

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship Final Four: LSU vs Iowa

Saturday, April 1, 2023

Dallas, Texas, USA

American Airlines Center

## LSU Tigers

## Kim Mulkey

### Finals Pregame Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning. At this time, we'll open it up for questions for Coach.

**Q. First, I want to know how many matching outfits Sage brought for the championship? I was curious if there is a comparison to Caitlin from film that you've watched. Obviously you've been a great defensive coach for a long time. Is there anyone that she reminds you of?**

KIM MULKEY: First question is a designer made that outfit for my granddaughter when she gave me the outfit she wanted me to wear. So I don't think there's another one.

Number two, I've never seen a player -- I don't like to use the word "never," but I don't know that I've ever seen a player that can do what Caitlin does.

She's going to get her points. That girl is phenomenal shooting the ball. But the most impressive thing to me, now that you're talking to an old point guard, is she makes everybody around her better. You have great players that can get numbers, but she makes others on her team better.

**Q. Does it make your job easier facing a player like Caitlin when it comes to putting together defensive game plan?**

KIM MULKEY: No. No. The familiarity that we would have had with South Carolina would have been easier just because they're in our league. But just the things she's capable of doing -- one minute you think you're going to guard her a certain way, then you watch the film and change your mind and go, oh, that's not going to work.

Hopefully by the end of the day, we'll come to some conclusion as a staff that we're going to try this first, and if

that doesn't work, we'll try this.

That's my first time to see her play in person, and I didn't get to watch the game because I had to deal with y'all. When I did get out there, I couldn't take my eyes off of her. Gosh, she's special. She's special.

**Q. I noticed an edge to your team this week, a sense of confidence, belief that they belong here. I'm sure that was only emboldened with the victory last night. Have you noticed it at all?**

KIM MULKEY: I've noticed it all year. That's the personality of the crew I get to coach. Big personalities, strong women, opinionated women, and when they get on the floor, they challenge each other.

And I say this in a complimentary way, they remind me of guys. You know how the guys roll the ball out and let's get after it? That's what I get to coach every day. They get on each other. They'll challenge each other. They don't take it personal. They know they're on the same team, but I guess it's maybe hold each other accountable in a different kind of way. Not so much a nice way as it is just, you've got more in your tank. Let's go. Or get that rebound. It just reminds me growing up playing with the guys and how the guys talked to each other like that.

**Q. Coach, congratulations.**

KIM MULKEY: Thank you.

**Q. My question for you, Coach, is first congratulations on getting here. You have won three National Championships, and you've been able to figure this out. What does your team bring? And can you just talk about the perseverance that you guys had there in the fourth quarter with Reese stepping up big. What do you guys have to do to win the championship?**

KIM MULKEY: Do what we've done all year. We can't change who we are. We got back in that game last night because of defense and rebounding. I just think we took it up a notch in the fourth quarter. Keep doing that.



Hit a few more shots. Just defend as hard as you can, rebound. I thought that being down 11 rebounds at half was so not normal for us, and then I finally saw in the fourth quarter Angel and those guys just go flying in there for offensive boards.

Just do what we've done.

**Q. I'm curious when you got to LSU, reflecting on how you built that program at Baylor, was there anything you had done in the first one or two years that you said, like, I have to do when I get to LSU?**

KIM MULKEY: Win one more game than they won the previous year. They won nine. So I thought schedule's already done, so I can't control that schedule. But when we got to ten wins, we celebrated. And then when we got to the number of wins that would allow us to have a winning season -- this is last year -- we celebrated.

When we finished second in the league to the national champions, we celebrated. When we were ranked for the first time -- we celebrated all those things, but no. I didn't know my team. You can't put those kind of expectations, but yet you do have to give a team goals on what to shoot for.

I think we changed our goals as we grew and as we continued to play.

**Q. Coach, throughout the season there have been ups and downs with the defensive intensity. For five straight games now, holding teams to 41 percent or less shooting, just what has it taken for you all to make this run defensively?**

KIM MULKEY: I think it's something we emphasize every day in practice. There will be days we don't pick up a ball. Just guard people. Just bow your neck, guard people, get through screens, don't hit screens, talk to each other.

And it's been good this year. For nine new pieces, nine new players, and to be sitting here playing for a National Championship, I would have to just say we continue to grind and get better.

We've had great shooting nights, but we've had some sorry shooting nights. I think the one thing they really have bought into is, okay, this is what that woman is trying to tell us. Just keep guarding people, and you'll stay in ball games.

**Q. Having been on these runs before, do you look for your team starting to get stressed as the stakes get higher? How has this team reacted to the journey of**

**going through the tournament and the games get bigger and bigger?**

KIM MULKEY: I don't sense stress. I just don't. I think it's their personality. They listen. They watch film. They want to play. They want to get on the court.

I don't stress -- last night I didn't sense any stress or nerves. I hope they have butterflies. I hope the butterflies I have continue until I retire. Butterflies are good, but stress -- I got some characters in that locker room. I don't know that they stress about much.

**Q. The team you have has never been here before as a school. You've been here three times and been successful each one. I'm curious what that experience can help you for the game tomorrow. And the second half of the question is this seems like there's a new way to build teams. Transfer portal is here to stay, and in the old days with Baylor, you didn't have to go to a transfer portal. You developed from freshman through. Is that the game you see going that you can bring players in more experienced to get you somewhere faster rather than building from freshmen, sophomores, juniors?**

KIM MULKEY: The first part of your question, it is so exciting -- I don't even know how old LSU is. I don't even know when they started playing men's or women's basketball, but it has to be a long time ago. And to think all those great players that have played in the NBA and the WNBA, and they never played for a National Championship. That's mind boggling to me.

Me being in the games, it's not going to have anything whatsoever to do with the outcome of the game. Those kids aren't in my body. I could share with them X's and O's, and we can go out there and prepare, but at the end of the day, they've got to go play.

The second part, the transfer portal, the NIL, all that's here to stay. You can fight it all you want. It's here to stay. Obviously the transfer portal was good to us at LSU, but you know what, in another week kids can depart, kids that you wouldn't expect would depart. You're seeing it every day.

They're departing for probably opportunities with NIL. At other schools it may seem better. Maybe playing time, maybe boyfriend, girlfriend, I don't know. They just leave. That's the bad part of the transfer portal. So you're going to have to take the good with the bad.

**Q. With as many new pieces as this team has this year, I'm curious if there was anything specific you did**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**early in the season to get them playing as a unit or any turning point where you saw that cohesiveness start to develop?**

KIM MULKEY: Just practice every day. Just practice every day. Get in the film room every day. There's no magical thing that I can tell you just happened, and boy, all of a sudden we became this Final Four team.

I think it was coaches who work hard, recruit hard, demand a lot, and we don't settle. When we have bad games or a kid plays bad, you get them in that film room. You hold them accountable. But that's hard to do.

I mean, nine new pieces. Alexis Morris is the only one we had that really had playing experience. This is quite a run. This is quite a year.

**Q. Just jumping off of that, you guys finished strong, the way you talked about, in this fourth quarter. I wonder what are some specific ways that you and your staff build the team to finish strong? Is this a team that takes certain practices into account to allow it to happen?**

KIM MULKEY: Early in the preseason when we're starting practice, maybe the third practice, somewhere in that range, I said I don't know if these kids can play against each other. They're going to hurt each other. I'm thinking I need to really, really get a good dream team, which is our guys, our college male practice team, because that's how competitive they are. That's how they talk to each other. It's like going in the backyard and big sister is fixing to whip little sister and little sister grows up and thinks, I'm fixing to give it right back at you. That's how they compete. Not in a dirty way, but like, oh, I don't know about this.

We did a lot of stuff using our dream team. Those guys are good. Those guys are all in this building and take great pride that they're a part of us sitting here on this stage.

You just think about Alexis Morris and Angel Reese going at it in practice, what a sight. I don't know which one trash talks the other one more. It is competitors.

**Q. Coach, you've talked about how Bob Starkey has been a vital piece on your coaching staff. He's been part of all LSU's Final Four runs. To get over the hump and getting to the National Championship, how special is that for you? I know getting there is not what your goal is, but just to do it with him.**

KIM MULKEY: I'm going to answer that. Leading up, start with this, there are head coaches who work their whole life to become head coaches. And then when they get there,

they have a very poor staff around them. I've seen it so many times.

You cannot as a head coach become stagnant. So throughout my career as a head coach, I have surrounded myself with head coaches who have left their respective head coaching jobs to come work for me, either for more money or bigger conferences or whatever. I want that input. I cannot do it by myself. I'm too old. I need to take a deep breath every now and then.

Leon Barmore was retired. That was my mentor, Hall of Fame, Naismith coach. He comes to Baylor for three years. "I need you, Coach. You don't even have to go recruit." He hated recruiting. "Just help me right here."

I've had three or four more that were head coaches and came. Bob Starkey never wanted to be a head coach, but yet he's the only one to my knowledge that has taken a team as an interim coach at LSU to a Final Four.

To have him on my staff and for me to be able to watch him speak the same language I speak tells you how good he is. He doesn't use different terminology. He observed, and he watched the first couple months, like how I want things done. I think in turn he's so glad to be back home. Baton Rouge is his home. He's coached on the men's side. He got to coach Shaquille O'Neal. On the women's side, he got to coach Seimone, Sylvia, all those great players. He's never played in a National Championship Game.

He's made a promise to these kids, that if we win a National Championship, he'll dance. This promise was made long ago, he doesn't like to dance. We like to dance in Louisiana. He doesn't. He's an old West Virginia boy. But he's promised them, should we win, that he'll dance. Now, he didn't say what kind of dance, but we're going to hold him to that.

But just his knowledge. His knowledge, he says things like a head coach. He motivates them. He gets on them. And he's comfortable. I think he's comfortable because I get out of the way and let him be him.

I don't know, it was one of you guys from Baton Rouge that wanted an interview with him. He's really good friends with our administrative assistant, our secretary. She said, yeah, call him. Interview him. He was in shock. He's like, she lets her coaches do that? She's goes, Bob, you just need to get to know Kim. All these people think she's a certain way. She's not anything like that. Heck, yeah, she wants you to interview.

It's an honor to have him on our staff.



**Q. I wanted to ask, you talked about Caitlin, but did anything stand out to you about Lisa's job coaching last night or throughout this tournament?**

KIM MULKEY: I didn't watch the coach. I'm watching that floor, and that's the way it should be. I know you all look at what I wear, but after you see what I wear, you need to be watching the floor on what the coaches are doing.

I'm watching that floor. I'm watching how they defend. I'm watching plays. I'm watching all the things that take place on that floor.

**Q. Did you see the video last night, Alex Box Stadium 12,000, 13,000 people that were all roaring as you won the game. The umpire didn't know what was going on. As you're here, I was just curious on your thoughts, straight back to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, all the people having viewing parties and rooting for you to finish the job on Sunday?**

KIM MULKEY: I did. Now, people have to send it to me because I don't have social media. So they'll send it to me, and they'll go, Coach, look at this. All of a sudden, during the middle of that kid batting for Tennessee, you just hear and you see everybody standing, 13,000 people, because they got the final score.

And even the guys on the LSU team came out of the dugout. Tell me things aren't happening at LSU that are positive. How about our gymnastics? They're in the regional finals.

But I've got to tell this quick story: So my son Kramer plays for the St. Louis Cardinals. He's in Triple-A. They're playing in Charlotte. He's batting in the 2 hole, playing third last night. He's like 0-for-3. I think he had two strikeouts.

Well, he obviously is distracted. I'll just tell it, hope the Cardinals don't bench him today for it. He's trying to get a score. He's got a trainer or somebody giving him scores. We're down 12, and hell, he strikes out again. Then he goes -- this is a great story. He's in the on-deck circle. He has no clue, he thinks we're pretty much done at that point. He's in the on-deck circle, and somehow, somehow he got word that we were up ten, and he hits a double.

So it's a great story. He laughed. When I left y'all last night, he FaceTimed me, and he was doing some pretty good celebrating with a few adjectives in there, and I said, shh, you're right in front of the media.

You've got a lot of people that are excited. We have lots of

people coming in from Baton Rouge that couldn't get here Friday. So if you've got extra tickets, sell them to people reasonably priced. Those LSU people will buy them.

You know we like a good party. I would imagine every bar is offering every kind of drink possible today, tomorrow. There will be watch parties everywhere.

Fun times. Fun times at LSU. Kudos to Scott Woodward, kudos to Dr. Bill Tate for being our leaders and getting some of the best coaches in the country to come coach at LSU.

**Q. Two questions for you: It seems like Lil Wayne is officially on board. I see he's FaceTimed you guys the last couple days. What have those conversations been like with him? Two, we talk about Bob a lot, but guys like Gary and your other assistant coaches who are going through this NCAA Tournament run for the first time, how rewarding is it for you to have those really young assistants get to experience almost -- for lots of coaches, maybe a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.**

KIM MULKEY: Well, Lil Wayne is a Louisiana guy. Those of you who don't know who he is, he's a famous rapper. Yeah, he FaceTimed Angel, and I was talking to him after the game last night. He's a treat, and the girls love him. And if the girls love him, I love him. Anything he can do to promote our program and LSU and Louisiana, I'm all for.

He even likes my country music. He wants to use that (singing) "all my exes..." he wants to use that as a sample, whatever that means. So I just nod my head and say sounds good to me.

Gary, Joe, Chante' come to mind on my staff, they've never been here. The tears Chante' cried thanking me. I said don't thank me, thank those kids. Gary said he's not taking his shirt off until it's all over. He's beside himself. Gary's father was a great player, for those of you who don't know it, Gary Redus. And ironically, I used to watch the Cincinnati Reds. That was my team in the '70s. I can still tell you every position on that field, and his dad was on that team.

To have him come and see our kids and talk to them. Joe Schwartz, I raised that boy. He and my son grew up together, and he went to UT and played for Shaka Smart and played for Rick Barnes as a walk-on. To watch them, it's exciting for them, but it touches my heart, and they are young and keep me young.

They do all the things, all the things these young people like, and I just shake my head and say don't embarrass me. Make sure you know who I am. "We've got you,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®



Coach." So it's all good. It's all good.

**Q. Congratulations on the win yesterday. You've been at LSU since 2021. Do you feel like you're ahead of schedule with the talent you have? Or do you feel like you're still in the process of getting LSU to become a powerhouse?**

KIM MULKEY: I don't want to use the word "powerhouse." We've won games. We have not won championships.

Are we ahead of schedule? I think it's obvious we're ahead of schedule. We're sitting here playing for the National Championship.

So the hard part now is, when it's all over, win or lose, you go back to recruiting, you go back to trying to duplicate what you did this year and just continue on a trajectory that is positive to someday maybe winning an SEC Championship, maybe winning a National Championship, or being what you would say a contender every year.

But we're ahead of schedule, if that's your question.

**Q. Yesterday Kenny Brooks, while talking about the physical play, he complimented the officiating, but he also said it might be time for the women's game to grow up a little bit and go to some rules like what you have in the WNBA. So stars like Angel Reese and Elizabeth Kitley can get freed up a little bit and not be surrounded by people all the time and show how good they are. I was wondering what you think about that.**

KIM MULKEY: I don't keep up with the rules in the WNBA. I don't keep up with the rules in the NBA. Hell, I do a good job of keeping up with the college rules, and that's all that matters to me.

I do understand his frustrations. I think every post player that plays the game understands that. But I've been blessed to have some of the greatest post players, probably more than any coach that's ever coached this game, and I've never complained but a couple of times.

They're not going to change it. The college game is different than the pro game. I understand his frustration because I've had those before, but you just have to deal with it. You have to make adjustments.

I can't help add to his comments because I don't know all that stuff. I just know what I deal with in college, and it's physical. And the deeper you make a run in the playoffs, it's physical. Yeah, I can't add to his comments.

I didn't hear his comments, but again, I don't know all the

rules in the WNBA.

**Q. So you talk about rebounding being a key to your team's success this year? Last night South Carolina outrebounded Iowa 49-25, I believe, and still wasn't enough to get it done. What's it going to take to capitalize on the advantage you have inside against them?**

KIM MULKEY: Well, you've got to score the ball. You've got to score the ball. It was very difficult, the little bit I did get to watch live. It was very difficult for South Carolina in the paint because they obviously were crowding the paint, and they allowed Caitlin to roam. She never really guarded anybody. She just roamed.

You've got to hit shots. No matter how many post players you have, you've got to be able to hit perimeter shots, and that goes for us too. If you don't hit perimeter shots, it doesn't matter how many rebounds you get.

**Q. You talked about the personalities you have in your locker room, and I was curious about, when you first met Angel, did that come through right away? What was your first impression of her?**

KIM MULKEY: I think Angel has told you guys this. She came to LSU for a new start. Get away from some things that she's not proud of in her past. Not bad things, but things that a lot of people tend to dwell on. We talked about it. I talk about everything.

There's nothing that's off limits when it comes to these kids and me when it comes to developing them and in their basketball. I think Angel has grown up a lot. Angel can handle tough love. I think Angel, probably she and Alexis Morris get more tough love from me than any of the players. Maybe that's because expectations are a little different, but it's also because they need it, they want it, and they embrace it.

**Q. Coach, Sue Bird and I were talking last night that we noticed there was about several Baylor players here and how that speaks to the culture of what you're building at LSU. Can you just talk about how the impact of that shows how great a coach you are, as you already know, but just the culture that you're building there at LSU also.**

KIM MULKEY: Lisa (Leslie) -- Jim, you should ask her, she's one of the great post players of all time, about those rules.

There were Louisiana Tech players here that I got to coach. Hug their necks. Just loving on me last night.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

There were Baylor players here that have a National Championship ring, and many Big 12 championship rings. There were LSU former players here.

That tells you you've been coaching a long time, but what it tells you is I had more of those former players that love me that don't. When these people want to write about all the ones that don't like me, go write about all the ones that do.

That's not just for me. That's for every coach in America. And to hug them, to watch their excitement, the parents of Lauren Cox, who couldn't be here, they're screaming and loving. That's why you coach because you realize when your coaching is over, somewhere you did something good. And if you did more good than bad for somebody's kid, that's what you feel good about.

So I had a combination -- Louisiana Tech, Baylor, LSU -- yeah, I'm getting old. I'm getting old. Had former teammates from the Olympics here. There sits Cheryl Miller right there. There's a picture. I don't want to get -- but she sends me a picture that Cathy Boswell had of our team getting inducted into the Hall of Fame here. Cathy sent it to me. It's Cheryl, when we were in L.A. for the '84 Olympics. We were at her house and there's her dad and her mom and all of us.

I looked at that picture. We don't have Annie Donovan anymore. We don't have Saul, her daddy, anymore. Bam, it just hit me. We don't have Pat Summitt, who was our coach. We don't have Kay Yow, who was our coach. We don't have Nancy Darsch, who was our coach.

That's just when she just said, Kim, you are a -- Cheryl and I talk and I won't tell you everything, but it's moments like that, Lisa. It's moments like that, when it kind of hits you like what in the world are we doing?

**Q. Kim, when you go from a program at Baylor, where you were there for a really long time, and then you're starting over, what is hard, or what is different when you take that jump?**

KIM MULKEY: Well, you first think recruiting is going to be harder because at Baylor, after you started and you started winning, the program sold itself. So when I left, I thought, whew, get to work.

But what I didn't realize is the brand. Those three letters, LSU, they don't mean anything else but Louisiana State University, and it's an international brand. What I didn't realize is how the portal is going to help you quicker than before we had the portal.

But you do the same things with the understanding that

portal, they're going to come, they're going to go. Get a good coaching staff that has energy and can help you recruit. But I had no clue. The timing of me going to LSU, I had no clue that the NIL was going to have, and it is going to have impact at the major power -- and it is having impact at the major Power Five conferences.

We're not talking about collectives that are internal at each institution. We're talking about these kids that want to be in these major Power Five conferences, and they see what Flau'jae has, and they see what Angel has. I don't even know their NIL deals until they put a list out. One of y'all put a list out, and I went oh.

And then they give me gifts. They're giving gifts to the coaches from their NIL deals, guys. I'm shaking my head, going I wouldn't go buy this. This is too expensive.

That's the world we live in now, but I didn't know the impact of that when I left. I thought, oh, boy, I'm fixing to start all over. But it's a lot easier than I thought it would be because of NIL and because of the LSU brand.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

