

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - San Diego State vs LSU

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Pete Maravich Assembly Center

## LSU Tigers

## Kim Mulkey

### Media Conference



Two of those three are still with us, so they have experience from that game. Flau'Jae, if she said that, she's exactly right. You have to have contributions from everybody. The Texas game, we didn't have the big three really. Mikaylah was the only one, but she was in foul trouble.

I thought the people who played in that game competed hard. We threw a zone at them and stayed in the game and competed.

**Q. How much rust has Flau'Jae knocked off? Meaning she's been gone for three weeks without a game. What does she look like in practice? Where do you feel like she is at this point?**

KIM MULKEY: I think she's actually looking pretty good. She's hitting shots, and she smiles when she does good. She wants extra reps. She doesn't want anybody subbing in for her. She's just ready to go.

But that's Flau'Jae. Flau'Jae just has a joy about her. I guess we'll see when the lights are turned on how long she can last conditioning-wise and how productive she can be when she's out there on the floor.

**Q. Coach, Flau'Jae mentioned seeing red with that Elite Eight loss to Iowa. How much is that motivation for this year? I know it's a new year, but still an NCAA Tournament, using that as motivation?**

KIM MULKEY: When you're a freshman and you win the National Championship, you think every year I'm going to win another one. It's hard to do, and I think that's one of the things, when she ran to that sideline and hugged me, she said, I did this my freshman year. So she still has those memories, and she wants to do it every year.

I think for those who were a part of that National Championship team, you know what it felt like. Hopefully that's great motivation. She's healthy. I don't know why they wear those boots, you know. I start singing that Nancy Sinatra song. (Singing) These boots were made for walking.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, congratulations. Welcome back to the tournament.

**Q. San Diego State, now that you've been able to dive into that matchup, just how would you evaluate their skill set and what they do well?**

KIM MULKEY: Very balanced scoring, not just one dominant player that takes all the shots, can dribble penetrate, can shoot the 3. They shoot about 15 a game and make 5. Predominantly man-to-man defense.

Now, that doesn't mean that's what we'll see. If you were comparing us and them, we're obviously bigger than they are, but they spread the floor. Our posts are going to have to go outside and guard.

A very interesting stat that's impressive is their bench scoring. They're like 13th in the nation with players that come off their bench. That tells you they're very balanced.

**Q. We just talked to the girls about being in the boots and the recovery and the whole thing, and Flau'Jae said something that I thought resonated very true is we're the big three, but we need the big eight. We're going to need eight, basically the idea that they're going to need everybody. How much of that was the messaging and building the girls' confidence from that Texas game?**

KIM MULKEY: You don't win big games or even championships if you don't have contributions from everyone. If you'll remember, back two years ago in the National Championship Game, who were the three MVPs of that game? It wasn't Angel Reese, it wasn't Morris. It was Poa, it was Sa'Myah, and it was -- shoop, shot the heck out of the ball -- Carson, and those three came off the bench.



I think they've just gotten in the habit of doing it because I don't know that they're needed, but I haven't asked the trainer. Flau'Jae's ready to go. Competitors and coaches, they always remember the losses. Sometimes they forget the victories and the championships. They tend to dwell on the losses.

I would think Flau'Jae's probably thinking about how the season ended. I will remind all of them, there's only one person, one head coach, and one team that finishes happy. That's a pretty profound statement.

**Q. Two-week layoff, you've obviously been a part of a lot of these. How do you manage the two-week layoff?**

KIM MULKEY: You give them some time off and then realize that you're not playing as soon as you get back out on that floor. So you just kind of do a little bit of everything. You work on yourself, and then you see the bracket, and then you do your homework, not just on who you're going to play in the tournament, but who you potentially could play after each game.

So you're working on three teams and doing scouting reports. We will get to see the first game tonight. So we'll get more live action there. You just kind of build. You don't do it all in one day.

**Q. Obviously Flau'Jae's activity level defensively is really important for you all. Have you seen that in this past week start to ramp up and just the impact she has on y'all's defense?**

KIM MULKEY: Yes, because we use the guys, our dream team, so she's out there guarding them. I don't see anything that concerns me about Flau'Jae. Maybe in her world she feels something a little different, but she looks like the Flau'Jae of old to me.

**Q. Aneesah talked about during the Texas game when she didn't want to go out but she felt a lot of pain and she had to. What was your message to her about taking the time off and coming out of the game in order to prepare herself for the upcoming tournament and to help her focus on her game?**

KIM MULKEY: Actually, I didn't talk to her. If you'll recall, that was my second game back with the team. So I was sitting down in the middle down there by the team, and I didn't make that call. The doctor said, no, you can, but no, we're not going to let you go back into this game.

We never really discussed it. I think after the game when they did X rays and MRIs, they said everything's good, just

reaggravated a sprain from the previous Texas game, but that she's good.

**Q. One thing that Flau'Jae said was that her attitude regarding injuries is that, if you're on the court, you're not injured, which kind of sounds like something maybe you would have said when you played. I'm wondering, though, could you explain maybe your experience with playing in pain and how you try to relate that to managing your players' fitness, especially in these big games.**

KIM MULKEY: I tell them there's a difference between being hurt and being injured. If you're injured, you are physically unable to perform. So I would say Flau'Jae and Morrow were hurt, meaning they could have played.

But then you have to evaluate as a coach can they injure themselves if they continue to play hurt and then we not have them for the most important part of our season? Is their impact going to win or lose? Are they going to change where we were in the conference? No, we were going to finish third whether we won or lost. I'd already added up all the games.

So I think it was a smart decision to do what we did with Flau'Jae. She probably didn't like it, but she didn't fight me on it. You can't go wrong when you err on the side of being conservative and you have the ability to be conservative as a coach with injuries.

So both of them have had some days to rehab and start feeling better, and they've been practicing. So it doesn't seem to be limitations on how long they can play or anything like that. I haven't been told that.

**Q. I think last week you said that you liked that perspective from the middle of the bench. What did that give you, and what did you like about it?**

KIM MULKEY: Well, it made me feel like an assistant all over again. You don't have to sit in that hot seat when you're an assistant. So I could just sit there and watch Bob and occasionally whisper something to a coach to send down to Bob.

But it also allowed me to be closer to my players during the heat of the game. You're sitting right there by them, and you can talk to them in a way where you're not up here coaching and directing and getting on referees. So I'm really kind of focusing on them to ask them, what do you see right there? What did she just do wrong? What can you do better? That was the perspective I really enjoyed. Yeah, I liked it.

**Q. Earlier your players mentioned Seimone Augustus and how she's impacted the team, impacted the visuals. From your standpoint, how has she helped this team this season?**

KIM MULKEY: Seimone is a quiet leader. Seimone is a legend in her state in the game of women's basketball. This is her school. This is her community. We're just so excited she's a part of our program finally. It took me two years to finally get her talked into coming.

I think her approach is she's going to do a lot of things one-on-one with the players. She doesn't project loud, but I can tell you she has been really, really loud in things that she has said to them, whether it's in a timeout or whether it is in the locker room or the film room.

I have watched her say things, and I'm thinking you needed to. That's good to see.

**Q. Coach, is it harder for freshmen these days to break in with the portal? And with that being said, how impressive is it that Jada has had the impact on your team that she has?**

KIM MULKEY: I guess it is kind of hard depending on the program. It may not be hard at some programs, but I would think at some of the elite levels, if you continue to recruit out of the portal, it is hard.

Well, what's the difference? It's the experience at this level. But the great ones, the freshmen, a lot of them can still go and do it. You've seen that.

Jada has -- she's gotten lots of minutes in this program as a freshman, and while she would tell you, no, I'm as frustrated as can be, I want to be out there more, that's what you hope she says. But she has gotten a lot of valuable minutes.

And I'm high on Jada, I really am. She can shoot the basketball. Sometimes I think I need to move her to the off-guard in games because, if you just throw it to her, she can score the ball from the perimeter.

**Q. LSU gymnastics has this saying that our normal is enough, meaning that the preparation and the workouts they've done have prepared them for the moment. Do you subscribe to that, or do you feel like at this point in the season there's a reserve you have to go to?**

KIM MULKEY: Well, it depends on your normal. Your normal may not be good enough if the other team's more talented. You've got to play above your normal.

What happens this time of year, you've got to have two, three, four things happen. You've got to all be on the same page offensively and defensively. Everybody just flows smoothly. You have to make sure that you stay away from injuries. Injuries can just derail everything you've worked for. That's out of your control somewhat.

Then lastly, during the course of a game at any level that you progress, there may be one or two lucky plays. Somebody missed a free throw. Somebody shot an air ball. Somebody turned it over. It's that one lucky break that you might get that gets you over the hump. If those things happen, who knows how far you can go.

**Q. We're all focused on your big three players, but you maybe don't get to the National Championship Game two years ago if LaDazhia Williams doesn't play like she did against Utah. It's hard to win the National Championship Game if Jasmine Carson doesn't do what she did. To make a run to win a National Championship, how much do you need a role player to have a great game, or several, and is there anything you can do to try to make that happen?**

KIM MULKEY: You have to have them all do what they do best. You don't have to go get a role player and say you need to score this many points for us to win. You have to play your role.

We did kind of mention that, we win the National Championship because of three bench players: Poa, Sa'Myah, and Carson. We had an elite point guard in Morris. You had Reese, elite post player. You had LaDazhia, an older player, against Utah she just goes off when Angel's in and out of the lineup.

Play your role and do what you do best. It's just a fun time of the year because there's so much more parity now in women's basketball, and it's fun to see these close games, and it's fun to see teams that are just better now, programs that are better.

Got to play good. Everybody's got to play good. They don't have to play above what they're capable of doing, just play good and be solid.

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