

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Kansas State vs Kentucky

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Memorial Coliseum

Kansas State Wildcats

Coach Jeff Mittie

Zyanna Walker

Taryn Sides

Media Conference



yeah, looking forward to it.

Q. Can you talk about what you're looking forward to in what will be probably (indiscernible) preparing for the Kentucky back court?

ZYANNA WALKER: Yeah, we're really excited. We've put in a lot of work this season. So to be able to compete with a great team like Kentucky, we're just so excited, and can't wait to show that, you know, we are capable of competing with some of the best teams in the country.

And it's something we've known we're capable of doing. And we've worked so hard throughout the summer and this season to do it. So we're excited to just show what we can do.

TARYN SIDES: Yeah, a very talented team, especially at the guard position. But I think we are as well. So I think we play together really well. And yeah.

Q. When you look at the leadership on your team, and we've heard a lot from your leaders like Sundell and Lee, what have they brought to your team and as you've come into this tournament? How have they used past motivation maybe to help you guys with this experience?

TARYN SIDES: Yeah, for sure. They're, like you said, very experienced. They've been through a lot throughout their career. So they passed down knowledge from just everything they've gone through in their journey here, and so we want to use what they've learned to carry on too throughout this tournament.

ZYANNA WALKER: Yeah, they've given us a little rundown of their past experiences in the tournament, and I'm just taking in information, all the information I can, all the knowledge I can from them.

And then just motivated this year for them because this is their last year, and we want to be able to go as far as we can for them.

Q. Your experience in being able to shut down Caitlin

THE MODERATOR: Questions for our student-athletes.

Q. You seemed to enjoy the environment in Memorial Coliseum yesterday. Shot the ball really, really well. Talk about how familiar you are with that or how comfortable you are with that arena, and can you carry that over to tomorrow?

TARYN SIDES: I like the arena. It's pretty small. So it just seems very intimate with the crowd and just all of us players. It's a lot of fun yesterday, and we're looking forward to carrying it on to tomorrow.

ZYANNA WALKER: Yeah, I think we've gotten really used to it, being in practice and shoot-around. We felt good. Got a lot of shots up yesterday and the day before that. So got a good feel for the arena.

Q. Would you talk about the motivation you had this year. How much did last year's loss, even though it's 365 days ago to Colorado, how much did that motivate you going into this year's tournament?

ZYANNA WALKER: I think it really motivated us. We remember what we felt when we walked off the court that day, and we felt like we just let our fan base down on our home court. So we really wanted to make sure that this year it was a different turnaround. And we came out from the jump and kept our foot on the gas the whole time.

TARYN SIDES: I think Zy said it pretty well. It's extremely motivating to go out like that, especially on your home court. So we want to do the same to Kentucky tomorrow, right? They do it to you, next year turn it around. So,



Clark a couple of different times, how much will that help you, or is it completely different when you're facing Amoore coming up tomorrow?

ZYANNA WALKER: I would say they're different players. So I think it will be different. Caitlin is a little bigger. Amoore is a little smaller, faster. And, yeah, I'm excited to be able to match up with her. Great player. Going to be in the WNBA. So I'm just taking it as a great opportunity for me to be able to see where I match up with that.

Q. Just from the defensive mentality, what goes through your mind as you prepare for a Caitlin Clark, for a Georgia Amoore?

ZYANNA WALKER: Just know that you're not going to be able to completely shut them down. Great players like that, you just got to try to contain them.

And that's just my mindset. I want to control what kind of shots I want them to be able to take. So I'm going to do my best to get them where I want them to be, make them a little uncomfortable.

That's all you can do, and just hope that the ball doesn't go in the basket for them.

Q. On offense, now that you have Ayoka Lee back as well, how much does that help the dynamic of opening up opportunities for everybody else as well and making it even (indiscernible) guard you guys?

TARYN SIDES: Yeah, having Yokie back, it's huge for us. We're super pumped to have her back. She just makes everything so much easier for the rest of us. When she can get going, people have to sink in and double team her so that opens up the outside. And we just flow really well together.

ZYANNA WALKER: Yeah, having Yokie on the court, I think it opens up a lot of shots for our shooters and also opens up a lot of cuts for us. And we know they're going to stay glued to Yokie, so it can also open up driving lanes as well.

It's great to have her. Makes our offense flow a lot better.

THE MODERATOR: All right, ladies, you can be dismissed. We'll open it up for questions for the head coach.

Q. Kentucky starts with Amoore. Without giving away the game plan, how do you try to slow her down or keep her from getting the ball or whatever it?

JEFF MITTIE: Yeah, it's a good question. You know, her usage rate in the pick and roll game is as high as anybody we've seen in the country. Probably her and Van Lith in terms of the usage rate. It's over 40 percent.

So when you analytically look at how many pick and rolls you're going to have to defend, that's just her, you know? They run it for others as well. Their back court, as you mentioned, is really, really talented.

So, you know, I don't think you're going to -- you're certainly not going to stop her. I think you've got to find your places to pick to contain her. You've got to, you know, within your defensive system, play to your strength as best of you can.

And then you've got to maybe give her different looks. And that's something that, you know, we're -- I think is kind of an end game thing, too, to see what kind of looks maybe is best for you.

So, you know, she's a very talented player. And so she does -- you're right, it starts with her. She sets the table for a lot of them. But she's very good.

So I don't have all those answers, but I will say that certainly we know that the pick and roll game for them is very, very good. They've got all the pieces to run it really well, and Kenny does a good job with it.

I wish Kenny was coming off a pick and roll instead of Amoore.

(Laughter)

Q. I'm sure we could get that to happen.

JEFF MITTIE: Yeah, sure. He probably wishes I was doing things out there too.

Q. You mentioned Georgia, Serena on your team as well, you know, the amount of good point guards in college basketball right now, how important is it to have one that can sort of do everything, score, play defense at a high level, but also play make for others?

JEFF MITTIE: Well, I think when you get to this time of the year, most teams have a pretty good one. Now, there's that next level, next level. And that's what we're talking about when you're talking about Georgia or Serena, there's another level of success. There's another level of where they've taken their team to.

So, yeah, I mean, you've got to have a leader out there that gets your team directed. You've got to have a player that

you can go to in crunch time. And both of us have that.

Q. On the topic of Serena, it seems like her scoring has increased ever since Ayoka went out. Was that a concerted effort to try and get her to score a little bit more, or was that just the natural consequences of not having Lee out there?

JEFF MITTIE: Well, both. Both. You know, when you -- we've had enough balance in our scoring all year that the shots weren't going to be distributed to one player, but certainly with Lee getting -- I don't remember how many shots she was averaging, but let's say 15 to 20, and we wanted to get her that many touches, those touches are going to be distributed. And certainly Serena is going to get some of those.

Now, the concerted effort on our part was to move her around as much as we could and see where that gravity -- you know, you've heard me say this numerous times about the gravity of where the defense is drawn to and how can you play off of that.

Well, certainly without Lee, we lost some of that gravity. And so Serena became some of that in other areas of the floor, and we were able to play off of that. And so some of that was scoring. Some of that was distribution as well.

Q. Coach, we heard your players talk about the importance of having that experience in Ayoka, in Serena. Your perspective, how helpful is that type of experience, particularly in really talented players when it comes to March?

JEFF MITTIE: It's important. There's no doubt about it. You've had to go through it. You've had to -- you want it to be helpful. You want the baton to be passed, those experiences, how do you learn from them.

Certainly Ayoka Lee has been in this environment, has been in these kind of games throughout her career. Serena Sundell. Zy and Taryn, who were up here earlier, are still young in their career. They've been in a lot of big games. But every experience certainly helps.

Q. You guys have a lot of length on your team, and then offensively you're playing against a team that has a lot of lengths in UK and is one of the best blocking teams in the country. How do you feel like that matchup pairs up that we're going to see on Sunday?

JEFF MITTIE: Yeah, they're big. There's no doubt about it. They're as big as any team we've played all year. You talk about the length, but they can put out a lineup with 6'7", 6'5", 6'4". And they will. They'll certainly play the two

biggs at times together.

And so they're I think very talented that way. You're not going to have many wide-open shots. That's one of the things that we try to do at our end. We don't want to give wide-open shots. We want to keep our length in front as best we can and force those contested jumpers.

So I expect this game will be a lot of contested shots. I expect this game will be who can make the most contested shots. And certainly Kentucky will be a challenge at their end, and we hope that we're a challenge at our end.

Because you're right. We have pretty good length as well. And with Lee back in, that's a difference for us defensively. You know, it -- vastly different. Yesterday's game had really the size difference of the two teams. There's not really a whole lot you can take from our game yesterday to what's going to be tomorrow's game.

But, yes, both teams have good size, and certainly Kentucky is one of the bigger teams in the country.

Q. I think I asked you a little bit about it yesterday, but Kentucky's size, I think Liberty, when they made their comeback, they got the Kentucky biggs in foul trouble. Is that just you need to try to attack them and get -- force them, I guess, to defend? Or is that kind of a battle of wills where you figure out what works and what doesn't?

JEFF MITTIE: Well, yeah, I don't think it's a big secret we're going to throw it to Lee. I don't think that's going to be any big strategic secret that that's going to be part of our game plan.

So, yeah, I mean, that's always going to be a part of our game plan. Liberty had the size and they had some good inside players, and they went at that. But you're talking Strack's SEC Player of the Year. She's a good player. They go 6'7" after that, Silva. She's a good player.

So, yeah, I think both teams are going to try to get established what they can, they'll try to establish their pick and roll game, I'm sure, and they'll try to get their guys involved.

But you know what? It's not going to be just a game of -- it's going to be a game of the entire rosters that play in this game. There are big moments in March, and other players are going to have to step up.

So, yes, we're going to make Lee, we're going to have Lee involved with that. But both teams I think are going to need both other secondary players to step up.

But, yeah, it will certainly be part of our game plan to throw it to Lee.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much for joining us this afternoon.

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