

# Big 12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 12, 2021

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

## Kansas State Wildcats

### Jeff Mittie

#### Postgame Press Conference

Kansas State 56, West Virginia 58

**Q. Coach, on that last play, Ayoka told me it was supposed to go into a lob. Was there a second option, because it was as crowd in the paint?**

JEFF MITTIE: Yeah, the second option would've been Rachel or Chrissy lifting up out of that and driving it out of -- or shooting it, one or the other. We had both the shooters spread wide on this play.

**Q. Did you think Ebert made the right decision to try to lob it to Ayoka?**

JEFF MITTIE: I think they -- you know, it's hard to -- it's hard to say. I mean, it's rarely a bad decision to lob it to Ayoka, so we have certainly gotten a lot of lobs. Yeah, just didn't work out. West Virginia made a great play on it.

**Q. Throughout the game how did you feel about the team's defense? They maybe kind of caught some breaks with West Virginia not making some jumpers, but overall how do you think they played tonight?**

JEFF MITTIE: I thought the defense played really well. I don't know about the breaks in terms of -- they're a talented offensive team. We executed what we wanted to. We wanted to force them into some jump shooters and at least keep them off the free throw line as much as possible. So I thought we executed that. When we got our defense set it was pretty good, but when they were in transition, we weren't very good. But for the most part we controlled the tempo and we kept them out of transition, with the exception of the start of the game, and obviously the end of the game, we didn't handle that very well.

**Q. And this is my last one here. Down the stretch she took like 12 threes in the game and hit four of them, but Ranke hitting the big threes in back-to-back games to end the year, how did you like Ranke and making those big shots when you really needed them?**



JEFF MITTIE: I think Rachel, she plays with no fear and she's -- hit big shots throughout her career. It's good to see her get her legs under her because she was the last one to come out of the COVID protocol, so it's taken her longer to get into game shape.

But, yeah, she hit some big ones. Certainly in this tournament she knocked down some big ones.

**Q. Ayoka said when she was in there and I asked her, she said this is about as tough a loss as she's ever had given just the stakes of what was on the line. You've had a lot longer career than her, but where does this rank for you?**

JEFF MITTIE: Well, I haven't had time to process that, Ryan. My answer would be more I think of a totality of this season in that everything we had to go through to play it. I haven't talked to a coach that's had a, you know a tougher situation than we had after Christmas. We had double-digit COVID situations from Dec. 26 to the 31st, and didn't play a game for 31 days I think ended up being the number.

And then we come back and we absorb gut punch after gut punch kind of like this. And in a season where you've seen some teams opt out and decide to something different, I was proud of our group for fighting through, and especially when you're having the gut punches and you're going through all the stuff and you're trying to play your way back into shape and all the things that go through your head.

So I feel for them that they have another game like this. That's sports and that's kind of what I told them. You get to experience the highs and you get to, in this case and in other cases this year, we've had as tough of losses.

So I think any time you struggle handling things down the stretch when you played well for 38 minutes, you know, it's different. It's different because one facet of the game has lost us games. That's a hard pill to swallow for a team that seemingly did other facets of the game really well, right, or good enough to win. I don't know where it ranks, but it's pretty hard right now.

**Q. Another thing would be just how big Emilee was for you tonight. She led you guys in first half scoring and she had three huge plays in the fourth quarter: The three-point play, the block that led it Chrissy Carr's transition lay-up, and then the pass on three for Ranke. How good was she tonight for you guys?**

JEFF MITTIE: Yeah, you know, that's one of the things, Ryan, when you look at like -- that was one of the things we talked about when we talked about being worth fighting through everything, was that look at all the things we did get to see this year. We saw Emilee Ebert really improve. We saw Ayoka Lee do historic things. We saw Chrissy Carr hit big shots and have career highs. Saw Rachel, you mentioned her. Laura Macke I thought played fantastic. Taylor Lauterbach has continued to get better. Gave us really good minutes tonight.

So talking about Ebert, I thought she made a lot really good plays tonight and made a lot of right plays tonight. Yeah, she was really good. Had really good focus and I think she was playing through some pain out there. She had some foot stuff all year, but she's kind of learned to manage it.

**Q. I wouldn't ask about this if on the broadcast Brenda Van Langen, who was doing it for ESPN+, was just beside herself about the no-call on Chrissy there. How tough that was not to get something there when everyone and their mom seemed to know that was a foul?**

JEFF MITTIE: Unbelievable. I mean, we've had it a couple times this year. I don't know what else to say. These guys got to be better. I'll probably get some reprimand, but it's their job to be better. I don't know what to say. The kid is landing on her back and I have no words for that. I don't.

Obviously I'm giving you some words. Boy, I got a lot more, but I'm going to be careful here. I'm going to be careful here.

**Q. And then Jeff, last thing for me and in a way you touched on it and it's a little bit like what Bruce Weber said after the loss yesterday. I know you guys had the really high expectation for yourself and you were picked pre-season No. 4, but for you do you view the season as a success? You got to a tournament when last year you didn't get to do it with a pandemic. So I know it is very fresh after the loss, but how do you view this season as a whole?**

JEFF MITTIE: It's hard for me to view it as a success because this team had -- it's hard not to feel like it wasn't taken away. But so many people have lost so much with

the virus, so this is just sports, you know. And so we got to play, and so it's hard not to be grateful for all the things that everybody went through to help us play.

So for that, and I think for a bigger picture, I'm going to say that there were successful things that happened in the last two months that will benefit our team, individuals, our program going forward.

**Q. I have one more question. So all but two teams lose the last game of the year. But a heartbreaker like this, you could potentially upset the No. 17 team in the country, was the toughest part to being a coach going into the locker room after a game like that at the end of the year. And try to say the right thing to the team even though everybody is obviously very emotional.**

JEFF MITTIE: Well, I think that's one of the things that took me a long time to go to the locker room tonight because I wanted to choose my words carefully. I didn't want to go in there and I wanted them to know how proud I was of all the things that I mentioned here about making a decision to fight through it, and even when we got the gut punches early, tough things happened, we continued to fight.

I think there of been individual successes. I think there have been lessons that, you know -- and then I just -- been lessons that we learned, hard lessons, and then from the aspect of what's going on nationally, just to be able to play, you're looking at high school kids that maybe they decided their season couldn't happen. You're looking at those kind of things. Or the universities of Big 12 to make the commitment to get our players to play, we should be grateful even though it's extremely hard right now. And I think our team is.

This will be tough one to settle, but I think we'll wake up tomorrow and we will recognize that there were things this year that were productive, and I think it'll help us be a better team next year.

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