

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Fairfield vs Kansas State

Friday, March 21, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Memorial Coliseum

## Kansas State Wildcats

**Jeff Mittie**

**Serena Sundell**

**Ayoka Lee**

Media Conference

Kansas State 85, Fairfield 41

**JEFF MITTIE:** Well, it's good to be sitting here after a good victory. I thought we got off to a good start. We talked about the pace of this game was going to be critical for us to play at a pace that we wanted to play it at, and that was going to require some balance offensively, it was going to require some shot discipline.

I thought early we had good shot discipline. We were able to get the ball inside. I think that always slows a running team down, and we wanted to do that.

We knew how difficult they would be to defend at the other end, just because in our league, we have a lot of traditional 5s, and having to guard shooters out there, having to guard five-person motion can be a difficult challenge for a team.

I thought Yoky got off to a great start defensively. It's a challenge to her, as any center, to guard that much space. I thought our group, for the most part, was pretty good at pushing them up and keeping them contained as best we could. But I thought it really started from the offensive end. We scored. That's harder to run when you score, and we wanted to have good balance offensively.

**Q. This was a game a lot of people thought could be an upset. What do you feel like this performance says about you as a team?**

**SERENA SUNDELL:** I don't know, I mean, I know we think we're a good team. We're confident coming in. I think we all knew we were capable. We knew we were going to have a size advantage. We knew the coaches were going



to do a good job of getting us a good scout and a good game plan, so we were just focused on staying disciplined to what the coaches had for us, which was guarding the three-point line, knowing that they were going to try some mismatches there.

But I think this group, when we can all stay committed, stay focused and disciplined to our scout, we're a confident group and we are very capable.

**Q. Ayoka, first time-out in almost a month. How did it feel to contribute at a high level?**

**AYOKA LEE:** It felt great, yeah. It's been a minute. I think our support staff, our strength and training coach did a great job just keeping everything where it needed to be while I was out because it's a long time, and it's not fun going through that many rehabs.

They're great, and they just did everything that we needed to do and put me through everything I needed to go through to make sure I was ready for this.

**Q. Ayoka, along those lines, you only had to play 15 minutes tonight. Could you have played more if you needed to? Also, how do the feet feel having been able to get back out on the court?**

**AYOKA LEE:** Yeah, my feet feel great. Dr. Smith did a great job.

I think I could have played more. Yeah, there wasn't -- I mean, I don't think any stretches where I came out and I was just, like, dying. I think I could have played more, yeah.

**Q. Jeff, this probably had to be the best result imaginable, especially not having to test Ayoka out too much tonight. How does it help you get ready for a Sunday where you're going to have a more traditional matchup with Kentucky's bigs?**

**JEFF MITTIE:** Yeah, I don't know. It'll be a very different game on Sunday. I think the benefit for this group is just being on the floor for 40 minutes together, playing together,



having Lee out there.

You know, this was a difficult game for her in terms of -- I mentioned that, in terms of just stylistically, this would not be her preference to go, oh, let's go up against a team that shoots it every six seconds and spreads you out and she has to guard space and all those things. That concerned me because one of the things that has been difficult about her is that you can't put too much pounding on the foot in her coming back. So it's not like you can do a ton of agility drills and a ton of things that go into this.

I definitely think she could have played more, but there reached a point where you're going, if she goes out there and twists an ankle, how am I going to feel on that?

For our group, I thought the start was critical. I thought her being out there communication-wise, it was good to see that group communicating through things that we don't necessarily see every practice. So that, I think, is the best thing in preparation for another game on Sunday.

**Q. Had the game been a little bit tighter, would you have a general minutes limit in mind on how much you wanted her to play? Would she have been at full go had the game been closer?**

A. I don't want her to play over 40, okay? So we prefer to keep it in games in regulation. There's not a minute restriction. There's not. There's probably just a feel in the game of if she's gassed. But that wouldn't be any different than any other game. Every game takes on its different identity of whether the pace -- there's no stoppages in play, there's no whistles. But no, she told me before, she said, I'm ready. There's no minute restrictions, play me how you want to play me.

I talked to her at half, just said, how you feeling? Do you feel good about the rotations? And she said, yeah, I feel good, do whatever you want to do with it.

**Q. You have the tough challenge of Georgia Amoore on the other side when you play Kentucky on Sunday. She had 34 today. What's the recipe for success to shut her down?**

JEFF MITTIE: You allowed me six minutes of enjoyment. (Laughter). I really appreciate those six minutes of -- and now we're to the reality.

Heck of a player. Heck of a player. I don't have any answers as we sit here today.

We'll get to looking on film. My staff has been watching, obviously, a lot of film, so we'll get back and dive into that.

But a heck of a player. I've watched her play over the years, and she just does everything right. She runs her team well, scores well. I know she scored it extremely well today. Yeah, just a really good player.

**Q. Serena just makes such an impact every time she's on the floor, and so versatile in everything she does. How much have you seen her grow over the last four seasons, and what does she add to this team in your opinion, maybe more of like the intangibles?**

JEFF MITTIE: She is just such a steady person overall, comes to work every day, enjoys competing. What she has grown -- you go her freshman year, her job really was to get us in the right spots and get the ball to Yoky, and she did that from a few spots on the floor.

As she progressed through her time, she really can run four different spots, and you see us use her in the post some. Now, not as a 5 necessarily, but we move her around.

That has been the growth of her game, not only understanding the why of what we're doing, but the why of what we need her to do and the why of what we need her to do for the team. She understands the game. She understands when she needs to take it over. She understands when she needs to get others involved.

And the growth of Taryn Sides and Zy Walker and Jaelyn Glenn have allowed us to move her around the floor.

Yeah, you're right, I think people see a lot of things she does at the offensive end, but you've got to take a look at what she does defensively. She blocks shots, she rotates, she reads things extremely well. She's one of our top defenders, as well.

She just does a lot on the floor for us.

**Q. You talked about Amoore, but also Kentucky's lineup is vastly different from Fairfield's. I think they have like 6'3", 6'4", 6'5" across the front line --**

JEFF MITTIE: 6'7" in there, as well.

**Q. You were able to lob the ball into Lee in this game, but that might be a little bit more challenging Sunday. Do you have to sort of, I guess, re-scheme for this game?**

JEFF MITTIE: Well, I think that's always -- yeah, there's no doubt, Sunday's game is going to be different, and as you mentioned, there's a huge size difference in terms of what we're going to face on Sunday and what we faced today.

So that will be vastly different.

The lobs are going to have to be better. The spacing is going to have to be better. Certainly, Kentucky will provide different challenges than what we saw today.

What I was pleased with today is just simply that you play the game you're in. You play the game you're in. You do the things necessary to win the game that you're in, and now we've got to flip that switch to Sunday, and we've got to put together a game plan to do exactly that against Kentucky, and that'll be very difficult. Kentucky is an outstanding team, and they've got a lot of really, really good pieces.

**Q. How important was that first and third quarter for you guys to get out fast in that way, especially knowing how tight players can be in a tournament setting?**

JEFF MITTIE: Yeah, I think it was just good to get all 10 that played today in early, have some success, get a little bit of a sweat going. Certainly, we talked about the start earlier, us having some early offensive success, I think, slowed their offensive push down, and that was critical.

But I expected Fairfield to fight back. That's a team that's won a bunch of games this year. They've gone on the road and won some Power Four games. It's a team that just ran right through their league. They made a push back at us in the second quarter, and I was pleased with our answer right before half.

Then coming out of halftime, we wanted to get some things reestablished, and I thought we did that in the third quarter.

**Q. Just wondering if -- what you might be able to take from what Liberty sort of did to get back in the game with Kentucky, or did you even get a chance to see any of that down the stretch?**

JEFF MITTIE: I did not. I did not. I did not. When you're looking at a 26-minute window, you've got to do all your pre-prep while that game is going on. So when you're the second game in this and you've got 26 minutes, you've got to do -- our normal stuff for me is to talk to the team about 40 minutes before, all that stuff. So my staff was able to see some of that. They'll communicate that to me. Obviously, it was a great game.

I did catch a little bit of it in the third quarter. At that point, it was about a 12, 13-point game, but Liberty was hanging around, and I only caught three or four minutes.

Obviously, it was a great game, and Kentucky did a great job of pulling it out.

We'll dig into that later, so I don't have anything for you on that.

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