tournament that we're going to be able to go in and play in, and probably for our kids, they're probably most excited about the opponent hopefully that we'll have we haven't seen yet. It will be a fresh, new opponent for us. I think there will be a whole new level of excitement.

Any time March Madness gets here and you wait for Monday and the selection show and whatnot. But, yeah, I think we'll take a lot of confidence from what we've been able to do the last two days.

I'm going to tell you, we're disappointed. Yarden said it. Our plan was to come in here, and we wanted to be playing on Sunday.

**Q. Are you positive, feeling positive that you're going to be in the tournament?**

TERI MOREN: Yeah, there's no doubt.

**Q. You don't worry about it at all?**

TERI MOREN: No.

**Q. You mentioned how your team played well yesterday and then today, but one ended in a win and then today a loss. How do you compare and contrast the two performances yesterday against Oregon and today against USC?**

TERI MOREN: Again, you have to go back, and I'll have to watch, like I said in my opening statement. The 11 offensive rebounds hurt us, the back to back. They were timely 3s that hurt us today. We were right there. And without a starter on the floor.

So a lot of really good takeaways from yesterday, but a lot of good takeaways from today. There's always things that you can improve and get better. We'll do that once we get back to Bloomington and get a look at both films and compare and contrast, what went well and what didn't.

**Q. Even if it's just for seeding or positioning or whatever, what's the case for your team going into Selection Sunday? What's the committee and what should people know about your season you guys have had?**

TERI MOREN: At the beginning of the season we were certainly without -- going into the season, Lenée Beaumont was going to be a big part of what we were going to be able to count on for us. She goes down with a knee injury in the summer, and we make the decision she's going to take the year off and not be available.

Then we go in and we don't have Lexy Bargesser at the beginning of the season as well because she's nursing a foot injury. We played without her for a majority of the first half of nonconference.

I think the injuries played a part in it. Any time you lose a kid like -- an All-American like McKenzie and a great shooter like Sarah, and you bring in new players like Shay and Strip, it's going to take time for your team to learn how to gel and learn to play with each other.

Again, going down to the Bahamas, Columbia is an excellent team out of the Ivy League. Then we turn around right the next day and beat a good Baylor team. They're top 20 in the country right now. Syd goes down. We have another injury. Then come up short against -- real short against North Carolina for a number of reasons.

Then we have to play a majority, another string of games without a starter like Syd Parrish, and then we get her back. We are able to get some really good wins, whether it was Nebraska at home, some of those on the road that maybe we fell short on. We come home, we play UCLA, both UCLA and USC really close, come up short.

Then turn around, Nebraska, think about it, Ohio State, play excellent. Then finish off the season with a great win at Purdue but then come in here beat Oregon, who we had lost to.

Are we gelling at the right time? We knew the year was going to kind of be -- there was going to be ebbs and flows in it, but again, we've got a veteran team. We've got an experienced team. We've had some tough luck throughout. We've had some challenges. Whether it was some on the floor, some off the floor and some just things that aren't really basketball related but can disrupt what our normal is.

There's not even a case to be made. Based on what we've been able to do, the history the last ten years, with our experience. I'm not worried about trying to make a case. Our team deserves to be in the field.

**Q. Teri, something that is, I guess, projected to be different is that you guys will likely have to be on the road wherever you go for the tournament. For the players that have not experienced that for you guys, just how do you expect to prepare them for those road one-and-done games?**

TERI MOREN: It will be -- we're going to miss being at home. We're going to miss -- the last two years we've been the fortunate ones to be able to host some of those first rounds.

The fact that, again, it's March Madness, and wherever they send us, we're going to go, and we're going to put our best foot forward. It might be different, but that's sometimes not a bad thing. Just the fact that we're going to, like I said, take a couple days off, and we can look forward to the next tournament. That's the most important thing.

Who we play, where we go really don't matter. We know that the next tournament is kind of similar to this. If you don't win, you're done, right? I feel really good about our group as far as competitive energy level, experience, all of it. We'll be ready.

**Q. Going against two All-Americans in Kiki Iriafen and JuJu Watkins, how hard does that make defending**

**them on the other side of the ball?**

TERI MOREN: They're challenging. Not to take -- I want to say this in the right way, but we've got a lot of teams that have been really challenging all year long. Both JuJu and Kiki are terrific, and we've got a tremendous amount of respect for USC and Lindsay, their staff and their players.

They're going to represent, just like we will, the Big Ten in their great way here in the next couple of weeks.

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