

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship Final Four: LSU vs Virginia Tech

Friday, March 31, 2023

Dallas, Texas, USA

American Airlines Center

LSU Tigers

Kim Mulkey

Angel Reese

Alexis Morris

Semi-Finals Postgame Media Conference



ALEXIS MORRIS: It's just another game. Like I said, I have bigger goals. I shifted my focus to Sunday, and that's where my focus is now.

Nothing to discredit my performance tonight. I think I had a great performance. I think my team, we did a great job tonight. I'm just locked in on the prize.

Q. For both of you, it seems like this year has been magical, but y'all have been that underdog. Now you're going to be in the National Championship. What goes through your mind?

ANGEL REESE: It's like a dream. It still hasn't hit me that I'm at the Final Four. I'm just not even believing this right now. Like it's crazy how much my life has changed in one year, how much I've grown on and off the court.

And then to be with this amazing program, LSU, and to be with my amazing teammates and amazing coaches -- I just don't know how to feel right now. Just to be able to believe in each other. All we had was each other. We believed in each other more than anybody else.

I'm just happy, I'm excited. I'm full of emotions right now.

ALEXIS MORRIS: Angel pretty much said how I feel right now too. It still hasn't hit me. Maybe if we're the standing champions at the end, then maybe I can just let go and just be like ahhh, like relief.

But I'm super excited. It's amazing. We just made history too, the first LSU team to ever compete for a National Championship. Men or women.

ANGEL REESE: Herstory.

ALEXIS MORRIS: Herstory.

Q. Bigger than the game, bigger than everything, you all are hometown heroes. You're from Beaumont, Texas, you know what that means. And you're from Baltimore. What does it mean for y'all to be hometown heroes and on this stage right now?

LSU - 79, Virginia Tech - 72

THE MODERATOR: We're going to open with questions for the student-athletes.

Q. This is for both Angel and Alexis: First of all, Alexis, the emotion. You were on top of the table. You were having a great time.

ANGEL REESE: I didn't see that.

Q. Talk about the emotion that you feel. All you've been through, the journey, reuniting with Coach Mulkey. Just talk about how you feel.

ALEXIS MORRIS: Just the comeback, it's bittersweet that I have to leave, but it's like I'd rather leave on top than anything, compared to anything. So I'm just super excited.

If you know me, I'm never satisfied. I'm super excited that we won, but I'm hungry, like I'm greedy. I want to win it all so I can complete the story and complete the comeback. I've been through so much, so much that you all don't even know.

So I'm just super excited. It was just -- you know, I wanted to show some appreciation to our fans. They were amazing tonight. I feel like they cheered us on to victory.

Q. Alexis, this was your goal. You wanted your senior night to be on Sunday in the National Championship Game. Now that you finally accomplished that, just what did tonight's performance mean to you?



ANGEL REESE: Man, we're doing it for the city, man. Baltimore. I don't know if anybody has gotten to the National Championship from Baltimore, I am not sure. But I know so many people have reached out to me -- the mayor, the Baltimore Ravens, the Orioles -- like everybody's standing behind me right now.

And the support I have -- my mom, my brother, my whole family, they came out as well. To be the one to be able to do this and be able to lead by example, I'm just proud because not a lot of people can say they do this from Baltimore.

ALEXIS MORRIS: Being an inner city kid, I just hope I'm empowering the youth and showing them you can choose the right way instead of the wrong path. Beaumont is Beaumont, you can look it up. It's a small town. It's not really much to offer.

So hopefully the kids in the younger generation can look to me and be like I can be somebody. It don't matter, girl or boy. So, yeah, I know my city's standing behind me too. Beaumont, I love you.

I can't even really tell you how -- I don't even know. I think we probably got a few pros, probably like two or three that has ever made it out of Beaumont basketball-wise, so yeah.

Q. Facing a nine-point deficit going into the fourth quarter, what was said going into that last ten minutes of being able to just stick together and come out and be able to make the game deciding run from there?

ANGEL REESE: Coach told us in the huddle play this next two minutes and see how far it can take you, and those next two minutes, I think we went on a 6-0 run, 7-0 run. So being able to just listen to the coaches and trust them -- she's been here before. So we have to at this point trust in them and let the defense speak for itself.

The game was going to come down to our defense. They have great players on their team. Amore, she's a great player, but we have Alexis Morris as well that hit a lot of big shots coming down.

So just coming down to leadership and being able to stay together at the right time was important for us.

ALEXIS MORRIS: Staying poised and staying calm, never get rattled. Like that's going to take you further in those situations when you're down. You've always got to have somebody that keeps everybody on one accord. Just keep everybody levelheaded.

Q. Did you guys -- LSU was 0-5 in the Final Four. Did you carry the burden of any of that history? Seimone Augustus and Sylvia Fowles didn't get where you all are tonight. What does that mean?

ANGEL REESE: We just wanted to make history. They supported us in everything we've done. We had Seimone out. I'm not sure Sylvia was here, but they support us in everything we do.

Having Coach Bob Starkey, he knows what it takes. He'd been to the Final Fours with them. He's been encouraging us knowing what it takes to get there. I'm just happy we're doing it for LSU and the program. I think LSU itself has put women's basketball on the map. We have. We've grown women's basketball just being who we are, and I embrace that.

I don't want anybody to ever tell us don't do that because I think that this is who we are and this is why we've gone this far because we have that swag.

ALEXIS MORRIS: Facts.

Q. Angel, Lex has done a lot of talking tonight, but what about her game? From start to finish, she set the tone. There's a chip there, we all know it, and she had something to prove tonight.

ANGEL REESE: Her game speaks for itself. She told you in the last press conference, that Georgia had a handful on her hands. Alexis Morris was the one who came out, and she had a handful of her. Alexis Morris is a pro. She's a first rounder. She's been through everything. You admire what she does. She's the comeback kid. She came back from everything and she's done everything they said she couldn't do.

I'm proud of Alexis. Alexis Morris is Alexis Morris, but when it's Luthor time, it's Luthor time. I'm just so proud of her.

Q. Just how big was the offensive rebounding in terms of coming down the stretch as you look to come -- as you did come back and win tonight's game?

ANGEL REESE: I remember they came in at halftime and said they had 11 offensive rebounds over us maybe. More rebounds -- they had 11 more rebounds than us, and I took that personal because I'm supposed to be the one that gets the rebounds. So I didn't want to let my team down and just trying to do whatever it takes to win.

Kitley is a great player. She's a great post player, and she does her job well, with her supporting cast Soule and King



coming in and getting some rebounds as well. Just being able to take it personal and go in there and be gritty and be physical. I think the refs let us do a lot tonight. So just doing whatever it takes to win.

Q. This question is for Alexis: In the fourth quarter, how were you able to find the space? How did your team make sure you were in the position to hit those shots that you hit that put the game away?

ALEXIS MORRIS: Screens. My teammates were setting great picks for me. Coach is calling plays for me, iso'ing me. Obviously I was the hot hand down the stretch. You go with who was hot. Fortunately, I was hot tonight.

Just playing, man. You just got to keep playing through the course of the game and staying aggressive. I was due a good game. I owe my team this game, so yeah.

Q. Alexis, throughout this tournament, you talked a little bit about how the team has not been doing as well offensively, but the defense has been carrying. So what about tonight the offense is working? And for both of you all, did you have the Sharpie rings on tonight?

ALEXIS MORRIS: I'll answer the second question. No, we didn't have the Sharpie rings on, but it's definitely on our mantles. For the first question -- oh, okay. We had a solid offensive night, but I know my team, I know we can be better.

Like I said, our offense is not what got us back in the game. It was our defense. We turned our intensity up another notch, and that's what gave us the spark on the other end of the floor. That's how we were able to be victorious tonight.

Q. Alexis, this question is for you: You mentioned earlier your journey and things you have gone through that we as the media of course would not know about. You say basketball has been your safe place. What does the game of basketball mean to you?

ALEXIS MORRIS: Basketball is like my playground, and it's not that I just have a horrible life or like, you know, but everybody has their thing. This is my escape. This is my arcade. This is my maze.

Basketball has taught me a lot of life lessons. I've been able to find my identity away from the court when I was away from the sport.

One day I'm going to write a book. I'm going to have a documentary. I'm going to have some charities for kids, be

a mentor, maybe even coach someday because I feel like I have a lot of wisdom from my experiences that I'm willing to share and help somebody else.

Basketball has put me in a position to bridge gaps, and I'm very fortunate for that, for those experiences. Thank you.

Q. I apologize if it's already been asked, but Flau'jae tonight, the plays she made defensively, offensively. She went up and got one rebound, and the guy behind me said, oh, my God, did you see how high she got up? Can you talk about her performance, especially down the stretch?

ANGEL REESE: That big steal that she had in transition, and she finished that. I think that gave her a lot of momentum. Flau'jae has matured so much during the season, just being able to come in. Even if she doesn't score a lot, she comes in and rebounds and plays defense.

She's a freshman. You have to realize she's a freshman. I remember in the fourth quarter, it was one of those last plays, where she had blocked Kitley's shot. They called a foul. I thought it was a block. And I said that was soft because I said, Flau'jae, you're a freshman, and you're playing against an All-American right now, and you just blocked her shot, and I'm proud of you. Sometimes as a freshman you don't want to go against matchups like that, and Flau'jae is not scared of anything.

We can't win games without Flau'jae. Her being a supporting role and doing what she does, we need that.

ALEXIS MORRIS: As a senior, you have to like let the younger ones know that it's not just about scoring, it's the little things, like that still gave us a spark. It gave us a boost, gave us some confidence on the defensive end.

Flau'jae, she just got swag, man. Some people just don't have it. Swag and she got heart. That's two things you can't teach. She's Flau'jae.

Q. Angel, LaDazhia goes 7-of-9 from the field and guards Kitley. What can you say about her performance?

ANGEL REESE: I wanted to tell you all that before the game. LaDazhia was going to be the one that was guarding her from the beginning, and she played her well to the T. LaDazhia, they may not say she's All-American, but in my eyes she is. She in a supporting role and she does her job every single night. She finishes around the basket. She rebounds. She usually guards the best post player.

She's amazing. I love LaDazhia. That's the best post player I ever played with, and her journey just continues as she keeps getting better and better and better.

Q. Lex, for you, I'm curious, you take the floor tonight, it's the Final Four, you're back in your home state. Can you just share maybe that last pregame thought that went through your head and what maybe transpired tonight through your play or performance that may have reflected what those final thoughts were?

ALEXIS MORRIS: The last pregame thought, I think I was thinking about my best game I ever played in high school. That's what I was thinking about, those moments when I just felt like unreal. You know, I was just playing out of my body. I was in the zone. I was focused.

I was just thinking about a lot of those moments, just kind of reminiscing. Maybe it could spark and give me a little edge on the court, a little more confidence.

You know what else I also thought about? I thought about the matchups. You all kept asking me about the matchups, the matchups, the matchups, but I appreciate that because you put a chip on my shoulder.

And being back home, it just means everything to me. I'm a Texas kid. I was born and raised here. Just to have my supporters and people I grew up around, people that have been knowing me since I was a child, and now they can see how to persevere and be relentless. Like it's pretty special, man.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, both.

At this time, we'll open it up for questions for Coach.

Q. Coach, there was a point in the second half it looked like your team was a little low on energy. You pulled Angel out, trying to get something going, I guess. From that point on, what did you see as far as the grit and determination that your team played with?

KIM MULKEY: I thought both teams looked tired. Their adrenaline's high, and they're all emotional, both teams trying to do the best they can. I told them in the timeout, I said, your conditioning's going to play a factor in this game. I said, you can't run the floor slower than them. You have to beat them down the floor.

Then going into the fourth quarter, we were down eight, I think. The way I approached that was you got two minutes left in the game. You're down eight. You got to come out smoking and on fire. You got to play like you're never going to play again.

Not ten minutes. I didn't want them to get comfortable thinking they had a lot of time. I wanted them to come out, pick the pace up defensively, fly to the offensive boards as if you have two minutes to play.

Then we cut it to two. They call a timeout, I think it was, and I said, okay now, you're back in the ballgame. We don't have eight minutes. We have two minutes.

I just felt like we had to challenge them on a sense of urgency.

Q. Coach Mulkey, year two, National Championship. LSU has not been able to get to where you guys will be Sunday. What does it mean to you?

KIM MULKEY: That I'm blessed. I came home for lots of reasons. One, to someday hang a championship banner in the PMAC. Never, ever do you think you're going to do something like this in two years.

Also keep it in perspective. No team -- you think about all the great men's players that have played at LSU. You think about all the great women's players that have played. When they told me none have ever played for a National Championship, I was kind of surprised. So that's an accomplishment. That's a step in the right direction.

I can't explain to you unless you're sitting on the sideline to look across that way and look at the fans. I saw Louisiana Tech players that I coached. I saw Baylor players that I coached. I saw LSU players from last year that I coached, and they're all cheering for their coach.

It makes you just realize they know what we feel in that moment.

Q. Talk a little about your relationship with Alexis and the fact that you made history with her like full circle coming back, LSU from Baylor, just the whole story. What she means to you as a player.

KIM MULKEY: Some of the things, when I talk to Alexis through the years, I can't tell you because it's personal. But one of the cutest -- and I won't tell you exactly, you can figure it out for yourself. But you know as a teacher -- I'll relate it this way.

You have those teachers who want little Johnny. You know who little Johnny is, right? You love little Johnny, but, boy, he annoys the heck out of you. Then you got those teachers, those that want a little Johnny in their class. I didn't call her my little Johnny, I called her my little something else. Well, she thinks that's the cutest thing in



the world.

When I dismissed Alexis from Baylor, it was just a coach decision, one of those tough ones you have to make. But it wasn't like you didn't love her because she was my little -- but it was the right decision. Not just for my team at Baylor at the time, it was the right decision for that young lady.

And when I got the LSU job, she wanted to come back. And the things that she can tell you that you've probably already read, I just need Coach in my life. I need her discipline. I need her tough love. I need her direction.

The sad part about it, it's not sad. It's typical kids and media and whatever. You're going to go back and play for a lady that almost ruined your career? Give me a break. Alexis will quickly shut them up and say how did she almost ruin my career? I did it to myself. How many athletes do you know tell the truth like that? It's always the coach's fault. Parents, it's always the coach's fault.

That's why she should write a book because she owned her mistake and she just kept clawing to get out of it.

There's a lot I could tell you about that young lady. I've known her since she was in the seventh grade. Her little private school in Beaumont, teachers, they love her. She's not one of those kids that, when they leave, you go, "good riddance." She's one of those that just was immature, and she has owned her mistakes and is a better person because of it, and now she's being rewarded.

Q. Do you feel like this season was as much a process for you as a coach of putting together a puzzle as any other, considering how many new players that you've had and just the amount of time that you've been at LSU?

KIM MULKEY: Yeah, it's a puzzle. It's crazy I'm sitting up here. It's crazy we're getting ready to play for a National Championship. I keep wanting to call somebody and go tell me how we did this in two years. I don't know.

Got a staff. Got Bob back. He can help me so much with X's and O's and film work. We're playing for a National Championship, guys, and I just got there, wow.

Yeah, nine new pieces. Nine new pieces.

Q. LaDazhia's impact, not only 16 points, but what she was able to do against Kitley. Just how can you put that into perspective?

KIM MULKEY: I thought LaDazhia was outstanding. The game starts, she's scoring, she's defending, she's blocking

out. She was good. And then she picked up the two fouls. Flau'jae picked up the two fouls. They went to a zone. The whole momentum changed at that point. We go in at half down two.

But LaDazhia has been playing like that. This was not just a fluke. She's been on a tear. LaDazhia's stock has soared throughout the playoffs. If Alexis Morris isn't a first round pick, I'm not a WNBA scout, but I know a little bit about basketball. She's just lightning quick.

Her defensive pressure got us energized in that fourth quarter.

Q. The addition of Poole, I've seen her play in Columbus when I covered the team there, her addition to the team has sparked the defensive side. If you can talk about what it was like to recruit her and how special she is to this particular team.

KIM MULKEY: Are you talking about LaDazhia?

Q. No, I'm talking about Kateri Poole.

KIM MULKEY: Oh, Kateri. I don't even know her by her full name. It's just, K.P., get over here.

Kateri was at Ohio State. We played Ohio State in the second round last year, and they beat us. She got a full dose of what LSU sounds like, looks like in that PMAC because it was packed.

She went into the portal, and we made a call to her, and I asked her, you're leaving a team that just beat LSU. You played. And she just said, Coach, I can't get that noise out of my head. She said, the people, it was so loud. Coach, I just want to be a part of something that's so appreciative and so welcoming. She said, that was the most unbelievable setting that I've ever played in.

She wanted to play some point. She's been a point guard all her life. As you see, I'll play her at the point some. And she consequently is how we got Angel Reese. They were buds. And she just casually asked, Coach, would you all be interested in Angel Reese? And we just kind of laughed, like we would tell them no, right?

Yeah, Kateri Poole, I'm so happy for her. And she'll quickly tell you she's from the Bronx. She's proud of being from the Bronx.

Q. What did you see in terms of the fourth quarter, your improvement offensively and defensively after that latter part of the second quarter and that third quarter did not go your way?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

KIM MULKEY: Well, I thought we turned it up a notch. I thought defensively we really, really got very aggressive. Alexis started it off. Flau'jae gets the steal and the finish on the other end. You finally started seeing Angel flying to the offensive boards. She's hard to block out.

And you just started doing some things that we've been doing all year. Did that take place because we were down eight and we were desperate? Possibly. Or did that take place because they were getting tired? Possibly. I don't know how to give you the exact answer on that, but I just know that, when you're down, you've got to do something different, and I just thought we turned it up a notch.

Q. Coach, you had mentioned that you didn't think you would be here two years. When you came to coach at LSU, did you have a timeline when you thought you'd be back on this stage?

KIM MULKEY: Absolutely not. Even at Baylor, when we won our first one in five years, you can't do that. Transfer portal affects everything. There's no way that you can put a timeline on anything. What you do is you try to take one more step. Just one more step. Is that a positive? Are we heading in the right direction?

But, no, you don't put this kind of timeline on anything.

Q. We heard Angel say that she took it personally that you all were down on the boards at halftime. Was that a conversation you had with her individually or did she just take it upon herself as you were addressing the team? How did you see her let the game come to her as the game went on?

KIM MULKEY: To answer your question, it was a conversation for the entire group. It was a conversation for the entire group, and that was just a small part of the conversation. There were many other things that we pointed out to them.

Took her out a couple times because I didn't think she was getting up and down the floor. She acted winded.

Yeah, she should take it to heart. That's what she does. I can't tell you they were blocking her out all that good. I think she just was letting the game come to her and not being aggressive enough, and she wasn't in foul trouble.

So I think that, yeah, she turned it up a notch on the boards.

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