

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - South Dakota State vs Utah

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Spokane, Washington, USA

McCarthy Athletic Center

## Utah Utes

## Coach Lynne Roberts

## Kennady McQueen

## Alissa Pili

### Media Conference

Utah - 68, South Dakota State - 54

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by University of Utah head coach Lynne Roberts and players Kennady McQueen and Alissa Pili.

Opening comments, Coach.

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yes, thank you. I do want to say South Dakota State is good, impressively good. And so much respect for them. It is so hard to win your league year in and year out and go the way that they do it, undefeated in conference and then to roll through your conference tournament. That's hard.

And so hats off to them. I think they're a tremendous program, not just a good team this year, but just a great program.

I thought they battled hard. And the thing that I said at my press conference, whenever that was, yesterday, it doesn't matter the score, they play the same way. And I think you saw that tonight.

We went up big in the first quarter, and they never quit. They never hung their heads. And that's a sign of a good team.

So congratulations to them on a good season.

I'm proud of our team. It is never easy in the NCAA Tournament to get a win. Tonight was not easy. We never could get very comfortable. They had us scouted pretty well.



And I think we just made plays when we needed to. That second quarter was less than impressive on our part offensively, but what a great third quarter out of halftime to score 26 and take control.

I thought Kennady McQueen was phenomenal tonight. Six assists, no turnovers, 17 points. Just tremendous.

And Alissa, you know, it's hard, the amount of pressure she has, not just off the court, which there is that, too, but the way she gets swarmed and the physical and all of that. She garners so much attention, and she handles it. So she had a good game.

And Jenna Johnson did her job. She always does. She defended. Brooklyn Meyer is tough. She's tough to guard. And Jenna took two or three charges on her.

So overall great team win. It's not easy. And I'm happy to be moving on.

THE MODERATOR: Question for the student-athletes, please.

**Q. Alissa, Coach already talked about it, the different looks that South Dakota State sent at you, but it never seemed like you were rattled, either you got a tough bucket or you were able to find somebody open. How were you able to work through the different defensive schemes that they were sending at you tonight?**

ALISSA PILI: I think throughout the whole season a lot of teams have guarded me in different ways. So I think the main thing for me was to stay poised and take what the defense gives me. And I've gotten better at that over time and as we've played more games and had more different looks with defenses and things like that.

So I just -- I don't know, it comes with experience, I think, just to know how to handle that.

**Q. Kennady, Coach talked about your performance tonight was really solid, but I felt like you were especially good when your team needed a bucket that**

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**second quarter, they go on that big run, but then the second half you got some easy buckets for everyone else, including yourself. What was your mentality going into that second half after that run South Dakota State went on that second quarter?**

KENNADY MCQUEEN: Yeah, we talked about at halftime just throwing the first punch. Coach said once you get to the NCAA Tournament, no game is easy. Whether you're the higher seed or not, everybody is going to keep playing until that final buzzer goes off.

So it was throwing the first punch and getting back to Utah basketball. I think that second quarter we got away from what we're good at. So it was just getting that back on track, and that just makes things easy for us on offense.

**Q. The bank shot, was it luck or skill?**

LYNNE ROBERTS: She called it.

KENNADY MCQUEEN: Skill.

ALISSA PILI: Bank was open.

**Q. What's the most difficult part about playing this South Dakota team?**

KENNADY MCQUEEN: I would say just how consistently hard they work. Every possession they made us work for things. They tried to take away what we were good at.

And them on offense, you just have to pick your poison. They have shooters. They have a great inside presence.

So just props to them. They played excellent. So that's what I would say.

ALISSA PILI: Yeah, to go off of that, I think they're just very -- like they play very hard. And like Coach was saying, we threw punches, and they weren't going away. They didn't hang their heads or anything. They just kept coming back.

And so that's just a mentality thing I think and a tough team. And so when teams are mentally tough, I think it makes them a good team and a hard team to play.

**Q. Alissa, what did you feel like you guys got away from? In the second quarter, you had that scoring drought and let them back in the game there?**

ALISSA PILI: I think just playing like our style of basketball, just moving the ball and kind of just honing in on setting good screens and kind of -- we were kind of just

going through the motions, and just taking quick shots when we knew that we -- if we just move the ball, we could get better shots. And I think we got back to that later in the game.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, student-athletes, you're dismissed.

We'll open it now for questions for Coach.

**Q. You talked about Jenna's impact tonight, but I just wanted to go back to that. The impact that it is to be able to draw those charges that she did, just how important was that, especially tonight, to be able to do that early?**

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, that was huge. And she's done that all season. She has a knack for sliding her feet, getting in front, and taking the hit.

And that was big. I think Meyer got her second foul like seven minutes to go in the first quarter. And so, you know, that's happened to us with Pili before, and it kind of makes your whole offense -- you kind of hiccup a little bit when your leading scorer, inside presence is out for that amount of time.

So Jenna has -- I don't know how many charges she's taken on the year, probably close to 40 or something. So maybe more. I don't know. Seems like a lot.

But that is a skill, and it's a talent, and it is such a value add to a team. And it doesn't really show up in the stats, and it's huge, a huge component to winning.

**Q. And just that second half, what can you say about the response that you saw from your team being able to come out after such a difficult second quarter and come out and do what they did?**

LYNNE ROBERTS: Difficult. That's a positive word for it.

Yeah, I mean, at halftime it wasn't like we were screaming and yelling or anything. It was just like, guys, let's just -- we have to move the ball. Our offense is predicated on pace and space and tempo. And we just kind of got away from that.

And so it's like let's go back to what we talked about and what we prepared for. And made a couple of adjustments with what they were doing defensively.

And with Alissa, it's really hard, you have to give it to her where she can catch it and just go right up because anytime there's -- she has to do a move, it's just a swarm.

Right?

So we've got -- you know, we tried to run some stuff where there was more space for her, and it was just kind of catch, bang, bang, finish. Which was helpful.

And, again, I think Kennady brought some swagger out there confidence-wise in scoring.

**Q. You probably talk about Alissa so often and so many things she does for you. Is there a piece of her game that you feel like over these years has been overlooked or gets underrated for everything that she does out there for you guys?**

LYNNE ROBERTS: I think, you know, what doesn't -- she's undersized, and I think -- I mean, people have talked about that, but her ability to get to somebody's body and be able to get her shot off, she's got incredible touch off the backboard.

But for her to be -- we list her at 6'2". I don't think -- she's maybe 6 foot, right? But for her to get shots off in traffic, just the power that she has, but combined with the kind of grace and touch, but it starts with footwork, and then it finishes with she's got incredible hands, the best hands that I've coached in terms of what she can catch and how she can finish.

**Q. Alissa kind of talked about what you guys got away from, but was there anything you feel like South Dakota State was able to do to maybe force you into some of the difficulties that you had in the second quarter?**

LYNNE ROBERTS: They did a great job of -- defensively, they're just sound. And driving lanes that are sometimes there, they were clogging it up and shrinking the floor a little bit.

And then, again, the stuff we run for Pili wasn't working. So obviously they had scouted that, and they did a great job.

So I think they kind of -- they were prepared, you know, for lack of a better word. And then they just kind of have that blue collar toughness that they never go away.

So I would say that. We're a really good offensive rebounding team, and we had four. And I was hammering on that in timeouts and in halftime. We had one at halftime. But they boxed out for 40 minutes. Like they just -- they're just tough.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

LYNNE ROBERTS: All right. Appreciate you guys being here. See you tomorrow. Thank you.

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