

# Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

## Kentucky Wildcats

### Kyra Elzy

#### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are ready to begin with Coach Elzy at Kentucky. We will go straight to questions.

**Q. You're entering your third season kind of with the opportunity to build your own roster this time. What was the main trait you kind of looked for in building this new team?**

KYRA ELZY: Yeah, you know, our staff, we were very intentional. I was looking for culture players, someone who had high character off the court but also on the court a winning mentality.

I needed some players that were tough, that were coachable and played with a high motor. I don't want to figure out if you have a heartbeat. I have too much energy, along with my staff. Someone who played with a high motor on both sides of the court but then someone who was relentless defensively. That was important to me.

**Q. Could you talk a little bit about Rhyne Howard and seeing her and her rookie season with the Dream and just really dominating that rookie class? What was that like watching her?**

KYRA ELZY: I was so proud of Rhyne and what she has accomplished in the WNBA. She took the WNBA by storm, but we were not surprised.

If you listen to any of my press conferences, I kept saying she will be a better pro than a college athlete because they couldn't load up on her. She could spread the floor and let her do what she does best, but she is a 6'2" guard that is strong, that shoots threes, like people shoot free-throws, but her basketball IQ is unbelievable.

So watching her do what she does best, obviously, we were very happy at Kentucky, but it warms my heart as a coach because she put a lot of work in.



**Q. Speaking of Rhyne, what has it been like building an identity on this team now without Rhyne?**

KYRA ELZY: Well, people keep asking, you know, what do you do without Rhyne Howard? Obviously, you don't replace a Rhyne Howard. She is a once-in-a-lifetime type of player that we had the honor to coach at Kentucky, but now we do it collectively.

I returned five core players that understand the standard and expectations at Kentucky, but they've also been in the trenches and had to produce in big games. One of them, Jada Walker, we baptized her by fire a year ago, and she answered the call.

And I don't know -- Robyn Benton can put the basketball in the hoop. And so proud of her for stepping up this year. To have a Blair Green return to the floor. She's a sniper from the three-point line.

We will do it collectively.

**Q. There's been -- other than just Howard, there's been quite a bit of turnover out of the team. Can you talk about how you have handled that, but also how the players who have continued with the team have been handling that?**

KYRA ELZY: Culture wins. At the end of the day, culture wins. There are standards and expectations, and that's a nonnegotiable for me.

So we have had ten amazing additions to our program. Six talented freshmen. Now, they don't know what's happening right now, but they are very talented. But four big transfers. Maddie Scherr is one of those. She has the "it" factor. For her to come home and play at the University of Kentucky, she makes us different. Along with Ajae Petty, who is a physical post.

Everyone keeps saying you're young. We're relatively young. We have nine vets and six freshmen. You figure it out from there.

**Q. You just alluded to it. You talked about the transfers that you just brought in. How do you**



**combine them with the players that you brought back and really continue to change the culture of the team for this season?**

KYRA ELZY: The culture has already changed, and the standard has been what it is. But for this season, like I said, you have five vets that understand my standard and expectation and our style of play.

But what I've told the players, at the end of the day we all have one thing in common. We love Kentucky, and we want to win. So, you know, we spend a lot of time doing team-building in the offseason. Whether it was get to know, whether it was boxing, but our staff is committed to spending a lot of time with our players.

But they are here and they want to win. They want to work. This is probably one of the most competitive teams that I've coached.

**Q. The theme for this year is "Built Different." How did you guys come up with that?**

KYRA ELZY: When you think about losing a Rhyne Howard and what people expect from us, it's we don't have a superstar, but collectively. But any deficiencies that this team has, we feel like, as a coaching staff, we can overcome if we have a "built different" mentality.

That's just a toughness that you bring, the style of play defensively, being able to do things that other people don't want to do in order to win.

So every day we approach practice that way. We'll approach games. I will tell you, having 15 has brought everyone's best because of that competitive spirit.

I've been very transparent with them. I'm probably going to do a 10-player rotation. You can play your way in, or you can play your way out.

There is one ball. There is five positions. There's 40 minutes. My job is to put a team on the floor and the best people that give us a chance to win.

They've really bought into that mentality.

**Q. Collegiate women's basketball is growing at a fast pace. How exciting of a time is it to be a coach and just being able to empower women to be a presence on the court but also off the court?**

KYRA ELZY: Great question. I'm so excited about the growth of our game, and we need to continue to grow it, but I'm all about women empowerment. That's what our

program is built upon.

We have to make sure that our players are successful not only on the court, but off the court with the name, image, and likeness. They're building their brand now. They are learning how to manage their money, speaking, social media. So all of it's all-encompassing.

I'm so proud of what we do at the University of Kentucky to make sure that our ladies are prepared for the game of life.

**Q. You said that culture wins, and that's a nonnegotiable. Do you think the culture has changed significantly? Is it an extension of what it was last year? Do you think things are really different culture-wise?**

KYRA ELZY: The culture has always been set from when I've taken the job, but I do think it will be an extension of last year as far as they understand what it is. And I don't have a whole bunch of rules, but the ones that I have, you will follow. It's more of an expectation on how you would conduct yourself on and off the court.

**Q. How did the momentum of the end of last season, how would you describe how you're carrying it into this one?**

KYRA ELZY: There's a lot of confidence in myself, the staff. We went through a lot last year. It was an up-and-down season, but for it to end with an SEC Championship.

For the five players returning, they have so much confidence, and they understand what the blueprint looks like. We had to work. Everything revolves around work. Roll up your sleeves and go to work.

But the momentum has been unbelievable. It's a lot easier to go in a recruit's house when you are win and you have a net around your neck and they're seeing you on national television. But the exposure it's given our program has helped us in recruiting but also as far as staff and players' confidence.

**Q. You have three sets of players. You've got the returners, the transfers, and the rookies. Is there a different way you have to coach all of them or maybe go about how you coach them?**

KYRA ELZY: Yeah, there are three groups, but you can't coach any of them the same. You just have to be fair, but it also goes back to our staff. We invest, taking time to spend with our players off the court, whether it's in a film session, whether it's taking them to get a smoothie,

whether it's walking them to class or go to work out when they work out. Investing time to get to know.

KYRA ELZY: Go Cats.

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Then you know how to push their buttons, and they also know you. We coach them so hard, but they know it's coming from a place of love to not only get them better, but also to get this team prepared for the season.

**Q. I need to know, how much do you lean on your players for your shoe game?**

KYRA ELZY: (Laughing) I lean on my players a lot. Thank you so much. They do keep me young, so I love having players. That's the fun thing about coaching. You are pouring into them, but actually they teach you so much about yourself. Whether it's in life and/or coaching, but they do help me with my shoe game.

**Q. I want to ask about Big Blue Madness and coming in on the motorcycle there. What was the process with that, and did you want to take it on the court too?**

KYRA ELZY: If they would have let me drive the motorcycle on the court, of course, we would have done that.

You know, Big Blue Madness is unbelievable. It's an experience for our players and our staff and just the excitement around it that basketball season is around the corner.

I wanted to do something fun for the entrance. Unlike Coach Cal, who has the swag and he can come in and do his presidential speech and everyone loves it, I have to think of something a little more exciting. He has the "it" already. That's where the motorcycle came in.

**Q. Y'all had basically the ultimate upset last year in the SEC tournament. How can you recreate those upset moments in such a competitive league and specifically with the top three that is just extremely dominant?**

KYRA ELZY: This league is tough. It's the best league in the country. Talented coaches, talented players. What we need to do is focus on ourselves and what we have to do day in and day out to be the best team that we can be.

You play the game because anybody can win. It's an opportunity every game to step up to the challenge. So it's important to me and this staff to make sure that we prepare in practice so they are confident in games.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach, and good luck.

