

# Indiana's Berger: A Tale of Two Graces

By:

Hudson Kirsh

8th Grade, Creekside Middle School, Carmel, Indiana

2021 Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament Junior Journalist

Indiana University

March 5, 2021

With just one more regular-season game, Indiana Women's Basketball is 17-4 overall, 15-2 in the Big Ten, ranked No. 10 in the nation, in second place in the Big Ten, and on an eight-game winning streak. There is a lot of leadership on this team. You wouldn't necessarily know it by talking with her, but Grace Berger has emerged as one of those leaders.

Grace is a junior from Louisville, Ky. When I interviewed her, she was very nice and friendly, but kind of quiet and unassuming. Then, I learned about what she's like on the basketball floor.

In Grace's freshman year, she was only averaging 5.5 points, 2.8 rebounds, and 1.6 assists per game. Then something happened. As a sophomore, she averaged 13.1 points, 5.2 rebounds, and 3.5 assists per game. Then a few things happened this year. As a junior, she is averaging 15.3 points, 6.7 rebounds, and 5 assists per game. Oh, and she has had 3 triple-doubles this year. That means Grace Berger leads the nation in triple-doubles. That also means she has the most triple-doubles in Indiana University Basketball history -- both Women's and Men's (and, remember, the Men's team has won five national championships) -- she's tied for the most triple-doubles in a season by a Big Ten

Women's player, and has the second most triple-doubles in a career by a Big Ten Women's basketball player.

Friendly, quiet, unassuming Grace Berger is not so friendly, quiet, and unassuming on the basketball floor.

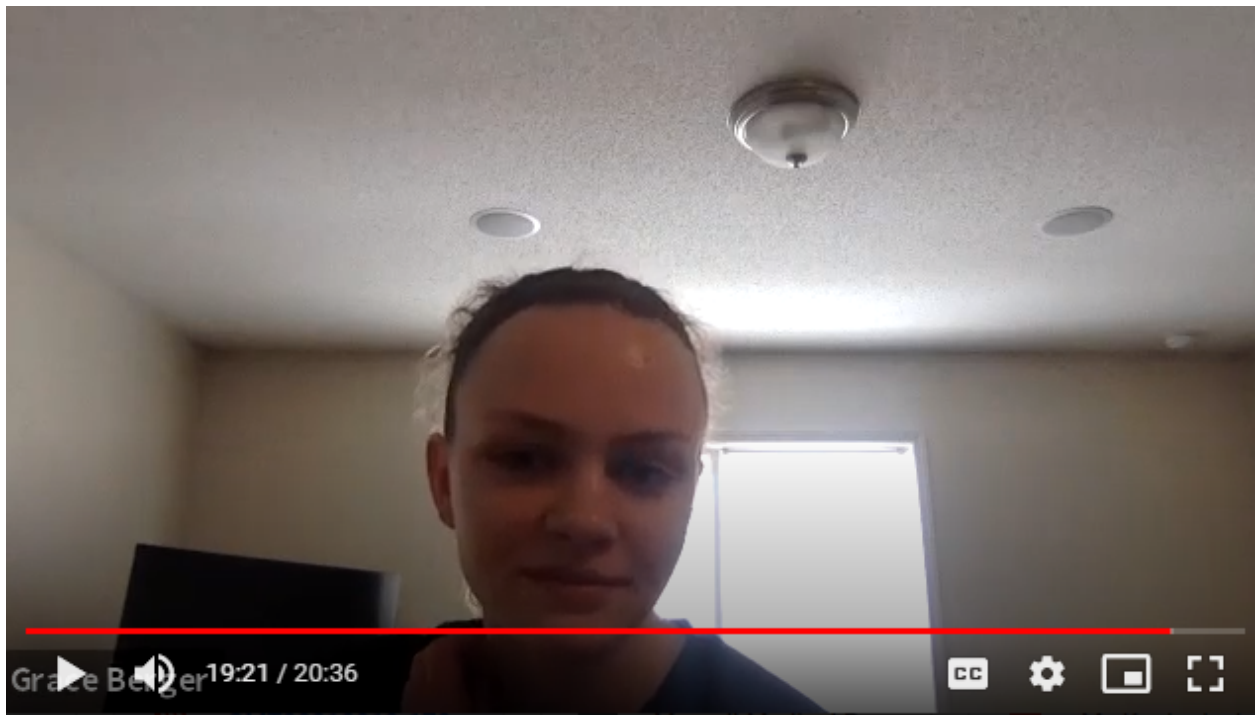
What makes Grace Berger so special?

Grace grew up around basketball in Kentucky. Her two older siblings both played basketball, and her dad played at Transylvania University. Grace said she started to play basketball when she was 5. Grace said she played a lot of other sports, but basketball was her favorite and she was most passionate about it. She also said she realized she could play at a program like Indiana when she was a junior in high school.

When it came down to deciding on a school, she chose Indiana. She picked Indiana over Kentucky and Louisville. When I asked her what made her pick Indiana, she said Indiana is a basketball state. She said she came to Hoosier Hysteria and could tell the fans were crazy about basketball ... just like her. It was an environment she wanted to be around.

When I interviewed Grace, I asked her about how she has made such major improvements. The first thing she said was "hard work." She told me that coming to college from high school was a rude awakening. She said, while she was good in high school, *everyone* is good in college. She said this was very humbling, and made her realize what she needed to get better at. To do this, she said she shows up at the gym with a good attitude and willing to push herself, be

uncomfortable, and try to get better everyday. Grace said she is not the tallest or the most athletic, so she works harder. She said sometimes she has had to believe in herself, even when others might not have. But, she also said her coaches have believed in her, even when she didn't necessarily believe in herself.



I asked Grace how she balances schoolwork and basketball. She said that school is first, then basketball. She also said you need to *know* what is important, so you can *focus* on what's important.

Grace also said the "Culture of Indiana" makes her work hard. "When you always see other people getting up extra shots and working on their game, it makes you feel guilty if you're not doing that," Grace said.



Grace says she always wants to be her personal best, and she's her biggest critic. Grace says Coach Moren teaches the team to be humble off the court, and humble enough at practice to be willing to work on their weaknesses. When it comes to gametime, Coach Moren teaches to trust the work and be confident to get the job done. Grace says, at gametime, you have to shift your thinking to believe in yourself and the work you've put in.

By the way, when I asked Grace about leading the nation -- and the storied Indiana basketball program -- in triple-doubles, she said, "It's definitely cool, but I

give credit to my teammates. They make it happen, and it shows what good teammates I have. It's more a team award than anything."

That's Grace Berger. Grace talks more about her teammates and her coaches than she talks about herself. So, I had to find others to talk about Grace.

Megan Kramper, Indiana's Assistant Director of Media Relations for Women's Basketball, said, "You see Grace is humble and quiet, but she's literally the most competitive kid I've ever seen."

Associate Coach Glenn Box works with Grace and the other guards. When I asked Coach Box about Grace Berger, he said there are two Graces: the quiet, unassuming Grace, and the Grace that is a fierce competitor. Coach Box said, "Grace is in the 99.99 percentile in terms of competitiveness." He said Grace has an unbelievable skillset, her ballhandling skills are elite, and her midrange game is as good as anybody's in the nation. I asked him what he meant when he said that about her midrange game. He said, "Her pullup. She can pretty much get a shot off anytime she wants." He said it is good to have her to be able to get the ball to, in case the play breaks down.



Coach Box said Grace Berger's work ethic is one of the best in the nation. He said sometimes they have to get her to leave the gym, because she is such a hard worker. He said Grace does not boast on the court -- she lets her play do the talking. Coach Box said, "Grace wants to win in the worst way. She's a perfectionist. You don't have to keep harping on her. She's not a big talker, but she's outspoken with herself. It eats her up when she does something wrong." Coach Box said Grace has also embraced the strength and conditioning part of her game. He said this allows her to do things she's never been able to do before.

I asked Coach Box about Grace's weaknesses. He said Grace needs to continue to work on her 3-pointers. He also said Grace has her fair share of "miscues on defense," often because of lack of focus. He said the Hoosier



coaching staff has been on her to work on improving her defense, and he says Grace has been putting in the work to improve that part of her game -- because that's what Grace Berger does.



Interestingly, Grace has also become a vegetarian, and she tries not to eat fried food or fast food. She said it makes her feel a lot better. At this level, she said you need to have any advantage you can get. She said this has made a huge difference for her. She feels she's now better able to outlast her opponents. So, no burgers for this Berger!



I had a chance to watch Grace in action as part of the media when the Hoosiers played Michigan at the Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall on February 18. On the court, you can tell she is focused. Grace played 39 minutes. While she only shot 3 for 12 from the field, and missed her two 3-point attempts, she had



four rebounds and led the team with four assists. Yet, when it mattered -- especially in the fourth quarter -- Grace made her free throws. As in, *all* of her free throws. Grace was *10 for 10 from the free-throw line* against the higher-ranked Wolverines. The fierce, competitive Grace came to play that Thursday evening in Bloomington.



During the post-game press conference, I asked Coach Moren what she thought of Grace's performance. Coach Moren said Grace was "quiet offensively" -- which gave me a little laugh, since Grace was the Hoosiers' second-leading scorer with 16 (including those 10 from the line). Coach Moren

said Grace's play, however, was really critical in tense moments when the Hoosiers needed a little breathing room. Coach Moren was really impressed with Grace's defense, as she held Michigan guard Akiemreh Johnson to 3 for 11 from the field, and scoreless from beyond the 3-point arc.

It sounds like Grace didn't like hearing she has "miscues on defense" ... so she went to work. Because that's what Grace Berger does.

Look for #34 during the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament March 9-13 at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis. I doubt you'll see both Graces -- I bet the quiet and unassuming Grace will be offcourt somewhere.