

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Jacksonville vs LSU

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Pete Maravich Assembly Center

LSU Tigers

Coach Kim Mulkey

Mikayla Williams

MiLaysia Fulwiley

Flau'jae Johnson

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning. We are joined by three Lady Tigers from LSU, Flau'Jae Johnson, Mikaylah Williams and MiLaysia Fulwiley.

Q. Last year you guys had the three-headed monster with Aneesah. This year I feel you have one of the most experienced veteran backcourts in the country. How much is that going to help you guys and make your run this season?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: I think it's going to be great. We have a lot of experience. I've been to a couple of Elite Eights and the national championship. So I think just knowing the ropes a little bit, knowing the focus you have to have, and, of course, with Mikaylah and Lay winning the championship as well, I think we all kind of know the focus that goes into it. It's good to have that in the locker room with so many new pieces.

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: To piggy off Flau'Jae said, it's also going to be exciting, extremely, extremely exciting knowing that we have this experience, but also knowing that we have a lot of experience to lead the young ones and the new ones.

MILAYSIA FULWILEY: What both of them said.

Q. Flau'Jae, a lot of talk has been about this being your last weekend playing in Baton Rouge. How much are you having to fight those emotions of your final tip-off's here in BR?



FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Not really, like, fighting it. Probably like Sunday is when everything will come. But I don't know. I'm having this mindset of, like, let's beat Jacksonville. Let's handle our business, and then let's get to the next game. So I'm trying not to think about it too much. But yeah, I don't think I'm going to be okay. (Laughter).

Q. You were obviously a freshman during that championship run a few years ago. Now there's another guard on this team that's shining as a freshman, Jada Richard. How much have you been a mentor to her and maybe see yourself in her throughout her freshman season?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Jada was different than me. Like because of her mindset, you know what I'm saying? She has this Louisiana blood in her. She just wants to be in that moment. She wants to attack you, you know what I'm saying?

And I feel like her energy, she's got that "I'm going to go out there and give everything." That's why I feel like I could kind of see myself in her wanting to do whatever to win.

But no, she's different. I'm just excited that she's finally, you know, got her recognition as one of the best point guards in the league because she's been vital for us in this whole run.

Q. Flau'jae, I don't know if you saw but Kim got a little emotional talking about you playing your last game. What does that relationship with her mean to you, and was that surprising to see her get a little emotional about it?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, because she had just went off on me in practice. (Laughter). They know. So, yeah, it was surprising, but we have -- she's just -- Coach Kim is just funny. But I really do love her.

I think it's kind of starting to hit everybody like, wow -- she's like me. We're focused, focused on the next game ahead. We're not thinking of the future, but when you kind of think about it, it's like wow, four years ago, when I came here I



was a baby.

I trusted her and she trusted me and we just have a beautiful relationship. I was like, wow, oh, my gosh. People are sending it to me. This is Coach Mulkey? This is not AI? No, she was very emotional. It was dope to see though.

Q. I'd like to get your thoughts on your ability to anticipate the steal, set up the steal then execute the steal, I guess how much do you work on that, and how much pride do you take in that? And then for the two of you, what do you see as her teammate when you know it's kind of coming and she's setting it up?

MILAYSIA FULWILEY: I work on it a lot every day in practice, a lot of defensive drills, a lot of defensive stops. I think another part of it is definitely just instincts. And I'm blessed to have those type of instincts and go out there and just do what I need to do on defense.

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: Well, personally I love being on the court with her when she's doing all those steals. Oftentimes, every time me and Lay are actually on the court together, I tell her every time, just steal the ball. I'll be waiting for somebody to cross over in front of her because I know she's going to steal it. And she is going to shoot a layup, go touch the backboard and we're going to have some energy going.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Definitely, my DPOY. Just like touches every ball, you know what I'm saying? If she's on the ball you know something is about to happen. It's fun because we get to run.

My favorite play -- I don't even know if she got the steal; yeah, she did get the steal and she threw the behind-the-back-head pass to Mikaylah. That was crazy. She's insane, you know what I'm saying?

But it's dope playing with her. It really makes you want to lock in on defense and try to do something like that even though you can't really do it. She's the only one in the country, I think, that can make those type of plays. So it's really exciting. We get to run a lot.

Q. Having won the national championship already, what kind of advice can you give your younger teammates for this tournament?

MILAYSIA FULWILEY: I think just go out there and give it all you got. Next game is not guaranteed, so you just gotta go out there and do what you have to do while you can and don't underestimate any opponent. I think that's the biggest part, and it will help us a lot.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: I'm saying enjoy it. I sound like a grandma when I say it. But it's really enjoy it because it's going to go by so fast. And not everybody gets the opportunity to play in March Madness.

That's what I want them to realize it. A lot of people's season is over. After the SEC Tournament, some people, they weren't allowed this chance. Although we had the opportunity to play, we need to be grateful for it and really embrace it.

But trying to get everybody to focus on one game at a time. Let's not look too far ahead -- even though it's enticing. Even though social media and all this, don't think too far ahead and just stay focused on the task at hand.

Q. Flau'Jae, you guys are proven commodities. At least two of you all are very likely to have great games, or all three. Thinking back to the Sweet 16 in 2023, if LaDazhia Williams didn't play like she did against Utah, you probably don't win the national championship. What do you need from your bigs in this tournament to get as far as you want to get and win it all?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: First of all, shout-out LaDazhia. That was my vet. I love her. Man, we're putting a lot of pressure on the bigs every day in practice. I know Lay is a thousand percent. But we're really telling them, like, we need y'all. We need y'all. And we're going to handle our part, but we need y'all to be big.

And I think they really like taking on that responsibility. And their focus has been unmatched. These last two practices, Kate, Mama, Z and Grace, they've really been turning it up a notch. I think they know we need them. And I think they know we're counting on them.

Just kind of, like, telling them, like, we need them but knowing that we're confident in y'all that you can all do this. We believe in y'all. So that's kind of the mindset. But they know they've got to be big.

Q. In the same vein of Scott's question, I want you all three to answer this. MiLaysia, if you would, none of you all put the perfect game together, it's like everybody has played parts at different points of the season. Do you ever think about how dangerous this team could be if everyone is playing to their potential? How eager are you to maybe put that together here in the postseason?

MILAYSIA FULWILEY: Definitely, that will help us out a lot. We're able to do that. I feel like it's going to come at the right time. And when it's time, it's going to come.

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: Basically what Lay said. We're waiting on it to come, too. But, yeah, it's coming and hopefully it starts on Friday.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: I think it's a blessing that it hasn't come yet. You know what I mean? I think for all of us to be able to play together is a blessing. You don't really get, like, three people -- that's like NBA stuff.

I'm excited. I feel like we've not really learned to play with each other, and I think what's going to get us cooking is our roles, like when we're on the floor together and knowing what we need to do to make the other person better. I feel we've learned each other.

I'm glad it hasn't clicked yet. It makes me optimistic and it should be very scary for teams coming up because I think we're all laser-focused and we understand what we need to do for each other.

That's the kind of mindset that I've been thinking, like, sometimes I think why hasn't it clicked, like what are we doing, a lot of self-reflection, but I think it's coming. It's going to be nice.

Q. Flau'Jae, you were talking about running earlier. Obviously teams are going to try to take way your transition offense, I guess. What are you guys going to do knowing that is coming, and which ways have you been able to kind of prepare yourself for that?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: You know, just knowing that we need to execute in the half court, but I still bet my bank account that nobody can stop MiLaysia Fulwiley in transition.

I bet my money on Lay, I bet my money on the whole team to get rebounds and go. Everybody knows we play fast. Everybody's going to try to stop us.

But that's just about us executing and learning how to manage the time and just learning how to be poised in those situations, like, okay, maybe they do stop us let's get into our sets. And I think that's something that we've really implemented and practiced the last few weeks.

And I think it's going to show we're well-rounded. We're not a fast break team. We can get in half court and execute our stuff, which I feel like we've been doing great. It's going to be smooth.

Q. Kim's asked you to play all different positions on the floor. Being a true guard, do you get excited when you can make those post players look a little silly

(indiscernible)?

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: Absolutely. That's something I worked on in high school, though, just knowing that I was a big guard and that was like one of my advantages to my game.

But, yeah, I'm really excited when I get to go down to the 4. I get to slow down a little bit and see what the offense is doing. I get to get MiLaysia and 4 open. When I go to the 4, I feel like it opens up the floor for everybody.

Q. I know it's been quieter, but what's practice been like without Gary and Daphne around? And who is filling in those voids for you guys?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Sure. I feel like, I knew when Gary left that it was going to be quieter. So I've been trying to talk a lot more in practice. I don't know how he did it all the time like that.

But I feel like we all kind of picked up the slack. I feel like he was a big presence. He was a big energy for us and what we needed. And for me I was thinking, I don't want to lose that tempo.

But it's been good. It's been great energy. I feel like everybody is business-minded right now. I feel everybody's very focused, and it feels like a real professional environment. It's still fun, but we're here to handle business.

But the energy's been great. And I think me and Mikaylah, we've been trying to turn it up a notch, just being the older ones, trying every time, even if it gets a little down, we're like, let's turn it up. That's been the mentality for sure.

Q. Thinking back to your freshman year, are there any lessons you feel are relevant that you can carry forward to how this season has progressed, maybe the fact that that team didn't necessarily peak until the tournament?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Exactly. It's just knowing how the tournament is and being on different outcomes of it, you know what I mean? And playing well in a tournament and then not playing so well, and just understanding it's not -- you can't think of it as a whole tournament. You've got to think of it as games. You can't think of it, I'm going to go crazy in the tournament.

One game it was Angel's game. One game it's Lexi's game. One game it was LaDazhia's game that saved us one game it was Jasmine Carson coming up after and just lighting up something. It's, like, you never know you just

want to come in and be prepared and ready to do your job.

It makes me really excited. I kind of get chill bumps because I just know how much talent that we have as a group. It's unmatched. And I feel like this game is going to show we're clicking. And I feel like last year, we kind of had that click game against Florida State.

We kind of all clicked. But I feel like our practices have been really clicking. But I'm excited to see that transition into the game.

Q. (Off mic) we know how important guard play is. You have a little experience in this tournament. What do you need your post players to do? What do you need, in general, to make a deep run in the tournament from that part of it?

KIM MULKEY: I'll give a general statement about post play without being specific on who we would have to play in the tournament. A lot of coaches believe it's the guards' time to shine in postseason.

I go back to thinking about my own career in coaching. I don't think I've ever won a national championship without great post play.

What is great post play? You've got to have post touches. I'm not going to tell you that they're going to be your leading scorer or one of your best players, but you have to have post touches. The men may be a little different.

If I didn't coach teams that had posts, then I may not say that. But going all the way back to my playing days, my coaching days, we always recruit good posts. And I think perimeter are even better when you have good post play or post touches.

Q. Can you just talk about, (indiscernible) this deep you've never had since you've been here, and how even the freshmen, everybody has kind of like a specific role and they don't really wander outside that. How much does the bench meant to you this year because you have a scoring punch off the bench?

KIM MULKEY: Well we do you guys have written about it a lot, how much we score with our players coming off our bench. I can only start five. So I have to make that decision. I don't really like using the word "bench" because I remember when I played I came off the bench and I never liked that. I'm as good as those out there on the floor. She just has to pick five at a time.

That's what my approach is. And depending on what we need when I start substituting, I'm confident in all of them

that have seen the significant minutes this year.

Sometimes in a program like ours, and a lot of programs that are elite, freshmen usually have to learn new roles and wait their turn. This freshman group didn't. They're significantly affecting our team from the time they got here.

They're very confident. They're producing. Some took a little longer. Like Bella Hines. I mean, I don't hesitate. Bella just kept coming on and getting stronger and stronger throughout the season.

The freshman group, they've lived up to their billing.

Q. You talked about post play's important, but your trio of guards, especially Lay, Mikaylah and Flau'Jae, how important and impactful do you think that they're going to need to be to go further in this tournament?

KIM MULKEY: Well, not just those three. Jada Richard, there's a young lady that didn't get many minutes last year and look at the impact she's had this year as our point guard.

So certainly they have to play good. And the good thing is we have that bench. One may have a good game, and okay, then the other one may not be. Okay, let me try somebody else.

They all bring different things, different styles a little bit. They all can score the ball. That's for sure. Jada can score the ball as good as any point guard I've had.

But sometimes I tell her, do we really need that from you? Let that happen. You don't have to make that happen. Let that happen.

But I think you see quickness, obviously, with Fulwiley. You better not blink because you may see her do something you've never seen on a basketball floor. Flau'Jae, you leave her open, she's going to hit most of the shots. Mikaylah, just Mikaylah can just play so many positions for you. One of the best mid-range shooters. But that's not all she does.

And then Jada running your show out there and can score it if left open.

So we've got enough guards. Then with Bella coming on here at the end, we've got enough guards to be able to play them all.

Q. I talked to MiLaysia a little earlier just about her steal game. I know how much of a defense, but when you see her setting up an opponent, what do you see

as the coach, and what do you like about the way she approaches her defense?

KIM MULKEY: She's tremendous on ball. A lot of teams we have faced, if they see MiLaysia's on the ball, they'll just have somebody else bring it up. So it's kind of like you kind of play this cat-and-mouse game, checkers or whatever, you think you've got MiLaysia on the point guard, the primary ball handler, then all of a sudden somebody else is doing it.

So I tell her don't worry about that because what you're doing is you're affecting them and what they normally are comfortable doing. So we'd love to have her on the ball as much as we possibly can because I think she just has tremendous hands, speed and quickness. Has gotten better on keeping people in front of her. Sometimes she gambles still. And I think she's learned throughout the course of the year how costly gambling can be.

You've got to know when to gamble and when not to gamble. And that goes also for when she has to guard on the wing versus at the top.

Q. Kaylin Rice, just her contributions to your team? Maybe she has not again the credit some people deserve and what is her role moving forward?

KIM MULKEY: Her role doesn't change. Kaylin, she does things that, Xs and Os-wise, that Coach Bob and I are -- I don't want to use the word "grooming" her -- but she grew up in my program at Baylor. She was a manager. Her daddy was a trainer in high school and moved over to the football side and became, you know, like a recruiting -- I guess you call it GM now. But he was on the staff for Art Briles at Baylor. She grew up in an athletic-minded family.

I have her hold my play card. I have her have it right there in every huddle. I'll turn to her and say, give me my card.

She does inbounds plays more. I like to not be stagnant and tell her, hey, they're playing a 1-3-1 right here underneath. You don't see that but from about four or five teams. In fact, Jacksonville will play some 1-3-1 underneath. And I want her to come up with some things.

Xs and Os, outstanding. She's behind the scenes, giving Bob what he needs in scouting reports, making suggestions in that area.

She's also our recruiting coordinator. That is her title. And she's very tedious and very specific with where coaches need to be, AAU tournaments, who we need to see.

So she's doing great. Not surprised. I knew when she was

a manager, that young lady is going to be a very good coach someday.

Q. You've been asked about probably a thousand times at this point.

KIM MULKEY: Then don't ask. (Laughter). Don't ask the same questions. It's like a teacher that comes to class and for three straight days they're teaching the same lesson.

Q. Teachers love me.

KIM MULKEY: Give me something new.

Q. It's a nuanced way of asking it, but how are you approaching the emotions of this being Flau'jae's last weekend?

KIM MULKEY: I don't mind you asking. I'm just picking on you.

I said this on senior night. People are like you're not very emotional. I said, "It's not her last game." I said, when I wrapped my head around the fact that that kid won't be in an LSU uniform again on the PMAC floor, then it will hit me.

And it actually did yesterday morning. We practiced yesterday morning, and I do my weekly radio show with Hester, and we were just talking. And this lump came in my throat, the thought that yeah, this is it.

And the challenge now is to make sure we do our part as fans, and that is get in the stands and watch somebody. That's your way of showing appreciation.

What is the appreciation for Flau'Jae that's any different than any player that I've ever coached? I love them all the same. But in this day and age, it's she stayed four years. I think Mikaylah Williams will be like that. She stayed four years.

She makes unbelievable money but not off of LSU. She gives back to the community and gives things that people don't know about.

She goes all over this campus -- everybody knows -- I don't think people even know her last name. You just know that's Flau'Jae. She's one of those young ladies, you don't have to know her last name. And then to think that she has two careers.

So those are the things that I don't know that we see the likes of very much in college athletics, really.

So that's why you get emotional about a Flau'Jae. And just her spirit, her soul, her joyous personality. She took a chance on LSU before this staff ever won big.

She's the first McDonald's All-American that I signed at LSU. And she deserves this place to be just packed.

It's always packed, but now that the NCAA has taken over and the tickets are a little bit higher priced, I tell the fans it's worth it. It's worth it.

Q. Do you still get a kick out of it, the tournament and everything? Maybe not like when you were 21 years old with the French braids playing point guard. But I mean, do you still get a kick out of March Madness, is it a similar thrill?

KIM MULKEY: Well, you handle each situation, each year, each team differently.

But the thing that never goes away is inside your soul, how excited you are for players that are doing it for the first time, for coaches that you may have on your staff that are doing it for the first time.

Just like anything in life, the very first time you do anything -- have your first child, some of us first marriage, okay -- it's different, right? But when you keep doing something consistently, it's rewarding.

But it's such a thrill for people in the locker room that are doing it for the first time. And no matter how many times I've been blessed to do it, if I lose that excitement, then, hey, get out, get out.

That's why you coach. You coach to get to the postseason. You coach to try to win championships. And this is a fun time of the year. And the thing I've always said, there's only going to be one happy program when this is all done. There's only going to be one happy program. And I've been blessed to be a part of that numerous times. So yeah, I still get a thrill. Isn't that an old song?

(Singing) "Do you still get a thrill when you see me coming up the hill? Do ya?" Okay? Go look that one up.

Q. How have you evolved as a coach since your first March Madness tournament, and how has women's basketball evolved?

KIM MULKEY: That could be a dissertation. You really got time for that?

You grow as a coach. You learn, man, I shouldn't have done that, but 10 years ago I did that and looking back, you

go, hmm, I shouldn't have done that. You learn. You don't stay stagnant.

I've always been a coach that believed in being real and honest, but not to the point where you tear kids down. If I'm going to ask them to get on that floor and play hard, I'm going to give them everything I have on that sideline.

I can't play with them anymore. I used to get on that floor and play with them, but then I became real intelligent after about five years of that and said, nope, not doing that anymore.

The game has changed, as you guys know. I think, how have I stayed in it as long as I have when people my age are getting out? You have to evolve. You have to adapt. But you don't ever change certain things.

What are those certain things? You always hold young people accountable. You always discipline them. But yet you watch generations and you watch the NCAA and you watch the rules and you watch everything change, you observe and you go, okay, I can adapt to that, but I'll never change this.

And I think I still am one of the few my age that can do that.

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