

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Missouri State vs Texas

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Moody Center

## Missouri State Bears Coach Beth Cunningham Kaemyn Bekemeier Lainie Douglas

Media Conference

**Q. For either of you, rebounding seems to have been such a big part of y'all's success this season and last night, as well. What are some of the keys to having that mentality to crash the boards? What is Coach hammering home to you in practice or how do you get yourselves geared up to do that?**

KAEMYN BEKEMEIER: Yeah, it's definitely a key for us every game. I know it's something that's kept us successful is beating our opponents on the boards. It's one of our keys going into every single game, and I think there's just a momentum switch whenever we are beating teams on the boards, so I know that it's really important not just for the posts but also for the guards, and a lot of times we have four guards while we're out there, so we need to have some really good rebounding guards to help us get that success and that momentum.

LAINIE DOUGLAS: Yeah, I think for me, it's an offensive rebound, a defensive rebound, especially offensive rebounds. It's just another opportunity for us to score, another opportunity for us to get our offense going.

I think as much as I can to help out the team to especially offensive and defensive rebound, to box out, make sure they don't get any offensive rebounds because that can really change the game around.

I think that offensive rebounding with both of us is one of our big keys, and I definitely know we try to do our best each game.

**Q. You did such a great job in Conference USA against the bigs. Do you like when you go against**



**these big power schools and they have a bunch of girls Lainie-sized and good athletes, as well? Does that pump you up to play that kind of competition on this stage?**

LAINIE DOUGLAS: Yeah, I've played a lot of competition, even throughout high school, like in high school I played against Audi. I think it's just so fun getting to play against high competition and showing what I can do, especially to help my team out. I think everyone is trying to get the ball into me as much as I can trying to get it out to them.

So yeah, playing against all of these girls and competition is a lot of fun.

**Q. Kaemyn, I was trying to look at when you would have played against Ashton Judd from Texas. I know you were pretty young, maybe freshman, sophomore year when you got to play here. What do you remember about playing against her, and how cool will it be to see two people from those arcs going against each other there?**

KAEMYN BEKEMEIER: Yeah, it will be a full-circle moment for sure. I mean, the basketball community in Springfield, you feel like you're a lot closer than what you actually are. Thankful with all the coverage that you guys give us. We get to be able to stay up to date, whether we're in high school and then now us in our collegiate careers.

But it'll be good to go against her on the court. I know she's thriving her, and I'll definitely be excited to play her, and I know she'll probably be excited to see some local faces.

**Q. By definition, being a 16 seed up against a 1, that's an underdog situation for you. How are you both approaching this, and what do you think you're expecting of yourselves in this game?**

KAEMYN BEKEMEIER: Yeah, underdogs for sure, but that's the way we like it. That's how we were the whole entire tournament, and we were able to set ourselves up for success and kind of just play with a chip on our



shoulder. I know we're excited to do that again.

We're excited to be in Austin, and hopefully have a huge crowd. To be able to play in front of a big crowd as a women's athlete is going to pump us up even more. We have so much support in Springfield. I know I got pictures from watch parties and whatnot. You don't realize that everybody is watching until after the game, but I know I'm really thankful for Springfield and their support, and we definitely feel the love. So we're going to go out there, do whatever we can, even though we're a 16 seed, and not even have that in the back of our head.

LAINIE DOUGLAS: Yeah, already getting a game under our belt in the tournament is such an awesome opportunity and experience. Just going out there, doing what we need to do, and we aren't going to prepare any different or play any different, we're just going to play our game and go out, be aggressive, play hard, and have a lot of fun, which is the main thing.

**Q. How do you guys assess this Texas team and just the variety of threats that they have on their roster?**

KAEMYN BEKEMEIER: Yeah, a great team for sure. They've had an awesome season. But just like Lainie said, we're going to approach it the same way. We've watched film the same way. We're going to practice the same way. Just some adjustments that we'll make, maybe even some that we'll have to make in game. But at the end of the day, we're playing the same game that we've played all year. Both teams are going to lace our shoes up the same way. We're playing the game that we love. We're playing basketball as a team, and we're doing it on a high level on a big stage, which I know we're really, really excited for.

LAINIE DOUGLAS: Yeah, just being aggressive, we know that this team is super aggressive, so just using our toughness and putting it against them, knowing that we still have a great chance with how tough our team can be.

Just playing with toughness and grit and showing -- kind of like Kaemyn said, how we play and just representing Springfield.

BETH CUNNINGHAM: Just thrilled to be back to have another game on our schedule. Was really proud of our kids last night in a tough battle against Stephen F. Austin. But excited to be back here and playing for another game on our schedule.

**Q. Given that you recruited Madison Booker, I'm just wondering, what were your impressions of her back then, and how have you seen her grow throughout the time she's been at Texas?**

BETH CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, honestly, it's kind of funny because in recruiting even if you don't end up coaching the kids, somehow you keep an eye on them from afar. Obviously Madi is one of them. Love Jordi Lee and her dad; we used to talk often and really liked her, as well. I could kind of go down through their list of All-Americans and players that they have and had some sort of relationship with several of them on the team.

Always thought that Madi had a ton of potential and would be an unbelievable college player, and certainly she's found a great place to do that and develop. Just her versatility, her confidence. She's as good as they come.

**Q. You got to coach against Vic in that 2018 national title game when you were at Notre Dame. Do you think about that often still, just in the context of obviously having that achievement of winning, and did it come to mind once you found out about this matchup?**

BETH CUNNINGHAM: I think just the question being do you think about that often, just winning a National Championship is just such an unbelievable experience and something that you're always striving for.

To have been in that position to compete for National Championships but then also having won one not too long ago, certainly it's something that often jogs your memory.

But not specific to -- we're two very different teams. It's not me against him, and vice versa. It's just interesting, though, that if you're in coaching long enough, sooner or later, your paths usually sometimes cross again through your careers.

**Q. You've won a lot of games in the NCAA Tournament as an assistant coach. Last night your first as a head coach. How did that feel? How was it different in that respect?**

BETH CUNNINGHAM: They always all feel good, whether you're a head coach, assistant coach. Just all the time, the effort, the energy, the preparation that you put into it.

But I think more than anything, as I mentioned maybe last night or the day before, just our kids having an opportunity to know what that feeling is like to win in the NCAA Tournament. There's no better feeling.

**Q. I spoke to Ashton Judd a little while ago and she said she considers you a mentor. I wanted you to talk about your relationship with her, how you met her. I know you got hired here after she had already committed to Mizzou.**

BETH CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, I have a little bitter taste in my mouth on that one. I don't know if she gave you the whole story, but my impression, version of it, and we talked about it when she went into the portal last year, when I got the job at Missouri State, Bill Rowe, our former athletic director from years ago, came into the office one day and said, hey, there's a local kid, she would give her left arm to come be a Lady Bear. I had known who Ashton was when I took the job and certainly we were trying to fill our roster, but literally I think it was the day I got the job. I said, Bill, I know exactly who you're talking about, I think she'd be great here, but I think she just committed to Mizzou. So we go on social media to look, and sure enough, she had committed to Mizzou.

Now, at the time I didn't know -- I believe she went as a walk-on, and once she was there and started playing with them, I think she then earned her scholarship maybe that summer when they realized how good she really was.

I felt like that was a kid that was always supposed to be a Lady Bear and never had that opportunity, however it ended up playing out. But then when she went in the transfer portal last year, I had to call her. I had to take a shot and call her.

Basically I just had said, just respect you a lot from afar and just wanted her to know that we really messed up originally. I never messed up because I never had the opportunity to recruit her, but I felt like we had missed up because that should have been a kid that was playing in a Lady Bear uniform.

We proceeded to talk. We probably talked for probably 45 minutes, an hour. She actually called me back. I had originally talked to her dad and said, I know she's going to be swamped but just wanted the opportunity to talk to her. She called me back and didn't have to give me the time of day, but we ended up talking a little bit and just talked a little bit through her recruiting process, and I knew that we really didn't have a chance to get her at that point.

But she was great. She said, had a lot of respect from afar, knew where my career had been as a player and as a coach. I think she asked any advice that I would have for her as she was kind of going through the transfer portal and the process of trying to find the right place.

But that's the kind of kid, just the way she -- just the conversation that I had with her, like, that's a kid I could tell right off the bat, I got off the phone and I was like, that kid is going to be really successful in life. If she ever has an inkling to coach, that's somebody that you should kind of keep your eye on down the road, just in my short

interaction with her. Who knows, maybe our paths will cross again someday. You never know.

**Q. How would you describe what your team's identity has been this season?**

BETH CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, we've definitely -- we were a new team from the beginning of the year, and certainly had to figure that out and have grown a ton since we first got together in June.

But I think we've really hung our hat on our defense and our rebounding. That's really been our ticket, especially as of late, and I can think of specific instances this year when we had some bumps in the road where we kind of flipped the switch and our kids really started to understand being so locked into a scouting report and game plan and really tightening up a lot of the little things on the defensive end of the floor, and when we started doing that, things really changed for us.

I think it was a huge reason we had the momentum we did, I think won seven out of our last eight games, and prior to that point, really, I think, started to know that that was our identity, our ticket to being successful.

The defensive rebounding has been huge. I feel like we've got a lot of different kids who can put the ball in the basket and we can score, but when we defend, we rebound, we are definitely a much better team on the offensive end of the floor, too.

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