

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Texas Tech vs LSU

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Pete Maravich Assembly Center

LSU Tigers

Coach Kim Mulkey

Jada Richard

ZaKiyah Johnson

Media Conference



JADA RICHARD: Yeah, I think now kind of starting to get a feel for it more and more like as the games go. I kind of just read the game, just who has the hot hand. If it's me, then I'll take the shots.

But it's kind of hard, you know, being that you have players like Mikaylah, Flau'jae, who can on any given night get hot. So I'm more than willing to give them the ball when they get hot.

Like you said, I am a shooter and I can shoot, so any given night that I have the hot hand, I'm more than willing to shoot. Anything just to get better for the team, anything for the team to win.

Q. For both of you, no one likes to turn the ball over, but y'all go so fast there's going to be some turnovers sometimes. You seem to take it in stride. They're a team that apparently likes to full court press most of the games. How do you feel that will affect you or maybe not affect you in this game?

JADA RICHARD: I think we just have to kind of dictate the pace of the game. We can't allow the defense to speed us up. That's what they want to do, they want to get up in you, make you turn it over or just waste time on the shot clock. So I think for us just kind of our mindset just to take care of the basketball. That's what they want to do, so we kind of just got to play our game and don't dictate their game plan.

ZAKIYAH JOHNSON: Yeah, I think Jada nailed it. One of our ways to win is to value the basketball, just taking care of it, not letting them speed us up or slow us down, play our game. We're a great transition team. Just getting it out, I think it will be fine.

Q. Z, this freshman class seems so close just like as a group, but it shows up on the court as well. Can you tell me a little bit about the bond that you guys have and how you guys are able to translate that?

ZAKIYAH JOHNSON: So coming out of high school, we did a lot of together with the camps and everything. I would say me and Grace were a lot closer than Bella and Divine,

Q. This question is actually for both of you. I wanted to ask you how has Kim Mulkey pushed you this season because I know that at some points there had to be some valleys, right, and you're now coming out on the other side of that in the NCAA Tournament. What did she say as something that maybe stuck with you along the way that has gotten you to this moment?

JADA RICHARD: Yeah, I think for me, I feel like Coach Mulkey's the hardest on me than anybody else just because we both play the same position. I think she just kind of told me just to keep going. She likes to say now like I'm not a freshman anymore, I'm not even a sophomore anymore. I'm kind of starting to go more to my junior year. So just kind of letting me know that those mistakes that I used to make, I'm kind of too old for that now. So continue to get better and continue to lead them.

ZAKIYAH JOHNSON: Yeah, definitely going off of Jada, she's told me and a couple of the other freshmen like we're not freshmen anymore and we're still in our freshman year. She definitely holds us to a higher standard. There's different things she looks for. She wants the level of our competitiveness to be higher than our years. I mean, a lot of people will probably take that as like discouragement, but I take that as a compliment. She sees a lot in me and she wants everything out of me.

Q. Jada, you were a shooter, just plain out you were a shooter. How do you balance playing for somebody like Kim Mulkey who is more of the -- she wants you to be the general, not just "shoot first" type of point guard? How do you balance that kind of different mindset?

but as soon as we got here we just clicked. And Meg, too. Like it's really easy. Our other teammates make it easy as well. Our whole team's really close, we do a lot together on the court. It's just it comes over with it, it bleeds onto the court. I really hope we stay together, all of us, because we definitely could be an elite class.

Q. ZaKiyah, early in the season Coach Mulkey said she saw minutes available for you at the 4. You're a guard, you've been very consistent finishing in the paint. What part of your game have we not seen that maybe from mid range to the perimeter?

ZAKIYAH JOHNSON: Definitely. I've gotten away from my mid range a lot. My teammates tell me every day to stay confident, because she's not telling me not to shoot or anything, it's just for our offense it's best for me to be in the post and getting the rebounds and getting the putbacks and all that. Definitely my outside shot, just getting out there, ball handling, all that, those are things that I can do. I'm trying my hardest to not get away from those things while also helping my team in the position that I'm in.

Q. ZaKiyah, seems like you were doing more ball handling especially in transition yesterday. Was that the case, maybe a little more than you've done this season or something you're more comfortable with or about the same?

ZAKIYAH JOHNSON: Definitely more comfortable. Jada actually told me in practice one day, she was -- and Mikaylah, they were like, you can dribble. Like if you get the ball and you don't see us, take off, like we're running with you.

I think them just motivating me and keeping my confidence up, it really helps a lot. So I just took it and ran with it. I know what I can do and what I can't, so I just stuck to it.

Q. This could be for either player, but does a game like yesterday where it seems like everything is just working for you guys as a team, everybody's kind of eating at the same time, does that help set the tone for the rest of the tournament, give you guys a little bit of a boost?

JADA RICHARD: Yeah, I think it's a great confidence builder just for us, and then also like the freshmen who haven't really been here before just to give -- let them get their feet wet. OK, we're here, we can settle in.

Then just to, like Z said, to get more comfortable with things she might not be as comfortable doing in like big-time games. Those games can be games where you kind of just try stuff and see what works, see what doesn't.

Q. To both of y'all, what have y'all learned about Texas Tech thus far?

ZAKIYAH JOHNSON: They're a very active team defensively with their hands, they're moving around a lot. They can shoot the ball very well. They facilitate.

I think we just stay calm, patient, don't let them speed us up. Their press is definitely one of their biggest assets. I think once we break that, we can kind of get ahead really far with the points and stuff just because our transition is really good. We have a lot of depth. We have a lot of weapons getting down the floor with MiLaysia and Jada and Mikaylah, Flau'jae. I think once we get going and kind of figure them out and get comfortable with it, we'll be fine.

JADA RICHARD: I think like she said, just kind of taking advantage of our transition offense. That's kind of what we do, we get out and run. They like to press, so just not allowing them to slow us down, taking care of the ball and that's really it.

Q. Jada, earlier this week Flau'jae commented that you have the Louisiana blood and that makes you -- it's part of your passion. What can you say about your passion for the game? Yesterday there was a play where I think it was an and-1 that you looked the camera right in the eye. What was going through your mind there? What can you say about your passion for the game?

JADA RICHARD: I just play with a lot of passion. I think it has a lot to do with being from here because I can kind of see flashes like me and Mikaylah, and I feel like Money -- Seimone Augustus -- she played with that same kind of grit.

I don't know what it is about being from here. I think for me personally, it kind of comes with just not playing on the circuit, not getting all the publicity that I thought I deserved, so I always feel like the odd man out. Like I always feel like I got to prove why I belong here. That's kind of why I play like that. And every now and then you see flashes of me screaming at the camera, something like that. But yeah, I think that's kind of what it is.

Q. For both of y'all, y'all score a lot of points, but how much fun is it to play such a free offense for Kim?

ZAKIYAH JOHNSON: I love open offenses, that's one of the reasons that I came here. I love the way that they played, getting out and running. It makes it really easy for us, too. It's fun. If y'all can't tell, we have a lot of fun out there. I think just seeing everybody. Like you said,

everybody gets hot, and it happens a lot, too, and I think the offense allows that a lot.

Our defense has been something we've been intentional about as well, and that brings the open offense. It's really hard to stop when everybody's clicking.

JADA RICHARD: Yeah, I think our offense is kind of just for hoopers. Like if you can hoop, you can hoop. I think the type of offense that we run is just basic pick-and-roll, can you guard it or can you not basically.

I think if you have the basketball IQ to be put on our offense, you can play free. You can kind of do what you want within our offense. I think it's a lot of freedom, but I think we love when we can all get out there and play our game.

Q. I wanted to ask this question. So Texas Tech has talked a lot about Texas Tech Lady Raider basketball. I want to ask you, what is LSU basketball? If you could boil it down to two or three things, how would you describe LSU basketball, like that brand of basketball?

ZAKIYAH JOHNSON: The show. That's it.

JADA RICHARD: That's it. The show.

ZAKIYAH JOHNSON: That's it.

JADA RICHARD: We going to give y'all a show. Whether that's behind-the-back passes, we're going to have celebrations, we just play with a lot of passion. I think from the top of our roster to the bottom, we just love basketball.

I feel like there's a lot of people who play basketball but they don't like it. Like I feel like we all love the game. We love coming to practice every day, pushing each other. We love the grind. Like we love the in between, the practices and things like that. I think that's what LSU basketball is. Like LSU women's basketball, we have that grit, that passion, so that's why we the show.

ZAKIYAH JOHNSON: I would definitely say just to add on to that, we're very intentional about improving things. Like there's always room to improve. I don't think a lot of people really focus on that a lot. You've got teams who are undefeated, teams who win a lot of games, and they're not really worried about what they can do to fix it, they don't think they can.

But for us, you know, Coach Starkey, he's always ready with something to fix. Even if we had the best game of our life, there is something to fix and I think that's really important.

Q. I spoke to him scouting the game last night and he said turnovers, dribbling too much, turnovers. I'm sure y'all have heard that. Coach Gerlich for Texas Tech was up here and she said y'all have a simple offense that you do very well. It was intended to be a compliment. Would you agree with that? It's not 100 different sets or anything like that, maybe it's very instinctive? What is your take on the way you guys play offense?

JADA RICHARD: I mean, yeah, I think our offense is very simple. I think everybody in the country knows what we do, but the question is can you stop it. I think that's the biggest thing. Like you watch film and you watch all these things that we do within our offense.

I think our offense is very basic, but like y'all said, it gives us a lot of freedom to do different things.

I don't think it's really the offense that you have to stop, it's the freedom that we play with that you have to stop.

ZAKIYAH JOHNSON: Yeah, definitely. Like she said, a lot of people know what we're going to run, but there are so many different things that you can get out of it. It's supposed to be simple for you, it's not supposed to be hard.

But for the defense, there's just so many different weapons that we have out there, so many different creations that we can make throughout the play. And even if we run something else, we can still go back to our base of the simple. I think just for us, just staying locked in and focused and figuring different things out, that's what makes it hard.

Q. Heard a lot about y'all's offense, but y'all are a really good defensive team as well. Can you talk about your defensive identity, both of y'all?

ZAKIYAH JOHNSON: I think we do really good at deflecting the ball, especially with (indiscernible) and Jada pressing the ball handler at the top. We fly around. Charges are very big for us as well. Bella Hines, she has so many charges. Just being active. As passionate as we are on offense, we take that to the defensive end as well.

JADA RICHARD: Yeah, I think for us, our coaching staff doesn't really allow us to think that we're good defensively. Yeah.

But, I mean, on the offensive side, like you see us putting up 100 points and, what, seven people in double figures and breaking records and things like that.

But people don't see what we do on the defensive end. I think that's the kind of standard that they hold us to as coaches. They never really let us get comfortable. Everyone knows we're good offensively, but I do feel like our defense kind of gets overlooked just because of our production on the offensive end.

But I do think we can get better just in terms of having lapses sometimes. We may play good defensively for one possession and then take the next possession off. So I think just consistency in terms of the defense. Yeah, defense turns to offense.

Q. You mentioned records. Y'all set the school record for most points in a NCAA game yesterday. You tied the record for most 100-point games in a season. Are y'all aware of those things?

JADA RICHARD: No.

Q. I know you don't want to focus on them, but when people bring them to your attention, is that what it takes? Because Coach said she didn't know much about it.

ZAKIYAH JOHNSON: Yeah, we didn't know at all. I think it's just because we're just out there playing and having fun. I mean, it's always cool to break records and hold to a different standard for the next person to chase, but when we're out there, all we're worried about is what's in front of us.

Q. Jada, do you feel like you've taken a step forward defensively this year?

JADA RICHARD: Yeah. I think just me kind of taking it personal this year just in terms of getting in the weight room, getting bigger, faster, stronger.

Coach Mulkey told me last year sometime that I can step into that role of just being a defensive stopper, but I had to do the things that it took during the offseason. So I kind of took that personal. Like I'm the type of person where I don't quit, I don't pout. Like I'm just going to take what she says. She's a Hall of Famer, a national championship. Like she has to know what she's talking about.

I just really got in the gym, got in the weight room with Thomas and got faster, got my first step quicker. Yeah, I think defense is all about attitude and effort. I think if you put forth your attitude and effort, then you can be willing to stop somebody on the side.

MODERATOR: Jada, ZaKiyah, thank you very much. Congratulations. We look forward to seeing you tomorrow.

We will open the floor for questions for Coach.

Q. Coach, I asked Jada if she felt like she had taken a step up defensively, and she gave a lot of credit of you calling her out, saying that she needed to get to work. What have you seen out of her?

KIM MULKEY: I just think Jada, she's a winner. She won four state championships in high school. She's a true point guard, but she has a tremendous shot. She didn't like sitting the bench last year and she took it upon herself in the summer to get the work in that she needed knowing the system better now.

Jada, she's extremely intelligent when it comes to the Xs and Os, and she figures it out defensively. She's guarded some of the best players in the country as a sophomore. She's our little engine out there.

Q. You talk about experience, especially in the postseason. You're facing a team with 11 veterans, only one freshman, one sophomore. What do you expect to see out of Texas Tech?

KIM MULKEY: Yeah, they have a lot of transfers that, you know, have played a lot of college basketball. Very well coached. Play together. Lot of activity. They're really, really -- they are really good. There's no just one superstar, they all are pretty comparable to each other.

Q. Coach, both your players were saying that as a staff, you guys don't let them get comfortable with their defensive game. Sometimes maybe their defensive effort can be overlooked by all the points that they're able to score. Just what have you seen from the defense so far this season?

KIM MULKEY: I still think we can do better. I think the second quarter yesterday is a classic example. We didn't break it down because we have to move on, but if we were in regular season we would take that second quarter and we would just show it in great detail on what did we not do in that second quarter that allowed them to shoot so good?

Defense and rebounding, you never let up. You have to constantly make that a priority in your program, and every day we're constantly showing them more of that than offense. Their offensive skills, they usually come to you with that, you just don't screw it up as a coach. You run some plays that are conducive to what they do well.

But defensive rebounding, we've got to all be on the same page there. So they're probably pretty accurate in saying that we never let them get comfortable.

Now, we acknowledge when they do good. You have to make sure that you acknowledge and you show them. We pick defensive players of the game and we show them the charges and we have stuff on our walls. We acknowledge defense.

Q. Coach, speaking of defense, the Texas Tech players were mentioning how they want a full court press all four quarters. Without giving away the game plan, what are some of the advantages of a team pressing you full court, and is that something you want to get them out of immediately?

KIM MULKEY: I don't think they're going to get out of who they are, they've been doing that all year. We've seen it all year, Texas full court presses.

Just be able to handle the ball, don't turn it over. When you get by them, go score at the other end. But we're prepared for all of that. They're going to do what they do, we're going to do what we do. Some tweaks here and there maybe, but your identity is already established.

So yeah, they really, really play hard.

Q. You've had a lot of teams that have scored a lot of points over the years. Have you embraced this style of play that y'all are playing now even more in recent years? And the players mentioned, they said it's the show. Playing an entertaining style of basketball seems to be important to you as well. Most important to win of course, but it seems like that's a component for you that you want to be an entertaining team?

KIM MULKEY: Well, no. I don't sit down and say this is what we have to do to be entertaining or sit down and say this is what we do because we're the show.

I just allow players to have a little freedom offensively. I liked when I played, let's get up and down the floor. So I've got a lot of athletes, man. Let's go. Who wants to walk it up the floor and wait for a post player to come down there and post up?

Go back to your question about a press. Presses allow you to get up and down the floor. So it can work either way. I think it just evolves. I think it's your personnel, I think it's your players. Yeah, I don't coach the offensive side any different than I did when I got here or when I was at Baylor. The players do that.

Q. Coach, what can you say about what Krista Gerlich's been able to do this year in turning around that program?

KIM MULKEY: Well, I'm glad you're here. I'm going to reminisce a little bit, if I may.

I remember when I was hired at Baylor. I got in the Big 12. Baylor was the bottom of the Big 12. I walked in the United Spirit Arena, I don't know if it's even called that anymore but it was, to play Texas Tech. I looked at that crowd and said, hmm, what have I gotten myself into here?

Then I said to myself, I hope someday this is what it feels like at Baylor.

And you must remember Marsha Sharp was coaching then. Jody Conradt was at Texas. Bill Finley was at Iowa State. Kansas State was unbelievably good with Deb Patterson. Sherri Coale was so good at OU.

All of those coaches made me a better coach because I aspired to build something at Baylor like they had all built.

Then I saw Coach Sharp last night. I was hoping that she would be here. She, before we played them one year at Baylor, came to my office and sat down, and I'll never forget, I said, Coach, I don't know if this is -- this coaching is for me. I said, this losing eats at me. I said, I'm a point guard that's used to having that ball in my hands and winning a ballgame. As a coach, you're really helpless somewhat.

And I'll never forget what she said to me. She said, Kim, as you age in this profession, you will learn to compartmentalize, and while the losing will still eat at you, you will be able to handle it as you age.

I won't ever forget her doing that. And we're getting ready to play them that night.

Marsha Sharp won how many National Championships? One, right? I have the utmost respect of Texas Tech and the people in West Texas. Do you realize I know the people here don't -- she has a freeway with her name on it, does she not?

I was like, this is awesome. This is an area that appreciates what she has done. So every time we would go to Lubbock, my staff and I would make the bus driver get on the Marsha Sharp Freeway to remind us, hmm, that's pretty special. They didn't have to wait till she died to do it, or even to retirement, right? That just impacted me as a coach. When she retired, I thought she got out too early.

So Krista and Sheryl Swoops, zone defense. I still tell this story today. Can you tell me how many women's basketball teams won a National Championship and they have played

zone defense as their primary defense? I can only think of one and that's Texas Tech.

Linden Weese was one of her assistants. I still think of a play I stole from him on an in-bounds.

Krista is a product of those years, so I'm not surprised at what she is doing. She's at the right place that saw her as a player, gave her time. She's coached her daughter. How many of us get to do that? What a blessing that is.

So it's amazing, but I'm not surprised.

Q. Broader question about the tournament. What did you make of the victory margins so far, some of the big victory margins so far in the first round of the tournament, especially posed by top-4 seeds?

KIM MULKEY: I know you won't believe this, but I haven't seen them. I saw ours. I have not seen them. We got up here at 11:00 today, 10:30, and I haven't looked at my phone, I haven't looked at anything.

I believe this on both the men's and women's side: The games are closer because of transfer portal and NIL. I do believe that.

Now, some may not be, but I think you're seeing when the announcers talk, they'll go, well, he used to be at this school and this school and this school, and man, you see an upset. And that's why you're seeing more of that. But I haven't seen any scores.

Q. (No microphone.)

KIM MULKEY: On the women's side?

Q. Yeah.

KIM MULKEY: Well, maybe you're trying to make me look bad and I don't really -- I don't know. I just know used to be 40-point victories, right?

Back when I played, there were only about three teams that could win a Natty every year, only about three teams, and now I think that potentially you could have more than that that can win a Natty. I think LSU's a classic example of that three years ago. We were a 3-seed, we weren't supposed to win it and we did.

Q. Just a followup on your story you were telling. You talked about how you still remember Coach Sharp giving you advice. Krista talked about the other day you giving her advice. Maybe you don't even remember those encounters, but I'm just wondering if

you do.

KIM MULKEY: I don't remember a lot. I remember, certainly remember her as a player, and then she was on Marsha's staff for a while while I was on Barmore's staff for a while at Louisiana Tech, and remembered what that was like. Is this really what I want to do? Is this what I'm supposed to do? This is all I've ever known.

And if any advice that I gave her, I'm sure she shared with you, it was probably more impactful for her to hear it from me like Pat Summit was to me when I asked her about can I do this and be a mother, too.

It wouldn't be anything that I purposely did. It was probably just done in passing, seeing a former player at her alma mater like I was, and what did Pat say to me that I could share with her, it was probably more along those lines.

Q. (No microphone.)

KIM MULKEY: Yeah, our children. Pat, I just said, when I was pregnant with Makenzie, my oldest, Pat pulled me to the side. We were getting ready to play them and she said, don't you get out, you can do both, you can do both, you can be a mom, you can coach. I probably said something along those lines.

All we are is a memory in life. We have memories. What wonderful memories I have of playing and coaching, but as a mother, there aren't many of us that got to coach our child. There just aren't. I probably should have played my kid a little sooner. I think Krista played hers early. Mine was on a 40-0 team with Griner and that crew. What a blessing it was to coach Makenzie, but I'm sure Krista has those same feelings.

Q. Coach, what concerns you the most about the game tomorrow?

KIM MULKEY: You've got to handle their pressure, you've got to handle whatever changing defenses you may see. You're always worried when you get to playoff time, are we going to rebound the ball, are we going to defend good.

Probably nothing any different than playing in the SEC, you know. Everything worries you. So as you coach, you go into a game and you're worried about everything, I'm worried about this, I'm worried about that. Just go play. At the end of the day, coaches aren't going to decide this game. At the end of the day, players make plays.

Q. Off topic a little bit. Paul Mainieri is out at South Carolina.

KIM MULKEY: I did get that text from somebody, and I can't open it. It won't open.

Q. He said in part of the statement on him being out at South Carolina is that he's done with coaching. I'm wondering if you had any thoughts on that.

KIM MULKEY: Me? Are you trying to run me off? No, I'm -- no, no, no, no.

Oh, I thought you were talking about me getting out. Oh, I was like, dang, Scott, I know I'm old, but damn, I'm still young really.

I'm sure I will. I'm sure when I talk to Kramer, you know, Kramer went to the National Championship with Paul here and was his shortstop. Kramer's probably, you know, sad, you know, because he probably has just wonderful fond memories of Coach Mainieri.

I remember Kramer's first two years, and this is so typical. He was behind Alex Bregman. I think y'all probably heard of him, right? Well, you signed here knowing you were going to be behind Alex Bregman, so Paul would move him to second a little bit. Was hard on him, which great. No big deal.

But I think the lesson that Kramer can send to all athletes is the same lesson Flau'jae can send. He stayed four years at the same school. He took those tough lessons. He became a two-time All-American at shortstop here and played for a Natty. He was how many inches diving into home plate of winning that National Championship against Florida?

So he did it the right way. He got his degree. He turned down, I don't know if it was 11th or 12th round as a junior to come out in the draft and he said, no. He said, my crew, we're all coming back. He ended up being the fourth round pick of the Cardinals. Never had a regret in doing that.

I just, I miss seeing those types of athletes stay four years and show commitment and loyalty. I'm sure he has nothing but good things to say about Paul, and I certainly do.

Q. Isn't it harder to judge coaches these days because of all this stuff, because that record at South Carolina, he's a better coach than that, we know that, right?

KIM MULKEY: Well, I don't know his record. With everything that's going on with the portal, NIL money, your athletic directors and your administrators better understand what's really going on out there and be very fair in what you think is a good season.

I'm not sure how many are involved in portal discussions with coaches, or involved too much in NIL discussions with coaches. I would think their deputy assistants are.

It's tough. And then when you deal with athletics now in their public institutions, how much power does an AD even have anymore? Who rules their world? That's a scary thought as well.

MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time.

KIM MULKEY: You bet.