

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

Sunday, March 23, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Memorial Coliseum

Kansas State Wildcats

Jeff Mittie

Serena Sundell

Temira Poindexter

Media Conference

Kansas State - 80, Kentucky - 79 (OT)

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us for the press conference for the Kansas State women's basketball team. We're joined at the podium by Head Coach Jeff Mittie and students Serena Sundell and Temira Poindexter.

We'll begin with an opening statement from our head coach.

JEFF MITTIE: I think everybody just witnessed one of the great games in the tournament right now. That was -- it's hard to even go over all the big shots both teams made. You go the last 10 minutes of the game, and there were just huge shots by both teams and different players.

Really proud of our group to be down five and to need to really dig deep defensively and make plays but also very little margin for error at the other end. We just tried to get them to focus on three stops at the other end and good possessions at the offensive end. Proud of our group for doing that.

Just a lot of really, really big plays in this game. We're glad to come out on the right side. It obviously could have gone either way, but these games are like that, especially when you have two really good basketball teams.

Excited for this group. They've worked extremely hard. They've been a resilient group. I don't think that you guys got to witness, when we have Lee, how good this team can be. She's a factor at both ends of the floor. She offensively makes people pay attention.



You don't replace All-Americans, and we know that, but she gave us everything she could give us today through foul trouble. Kennedy Taylor gave us a big lift.

I could go on and on, but just a great basketball game and just a great win for our program.

Q. Temira, you started 0 for 5 from 3, and then you ended up with eight 3s in that game. What do you tell yourself to have the confidence to keep shooting the ball obviously knowing you can hit big shots when it matters?

TEMIRA POINDEXTER: Honestly, it's my teammates that tell me and give me the confidence because in those moments I do like get down on myself. So my teammates come in and having my back and telling me to keep shooting is really what lifts me up and gives me the confidence.

Q. For either of you guys, it felt like as soon as Lee got in foul trouble, you guys immediately stepped up. It felt like the momentum shifted a little bit. Did you feel that, and what were you guys telling yourselves in that moment?

SERENA SUNDELL: I mean, we've been playing without her for a month or so now, more than a month. So we know the team that we are with her on the court, and we know we can be just as good, but in a different way, without her on the court.

Having girls like Kennedy Taylor step up is so big for us. Having our shooters to stay confident, because we know that's our strength, and not shy away from that when it's one of the main factors of what's made us successful all year, I think was really big in that moment to just be able to rely on our habits.

Q. Question for both of you. Were you shocked about the zone looks? At one point you already have your double double and you already have a couple 3s. Were you all expecting a different look? Coming out of that late time-out in the fourth, what were you all preparing for?



TEMIRA POINDEXTER: I think we were prepared. I think Coach Mittie in the huddle said be prepared for a zone and run what we're going to run no matter what they're in. So it didn't catch us off guard. I think we were ready for it.

Q. How are you all able to come back from the slow start, down 7-0, and of course come back at the end after being down five or six points in the final minute?

SERENA SUNDELL: We all came into the locker room at halftime and were like we're in a really good spot. We didn't shoot the ball very well, but we got the exact looks we wanted. So we knew if we stayed consistent, we were going to keep getting those looks, and eventually they were going to fall.

There was one specific timeout towards the end of the game, we were down five, I think, 1:30 left or so, and Coach Mittie was just believe. This team, we came into this game knowing we were capable of winning. We never lost that throughout the whole 45 minutes. We knew that we had a shot, and we were going to play till the buzzer.

So I think just the confidence of this team is what carried us through.

Q. For both of you, how difficult is it to stay locked into a game like that where there are just so many lead changes and just big shots and then you're playing five extra minutes? How hard is it to stay locked in? And what did you do well in order to keep stepping up?

SERENA SUNDELL: I think this game we were just lost in the game. We knew they were making big shots, but then we'd come and hit a big shot. Once you kind of get in that rhythm, obviously you want to get stops on the defensive end, but that's a really good offensive team. So knowing they're going to find ways to score the ball, but know we have to come back and push it back at them just to give ourselves a chance.

I don't think it was hard necessarily to stay locked into the game. You're just lost in such a big game and such a big moment.

Q. Serena, you guys, this is the biggest point that you guys have been able to reach in your career. To be able to have on your team's resume this group of seniors that you guys are in the Sweet 16, is that a relief at all knowing that you've made it to this point now?

SERENA SUNDELL: I don't know if I would say relief. I'm

excited for our group. I once again knew we were capable of getting here. I'm proud of this group, and we want to keep going as far as we can.

Yeah, I think we've just worked really hard, and I'm so happy for these girls, just all that we've been through last four years, especially just a year ago this time when we lost on our home court. We've had that sticking with us in the back of our mind. So to come out here today and get a win, I'm just super happy for us.

Q. Serena, just wanted to ask you about -- it was kind of two different halves for you. Early on you were pretty much the only one scoring. Then the second half it looked like, I think, you ended up with 14 assists and broke the record. Maybe talk a little bit about how the game unfolded for you and what your thinking was from one half to the other.

SERENA SUNDELL: I was kind of just taking what the defense was giving me in the first half. I found myself open, and I was confident, I was ready to go. I was hitting shots. That always helps when you make a few shots at the beginning of the game. You want to keep shooting. That's what was working in the first half.

Then I was telling my shooters the whole game, keep shooting, keep shooting, they have to fall. Jaelyn, keep shooting. Taryn, TP, keep shooting. Once they got going, and I could use the gravity of Yoki, and we're hard to stop because defense has to make a decision.

I don't know what switched, but my teammates just came alive a little bit.

Q. Serena, you are now the school's career record holder for assists. How does that personal accomplishment compare to this team accomplishment today, getting to the Sweet 16?

SERENA SUNDELL: It doesn't compare. It doesn't compare. I would choose the Sweet 16 every single day over getting that record. A really cool record, and once again, credit to my teammates for being able to make shots.

To be honest, at the beginning of this year, I didn't really see that record being something that I would reach, but I've been able to play with a bunch of really good shooters. Obviously having Yoki gives me a lot of different options.

Definitely way more excited about being able to advance.

Q. Obviously you guys played here on Friday, but tonight the environment was way different. Did you



guys feel prepared coming into it knowing it was going to be that loud, or did you have to adjust early on?

TEMIRA POINDEXTER: We were prepared. We know this is their home floor. Yeah, if we played at home, it would be the same way. I feel like we were definitely prepared.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thank you very much. Congratulations. You can be dismissed.

We'll open it for questions for the head coach.

Q. Coach, on Friday you said you didn't have the answer to stopping Georgia Amoore. How do you feel your defense did tonight, and do you think they found the answer to that?

JEFF MITTIE: A player like her, it's tough. It's tough. She does so much for her team. I thought we did a good job, though. I thought they stuck to the game plan, even when Georgia was able to do some things that I didn't like. She's such a good player. She gets that huge 3 behind the ball screen.

You're not going to -- if you find some success, you're fortunate, but I'm proud of our group. I'm proud of Zy Walker for taking on the task because one of the things that having a Zy Walker does, it allows Serena to not have that defensive stress. It allows Jae to not have that defensive stress. And Zy loves it. Zy loves it. Zy loves the challenge, and she didn't have the only. We switched some things.

I thought our defense was pretty solid on her all night. We just wanted to keep her in front. I don't remember too many times that she got to the rim, but she's a heck of a player, and she'll have a heck of a pro career because she just makes everybody around her better.

Q. With 20 lead changes in this game, without going back and watching film yet, as an initial reaction, what do you think the team can do better with keeping a lead or not giving up those 3s, going back and forth?

JEFF MITTIE: What our team can do better? There was a stretch where I felt like they were getting every loose ball, which was hurting us, to maybe have a 6-0, 7-0 run. Every loose ball they got, they got a couple 3s that hit, they got a big jumper late, and we just weren't getting off of contact.

Lee got a little hesitant because she could not pick up another one. So she blocked out a couple times. We could definitely do that better. Boy, it's hard to argue with this game. We're not going to do everything perfect.

I loved the fight. I loved our answers. I loved our answers when Kentucky made big runs and the crowd got loud. We answered back, and we answered emphatically, and many times it was Poindexter in the second half, and Serena certainly.

I'm proud of our group for being able to fight back in front of a hostile crowd and a pretty loud crowd.

Q. Your players touched on it a little bit, but the slow start, it was over four minutes before you scored your first bucket. What do you attribute that slow start to?

JEFF MITTIE: I guess a little bit of nerves. I liked our shots. I had no problem with our shots. I had no trouble with our reads. They were the right reads. They were the right looks. They were just, I'm going to guess, a little bit of nerves, a little bit of excitement.

I remember the first media, I just kept saying, hey, look, we're getting the looks we've talked about. Keep doing it. Keep doing it. Trust each other. Don't try to do too much. Let's get a few more stops defensively. So I felt pretty good about where we were at.

Q. It's rare to see a player start 0 for 5 from deep and then end up with eight of them. How impressed were you overall with Temira's mindset and her performance tonight?

JEFF MITTIE: Really proud of her because this was -- you know, she transferred to us, and this is one of her reasons. I want to play with a team like this. You know a lot of transfers go I want playing time, I want this. She goes, I want to go to the NCAA Tournament. I want to be a part of the NCAA Tournament. I haven't done that in my career.

Her dad just about broke my ribs out there with a little hug. He's a big man. If you guys see him, he's a big guy. He was as excited as I've ever seen anybody for Temira because those were things that she said right away. It's rare, right? It's rare. Most players are looking for playing time.

She said, Coach, I want to go to an established locker room. I want to go to a group that wants to go further.

And to see her step up in the biggest moments after a start like that is pretty special.

Q. Obviously it was a great game. What are your takeaways of, first of all, Kentucky, and then Kenny Brooks' first season at Kentucky?

JEFF MITTIE: I'll tell you what, Lexington should be really excited about their team and their coach. Kenny is a great guy. Excellent coach. They've got a really, really bright future. There's a good atmosphere in here today, and I would expect that atmosphere to get better and better.

They've got a really, really quality team and a team that competes really well, but that doesn't surprise me. I've watched Kenny's teams over the year. So just a quality team, and he'll keep putting together quality teams out there.

Q. I just wanted to ask you about the last 20 seconds. Kentucky got a couple of offensive rebounds and got a few chances. I just wanted to ask you about it and kind of run through your take on the last 20 seconds.

JEFF MITTIE: I didn't enjoy it until the very end (laughter), until that buzzer went off.

Look, a lot of bodies flying, right? They don't have any timeouts left to hit the reset button. A lot of bodies.

It's hard for me. I had a little bit of an angle on the last one. I felt like it was short. I wonder if it wasn't wishful thinking at the time. Just a great effort and obviously a lot of joy when that horn went off because, you're right, Kentucky got the extra chances there, and they just couldn't convert. It happens like that sometimes.

We've been there, and their kids were scrapping as hard as they could scrap, and sometimes it just doesn't fall.

Q. Coach, you've gone nine and ten deep all season long, but today just seven, even in overtime. Curious about the decision there and how you felt like those seven players handled such long minutes.

JEFF MITTIE: Glad it didn't go 50. I thought they handled it as well as they could. I did not see a lot of fatigue from Serena or Jae. They both went the full. We felt coming in that we probably weren't going to go ten deep, but we didn't know how the game would evolve.

Kennedy obviously gave us a big lift in the first half. She was plus 16, I think, at halftime. Plus 16. That's a huge number.

So I planned on going a little deeper at the center spot, but Kennedy was giving us such a good lift and playing with such passion that I felt pretty good about rotating her and Yoki at that time.

Q. In crucial moments like that, how important is it for a coach to have thoughts within himself about

maintaining control and not having self-doubt and being able to handle moments like that?

JEFF MITTIE: I think as a coach my job is to get them to believe and to get their eyes forward. There was only one stretch where I thought that our eyes were a little bit backwards. There was a ball that went out of bounds with about 2:30 to go, and Serena hung too long in the backcourt. She was kind of complaining that she thought the ball went off them.

That next timeout was maybe -- I took a timeout in there somewhere, 1:46 maybe, and I said, hey, we have to get three stops here. We have to all be locked into this. But that was the only time I ever saw us backwards.

I do think it's my job, as much as I always agree with the officials, when I don't agree, it is hard to make sure that I don't overreact to that. This particular team hasn't reacted well when I've overreacted.

I'm going to be honest, I told them two weeks ago, I go, look, I can't -- I'm not going to -- I want to fight for you guys, but you're not reacting well if I react strongly. So I'm going to not react strongly. I've got to let you guys play through it.

I think that this group is trusting each other more. Lee back from a basketball perspective is huge, but Lee back from a communicator on the floor, she's one of the best communicators I've ever coached. She's one of the best -- she sees things well, and I think that gives us a lot of confidence to also go to the next play.

I do want to say this. The people of Lexington have been phenomenal, and I do want to thank everybody. We did have -- let me just put it this way. The training staff, I appreciate what they've done for us. I appreciate what their medical staff has done for us. I can't thank them enough for it, and I can't thank the fans enough and the hotel enough.

It's been a good trip, and the people of Lexington have been great. So I just wanted to say thank you for that.

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