

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Colorado vs Kansas State

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Manhattan, Kansas, USA

Bramlage Coliseum

Kansas State Wildcats

Coach Jeff Mittie

Serena Sundell

Gabby Gregory

Zyanna Walker

Media Conference



coming from, like Gabby said, but having a sellout is a huge advantage for us, and it just shows one of the reasons why we deserve to host, just because of the support we have here in Manhattan, but it'll be a good ballgame.

ZYANNA WALKER: Yeah, I definitely agree. I can see where they're coming from. If we were a 5 seed, I'd be a little frustrated, as well, but at the end of the day the baskets are still in the same spot, three-point line is still the same length away from the basket. It's going to be a great ballgame, and we'll see what happens tomorrow.

Q. What have you guys learned about Colorado over these last few hours?

ZYANNA WALKER: Yeah, we know that they're led by their point guard, super fast, pushes the pace. They have a lot of shooters and they've got a good inside game going on, so we know we have to be prepared for all that, and that's what we're doing.

SERENA SUNDELL: Yeah, they're going to be physical. They've got some size on their team and some speed. They've got really great athletes.

Our matchups are going to be important going into this game and just knowing who you're guarding and really our execute is going to be more important this game. Coach Mittie has been talking about that, more than it ever has before, just being prepared and focused on all the little details and locking in on who you're guarding and what they do well and trying to take that away. Just the one-on-one matchups are going to be important. But they're a good team. They're scrappy on defense. They're going to push the ball, push the pace.

GABBY GREGORY: I think they have a point guard running the show that's very, very fast. Coach Mittie mentioned we had not played somebody as fast as her. That will be very important to slow her down a little bit, slow their whole team down, and like Serena said, our matchups will be really, really important tomorrow. I think we'll match up with them well, though.

GABBY GREGORY: First off, I would like to thank all of the fans for all their support. I thought the environment in Bramlage yesterday was absolutely amazing, and I would like to announce that the game is officially sold out.

Q. I just asked Colorado players if they felt as if maybe you were a team that slipped in front of them for a 4 seed, and one of them said yes, the other played it a little more politically, but they did say they wanted to host, and that kind of motivates them in this game. Do you feel like you have something to prove, having this game coming up?

GABBY GREGORY: Yeah. I mean, I totally see where they'd be coming from with that. If we were on the other side getting the 5 seed, we would feel the same way.

I think that's why it's even more important that we did get to host, that we do need a sellout and things like that because that's the advantage that you do get at the end of the day.

It's March; it's the NCAA Tournament, so you're going to get everybody's best game no matter what.

I think that they'll be ready to fight, and it'll be a really good ballgame.

SERENA SUNDELL: Yeah, I think you said that pretty well. They've been a similar team to us throughout this year, climbing pretty high in the rankings just throughout the whole year. Selection Sunday we really didn't know if we were going to be a 4 or 5 so I can see where they're



Q. Did Gap Goat have an official statement on the sellout?

GABBY GREGORY: Per usual, he's stone cold, no reaction. He never gets too high, never gets too low, but he's excited to get his chains tomorrow.

Q. Just curious, you've obviously played some big games this year. You beat No. 2 Iowa. Colorado has played some big games this year, they beat No. 1 LSU. How big is this matchup given all the success that both teams have had this season?

GABBY GREGORY: Yeah, I think it's a very interesting matchup, two teams that were both at one time No. 2 in the country. That's a rare thing to see.

I just think that we match up really well. I think it's going to be a really good game. They play kind of similar to how we do. They do a lot of things that we like to do. I think they've had a really good season, but so have we. I'm really excited for tomorrow.

SERENA SUNDELL: Yeah, we try to play throughout the season as every game that we're coming into as the biggest game of the year, but you can just feel that this game tomorrow is the biggest one of the year just with what's at stake and the environment we're going to have and all of that.

You try to find a balance of kind of letting yourself have those good nerves and also going back to your preparation and keeping everything in check. But I'm excited to go in with my teammates. We're all confident, and we can lean on each other. We're excited just to get out there and play tomorrow.

ZYANNA WALKER: Yeah, I think whoever comes out victorious tomorrow will be the toughest team, so yeah, it's just going to be a dogfight to see whoever gets to New York. Great matchups; I think we match up well with them, and I think they match up well with us. It'll be interesting to see what happens tomorrow.

Q. Serena, you got to play in this tournament as a freshman. You're back now. How different is this time around for you compared to two years ago?

SERENA SUNDELL: Yeah, I mean, it was a big deal my freshman year, and it's a big deal this year. But playing at NC State, I just remember their home environment. I'm pretty sure they had a sellout. It felt like a sellout. We were preparing with loud noise and we had hand signals for all of our plays just in case we weren't able to call out the plays loud. It was a big atmosphere. It was a big

game. Obviously I was a freshman. I was nervous, my first time ever in March Madness and postseason like that.

I think just coming into this game yesterday and tomorrow, I just feel with my experience and just the people I have around me that I've prepared for this moment. I've been blessed to be able to have a lot of playing time here, so I'm confident coming into this game. I'm confident with my teammates, and I'm just excited to go play.

Q. Coach Mittie said after the game yesterday that he felt that was the kind of game you needed, just the intensity to sort of get the nerves out. Do you feel like it's going to be easier tomorrow to take the court with just having one of those under your belt?

ZYANNA WALKER: Yeah, I would say it would be probably a little bit easier now that we're kind of adjusted to being playing in this tournament a little bit. I think yesterday was really a good game for us because it wasn't just like a crazy blowout. We had to fight for the win, so I think tomorrow we're going to be more prepared on the scout and the execution.

SERENA SUNDELL: I agree. I think everybody did a lot of good things yesterday that will just help build confidence going into tomorrow and also the areas that we struggled yesterday. We know that we have to lock in better for tomorrow's game because Colorado is going to take even more advantage of our little mistakes and things like that. So just going into our preparation and scout, we have to hear Coach Mittie and really translate every little thing that he's saying because everything matters.

GABBY GREGORY: Yeah, I think just like Coach Mittie said, I think we needed a game like that. It's always weird when you don't play for a week or so, so you're just kind of like going to practice every day just itching to play a game, so I think we were all really excited to get out there and play finally.

But it also -- I mean, we're excited when we get a sellout, but it still makes you nervous when there's 10,000 people in there. Even if it's your fans, you still get a little nervous. It's still high energy and you've got to try to stay even keel, but now that we have that game under us, I think we're all just really excited to come out tomorrow.

Q. What has it been like to be able to have players like Serena and Gabby to kind of help guide you as a freshman this season?

ZYANNA WALKER: It's been amazing. They've been playing in this program, Gabby two years, Serena three, so they're veterans and they know kind of what Coach Mittie is

looking for and can guide me on just like the flow of the offense, the flow of how Coach Mittie coaches, and they were really great when I just came in here of being those leaders, being those role models for me.

Q. Zyanna, you made a couple tough shots yesterday. How do you keep your offensive mentality when you have three players in Serena, Gabby and Ayoka who are such proficient scorers and make sure that you still when the moment counts, that you're ready to hit a basket if needed?

ZYANNA WALKER: Just be ready for my opportunity. When I had the ball in my hands late for that one mid-range, I just knew I had to make a play. I had to shoot it. Shot clock was running down, so I just got to be ready for my opportunities and just be ready to step up when my time comes.

Q. You have families around, friends. I was wondering if you could go through and let me know how big your crowd is going to be tomorrow, what that's going to be like.

ZYANNA WALKER: Yeah, so I used all my tickets. My family is going to be coming as well as friends and previous coaches. It'll be exciting to be able to see all of them and have them be able to watch me play in the NCAA Tournament.

SERENA SUNDELL: Yeah, usually throughout the season I can ask my teammates for tickets and they'll send them right over to me, but I was asking everybody, and Gabby beat me to some people, Beck was beating me to tickets, Yoki was beating me to tickets, so they're tough to come by. But I did get them. I think I have 13 on my pass list. Yesterday I had a similar amount, and then there's people who just feel bad for bothering me, so I didn't even know they were coming and I see them after the game, like, oh, hello.

But no, I have a great support system when I'm close to home. So I'm excited just for my family and friends to be able to come watch a game like this.

GABBY GREGORY: Yeah, I think I've got 11 coming tomorrow, but yeah -- and then also people like Cooper Beebe and his girlfriend and I don't have to get tickets for them thankfully. Thanks, Gene. But yeah, there will be a lot of people there. Then obviously I have tons of people texting me saying that they're watching the games from states away and stuff.

I know we'll have a lot of people's families here tomorrow and a sold-out crowd, so it'll feel good.

Q. Obviously with the sellout the fan support has been huge, but also a lot of the other athletic teams at K-State have been posting supporting you guys. How does it feel to have all of their support, as well?

GABBY GREGORY: Yeah, that's been really cool to see on social media. It was cool to see some of the teams incorporate the Gap Goat into their videos, as well. I know the football team, as well, they had the Gap Goat over there. Volleyball they had a tiny gap goat in their net. That was really awesome to see. Everyone has been so supportive. I know even yesterday, the track team, the throwers were supposed to practice at 3:00, and Yoki emailed their coach, and their coach was like, yep, we'll change practice, and they went in the morning so they could all come to the game yesterday. All the sports and coaches and everything, everyone has been so supportive. It's been awesome.

SERENA SUNDELL: Yeah, this is just a special place to be and be a college athlete. Just the support that we have throughout teams and -- I mean, it's just -- it's very rare. You don't see that across the country. I'm just super thankful to be in a place like Kansas State where everybody is just so supportive.

We go to volleyball games and soccer games and all that stuff, too. It's so fun. People just truly enjoy just supporting one another, and this is a great place to be.

ZYANNA WALKER: Yeah, I also heard that the soccer team was supposed to have practice while we played our game yesterday, and they got it canceled so they were able to come to our game, and I saw some cool signs that they had made. It feels great to just play for a program with such a great family culture.

Q. Just was curious first of all with the sellout, what that means, and then also, Gabby was talking about maybe being a little bit of nerves coming out with the sellout. How do you use that to you guys' advantage?

JEFF MITTIE: Yeah, you know, we've played in such big crowds, I don't know that the sellout -- but they're excited about the sellout. I thought it was a great crowd yesterday. I thought it was a great atmosphere yesterday, as I've referenced numerous times. We've had really, really good crowds.

I think the significance of the sellout is just simply that that's a big statement for I think any program to be selling these events out and any community to be selling these games out.

We're very fortunate that -- I've said this a couple times. We're very fortunate that we have a fan base that appreciates women's basketball, and we've got an administration that wants to host these events.

There's a difference, and obviously we earned to host these events, but wanting to host them and wanting to do a great job, those are different things.

Yeah, I appreciate the fan base, and I appreciate all the people that made this happen because it's pretty cool.

Q. Jeff, you got to go through this process two years ago with Serena and the Glenns as freshmen. How different, aside from the fact that you guys are at home, how different has it been, how different have you seen them handle the biggest stage?

JEFF MITTIE: Well, you know, they're not as wide-eyed young ones as they were that first tournament run. Their approach I think has been like you would expect a veteran approach of taking care of their bodies, getting ready.

I thought they had a good approach to the first game, good approach to practices.

Every year is different, though, and so whether you're a freshman or a junior, you hope that you have that same excitement. I've been doing this a long time. I have the same excitement.

But it does feel different. You understand the preparation. Maybe you don't know what you don't know when you first get into it.

They have a good understanding of that now, and I think that's not just NCAA Tournament basketball but going through all the tournaments that we've played, whether it be the Florida tournament, whether it be the Big 12 tournament. I think all of that prepares you for moments like this, and I think they've played in a lot of those moments throughout their career.

Q. Since yesterday, what have you learned about Colorado? The girls mentioned Jaylyn Sherrod and her speed. What else have you learned?

JEFF MITTIE: Well, I knew a lot about Colorado before. Obviously this is a veteran group for them, so this is a team that's played together. This is a team that last year made a good run in the tournament. So they've got a quality team.

Sherrod really does a great job at the point. They've got good shooters. They've got good inside depth. They're just a well-balanced team that can hurt you in a lot of ways.

Q. We know the resumes of yourself and also of Colorado, the rankings and the big games you've been involved in. How big-time is this matchup tomorrow?

JEFF MITTIE: It's a great matchup. I think it's two really good teams. I think it's two teams that had a really, really good year in their respective leagues.

I think it's a matchup that deserves the crowd that we're going to have and the energy that we're going to have in that building. It should be a great matchup.

Q. Both of you were on the bubble for the 4-5 seed there. How good does it feel that you were on this side and you get to play them at home?

JEFF MITTIE: I had us as a 2 seed, so I wasn't on the bubble in my bracket, but the committee -- no.

Yeah, it feels great to have it at home. We've had a great home-court advantage. We've had great energy. Our students have been phenomenal. Gosh, our students have been phenomenal. They have really -- I visited with some of them the day that the tickets opened up for them, and they were just so excited, and it's been phenomenal.

It's kind of been that way in our athletic department for the last couple years in a lot of our sports.

But to have it for us is really, really special.

To have it at home and to have earned the 4 seed, obviously we were on the bubble, we were in the mix of those last couple spots with about four or five other teams. We feel good that we came out on the side that's hosting.

Q. Yesterday just watching the game we noticed that Imani wasn't on the bench with you guys. I didn't know if you had a status update on her.

JEFF MITTIE: Well, the good news is we think that she'll be able to be there tomorrow. But she got another sickness, so I don't want to go into too much medical stuff. But we're hopeful.

She just really battled something, and they haven't been able to get her to feel better. So they were a little bit worried and just being around everything. But they did give her good news that if she keeps moving forward feeling better that she'll be on the bench and that would be a big lift for the team because Imani is a lot of fun over there on the bench. She has a good time. She has good energy to her.

Unfortunately she's probably a ways away from playing, though, so that would be the playing status. She had a setback Monday or Tuesday.

Q. Recently in the close games, it seems Serena, Gabby and Ayoka are always on the court and then Jaylyn, Brylee and Zyanna are sort of mixed in. There was foul trouble with them yesterday, but what determines which two of those three are in late?

JEFF MITTIE: Well, sometimes it's just as simple as feel. Sometimes it's as simple as the rhythm of the game or the feel that the player has or -- yeah, there's not a -- I think that particular group, I think any of them can be on the floor in that stretch of minutes.

But I do think that Zy has given us a good defender off the bench, and if I feel like I need that on the floor, then Zy is somebody -- Brylee has been in 90 plus games in her career. She knows the big moments. She rises up in the big moments. She's going to be out there. Jay gives us another ball handler. I can't speak to all the specifics of that, but I feel comfortable with any of them on the floor, and in some games I've just had a feel that this was Zy's moment to be out there. We needed what she gave us. So it's as simple as that.

Q. I know yesterday you kind of compared Portland, said they had kind of a West Virginia type feel. Is there a team that you've played this season that you feel like compares well to Colorado?

JEFF MITTIE: Well, I think Sherrod gives you the West Virginia part. The front line depth gives you a little bit of Texas in that.

Yeah, I don't know that there's a similar across the board. I think the speed of West Virginia's guards with Harrison and Quinerly. Sherrod has that kind of push, and they do a great job of getting her in the open floor, and then as I mentioned, their depth at the forward center spot is pretty good.

I think they're a quality team that -- like it should at this time of the year, quality players across the roster.

Q. If you can just tie a bow on it, what would it mean to this team and this program to get a win tomorrow?

JEFF MITTIE: Well, we went into this year wanting to have the best season in women's basketball here at K-State. That was one of the stated goals, that we wanted to have a record year.

It would mean a lot. It would mean a lot for this team to

make that push. It would mean a lot to do it at home, and it would mean a lot to do it in front of our fans, who -- we've talked about this numerous times, but when you lose an All-American for seven games, we had players step up in those moments, but we also had our fans step up in those moments.

Yeah, it would mean a lot at home. It would mean a lot for this team to continue to play.

That's the one thing that -- continue to play, continue to go to practice. Ayoka Lee says it better than anybody. Just appreciate the moment of being able to spend with your teammates, your coaches, all of the above. So it would mean a lot.

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