

Big 12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 11, 2022

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Kansas State Wildcats

Coach Jeff Mittie

Serena Sundell

Ayoka Lee

Postgame Press Conference

Kansas State 65, Texas 72

THE MODERATOR: We are now welcomed by Kansas State. Coach Jeff Mittie, Serena Sundell, and Ayoka Lee. Coach, your thoughts?

JEFF MITTIE: Well, I thought it was a heck of a game. I thought we made a really good push back at them after they pushed away from us at the end of the third.

That end of the third was critical. We gave up back-to-back three's and had to turn over to get the ball in bounds, and that happened quick. That happened in about a minute and 20 seconds, and that was the turning point where we just couldn't push back enough.

I thought we made some good plays down the stretch and thought our group kept fighting and gave us a chance.

Q. Jeff, how much more frustrating is it? You guys shot 50% from the field. How much more frustrating is it to lose in a game like that?

JEFF MITTIE: We haven't been able to get enough shots against them. We only got 41 shots. We've been kind of in that number. Turnovers were a problem early in this game. It's a really physical game, so they really -- defensively they lock you up.

But we just -- and you know, we're not a team honestly that offensive rebounds, so we don't get a lot of extra possessions that way.

So, yeah, we shot 51%. I thought our group attacked well. I thought we did some things better than we had the previous games against Texas, but, yeah. We shot well enough to win. We shot well enough to win and we did



some things good enough to win.

We didn't have enough shots and we didn't have enough possessions, and part of that was the turnovers.

Q. How difficult was the foul trouble, especially in the first half for you guys?

JEFF MITTIE: Well, I think -- yeah, boy, I tell you what. I could go on and on about some things in terms of fouls. I think Texas did a good job of driving it at us. They did a good job of -- they're a step quicker in some areas, and if you're late on a play you're going to pick up some fouls.

Now, I happen to think that there are some fouls the other way that if they called the game would be cleaner, because this damn thing is a wrestling match and it's been that way all year. I don't know, freedom of movement. I don't know. You gotta talk to -- I don't understand that.

And our league is criticized across the country for it, too. You read articles all the time about there is no freedom of movement in the Big XII, and they're talking about men's basketball, they're talking about -- I don't know if we have a conference somewhere, but that's a concern for our game.

It's been that way all year. We have to play through it. It's not changing. It's not going to change this year. I will say this: I thought our group did some things better against the physicality than we had the previous game.

So for us, I thought our young guards grew up. I thought we got some drives and backdoor cuts. I do think we got better in that area, Tim, and we've got to be better, but we made some strides tonight in that area.

Q. Thoughts on the spark that Aliyah gave off the bench. I know she has given you trouble throughout the season.

JEFF MITTIE: We're in the zone. We've got to know where she's at and we lost her. I thought Texas had us on our heels. They were really screening the inside of our zone and getting our attention in there, and we were trying to get some attention in there.

But, yeah, we lost their best shooter and she delivered when she was open. She gets the back-to-back three's that are costly to us in that stretch. That's on us to not give her those looks. We lost them.

Vic and them were running some good stuff. They've got the right play and we've got to be better in that.

Q. If you both answer. Season is not over; you've got the NCAA Tournament to look forward to. What are your thoughts?

AYOKA LEE: Like Coach said, I think while this isn't a great outcome, there are things to build off of from this game. I think there were points where we executed things we had just put in really well, and I think with that we have to take what we didn't do so well and build off of it and go back and work on those things.

Yeah, I think we're excited this season isn't over, and I think it's -- yeah, we just kind of have to move forward.

SERENA SUNDELL: I agree. There are things we can build off of. There are things that didn't go well. We will go back and practice and see who we get and start getting ready for our next opponent.

Q. Ayoka and Jeff, if you could talk about it, too, I asked Vic about the 5 position in some ways is rare now. People who really want to pound down there. Obviously Ayoka is one of the best in the country at that. Ayoka, can you talk about taking your game, the way you've been playing all this season into the NCAA Tournament? And Jeff, I wonder if you could talk about the best centers, because the Big XII has several of them, and how big of a factor do you think centers are going to be in the NCAA Tournament?

AYOKA LEE: I think for me it's just -- I don't know how to say this. I guess just like staying with the fundamentals and keeping with what I do well and continuing to work hard.

Like you said, the Big XII isn't an easy conference to play in as a center. I don't really expect it to be easier at the national tournament. So, yeah, I think just continuing to work and grind through it, yeah.

JEFF MITTIE: I think this: I think Ebo is one of the most improved players in the league, and I think she has been a huge factor for Texas this week. She got 20 shots in Austin, and that game was coming off having 61 against Oklahoma, so they were really physical with her in Austin, but we were able to get her touches.

We didn't get her many touches in Manhattan, and then tonight she delivered 7 of 8. There is not much more she can do. We did run some different stuff because we had better balance tonight offensively, but I think the one thing about the NCAA Tournament, Michelle, is it's so physical.

If your centers can guard on the perimeter and you can do things, that's one of the things -- you know, you will see two styles tomorrow night with Iowa State and Texas. Ebo is going to have to guard on the perimeter. Done that with Oklahoma, done that with Iowa State.

But in using them, I think the centers can have a big factor in the NCAA Tournament. We have already played Aliyah Boston who can do everything, step out, knock three's down.

I think it's going to be a tournament that centers will be a big factor in it.

Q. Coach, you mentioned that you were running a little bit of different stuff tonight. You had Ayoka and Taylor out at the free throw line distributing the ball a little bit there. Did you like the looks you got out of that? What does that open up for your offense?

JEFF MITTIE: Well, it's hard to argue with the looks because we shot 51%, but what we wanted to do tonight was move everybody higher and try to get -- try to be able to at least open up some backdoor cuts.

The one thing with Lee down on the block, that doesn't open up our guards for backdoor cuts, and we had been struggling in that area. So we wanted to give our guards an opportunity to get that done.

We also wanted to have a better combination of allowing her to not be in a physical wrestling match the entire possession. What we didn't do very well is we didn't flow into the next phase of the offense where we can then get her touches there.

Now, hard to argue with us doing a few new wrinkles to say they did some things very well in it tonight. So you're not going to do everything perfect -- when I look at progress we scored 65 tonight. We had been low 50s against them both times. I think this is something we can build off of and take it into the NCAA Tournament and we know we're going to face -- obviously there are going to be some teams maybe not stylistically like Texas, but it's an area we need to improve in. You saw Ayoka -- one of the things we haven't utilized her in which is the screening game, and part of that is to protect her to stay out of foul trouble as much, but it's the time of year where we're going to use

everything we have right now.

We're in this position and we're going to use everything we can. I thought they executed pretty well tonight. Hopefully we can get back to work and execute it better going forward. Thank you guys.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much. Good luck ladies.

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