

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Hawai'i vs LSU

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Pete Maravich Assembly Center

LSU Tigers

Kim Mulkey

Angel Reese

Flau'jae Johnson

Media Conference



ANGEL REECE: She's one of our leaders. She doesn't really get down on herself. For her to come back and make those shots at the right time, she always seems to make the shots that gets the crowd going. She does that. She stays consistent.

Q. How much emphasis this past week have you guys spent on the defensive end of the floor and being able to turn good defense into efficient offense?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: We worked on that all week, just getting back to our defense. We play a lot of teams that play a lot of different styles but I feel like what we do in our defense, LSU defense really works for us. We worked a lot on transition defense. They shoot a lot of threes, so fanning out and getting downhill, that's. What we've been working on all week, so just getting back to our style of defense.

ANGEL REECE: Yeah, just focusing and just executing.

Q. Angel, they said you tied the school record with Ferdinand, who you may have met, another All-American here. What does that mean to have in your first NCAA Tournament game? You gave the crowd a bit of a scare when you went down you know with the ankle in the second quarter; what happened there?

ANGEL REECE: I caught a cramp. That was it. It wasn't my ankle. I'm excited I'm happy but it's bigger than that. I want to get to the next game, so taking one game at a time and just focusing on that. Got to get a lot of rest can recovery tonight and tomorrow. So just being able to play within the team and just listening to the trainers from now on.

Q. Did they do anything you had not seen this year defensively? Did they throw a lot of different things at you?

ANGEL REECE: I've seen double teams all year. I've seen post players become aggressive with me down low. They didn't give up. Hawai'i is a really good team. Just

LSU 73, Hawai'i 50

THE MODERATOR: From the SEC: Angel Reese is the first SEC player this century with at least 30 points and 15 rebounds in a Women's NCAA Tournament game.

Q. There were times where the offense was up and down. What was your mindset, what was your approach obviously now in the NCAA Tournament?

ANGEL REECE: Just doing whatever it takes to win. Hawai'i is a really great team, and we couldn't go back and forth shooting the three. They are a really good three-point shooting team, just guarding perimeter. Offensively we had the advantage inside, so just trying to get inside as much as we could.

Q. First taste of NCAA Tournament play and Coach looked like she ratcheted up the intensity on the defensive pressure, quick subs, in and out, and making sure she had y'all's attention. How important was that to start the game?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: It's very important. When I did my film, I was just like don't get beat backdoor because they kept going backdoor. So I got an early steal and I just feel like that made it contagious and everybody got into it. But we really were just focusing on defense, everybody being able to guard, big lineup, small lineup. So that's what I was really focused on when I came out.

Q. Alexis's burst of points, only like six but seemed to separate the score for good and fire up the crowd. What did you see there?



being able to know that, and just trying -- my teammates got me the ball as much as they could, so kudos to them. I'm just happy we came out with the win.

Q. We talked about this team not having a lot of postseason experience together. How important was this first step for you as a team? And then secondly, how important was it to see the physicality that's going to be coming at you in the postseason because they let y'all play early in the game?

ANGEL REECE: Yeah, I'm sure it let go of a lot of jitters that had never been to the tournament before and it was a first experience for a lot of them. Just being a leader and keeping everyone together and poised.

So this first game, and luckily we have it at home with our amazing fans here and just having that and going into our second game. We won't have fans after this round, so just trying to embrace it all.

I've seen physicality all year. So just focusing on that, I mean, early on, a lot of teams become physical with me, and I just can't let that get to me mentally, and the coaches do a great job of emphasizing that.

Q. Seemed like you guys made adjustments and recovered from the first half to the second half. Was that a big emphasis coming out of the locker room that you guys talked about?

ANGEL REECE: For sure, I think they had nine offensive rebounds and Coach really got us on that because people shouldn't really be getting offensive rebounds on us. But I think it was just all on us. It wasn't really something they were doing. We weren't focused. Just coming out in the second half and being really focused and playing together and just rebounding.

Q. Your brother had a big game yesterday for Maryland. Wanted your thoughts on that?

ANGEL REECE: I'm happy for him. They get to play tomorrow. My mom is here so she's probably going to drive down from here to Birmingham tomorrow and see him play. Being able to see him dance for the first time, I'm really happy for him. It's probably hard for a mom to pick one game to come to. So she came today and luckily she's able to come tomorrow. This is an enjoyable moment for the Reece family.

Q. We talked yesterday about everybody contributing but to see Poa really quick defensively tonight, and Dae getting some buckets early, I guess, how important is that for the success of this team?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: That's what's going to take us far, everybody just doing what they do best. I think that we are a great team when they can't just hone in on one person, you know what I'm saying. It just opens up what we can get for Angel and Lex and then Dae. I feel like we are a great team when everybody is just moving as one on the court offensively and defensively.

Q. Can you talk about what you saw on this Hawai'i team and anything specific they did on Alexis? She got points in the fourth, but anything defensively they were doing or was it all Alexis?

KIM MULKEY: No, they didn't do anything we didn't expect. I think it was Alexis missed some shots early. You know, she just needed to stay cool and she did. She didn't get it down. Doesn't get too high. She's a senior that understands that happens in the game and I thought we got her some screens there at the top, and she hit two or three baskets and I thought the crowd -- it energized the crowd and got everybody going.

But she didn't shoot it particularly well. Jasmine didn't, nor did Poa. But you win by 23 or whatever it was, and three guys that are in your top eight don't shoot it very well, we'll take that victory any day. I think we outscored them 11 field goals, got to the foul line our usual amount of times, 25 or so.

Rebounding, I'd have to go back and look and see why the rebounding was so close. I think some of it had to do with long rebounds. They got a lot of long rebounds, those 50/50 balls. Yeah, it wasn't like they trapped her and took it out of her hands or made her take bad shots. She had good looks.

Q. Earlier I talked to Lex after the game and asked her, you know, the game plan it seemed like y'all wanted to bang down low, and I asked her if maybe her shooting wasn't there because she was so focused on getting the ball inside. She didn't look like the offensive threat that we've seen for the majority of the season.

KIM MULKEY: No, I think she settled. If you go back to the beginning of the game instead of coming off the on-ball screen and get to that foul line area and shot a mid-range, she was settling for threes. I don't think it had anything to do with the fact that we wanted to pound it in there and we had the size advantage inside at all. I don't know this but I would be willing to bet, we got just as many perimeter shots as we did post shots.

She just, you know, that's basketball. You make some; you miss some; you keep shooting it.

Q. Were you satisfied with the first quarter defense? Looked like y'all really came out on fire defensively.

KIM MULKEY: I told them in the time-out, I said, it's not your defense that's struggling now. It's your offense.

I was pleased. I think we had like 20-plus turnovers. I'd have to look at how many turnover -- yeah, 21 turnovers we created, and we only had ten. We got our hand on a lot of balls. We were very active. We were very physical. I thought starting the game on the defensive end, I thought the kid were locked in.

Q. Can you talk about last year, Poa, second highest-plus minus tonight, even though the stats sheet might not show it, can you talk about what she does that makes her so effective on the court?

KIM MULKEY: First of all, Poa came to us, she scored the ball a lot in junior college, and she's very willing to be unselfish. She'll find the open player. Sometimes she makes too many soft passes and you need to make them a little bit more crisp.

But she's playing very confident. She's not afraid to shoot the ball. She's not afraid to drive in there. She's getting better defensively and keeping people in front of her and not hitting a screen and stopping. I thought the production from our bench was outstanding. I thought Kateri Poole had like six big rebounds. I thought Kateri, she was good tonight.

Sa'Myah, she was good early, and then you know, just teaching her, you know, as a freshman. I take Angel out of the game because she gave up a three and she goes in and gives up the same three so I take her out. I think Bob, Coach Starkey lit into her because he's in charge of post play.

But you've got to have those guys learn. They have to learn, and you know, Flau'jae and Sa'Myah are players that we defend on and not many freshmen see the floor as much as those two do.

Q. How proud does it make you when you see a true freshman like Flau'jae come and affect the game the way she did as early as possible on the biggest of stages? And wanted to get your inspiration on the outfit today?

KIM MULKEY: I'll answer Flau'jae first.

There's still a freshman. They have played a lot of minutes but they have never played in the postseason. So you

spend -- guys, we've been off two weeks. We weren't sharp. I don't make excuses. I remember when I was in the Big 12, I used to be envious of the SEC because I said, man, they get to rest.

Now I'm in the SEC and I'm like, nah, I don't like this rest stuff.

I challenged her and Sa'Myah, all week, that you are going to have to guard older players to keep advancing. I can't rush time. I can't make you experienced but you've just got to have it internally to have it in your gut; that I'm going to bow my neck and I'm going to do everything I can, Coach.

So she probably didn't like that. But she performed tonight. I subbed a lot early. May do that the whole playoffs. Just depends on the flow of the game. May start a different lineup tomorrow because Michigan is big at all positions.

We worked in two weeks on things that I haven't worked on all year, not changing who we are and what our identity is, but I have to work on a big lineup. I have to work on a small lineup. I have to work on presses. I have to -- so there was a lot of teaching going on in two weeks with a few days off there, but I challenged her. I think she responded beautifully today.

The outfit is -- you know, it says Kiss, what? "Kiss Me I'm a Queen." That's the people who give me my clothes, Queen of Sparkles. It's not talking about me being a queen.

On the back, it's lips, right? You kiss with your lips, right? And what color is it? (Green) And what is today? (St. Patrick's Day).

So are you any of you Irish? We all acknowledge it; tomorrow is the St. Patrick's Day parade in Baton Rouge. If you're here and you have nothing to do, they say it's wonderful. Go see it.

Last year it was a conflict with us with the NCAA playoffs. That's the story behind the shirt. Not me being a queen. It's giving acknowledgment to Queen of Sparkles.

Q. In your 2021 tournament run with Baylor, 78-75 overtime game against --

KIM MULKEY: Michigan. Kim and I are friends, the coach from Michigan, and I saw her when she was leaving the court -- was it today or yesterday? And we just went and embraced, brought her daughter, one of her children.

You know, when you get to the NCAA playoffs, you want to see new people. Do you realize they have put us together

three of the last six NCAA Tournaments. She looked at me and I looked at her and said. "What in the hell is the deal? Is it a 'Kim' thing?"

She goes, "I know it."

I played her in the bubble, too, when the bubble was in San Antonio. That's the one you're talking about. Then I played here in 2018 at our place in Waco, and now here we are playing each other again. You think at some point, you're going to see somebody different.

For a long time at Baylor, it was Cal. Much respect for him. Her kids are grown now. When they came in 2018, it was during Easter and I gave them gifts and Easter baskets and now I look at her kid, and her daughter is probably going to play for her some day. She's one of the good ones. Good coach. Good person. A good mother. Good wife. I hate that we have to play each other.

Q. Defensively, the scout for them, you'll have to close out and play big.

KIM MULKEY: They are just solid, you know, Brown at the top. When I last played them, she wasn't their point guard. They had Hillman inside. They are big at all positions, not 6-5, 6-7 like a South Carolina. They are just 6-1, 6-2. On the perimeter, they are big.

They played all year in what a lot of people consider the best league in women's basketball which makes me want to give a shoutout right now to the SEC. The SEC has won their games, haven't they? Right? We haven't lost yet. Ole Miss is left, right.

So maybe you need to give a shoutout to the SEC today. Tough league. If you watch the Big Ten, a lot of just tough, strong basketball.

Q. I know your team is usually better from the three than they were today but I think this is maybe the second time where you've had a rough day from there and still won handily. To what extent does having a player like Angel in particular allow you to win by this much when you're struggling from outside?

KIM MULKEY: Well, I've always been blessed to have good post play. I've never had to coach a team that Jacks threes up and shoots 30-plus a game. How many of these teams ever win national championships? Men or women? They may in the pros, the Warriors or different teams but it's a different game at the pro level.

I've been blessed. We were 1 for 14. 14 is a good number for us to shoot. They challenged us to shoot those. We'll

make them. We'll make more than that. Keep shooting it. But we are not going to live and die by the three ball. That doesn't mean we don't have kids that can shoot it.

It's just we are not going to live and die by it. To think that we won by 23 today and Alexis Morris scores, what, six, and she and jasmine and Poa missed all those wide-open shots, I'll take that any day.

Q. To follow up on that, what does that say about this group that even when Alexis Morris does have a night off that you can still dominate offensively? And as you prepare for Michigan, what is your message to her to try to keep that confidence in her shooting?

KIM MULKEY: I don't have to give her a message. Alexis Morris is going to be fine. If you look down the scoring, I'll take that. You'd love to have four or five scoring double figures but if you look, 9, 2, 6, 5, 3; nobody was hesitant to shoot it. I'll take that kind of scoring. You scored 73 points.

I thought our defense was good until about the middle of fourth, we got a little fatigued and let them start hitting some threes. They average 7 threes a game and we held them to that. They only average shooting 22 or 25 threes and for probably good reason, they shot more. They are not going to go inside again us, and so they are going to look for more threes.

Yeah, survive and advance, right. We've been here at this level. We want to win one more and get to a Sweet 16. But Michigan does, too.

Q. To survive and advance, do you have to play better on Sunday than you played today to win?

KIM MULKEY: Did we play bad?

Q. Offensively you weren't great.

KIM MULKEY: Yeah, we just didn't shoot.

Q. Defensively you were good.

KIM MULKEY: We just didn't shoot it good from the perimeter. I mean, I'd love to tell you that, man, we are going to do better and we are going to score at all five positions. Go win a ballgame. We won a ballgame by 23, and I don't think we played bad.

I think we were a little rusty and missed some open looks. You could go out there right now and they would probably make evident one of them. That's basketball. That's the game of basketball.

Honestly it wasn't looks -- maybe a few were contested. It was wide open looks. I got to see that firsthand in the second half in front of me. I couldn't tell if some of those shots we were taking from the perimeter they were challenging us to shoot those or not. I would say leave us open, leave us open if you don't think we can make it. We are not afraid to shoot it.

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