

# Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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## LSU Tigers

## Kim Mulkey

### Women's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by LSU. We'll go straight to questions.

**Q. I talked to Coach Staley about this. You're seeing record numbers in attendance and in ratings. You're seeing expansion in the WNBA, growth in the college game. Would you say we're maybe in the golden era of women's basketball in general?**

KIM MULKEY: Well, you're talking to someone that's 61 years old, and only one game was ever televised when I played. In my world, it's pretty salty right now. It's pretty darn good right now.

Why it is, I can't give you all the reasons. It's pretty good. I don't know if I'd use the word 'golden' because I tend to think if you use that, then what do we aspire to keep doing? We're not content. I think you got to keep growing. I think you got to do this on a continual basis. Don't let it be a fly-by-night thing, and you do it, and then it dies off. Do it for a period of time, then maybe we can use the word 'golden'.

**Q. Now that you've been practicing for a few weeks, how far along are you in determining what your rotations might look like opening night?**

KIM MULKEY: Well, I haven't determined that. We have a lot of depth. That could be different every night. I tell them it doesn't matter who starts, you want to be in the rotation of eight to nine players. Because we have a lot of depth, it's going to be my job to make sure the right people are in the game at the right time.

Our practices are extremely, extremely intense and competitive, as you can imagine. In fact, we don't scrimmage against each other much because it can really, really get intense, which is good. You don't need to do that every day.

We go against our Dream Team probably more than each other just to make sure that I get a look from a coaching perspective of who I want on the floor.

But it's all good.

**Q. About the growth of women's basketball, it seems like we're on the precipice of what might be the biggest change for the game, just women's sports in general. What does it feel like after all these years to see your team and your ladies obviously at the forefront of reaping those benefits? Emotionally, how is that to know that this game still has more to grow, but it's starting to really get there?**

KIM MULKEY: Well, you're flattered. You're flattered. I tend to think about those that came before now that didn't have all these things, those that didn't have NIL, those that only played one game a year on television.

You can't have the future without having the history of it. So I kind of mix both and think, Wow. To think this last third of my coaching career that I get to be a part of what is really, really special right now in women's basketball. It's special with the attendance that we had at the championship. It's special with the NIL deals that I get to watch these young people have. It's special just in so many ways.

It really, really is something that I can tell you I knew it would get better and we hoped this day would come, but I don't know that I ever thought it would be this big this fast. It may not be fast in the eyes of some people, but it really is fast for this generation.

**Q. Last year you got the No. 1 transfer in the country in Angel. This one you got the No. 1 and No. 2, whatever way you slice it, and then a really good freshman class. What makes you a dynamic recruiter? What in the portal has made you so successful?**

KIM MULKEY: Well, the portal has changed everybody. I mean, it's something that you have to embrace just like the NIL has changed everybody.



I don't go get those players. I have a staff that's unbelievable. I could name every one of them, but my staff works extremely hard in selling me, selling LSU, selling what I've done in women's basketball.

It's not me. I'm maybe a deal-closer, go in and do things. But at the end of the day if you don't have a good staff that just really, really understands and works at recruiting, they're not going to knock your door down to come play for you. You got too many great coaches out there that they could play for.

So we work extremely hard. If we can get 'em on campus and they can see what LSU is about, we feel we have as good a chance as anybody to compete and get recruits.

But, yeah, we've done a lot of good recruiting quickly. There are a lot of other programs that have done the same (smiling).

**Q. Is there any trend in basketball, the men's kind of got away from the big people throwing it to the post, spread out? Any trends in women's basketball that you see offensively or defensively?**

KIM MULKEY: Listen, my answer's going to be probably totally different than a lot of people. I'm still of the belief, give me a post, give me a shooter and give me a point guard, then I'll fill in the other pieces. I don't think that's changed.

The problem is we don't all get a post, shooter and point guard. We have to take whatever we have and be very creative. I think not only in basketball, you've seen it in college football. The spread became really, really popular when people didn't have big offensive linemen that could knock you on your rear-end and running backs that could run over you, so you had to be creative, right?

I think in basketball it became creative to where, Wow, I've got to play these five guards because I don't have a big. I've got to play because...

You have to be creative. Great coaches figure out ways to compete. I've been very blessed that I've always had a post, a shooter and a point guard, then fill in the pieces around you.

**Q. The story of recruiting Hailey, specifically she came into the portal with a do-not-contact tag. When you heard the news she was choosing to transfer, what was it like to get her on campus?**

KIM MULKEY: I recruited Hailey when I was at Baylor. It

got down to us in Louisville. I always tell my coaches, When we lose a recruit, don't be ugly. Show your disappointment, but you never know if you're going to see that player again.

I wished her well. Ended it the right way. When they told me, I say 'they', that's my coaches, that she was getting into the transfer portal and had whatever it was, do-not-call or whatever, and I just laughed. I said, Well, that tells you she probably knows where she wants to go.

Little did I know that she pretty much contacted us. We brought her in on a visit. I think she talked to two other programs. I'm not sure she even visited those other programs. She came by herself on her visit.

I think the connection with us recruiting her and her knowing me at Baylor was an advantage. So that's the story of how we got Hailey.

The comparison, listen, the only comparison between me and Hailey are the braids. She's so much better than I ever was as a player. She can play multiple positions for us on the perimeter, and she will. Working with her a lot right now on playing a point guard position. She's never really had to do that probably since high school.

I think she's getting a great lesson in you don't just throw a ball out there and tell somebody to be a point guard. There are lots of things that have to take place on that court, both offensively and defensively, for you to be really effective. She's working really hard to try to get more playing time as a point guard for us.

**Q. Whenever you look across the SEC, you know it's going to be a battle every time you go out. Last year you had to come back in the final minutes against an Arkansas team that didn't make the NCAA tournament. What do you think of the overall collective talent in the league, the competitions you have within the league?**

KIM MULKEY: I'm going to start with the coaches in the league. I just think there's just a ton of coaches in our league that bring different styles to the floor. Each night you have to prepare for something different. You have young coaches. You have the older coaches. You have different styles. Each year you lose a group of seniors in your league that move on, some go to pro ball, some don't. But the next group up is usually just as talented as the group that left.

I just feel like this year you're going to see a lot of talent again. Maybe the difference is those kids can decide if they want to leave or stay because they got their COVID year. That's going to make it really interesting as we watch

this season unfold.

But the SEC is the SEC. I can say that now having been in the league two years. It's a challenging league in that you really have to flush one game and prepare quickly for the next game, and it can be totally different philosophy. That's good. That's good. That's why you see people get upset in the league. That's why you see some teams play teams always close.

Let's don't even talk about the rivalries you have in the SEC. That brings another whole dimension to the league.

**Q. Regarding Angel, how can she grow? How can she go up to the next level?**

KIM MULKEY: Angel has been working on midrange shots. Angel, she's a competitor. She doesn't want anyone to think there's something in her game that she's weak at.

I tell her, Well, everybody has a weakness. That doesn't mean you're not going to be a pro. That doesn't mean you're not going to be great at the next level.

But Angel will go and work one-on-one every day prior to practice on anything that she's either read, heard, anything that she can't do that's a weakness of hers. I just think that's Angel Reese. She knows she can rebound with the best in the country. She now wants to show people what she can do facing the basket, what she can do taking you off the dribble to the basket.

I just love coaching that kid 'cause she's just a competitor.

**Q. Angel talked about how Sa'Myah Smith has taken off this summer. Can you talk about her, how she's grown over the summer, what you expect from her?**

KIM MULKEY: Sa'Myah Smith stayed in Baton Rouge on campus. Basically she had an invitation to try out for USA Basketball. Chose not to do that. She wanted to get stronger. She wanted to be in the weight room.

She played such valuable minutes for us last year. She realized LaDazhia Williams is gone now and I want to step into that spot. If anybody's going to beat me out, they're going to have to work as hard as I am.

She stayed on campus. She's just a quiet person, but little by little we see her growing in that area. She'll block a shot and might say something. We'll go, Did she just say something? We're kind of proud of her for speaking up.

But Sa'Myah is a coach's dream. She is so talented.

Played her role last year. Now she realizes her role needs to change and she needs to be prepared for it.

**Q. You mentioned your Dream Team. You gave them rings. You could tell it was one of those special moments that you wanted to thank them. Was that something you set out when you first got the job at LSU or is that something that you just always wanted to do?**

KIM MULKEY: Within an organization, you have all levels of people that make it work. I've always had Dream Team. But the rules with NCAA didn't allow you to do things for Dream Team. They didn't allow you all the things that we can do now.

I just wanted them now to go back and check and see if we can legally give them rings. If it is an LSU deal, I'll cover the expense myself, but it wasn't an LSU deal. We had to get clearance through compliance and the NCAA. We finally got it a day or two prior to me doing that at practice.

The look on those guys' faces and the joy and the excitement, it was just priceless. It was so real and it was so genuine.

They are a big part of what we do. But it also made me reflect on all those other Dream Teams I have had through the years that, again, didn't get these opportunities. The same question that was asked earlier.

Now people are reaping rewards that others didn't get the opportunity because of rules and things like that. But those guys were at our Final Four. They pay out of their own pocket to go to the Final Four. They're the first ones hugging you, cheering you on.

Our team is their team. That team I get to coach belongs to that student body. If you've never been to a game, you can't get a ticket in the student body section. It's crazy. They just fill a big part of it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

KIM MULKEY: Thank you.

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