

Big 12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 12, 2021

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Baylor Lady Bears

Kim Mulkey

NaLyssa Smith

Postgame Press Conference



Baylor - 92, TCU - 55

Q. Kim, I guess just a good way to start the tournament. You guys have really done it every game, but Lauren Heard just -- she scores on everybody else, but you guys have held her down in every game.

KIM MULKEY: Well, mainly Moon today because DiDi got the two quick fouls, played only the first five minutes of the game. Normally, I would tell you that DiDi did all the shutting down, but really Moon had a lot to do with that today.

It varies from team to team. It can be NaLyssa's man one game. It can be Queen's man one game. I think you have to attribute a lot of that to our scouting reports, the fact that we emphasize defense like we do, and it was -- again, Lauren Heard did not hurt us today. I thought Diggs and those guys took a lot more shots than they normally take. Everybody got to play. Everybody got to feel good.

I was so glad and impressed with the last five minutes of the game because those minutes matter to me because you're looking at players that are young, and you're looking at players that you can spot down the road and play and look at what they all do. It was good to see them all on the floor, and they all did something good.

Q. Kim, you mentioned DiDi's foul trouble early. I thought Jordyn Oliver and Sarah Andrews came in and played really well that first quarter.

KIM MULKEY: I thought all of them that went in that were young played well because you didn't have Moon some in there. I gave her a breather. You didn't have Trinity out there, and you didn't have DiDi out there, your three starting perimeter players. We got an 18-point lead, and then the last maybe minute or two minutes of the half, we lost that and went in at halftime with a 13-point lead.

You have to teach, but you also have to praise, and those are minutes that were valuable, and they were playing against starters from TCU, and they still did some pretty good stuff there in the first half.

Q. Kim, of course NaLyssa had a big game. She scored eight of your first 12 points. Did that kind of open up things for everybody else once she established her presence in there?

KIM MULKEY: Well, John, NaLyssa is Player of the Year in this league and deservedly so. I was just telling her, when we were walking down the hall, you're going to get everybody's best shot offensively and defensively. Whoever you're guarding, they're coming right at you, and whoever's guarding you, they're coming with help and all that.

That's what the great players do. They have to adjust. They have to adapt. She made some great passes to queen in the second half. I told the team this, and NaLyssa starts this -- I've been doing this a long time, since I was 23 years old, and each team is different. Each team has strengths and weaknesses, and you never compare teams. This team has found its little niche on these lob passes and catching it in the air and finishing it. How many of those did you see even when the game was ending? I've got guards that can do that. That's just pure athleticism.

And the timing of the passes, that's a teammate timing it just right, comfortable with each other. NaLyssa kind of, it's contagious from her because she can do it so effortlessly, so the rest of them want to do what NaLyssa does. Yeah, when NaLyssa's feeling it, you kind of just smile and go, I'm glad she's on my team.

Q. Congratulations on the win. Coach, just following up what you just talked about. Smith, back-to-back alley-oops, can you explain a little bit of that? And then also your team's performance today.

NALYSSA SMITH: I feel like it comes from chemistry. Like in practice, we always practice those things. Like at this point, we're so far in the season that they know where I

want the ball and how I want it. So it goes back to like team chemistry. They know like where to pass the ball, and they know I'm going to go get it.

On the game, I feel like everybody played well. It was a collective effort today. Like she said, the bench gave us a lot. When the bench can give us something, you can tell it's going to be a great game.

Q. Kim, what do you feel like the biggest difference was between your performance in the first half and the second half? What do you think clicked?

KIM MULKEY: Well, I think we just kept grinding. We played a lot of players today, and I hope that we just -- I don't want to say wore them down, but we're going to push the ball, and I thought we got a lot of transition baskets in the second half that maybe we didn't look for or get in the second half. I thought that in the first half, our defense was better than our offense, which I'm good with, but I thought in the second half our offense caught up to our defense.

We started hitting some perimeter shots. We started getting some transition baskets. You had your leaders out there on the floor more, DiDi and Moon, and in the first half we didn't.

Q. Then I guess, following up with that, you had mentioned the perimeter shooting kind of helped open up the game. Is that something that you feel like y'all are going to have to improve a little bit going into the tournament? I know that's not where the focus of the offense is, but is that something you feel like you need to improve on heading into the NCAA Tournament?

KIM MULKEY: Well, it goes without saying, if you can hit some perimeter shots, you're more dangerous, right? Do you know how many perimeter threes we hit in the National Championship run? So does it help? Well, yeah, if we can say, oh, boy, I'd love to have ten of them out there. But at the end of the day, we're going to just keep playing, and we're going to keep shooting, and we're going to keep executing.

So to answer that question, everybody wants to look for somebody's weakness. I was told that National Championship team would never win it because they couldn't hit the perimeter shot or we don't shoot enough of it. We're old school. We're old fashioned. I don't think there's anything old school and old fashioned about this bunch that can leap and run the floor and catch it in the air and finish. That's just athleticism, and that's getting up and down the floor.

I can tell you one thing I do think we need to improve on,

and that is we've got to quit turning the ball over. We're having too many unforced turnovers. When you get to a tight game, those turnovers are going to be very costly.

Q. NaLyssa, I know it's not the big tournament just yet, but how did it feel for you and your teammates to play in a tournament game where it just has that extra energy and buzz around it?

NALYSSA SMITH: I mean, it feels good. We're playing for our three seniors who didn't get to make it this far last year.

KIM MULKEY: Four.

NALYSSA SMITH: My bad. Four seniors that didn't get to make it this far last year. So that's another lift for us to just come out here and compete every day.

Q. Do you feel like -- obviously, you had a great game today. Did you feel like it elevated you to a new level, or do you just go out and do what you do regardless of the circumstances?

NALYSSA SMITH: I just play basketball. My team got me the ball. I feel like everybody just played good today.

Q. Coach, for you, in the same note of the tournament, obviously, quick turnaround playing Texas tomorrow. What does that preparation look like? How do you go from celebrating such a big win to getting ready for the next game so quickly?

KIM MULKEY: We're all in the same boat. We all have to do the same thing. We will go eat. We'll relax. Used to, we could come watch games tonight, but we can't do that because of COVID, so we'll watch them on TV. We'll have dinner, and then after dinner, we'll go and do our film work. I hope that, because we played Texas twice late, late in the year, we're very familiar with Texas, and that's about all you can do. You can't do your work before getting here because you don't know who you're going to play. So it's a quick bam, bam, bam, three games in a row if you're fortunate enough to make it to the Championship. We're not at an advantage or a disadvantage. Everybody's got to do the same thing.

Q. NaLyssa, for you. When you look at where Sarah Andrews was at the start of the year till now and her just getting comfortable, her being out there in the first quarter, and then throwing that alley-oop to you, or one of the alley-oops. How much better is she now? How much more comfortable is she now than she was at the start of the year?

NALYSSA SMITH: She's so much better. I mean, you can

see it in her game. She's shooting with more confidence, passing with confidence. She knows where to get people the ball. You can just tell she's playing with a lot more confidence, and it shows in her game.

KIM MULKEY: I thought -- to tell you a little more about what you just asked. I thought Sarah Andrews and Jordyn Oliver, they were 8-for-11 from the field when they went in for that first half. That's nothing but confidence. That's nothing but kids that want to contribute, kids that are more comfortable out there because, when they become more comfortable, they become more confident. That's why we got that 13-point lead in the first half.

Q. Kim, I forgot to ask you the other day -- and I know you say reward conference championships, or champions. NaLyssa got Player of the Year, but the only player on the 10-player First Team. Was that a little bit of a disappointment, I guess?

KIM MULKEY: Everybody thinks their kids deserve certain things, and I'm no different. I've been doing it a long time, and I can't remember -- help me, Kyle -- it was the National Championship team. I can't remember who it was, but we may have only had -- or the year before that. I don't know. It's just, when you deal with voting and you don't put your name on a ballot, I feel like you protect your own players a lot, and I think, if you put your name on a ballot, I think we get a truer picture of that it doesn't matter to me if you're First Team or Second Team. What does matter to me is do the right thing as a coach and don't hurt kids.

I feel like all of our players got some kind of reward. They either made first, second team, got Player of the Year, newcomer of the year. Two of them were on the All-Defensive Team. Queen and Carrington were Honorable Mention. So they were all rewarded in some way, so I was fine with it. I can tell you I haven't been fine with it in years past.

You win the league by four games, right? We won the league by four games. We won the league by four games last year. We had three on the First Team. So I guess I'm coaching them down. We only had one on the First Team this year, right?

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