

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Four - Stephen F. Austin vs Missouri State

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Austin, Texas, USA

Moody Center

Missouri State Bears Beth Cunningham Kaemyn Bekemeier Maiesha Washington

Media Conference

Missouri State - 85, Stephen F. Austin - 75

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Missouri State. Congratulations on the victory tonight. We are joined by players junior guard Kaemyn Bekemeier and freshman forward Maiesha Washington, along with head coach Beth Cunningham.

BETH CUNNINGHAM: Congratulations to Stephen F. Austin. I thought they had a great year. It was going to be a good battle tonight. Really proud of our kids coming out on top. Had to be an exciting game for fans because both of us put a lot of points on the board.

I wish we'd have held them to a few fewer, but really proud of our kids. I thought they did a great job. Had multiple efforts by a lot of different kids. Looking at the stat sheet, had a lot of balance across the board.

Proud to come into the NCAA Tournament for the first time for these guys and get a win under our belt.

Q. Can you guys talk about how important it is to get a first win in the NCAA Tournament and maybe go over some of the keys to the game? Obviously rebounding was a big one for you guys.

KAEMYN BEKEMEIER: It was really important just to get here. I know we were really excited just to get shots up on this court. We'll have to turn around and play again on Friday. I know we were just excited to have a game coming into it just to kind of shake off the jitters for sure. There were definitely a lot of nervous jitters. Those will all



be gone by Friday. That was definitely a key for us.

Q. Maiesha, it seemed like you guys had a pretty good size advantage there. Even when you were getting that free-throw line extended, you were hitting that jumper all night. Was that one of your favorite shots to hit? It seemed like it was going down all night for you.

MAIESHA WASHINGTON: I think I've always been a mid-range girly. That's always something I grew up with and been taught to not only be able to do something inside, but be able to pull out and shoot the mid-range.

Q. Kaemyn, when they went on that flurry there where they were able to take a lead, what did you guys do differently, or did you guys just stick to what you were doing?

KAEMYN BEKEMEIER: We just needed to regroup for a second, kind of figure out what was working for us before and what kind of let them go on that run for a second. Whenever we were able to regroup to kind of talk in the huddle and figure out what we needed to do and then go out and do it, it made us successful.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about -- you mentioned earlier getting over the jitters of being on the court for the first time. You've got the win behind you now, but there's obviously a lot more work to do. How do you guys balance celebrating this one and feeling good about it and beginning preparation for the stern test that Texas will be?

KAEMYN BEKEMEIER: It's a brand new tournament, so records start at 0-0. We can't get too high on this one. I know we were all excited to put our nameplate on there and kind of officially be on the bracket and not be in a play-in game but like a real game, not that it wasn't.

I know we're really excited to play against a really high level team. We're also a high level team, but I think it's going to push us to some limits that we haven't been pushed to before. It's just going to make us a better team and better basketball players individually.



Q. Kaemyn, you guys have played some grinders this year. Look at the LA Tech game, and look at what you guys have been having throughout the season. How fun was it, obviously like Coach said you want to hold them to less than that, but how fun was it to have that kind of output on this stage and can kind of see it across the board?

KAEMYN BEKEMEIER: Yeah, scoring a lot of points is fun. It gets us a little amped up. Yeah, I do agree with Coach, I wish we could have played a little bit better defense, but at the end of the day, we got it done.

Yeah, just feeding off of each other, but at the same time, scoring a lot of points is going to help us with getting a feel for each other on this stage. Then again, like I said, just getting those jitters out because this is everybody's first time being at this tournament except one person. So kind of figuring it out and realizing the level of basketball that we're about to go into.

Q. Can you talk about what you liked about the way your team played today and maybe one or two things that you need to work on before Friday?

BETH CUNNINGHAM: I thought we were pretty efficient offensively. I wish we could have gotten some of our turnovers cut down a little bit. We got sloppy at times. But I thought our offensive efficiency was good. We wanted to play with pace on the offensive end of the floor. We knew they were going to try to press us a little bit more to take time off the clock to back us up to the 2-3 zone.

So we really wanted to come out, attack the middle of it, and not just walk the ball up the floor. I thought our kids did a good job of that. Then I thought we did a great job just working inside out in their zone.

To me, that was probably the biggest key on the offensive end of the floor. Then defensively I thought we did a much better job in the second half. Certainly was concerned about their transition game. They get a lot of points up in a hurry, shoot the 3 really, really well.

Proud of how we opened it up a little bit, but then we kind of relaxed on the defensive end of the floor heading into halftime. I thought we did a pretty good job kind of refocusing at the half and understanding it didn't matter what kind of looks we were getting on the offensive end, we had to get stops. Really in the first half we were fairly even across the board.

I thought our offensive efficiency was good. I thought we'd have an advantage inside, which we certainly did, and that obviously proved true on the boards as well, which I

thought would be a big advantage for us.

Q. What went into having Angel in so early in the game. Ended up being kind of cool, she comes in and hits a 3. You had a good flow going there, and she had a big smile on her face. Obviously she made the most of her minutes. To see her in that moment was noteworthy, I thought.

BETH CUNNINGHAM: Honestly, just situational. I knew we could potentially have some matchup issues just in terms of kids that they were playing on the offensive end of the floor. At times they had five guards in there, and all of them can shoot the 3.

Kind of had our usual substitutions with Audrey Hopkins at the 4 and put Cady in there for a little bit, but I just thought defensively we needed another true guard in there to really defend.

Obviously she played there, I think had a little -- I think just more confidence and familiarity understanding what they were really trying to do. So I thought she did a great job just coming in and really helping us on the defensive end of the floor.

Regardless of what her minutes are, she's a kid that always knows what's to do. She knows the scouting report. I can put her in any spot and she knows. She's such a high IQ kid. I thought she came out and did a really good job giving us another guard to help us really on both ends of the floor. More just situational, to be honest.

Q. When we spoke on Sunday, I know you didn't understand why you guys were going to go to the first four as opposed to getting right in, but now that the game's happened and now that you've gotten another win against a quality opponent, do you feel differently about that? Do you feel there's a silver lining to be able to get one more quality win like that before you play a team like Texas?

BETH CUNNINGHAM: No question. I think more than anything, when the brackets came up, just looking at maybe where I thought our NET had been in previous history with potentially where we thought we'd be projected, I think I was kind of surprised. I didn't really expect it. Not necessarily that I agreed or disagreed.

I think our mentality quickly became this is a great opportunity. I don't think anybody -- we're excited to be in the tournament. I think it's more of a surprise that we were turning around and playing so quickly because it wasn't really on our radar, so to say. We thought -- we had just gotten back Sunday night, that we'd be getting on a plane

Monday to head to playing a game on Wednesday. In my mind, you're looking at maybe more end of the week. So I think it was more that than anything.

Our kids quickly flipped the switch. They've done it all year. We've had some quick turnarounds. I don't think anybody was disappointed. I think we looked at it as this was a great opportunity to come in and not only get some -- get everybody's feet wet playing in their first NCAA Tournament, but felt like, if we came out and did what we could, this is a great opportunity to get a win under their belt for the first time in all of their collegiate careers.

Q. Can you talk about turning the page from tonight? Obviously you knew if you won you'd be playing Texas, but what do you see when you look at them? What challenges do they bring for you guys, and what do you guys need to do to compete well against them?

BETH CUNNINGHAM: Yeah. Honestly, I haven't really looked at this any differently than we would for any other preparation. I know my assistant coaches are always looking ahead. As soon as we walk out of here on the bus, they'll have stuff ready to go for me.

I haven't looked at Texas at all. There's been a couple times this year I've probably seen them on TV but haven't watched a game. Pretty familiar with their personnel. I recruited a lot of their kids when I was at Duke. I think one of my last home visits I did was with Maddie Booker. Karen and I went and did a home visit with Maddie Booker before I took the job here.

Very familiar just personnel-wise from having been at Duke and recruiting some of them over the years. Obviously a great team. They've had a heck of a year. Vic Schaefer has done a phenomenal job. I know stylistically how they traditionally have liked to play. He was at Mississippi State when I was at Notre Dame. Just stylistically familiar with that.

Obviously a tall task, but I don't think that we go into this differently than we have any other game. We'll get our kids ready to play. We'll prepare and try to control the things we do that we always talk about that will help them be successful.

I tell them, they've heard me say it throughout the year, regardless of who we're playing, there's a reason you have to put the uniform on and play. You've got to go out, and you've got to earn it. We won't go into this any differently and approach it the same way we have all year.

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