

2026 Phillips 66 Big 12 Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 5, 2026

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Kansas State Wildcats

Coach Jeff Mittie

Nastja Claessens

Tess Heal

Postgame Press Conference

Kansas State 58, Texas Tech 51

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Kansas State head coach Jeff Mittie, student-athletes Nastja Claessens and Tess Heal. This is the first time since 2008 that a No. 12 seed has advanced over a No. 5. Coach, if you would open us up, and then we'll get questions.

JEFF MITTIE: Well, proud of our group. You don't have many comebacks like that where you shut them out the last seven minutes of the game. We had to do a lot of things well.

I felt like after yesterday's game where things came -- where we were shooting the ball so well and had such great rhythm, this game, Tech is such a good defensive team, that things were really hard, and we didn't handle that very well for about 30 minutes.

We were forcing a lot of things, trying to do too much one-on-one basketball. You know, we're a better team when our five are working together to score and working together, and you saw that the last seven minutes where we did play very well.

I thought we were trying to hit 15-point shots, trying to take the lead with the start of the fourth quarter. After that I thought, you know, we were playing each possession, and that's what you got to do this time of the year.

Proud of our group for regrouping. We didn't have much margin for error. We made a lot of plays down the stretch at both ends of the floor, so proud of our group for that.



Q. Jeff, how much was the rebounding effort in that fourth quarter a part of what you guys were able to do defensively?

JEFF MITTIE: I think there were two things. I think we were defensively keeping them away from the rim so they had fewer bodies on the glass, and I thought our effort was outstanding there. You're right. They held a pretty big rebound advantage most of the game, and we were able to even that up in the fourth.

Q. Then, Tess, this is now back-to-back games where they've really kind of clamped down on you in the first three quarters and then you've kind of found a way to impact the game in the fourth quarter. What is kind of going through your mind whenever you're in a game like that, and how hard is it to stay ready and keep trying when they're kind of locked down on you?

TESS HEAL: Yeah, it's not over until it's over. It's never over until the buzzer sounds, so it really doesn't matter until the clock goes off.

I'm proud of the team. I'm in the game impacting in whatever way I can, and that might not be with scoring. Some days you're going to have a great day. Other days not so much. I'm going to do whatever I can defensively, passing the ball, rebounding, whatever I can to impact the game, and I have incredible teammates who have the ability to carry games like that, so...

Q. Coach, was there something in particular y'all did in that second half to slow Snudda Collins down a little bit?

JEFF MITTIE: I thought our group that had her, I thought Nas had a really good defensive second half. I thought Aniya Foy played really well, I thought Tess. Those three were given kind of the responsibility being able to switch out on some of their iso stuff. I thought they all did a good job, had a great awareness there.

I think for the most part our team was going to play

defensively. We made it tough on them. They made it really hard on us, but I think for the most part our team had pretty good awareness and made it tough on them.

I thought this was one of Aniya Foy's better defensive games. She made an impact at both ends of the floor. But defensively she was a factor for us.

Q. Seeing you all switch between man and zone, was that part of the thing to make them take outside shots and kind of see --

JEFF MITTIE: Malone gave us such trouble in Lubbock. When she came in the game, we wanted to play some zone, and that would leave Jordan in the game, which would give us an offensive advantage. I tell you what, the minutes Ramiya gave us were huge when she played. We did want to go back and forth. It was more based off of their lineup that we felt more comfortable doing it.

I thought our group was pretty good. Now, there was a couple of possessions where I think we had three in man and two in zone, so I think that really confused myself and probably Texas Tech. I think Nas knows what I'm talking about.

NASTJA CLAESSENS: That's also a tactic.

JEFF MITTIE: Yeah, right.

Q. Nas, consistency has been the thing for you guys all year long. To have back-to-back wins on back-to-back days like this in two just completely different games, having to win it in a completely different way, what does that say about how much this team has grown throughout the year?

NASTJA CLAESSENS: Yeah, I think we have grown so much this year. We've been more experienced. And I think this team can do a lot if we all are going with the nose in the same direction, and we go for it, and we believe in it. I think we can go far, and we can do great.

Q. For both players. Seven minutes to go, and you are down 14. What's preventing keeping your shoulders from sagging and wondering just how this thing might end?

TESS HEAL: Basketball is such a cool sport because anything can happen. I've seen a team overcome a 15-point deficit in 11 seconds. Crazy things happen all the time.

And it's March. People talk about, you know, the magic and the fairy tales of March. We want that. You just have

to keep going no matter what. That's what we're saying in every huddle: Keep your head in it, keep going, keep pushing, keep working. We're right there.

I thought the fight from the team from every single person was absolutely incredible. Hopefully we're on our way to a fairy tale.

NASTJA CLAESSENS: Yeah, I think what Tess said, when there's somebody has their head down, we all keep encouraging them and pushing them, and we stick together in tough moments, or we try to, at least, yeah.

Q. Nas, your family flew in from Belgium and got in last night. What was that like for you to have them here in this environment? Added pressure, or were you just -- did that add something to how you played today?

NASTJA CLAESSENS: No, their presence makes me feel calm. I'm really happy. I've been looking forward to this. I think the team -- I've been counting down the days. So I'm just really happy that they're here, and just being in their presence just makes me feel calm, yeah.

Q. You've been literally at Kansas State for, what is it, nine months now. This whole environment, all of this, is new for you. Some people might think that would be pressure or this stage -- first off, how is that for you being the first time in this, but also, how can you lean back on some of your prior experiences in the Olympics and other things to be able to rise up in that moment? How did you do that in this game on this stage with that amount of pressure late in the game?

NASTJA CLAESSENS: Yeah, I think my experience that I had in the past, I just try to stay calm in moments like this. Just focus on what I can do right. It's the little things in the moments like that. It's the little things that matter. I just try to do my best... take the rebound, maybe stop the shot, something like that. That's what I try to do, yeah.

Q. Coach, you called a timeout with 7:42 to go and went on to score 21 unanswered. What did you say in that timeout to spark the players?

JEFF MITTIE: Well, I don't know. Honestly, at that point I thought we were pressing really too hard to try to win the game by ourselves, and I thought -- I told them not so nicely that one on five isn't going to cut it here. I don't know what will happen, but we're a better team if we play together. We're a better team if all five of us are playing together.

I told them that if we could get this thing under five, under

five at the 5-minute media mark, we would have a ball game just like we did in Lubbock.

In Lubbock we were trailing I think six or seven in that early part of the fourth, and we were able to get that down. So, you know, we had it down at three. They did better than I asked them to do, so that was good, but there was still a lot of basketball left.

I thought we had a great look. I thought the entire team did a great job on Bailey Maupin. I thought Nas really bothered her in the fourth. Maupin had to take some really hard shots, and I thought that was critical.

Yeah, I was just trying to get them to focus on not trying to win it with one shot, get this thing under four, five, six points at the media mark, and let's see where it landed.

Q. You guys have -- Coach, you've beaten Texas Tech before, but what was different about this game? What were some things you saw in the first match-up that helped you make adjustments for this one?

JEFF MITTIE: I thought today their defense was outstanding. They had us really on the perimeter and really taking tough shots early. I think the one thing that we learned before was that when Malone came into the game, she was such a factor in the first game that we had better match that early, or we better match it with some zone.

We kind of learned the hard way in Lubbock, because they took the lead with that lineup in Lubbock. Hopefully that helped me make some quicker decisions.

Beyond that, I knew today -- I knew that their perimeter defense was outstanding, and we weren't going to get many open looks. We were going to have to be shot-ready. Obviously we struggled shooting the three today, but you know, we found just enough offense to come out on top.

Q. Coach, y'all beat Oklahoma State in Manhattan about a month ago. What you have you seen out of them since then?

JEFF MITTIE: Nothing. I haven't watched an Oklahoma State game since that time. We haven't played them. Yeah, Jacie has done a heck of a job with them. They got a heck of a team. If I've caught them, it's been a possession here or a possession there, but you know, they weren't on our list to play twice.

They've got one of the higher-scoring offenses obviously, and they've had a heck of a year. I don't know if they've

changed anything. My guess is no. They were doing so many things well in that stretch when we played them, but we'll get a look at them here this afternoon and tonight and take a look at some recent games and see if they've made any adjustments there.

Q. What would you say this win says about the attitude of the team and the ability to battle through adversity against a Texas Tech team that has nine seniors on their roster?

JEFF MITTIE: Yeah, I mean, I think that's the one thing that we've grown in. Both of them have talked about the growth of the team throughout the year. I do believe we rally better than we did a month ago, two months ago. Our stretches of bad basketball are shorter than they were a month ago.

Then, you know, a player like Aniya Foy is able to play. Aniya hasn't been in many last-five-minute, you know, game situations. Yet, she was out on the floor making plays. I left her out there defensively, which is an area that she continues to grow in.

I think it's not only individual improvement, but collectively as a group we're more poised than we were a month ago. We're tougher than we were a month ago, and all these experiences, they're drawing on now.

Q. Coach, I want to ask, with you being one of the youngest teams in the conference, what do you do to strengthen your team chemistry outside of the season? Because you can see that your players play with intent, and the chemistry is there. You usually don't see it with such a young team. I want to ask, is there anything that you guys practice?

JEFF MITTIE: I would say this about our chemistry: It's still a work in progress. I don't think that's something that -- whether it be a young team or an old team, you know, you've got to work on those things. Part of it's on the floor, like you talked about. These kind of experiences grow a team together, these kind of moments. But also the losses grow a team together.

This team has done that throughout the year. It hasn't all been -- everybody sees the social media stuff. You don't see the tough stuff behind the scenes, right, where teams aren't getting along or playing as well together or those kind of things. This team has had to grow through some of those throughout the season.

I think they have, but you know, I think that's something that you got to work on daily. Your culture has got to be defended daily. It's got to be worked on daily. We got a lot

of really good people in that locker room, so you can work through that. You know, you can work through those things.

I think this is another step forward in that direction.

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