

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Michigan vs LSU

Saturday, March 18, 2023

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Pete Maravich Assembly Center

Michigan Wolverines

Coach Kim Barnes Arico

Media Conference



as possible when people had success and when she really had success, and what we can do against her.

Q. How have you seen her game kind of improve over this last year at LSU?

COACH BARNES ARICO: Yeah. Well, one, I think she's finishing way better. Her percentage is off the charts. But her rebounding. She was a great rebounder last year as well. But you don't really see many rebounders at this level have 20-plus rebounds a game, or 15 rebounds a game. That's absolutely incredible. So she has a gift to go get the basketball and motor to the ball. But just her presence on the defensive end as well. Her ability to block shots. She's grown. And I knew she could always handle the basketball. But her ability to start the break, her ability to start the transition, her decision making has got a lot better. She's grown in every facet of her game and she's playing at a really high level.

Q. Couple of your players were talking about, you saw LSU's type of athleticism and speed in the nonconference. Did you get a lot of this during Big 10 play, and if so, there is anything you can liken it to? And how does that better prepare you for tomorrow?

COACH BARNES ARICO: Yeah. They are long, they are fast, they have tremendous size, and they have tremendous speed. You know, we played Baylor earlier this year, their guard play is similar. They have some good post players as well. They don't have Angel Reese. But our league, maybe not the same type of athlete, but speed and post play, Indiana has been terrific. They are one of the top teams in the country. Ohio State has that type of athleticism. Iowa has some really great players, inside-outside combo in terms of a point guard and a post play, just like LSU. Maybe not the same, but definitely -- I think the other thing that these three specifically that were up there, they have had an opportunity in the last four years to play in the NCAA Tournament where they have, you know, faced Baylor when Kim was at Baylor. Faced Tennessee a couple years ago in the bubble. So we have played against different teams that have that size and that athleticism.

COACH BARNES ARICO: Kim Barnes Arico.

THE MODERATOR: Michigan got passed UNLV on Friday. Coach I know you had a chance to watch the second game and then a practice, how did everything go as you lead up now to tomorrow night?

COACH BARNES ARICO: It was great. We tried to enjoy the moment yesterday for a little bit. And then get back to work. LSU is a great team and tomorrow is going to be a great game. They have an incredible program. So we had a chance to practice and prep for them. Obviously, they are led by two superstars, but they really have a balanced team around them as well and are dangerous in so many ways.

THE MODERATOR:

Q. Coach, have you watched some film of how y'all guarded Angel Reese? Y'all faced her three times, I believe. And what did y'all do to make her struggle so much in those games?

COACH BARNES ARICO: Yeah. We definitely watched that. I had my assistant coach, Val Nainima, this is her scout. And we talked about, you know, getting those clips from last year just to show our team those clips. And we also had an All-American who has graduated and playing in the WNBA right now, she guarded her, so that helped a little bit. So I think we did a great job on her two times that we played her. But she's also improved a tremendous amount. You know, everyone's freshmen year is challenging in many different ways. And she was a freshman going against Naz Hillmon who was a senior last year. And I think Naz, kind of, had the advantage. But she's grown so much. She's matured so much. And her game has really exploded this season. She's not the same player. But I do think it is helpful for us to see as many clips



Q. Coach, I think Coach Mulkey's striving to get what you have, and that is a group of players that have played together for a long time and have experience. What does that mean, you know, at this stage of the season?

COACH BARNES ARICO: Yeah. I think that's really a great point. And obviously, I know she spoke a little bit about it yesterday, how we feel like we've played against each other a bunch probably in the last few years. But I remember 2005. I think I was on the All-American Committee and I was a young coach. And she was in the final four with an All-American. One of the first times that I had met her. I always watched from afar how she built her program and how she built her culture and how her teams play. And I think she was able to do that and sustain that with consistency year in and year out at Baylor. She's only been here a short period of time. What she has done in a short period of time is incredible. I do think there is something to be said for experience. And these three that are up here have had that experience and have been able to make runs in tournaments and have played, you know, with each other for a long period of time, even Laila who is only a sophomore. Emily was laughing at them because our three guards know each other and they play off each other. And Emily was laughing about the guards, but she's the smartest kid on the floor and she sees things on the defensive end before they happen, and she's always in the right spot, and she's always in help defense. I think her IQ has really kind of been, you know, the foundation, the core of what our defense is built on. But there's no substitute for experience, and you know, they are going to get there. I'm sorry, but I don't feel bad for them. They will get there. They haven't played together for a long period of time because most of them are young or just getting here, but they are still terrific players and have a great program.

Q Coach Mulkey joked last night, saying it always seems to end up being you guys going against each other in the postseason. How have those battles been for you?

COACH BARNES ARICO: Yeah. You know, they have been battles. And always -- I wish one of those times, maybe one of these times we're going to get Mulkey up to Ann Arbor. It's nice when you get to play on your home court. And I know -- I was here yesterday, the crowd and kind of the intensity and the advantage of being home is incredible. And I know that the program here has such rich tradition. I followed it when I was a young kid with Coach Gunter. It's back and there's fire and there's intensity. And she's got it back. Which is really exciting. But like I said, I've always, you know, watched her, studied her, as a young coach coming up. And just kind of how she built teams and how she kept that consistency and how hard she got her players to play. I think, you know, is something

that our players really pride themselves on as well. We want to be the toughest team out there, we want to play incredibly hard, and we want to play together. And we always talk about wanting to do it, you know, for Michigan. We want to do it for Michigan. For something bigger than ourselves. And I feel like, you know, this program, the LSU program, does that as well in a short period of time. So yeah, we have a little bit of history. It does seem like, you know, we get to play against each other. I know for the rest of the world it probably feels like it's a few years and I didn't realize that until I looked at the pictures of children, who were this big and now are this big. We feel like we never age. So that made me realize it was a couple years ago. But I think it's kind of a great thing at the end of the day. It means that we've both been in women's college basketball for a period of time, and to keep competing at this level is pretty special.

Q. Kim, kind of going back to the question about players with experience. How do you approach kind of the transfer portal and how has that kind of changed kind of what we've seen over the last couple years when we get to this time of year, you have some lower seeds winning some games against higher seeds. Is experience as important as it was 10 years ago, or is there a way to circumvent that now?

COACH BARNES ARICO: Those are great questions. And this is an interesting time in college athletics, for sure. The landscape has certainly, certainly changed. But it's been a little bit different for us. And it's a little bit different at Michigan, just from an academic perspective. It's not a fit for everyone. So, you know, in terms of -- we're really selective in terms of the transfer portal. So what we've kind of built our program on is people that buy into the process and people that buy in to improving. Emily Kiser is a great example of a kid that came to Michigan and backed up an All-American and backed up a four-year starter and didn't really play until the end of her junior year. And here she is as a fifth-year, First Team All-Conference. I think those things really make me smile as a coach. And those things are things I get really excited about. Players are getting developed, and players are improving, and our team is improving. The scary part, the opposite side of that is you know, when you lose that experience, you know, other teams are bringing in transfers that have that experience right away. And that's the reality of it though. And I think that has helped a lot of teams become great quick. I think it's a different -- it's not the same philosophy as building a program and building something that's going to have that type of consistency year in and year out. It's just different. But it's interesting. I don't know, you know, I can't comment on it either way. I just know what we do. But it's just the landscape has certainly changed and it will be interesting to see in the next few years where things go.

Q. I have two questions. When you are talking about the smartest defender, was that about Emily or Laila?

COACH BARNES ARICO: Emily is like the glue. Emily is our old lady staple in the middle of our defense. She's such a high IQ player and she knows where to be and how to help people out. Even when Naz was here, Naz was an incredible athlete. Emily was always in the right spot to make sure she was always help Naz out. Emily is like the glue to our defense.

Q. People keep talking about you are both named Kim. And you are on the opposite end of the outfit spectrum. She is Jordans and hoodie and she is glitter and sparkles. Do you have anything special planned for tomorrow?

COACH BARNES ARICO: Oh my gosh. I can't keep that pace. I don't know how she does it. You know, I used to be -- preCOVID I was the heels and the dress up. And then COVID hit and I'm like, "Oh my goodness, my feet feel so good and my legs aren't screaming at the end of the night." I don't wake up with pain in my calves anymore. I'm completely Jordans. It's nice to have the Jordan brand as well. It's a good look. It's a good fit, as the kids say. Yeah, I have something special planned for tomorrow. You know, I'm not going to be Kim. No one is Kim. I'm the other Kim. But no one is Mulkey. So she has her own look and it works for her.

Q. Sometimes coaches have an interesting way of highlighting certain plays in the film review and emphasizing those to their team. And this might have been asked before I got in. So there was one play yesterday, you probably remember, Brown dove on the floor and didn't succeed in getting the ball. In terms of the stat sheet, a possession that was inconsequential but in terms of tangible, maybe it meant more. Kim Mulkey showed that play to her team specifically. And I'm wondering, you know, when people are talking about the Kim versus Kim matchup. The fact that one of your players did it and the fact that the other Kim picked up on it and showed it to her team, does that kind of show any in your mind similarities about your approach to the intangibles?

COACH BARNES ARICO: Yeah. I was telling I don't know maybe one of our players about this last year. I went to the draft with Naz Hillmon, and NaLyssa Smith was at the draft. As soon as I came in, her mom came running up to me and she's like, "I need to talk to you. I need to talk to you." I was like, "Okay." She's like, "We just hated playing against your team." She said it was always, like, "Oh no, we got to play against Michigan again because of how hard

your team played." And that was something that Coach Mulkey always prided herself on is we're going to have a team that plays incredibly hard, and we're going to be, you know, the hardest-working team on the floor. But she's like, "When we face Michigan we felt like there was another team that was really challenging us and doing those intangible things the way that we were expected to do it." And in that moment, she's like, "We never wanted to play you." Kim wasn't there anymore at that time, but I think that just spoke volumes for her to say that, just about our program because something that is a staple. We always say that we want to be the hardest-working team in America. How do you measure that? Everyone says that. Yesterday we talked about our stickers a little bit. And I think you were in there and the intangibles. But you got to see a few of those plays. Maddie Nolan stepped in and said, "Coach, I have never been hit so hard," when she tried to take that charge. And it was called off her foot. But she stepped in and she was like, "Am I still going to get a sticker?" That was the first question last night. "Am I going to get a sticker for that even though the ref didn't call that a charge?" Leigha Brown -- we have a team of people that decide if it's sticker worthy or not. When I read the stickers last night. They didn't give Leigha a sticker for that. But we say, you know, "You have to come up with it." So we add another layer to it. But I'm happy that, you know, they saw, and the rest of the world saw, that our team is willing to sell out and willing to sacrifice and make those type of plays because we do believe those could be difference-makers. And I think that LSU and Kim-coached teams, they will play the same way. And our kids will know that. And they will be aware of that as well.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Coach, thank you very much for your time. Best of luck tomorrow.