

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - South Dakota State vs Virginia Tech

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Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

Cassell Coliseum

South Dakota State Jackrabbits

Aaron Johnston

Myah Selland

Paige Meyer

Kallie Theisen

Media Conference

Q. Based on who you have played this year and who you have beaten this year in conference, I take it you probably -- what's going to be the mindset for this team? I take it you won't be too intimidated playing the number one seed based on who you played this year already?

MYAH SELLAND: I think we like to embrace these challenges. We are excited for the opportunity. We know it's going to be obviously a tough opponent in a really fun environment, going to have a lot of fans. So we are just going to try to embrace that and just make the most of the opportunity, but we are excited about it.

PAIGE MEYER: For sure. That is why we played in nonconference like we did, to get us ready for these moments. Like Myah said, we are going to embrace the moment and excited for the challenge.

KALLIE THEISEN: Our nonconference prepares us for moments like this. I think we are just excited for the challenge and excited to have this moment.

Q. How do you guys feel today? That was a bloodbath. I hate to call a basketball game a bloodbath, but it was a physical, physical game. So how quickly do you recover from something like that?

KALLIE THEISEN: Yeah. Obviously feeling a little sore. It was a hard fought game, but I think we are excited for



tomorrow. Recovered today a little bit. We will be ready to go tomorrow.

PAIGE MEYER: For sure. It's obviously nice to have today to recover and get ourselves ready for tomorrow.

MYAH SELLAND: We feel a lot better after a win I think, but like they said, we will take today to recover and be ready for the challenge tomorrow.

Q. Ladies, in the postseason, a lot is made of the home court advantage that you guys had. Tomorrow you will be walking into the opposite thing. What can you say about the approach of going into that sort of hornet's nest?

MYAH SELLAND: Yeah. We have kind of talked. We are excited. We are kind of excited to be on the other side of that, and it's always fun when you get to play in an environment where there's a lot of people, a lot of fans. And we saw yesterday just the support that this program has. And so any time you get to be a part of an atmosphere like that, it's exciting, so that's something we talked about just embrace and having fun with.

PAIGE MEYER: For sure like Myah said, we are kind of excited to be able to be in this fun atmosphere and grateful for the opportunity.

KALLIE THEISEN: Yeah. For sure obviously there's going to be a lot of people there. It is great for women's basketball to have a crowd like that. We are looking at that as an awesome opportunity.

Q. Kallie, going into the USC game with their size, did you feel like you were going to play a big ^ roll ^ role and then going into Virginia Tech, you know, how much do you think your size will kind of help you guys?

KALLIE THEISEN: I'm ready to step into any opportunity I'm given. I think defensively, I think that's something I take pride in. I'm excited for that and excited for that for Sunday too.



Q. You and Virginia Tech, you are two of eight teams in the country to have a win streak of ten plus games. What has helped you guys sustain success for so long this season through the ups and downs? And when you look at Virginia Tech, do you see any kind of similarities between how they have been able to sustain success lately?

KALLIE THEISEN: Yeah. I think we have been able to sustain it just because we are really close knit team and really play for each other. I think that helps us with any ups and downs throughout the season. I guess I don't necessarily know exactly what Virginia Tech does for their success, but for us, I think it's just we are a really close knit team.

PAIGE MEYER: Just staying together and kind of taking it one game and one day at a time.

MYAH SELLAND: Kind of like Paige touched on, I think we just found ways to get better throughout the years and found ways to get wins. But even in the wins, learning from them and finding ways to continue to get better as the season has gone on.

Q. I want to go back to last night. It didn't start off very well. You guys didn't score for like seven minutes, at least a basket anyway.

How did you keep your positive mindset going and then what was it like to watch your senior friend right there just say just give me the ball, we are going to win?

KALLIE THEISEN: Obviously we have to have of confidence in Myah. She can take over a game. She's done that plenty of times throughout her career and this year. We knew it was going to be a game of ups and downs, so obviously it didn't start the way we wanted, but we knew we could come back and was able to do that and sustain it throughout the game.

PAIGE MEYER: It is obviously always fun to see someone on the team go off like that. That gives a lot of more confidence to everyone on the team when Myah has shots go in. Yeah. It's a lot of fun to see Myah do what we all know she can do.

Q. Looking back when you beat a team like Louisville or Kansas State or Mississippi State or even USC last night, what do you kind of want to bottle from those wins to help kind of beat those teams that you want to duplicate tomorrow?

MYAH SELLAND: I think just the respect and the preparation ^ in a ^ that goes into playing such good

competition. And so I think that's something that we really embrace and just kind of that level of intensity that you have to match when you are playing a good team.

And so I think having those opportunities in the nonconference are really good for us to kind of learn from, and that's something that we will definitely draw on tomorrow.

Q. Myah, you scored almost as many points in the first round as Chattanooga against Virginia Tech. What have you seen and what you have seen from them that's going make that more challenging?

MYAH SELLAND: They're just a really solid defensive team. They guard you really well one on one. So I think we are just going to have to continue to do what we have done best throughout the year of just finding open players. You know, we are so unselfish, and we can -- any one of us can make shots when we have them. So really relying on each other will be important because, yeah, they're a good defensive team and we have to be able to match that.

Q. How do you approach as being visitors in a place that's going to be loud and against you?

MYAH SELLAND: Yeah. We are just excited about it. Any time you play in an atmosphere that has a lot of fans, attendance is great for women's basketball. And we are just kind of in that mindset of we are happy to be a part of that.

You know, we are blessed with great fans back at home. And so we kind of know what it's like to be a part of high intensity games. And so we just kind of like to be a part of big games with, you know, a lot of support. And so we are excited about that, and we will embrace the challenge.

Q. Does it feel like you guys come out of nowhere? Like South Dakota, a lot of people don't even like know where that is, right? Then you know, South Dakota last year did well in the tournament. How cool is it to be like this unknown quantity?

PAIGE MEYER: You know, we are excited to just kind of play against this kind of competition and show, I guess, everyone what South Dakota is made of.

KALLIE THEISEN: Yeah. I think it's awesome to put South Dakota on the map, and I think it's fun to kind of be the underdog and have that challenge. I think we are excited for that.

Q. This one is for Kallie. Last night coach spoke about the important ^ roll ^ role that you played in the



game last night given some very big minutes.

What was your mindset going into playing on the biggest stage and against such a physical team such as USC and another physical team in Virginia Tech?

KALLIE THEISEN: I was excited for it. I like to play physically too. I think that worked to my advantage. They're obviously a great team. They have great post players. It's going to be a challenge just stepping up in those moments on the biggest stage is exciting.

Q. When you guys looked -- when you look at your summer league scores, you put up a lot of points. Last night's game and the Louisville game are examples that you don't have to play that way, you know, to win.

What is it about this team, I guess, do you do you feel like whatever the style of play is, whatever the tempo of the game is, you could win that way? What's kind of, you know, the approach being able to win in different styles?

MYAH SELLAND: Yeah. I think, you know, we have had games this year where we have scored a lot of points, but in those games, our first priority is always defense.

So our defense leads us to offense a lot of times. When our offense isn't going, our defenses really what we proud ourselves in. We try to, you know, rely on our defense so then when nights are like last night where offense was harder to come by, we can still kind of rely on our defense.

Q. 45 points in regulation, and bang, you you turned it on in overtime and scored 17 points.

Do you feel like that's going to -- that momentum is going to carry over into the game tomorrow? Obviously you have to shoot better to beat Virginia Tech?

MYAH SELLAND: I think hopefully. Like I said, we obviously pride ourselves defensively. When we can get stops and kind of get us going offensively, that will be good. I think we ride the momentum from, you know, an exciting game and an exciting finish.

And yeah, part of the first round, new environment, so hopefully we can kind of shake some of that stuff off too Sunday, but either way we are excited and be ready to go.

PAIGE MEYER: Like Myah touched on, a lot of pride in our defense. Yesterday we were getting good looks. They were not falling right away. Just keep being confident and shooting that shot when you are open will definitely help.

Q. What did you like about your defense last night that

maybe you want to replicate tomorrow, you know, in terms of how you made it a tough shooting night for USC?

KALLIE THEISEN: I thought we overall both our guards and post did a great job just contested shots and making it tough. We really prepared well. In scout, our coaches prepared us well to know where we want the shots coming from. We do a good job of forcing tough shots.

Q. So you guys are not a Power Five. USC is. How much does it mean to you guys to knock somebody like that off?

MYAH SELLAND: Yeah. I think, you know, we kind of pride ourselves of being mid-major student athletes, and we are proud of that. So I think any time we have the opportunity to represent, you know, the Summit League, SDSU against Power Five schools, we are excited about that opportunity and just to see how this program is continued to grow is exciting for us. And I know we are all just grateful to be a part of that. We want to represent, you know, SDSU in mid-major as well.

PAIGE MEYER: For sure, we are always just really excited to step up to these kind of challenges that we are given throughout the year. And like Myah said, just represent the mid-majors as best we can.

KALLIE THEISEN: Obviously USC has a great program. To be able to win yesterday was great. I think we are more excited to earn another opportunity to play on Sunday.

Q. Can you guys win a shootout with Virginia Tech? Can you guys win a shootout with Virginia Tech?

MYAH SELLAND: Yeah. We pride ourselves on defense. So that will definitely be our priority going into the game. I'm confident in everyone on our team to step up and make big shots. So we will see how the game turns out, but yeah, I'm confident in everyone that we put on the floor.

Q. Going off the Power Five, not just with the conference, but for your team specifically, it's like you have a power ten. You guys come in waves.

So when you are looking at how beneficial that is for you, especially coming off a year where you have that postseason experience of what it takes to win each game, how beneficial is that for you knowing what it takes to advance each level in the NCAA tournament?

MYAH SELLAND: I think, you know, we have a lot of experienced players on our roster. And we had a lot of good experience last year just going through a postseason

run. You know, postseason games are different. Every game matters.

So just to have that experience is really important. I think we can kind of ^ lean ^ lien on each other, and we have been here before and trust each other in that. And you know, our freshmen and new players have stepped up great and just filled in, but just having that experience just allows us to trust each other when those big moments come.

PAIGE MEYER: We are always there for each other having those veterans that been through these experiences helps the younger players get through these opportunities. So yeah, definitely just the experience helps.

KALLIE THEISEN: We have a lot of experience on this team as they hit on. Obviously our last year definitely prepared us for this moment. I think we had earlier games in nonconference too that definitely prepared us, so I think we are ready for it.

Q. As I'm looking at your stats, this is your sixth season of college basketball. So I'm kind of curious, you know, from your perspective, when you first got to South Dakota State, you talked about the confidence you all have against Power Five teams.

Has that changed at all since you have been there? Has that grown? And kind of how has the program evolved since you have been a part of it?

MYAH SELLAND: I was lucky enough to come in at a time where the program was really on the rise and played in some really good teams my first couple years. And so it was fun to be a part of that and just being a part of this program has really, I don't know, made me appreciate just what we have building here and just grateful to be a part of it because I think just every year, we just find ways to continue to grow as a program.

And when you see that success, and you get to taste a little of that success, you know, you just build that confidence in each other and in the program and the system, and you know, the culture that we have been creating for a lot of years now. I think just as I reflect, it's just I'm grateful to be a part of a program like that.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for your time.

AARON JOHNSTON: Questions for Coach Johnston.

Q. Virginia Tech, what makes them good and how are you going to beat them?

AARON JOHNSTON: They're playing at such a high level obviously on the perimeter and shoot the ball really well. Their point guard is exceptional. She makes them go and does so much for them offensively and defensively, able to get up and pressure the ball and contain point guards. She's a big part of what they do.

Their inside is as good as anybody too with their length. So yeah, the individual matchups are going to create a lot of problems as they do for every team that Virginia Tech plays. They execute really well. There's a team that have a ton of talent. You feel like you can kind of scheme it up a little and put yourself in a good spot. They execute really well. They have a lot of actions that are hard to defend, counters to those actions that are hard to defend.

Their spacing is real good. So it's hard to pick off their people. Very predictable, very comfortable, but it makes it also hard to defend because you can't really leave a lot of people. It's going to be a challenge.

I do think defensively though we played at a high level all year. It's going to have to be a collective approach. We won't go out there one-on-one defense the entire game.

A lot of just subtle changes throughout the game that we will continue to throw in with ball screens or post coverage or things like that, just to try to keep them a little out of rhythm. I don't know that we are going to be able to take them out with pressure, but try to keep them a little less comfortable than they normally are.

Definitely offensively, I think an elite team. Not because they run up and down try to score 90, they're so efficient. Don't make mistakes, always get good shots. The right people are making plays that they're good at making and just so, so efficient with what they do on offense.

Q. Elizabeth Kitley is kind of a known commodity here. You mentioned their point guard who's been on a terror while they have been on this winning streak. What kind of specific challenges does she present?

AARON JOHNSTON: I mean, she will be as good as any point guard we have played this year. I think from watching her play -- you know, when I watched her, I hope our point guard, Paige, as a young player continues to evolve and grow into that kind of player. They both have some same skill sets with their quickness and ability to change speed, change direction, explosiveness. I think what makes her so good is she can do all of that. She is such an elite shooter, off ball screens, hand offs, double screens, get to her shot with the ball in her hand, get to the shot with hand offs, off screen, just always under chrome.

Out of all of the film I watched, I'm trying to remember a bad shot or a forced play. It just seems like she's always in great control. Then to do that though as a guard, everybody around are you has to know how you are going to play too. That's what makes it so hard. Sometimes you have players that are really aggressive and hunting up shots. Everyone else is not quite ready or spacing is not good. They always have people in the right spots. They give them a lot of second or third help that is hard. So she's really a good player and then how they play really fits her strengths right now.

Q. AJ, you had a chance to take a few deep breaths after that game is ^ finely ^ finally over last night. A, how gratifying was it to pull a game like that out because it was a tough game for both teams? And B, how does that help you moving forward to know you can win that kind of a game because Virginia Tech is a pretty strong defensive team?

AARON JOHNSTON: Yes. The breaths are really shallow and quick. I think that has to do with heart rate and energy. It was tough game last night. It was. And I think all of these games for us are going to be -- very rarely are we going to in an everything go our way and just ^ roll ^ role along.

I think we have come along with the idea we are going to play other teams that are capable of not only playing with us, but beating us. We have to feel like a team that's capable of beating other people too. We are on an even foot with a lot of teams.

We kind of felt like that could be the case. We really felt their defense is going to be tough for us last night. You know, I don't know about each situation, but in terms of being a more defensive, you know, game, I thought it played out probably the way I thought it was.

We did. We made a lot of plays. There's a few that I look back on and wished to put us in a better position, maybe gone a little differently. We made a lot of plays. You can always look back on at game like that and say I wish we would have done this, but ultimately we did a lot of things right to be in those situations.

Hopefully we can draw on that going forward, specifically to Virginia Tech. You know, they're good. You know, we have played South Carolina this year, and they're good. They're a different good. They're efficient and skilled and so difficult to try to help off of.

But they do a lot of things well defensively too. Offensively I think they're very good. Also defensively, we are going to

have to get the right people involved. Some of the things I said Virginia Tech does well, we are going to have to do well. We have to get the right people the ball and handle the emotion of the game, the crowd.

So there's a lot of things we are going to have to overcome and do well in that game. I think our, you know, history of playing really good teams, this year and in the past years continues to help us be more prepared and better positioned to play in this game and to do well in in game.

Q. Are there certain things that helped you beat people like Louisville and Kansas State and Mississippi State and USC last night that you kind of want to bottle and replicate tomorrow?

AARON JOHNSTON: Yeah. I think we are kind of a team that I wish I could say everything about us we go out and do our plan, and that's what we do no matter what. I think for each those opponents, each of those great teams, we played last night and tomorrow, I don't know that we would say big changes. We are going to fit into what the other team does.

We are not going to go out there and pose our will. We have to be really sharp with our defensive plan, where do -- how do we want to defend some of their actions. Offensively I think we are going to have to be better than we were last night and be more efficient.

Certainly take care of the ball better, have to make some perimeter shots. We did have good looks. We didn't make enough of them. All of the things that we kind of done throughout the year, but ultimately we have to have a good plan for Virginia Tech.

I think the thing that I like about our team is I think they are really poised, play with a lot of confidence. I think they will really dig in and try to execute what we ask them to do. Those are the things we have done all year. The plan for each team probably changes a little bit, but those characteristics of how we play and how focused we are and how driven we are, those are the things that have been consistent throughout the year.

Q. You mentioned Paige a little bit. You know, how did you feel she handled the moment last night and kind of had another impressive performance, you know, in her first postseason?

AARON JOHNSTON: That's just it. She's a sophomore. She has a lot of game experience. That was her first NCAA tournament playing against a really good team in pressure situations. I thought she played really well.

I'm sure we can look and say, oh, I wish you would have had this possession or this thing back and that happens. Myah didn't get to be Myah last night on day one, first NCAA tournament. You know, Myah had people that were carrying that load when she was a young player. She learned kind of how to do that and how to handle that pressure. Then she turned into Myah last night.

So we will see as Paige continues to grow, Paige is an elite player. Paige can play at a lot of levels well. Haleigh Timmer is that kind of player. I know she didn't shoot it well last night, but she made a lot of plays. She showed a lot of athleticism and a lot of beginnings of the kind of player she's going to be as she gets to be a junior and senior in those moments. Really proud of Paige. I thought handled it really well. Really happy she's a Jackrabbit and really look for her to build on those experiences.

Q. You and Virginia Tech are two of the eight teams in the country that have a winning streak of ten plus games. For you, what has helped you guys sustain success for so long this season? And when you watch film of Virginia Tech, do you see any similarities in maybe what's helped them sustain success lately?

AARON JOHNSTON: I think so. I always hate to say there are similarities because I don't want people to feel like I'm comparing us to an ACC team, number one seed. That's not what I'm trying to do.

I think what we are is a really consistent team. We don't have a lot of ups and downs. Even last night there are a lot of emotional swings, but we were pretty consistent with what we want to do. We have been like that all year long. The things that make us consistent are our leadership. We have great, great leaders. Virginia Tech, you can see they have great leadership and great poise.

But then when you look at how each team plays, I think both are really efficient on offense and defense. They don't turn it over a lot. We don't turn it over a lot. We rebound well. They rebound well, their offensive efficiency. We have good balance on offense. They have good balance on offense.

A lot of the basketball pieces, I think there are a lot of similarities. The difference is, you know, they have some really elite national players that earn the right to be looked at that way. We have some really good players too, but it's a lot of I think similarities in the two programs, different levels, but how we win I think is pretty consistent.

Q. I have two if that's okay.

Myah scored almost as many points last night as

Chattanooga scored when they played Virginia Tech. Is it a concern that you guys rely too much on that?

AARON JOHNSTON: Yeah. I think like I said earlier, every game for us is a little different. We are going to go to match ups that we think are helpful, try to put or players in positions where they could be good and successful.

If you watched us last night, you watched us and say Myah has to carry that team. She did last night. No doubt. If you watched us 20 or 30 times, we are really balanced. We have a lot of people that can make plays.

It didn't show last night, and that was a credit to USC and their defense and how good they are.

I would agree with the idea we have to have more balance in the game tomorrow. We are going to need other people to step up. Certainly lean on players that are in a groove and playing well. Myah is always a big part of everything we do.

You know, last night was also a game -- part of why Myah's numbers were good, it was one-on-one match ups. One-on-one match ups. If Myah had one-and-one match ups for the last 25 games, she would average 30 a game too. She just doesn't get that. She has two or sometimes three people around her. She doesn't have those kind of numbers based on the who are people are playing her.

I think we have to get more balance. We have to take advantage of how they're going to play us. But Myah was important for us last night, and I'm sure others will be important tomorrow.

Q. Obviously Virginia Tech as a one seed is kind of an imposing opponent, but how much does -- you guys have played, and how you have set up your schedule kind of make them, I don't know, less gigantic?

AARON JOHNSTON: Yeah. I think that's a good question. That's why we do it. It is not just this year. Every year we have really taken that approach. You know, this year alone whether it's South Carolina, Louisville, UCLA, certainly Washington State is in that group, Kansas State, I think our nonconference schedule this year is still top five in the country. Last year I think we were top ten. And you can go back for several years and see that. That's been important to us. And I think we love those challenges.

I think I can make our players' lives a lot easier by scheduling differently. You can certainly put them in positions where they're going to win more games by just being in the gym. But I don't think that's why players come



to South Dakota State quite honestly. I don't think that's why our fans come and fill up our place like we are going see home. I think people really appreciate the fact you get a good team at SDSU playing against other elite teams across the nation.

And I love the fact that we have young people in the state of South Dakota grow up thinking this is a neat place. And I don't have to go to a Power Five school to play against those type of schools in that level of competition and play in the postseason and have chances to win. All of those things helps us prepare for games like this and moments where now you have to really in the NCAA tournament against an elite team. I love those challenges. It's a lot more difficult and stressful, but it's a good stress and good challenge.

Q. You mentioned Haleigh and how she didn't have a great game offensively last night. You played her 42 minutes. She played more minutes than Myah. Why? Why do you have that much trust in her? What was she showing that you kept sticking with her like that?

AARON JOHNSTON: I thought Haleigh just had a lot good looks, just didn't get enough on the go down. I don't go back and look and think there was a forced shot here, forced play. We want her to force some. You have to live with a couple. I really think Haleigh is going to be that next go-to player. Paige has a chance to be that next go-to player.

I just have that much confidence in both of those guards, but Haleigh has been that for us for a long time last year in the WIT and those situations. She really rose to the challenge and looked like she was as big or bigger than the moment. You know, and even last night when the ball didn't go in for her, I still feel like she was engaged defensively, I think. She's ^ groan ^ grown so much, and you know, players hear that as a trigger word when I say they have gotten better defensively because it means they were not good defensively. I don't mean that about Haleigh. She has gone from a good defensive player to a really good defensive player. We are better when she's on the floor.

And like I said with Myah, Myah was different as a freshman and sophomore and that helped her get to be where she was last night. It will help Haleigh too.

Q. What is it about your team that you can win when you score a lot of points, but last night's game and Louisville showed, it doesn't have to be that kind of track meet to win?

AARON JOHNSTON: I don't know. I mean, we are kind of

grinders for lack of a better word. We kind of try to stay in the game, stay in the moment, stay in the fight and figure out in that position what it's going take to win. In November and December, we had games like this. You know, we did. We had some really, you know, competitive physical battles that just didn't have a lot of flow. We were able to hang in there.

As we got into late December, January, February, we started clicking. I think we have always been that way. I think when you asked me before what makes us good and what's going to happen, I think we are really good at adjusting to what's happening during the game, you know, what's required in that moment and figuring that out and staying with that as opposed to saying here is what we do, if it works, great. If it doesn't, we are going get beaten. A lot of teams are that. They have their system, and it works or it doesn't.

I think just think for us, we are really flexible. We are able to try to play in a lot of different ways and kind of figure it out as we are going in those games.

Q. Last night after the game you said you wanted to defend USC one on one at the post. Same attitude against Kitley tomorrow or no?

AARON JOHNSTON: We will tell you after tomorrow's game. I guess that will be a good time to talk about that. I don't know that we will do anything against her that she hasn't seen from teams.

She's elite. They have been playing against elite competition. I look at it as comfort. How do we get all of their players a little less comfortable than they are, what do we have to do to get them off the spot they seem like they're most effective at? We will really focus on that.

Now, they know that, and they'll have ways to get them comfortable, ut but that's certainly always our plan defensively, and it will have to be a big part of tomorrow's game.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time.

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