

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

Friday, March 20, 2026

Austin, Texas, USA

Moody Center

Missouri State Bears Coach Beth Cunningham Lainie Douglas Kaemyn Bekemeier

Media Conference

Texas 87, Missouri State 45

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Missouri State contingent of head coach Beth Cunningham and Lainie Douglas and Kaemyn Bekemeier.

Coach, if you could just start our press conference with a statement, please.

BETH CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, congratulations to Texas, to their team, and Coach Schaefer. They're obviously the number one seed for a reason and we certainly saw why. But they've had a tremendous year. Defense, rebounding wins championships. I think they'll have a heck of a shot to compete for a championship.

Proud of the ways that our kids competed. Took us a little longer than I would have liked to settle in but you have to give credit to Texas and just their physicality, their pressure and taking you out of what trying to do. But proud of our kids. It's been a great run here at the end. Thank you to the University of Texas. It's been a first-class experience for our kids.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thanks so much. We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Kaemyn, what were the mean factors that contributed to you guys scoring just 12 points in the first half and then in the third quarter, how did you turn that around to only be outscored by one point?

KAEMYN BEKEMEIER: I think it was what coach said, just settling in. The environment was amazing. We might have



been a little intimidated at the beginning, but just settling in. I think we were getting good shots, just some things were falling. But, yeah, at the end of the day, just settling in and getting that confidence back to go in to the second half.

Q. Kaemyn, can you talk a little bit more about that? When you're a shooter and you're used to having space but obviously you didn't get a lot of space today. When you do finally find yourself with some space, is it hard not to rush the shot?

KAEMYN BEKEMEIER: It's the same game at the end of the day. They're great defenders. Like Coach said, they're number one seed for a reason and also like Coach said, they have a great shot to go win this thing and if not, go really deep into the tournament.

Yeah, it's a new level of basketball. You're not going to get near as much room but that's what you practice in the offseason is not near as much room.

Q. Lainie, you played against some pretty big teams in your year. How tough was it against a front line that big? What was that like going against a group that size?

LAINIE DOUGLAS: Yeah, they were really physical, so I knew that going into here. Kind of worked on my jump shot before the game, just to have it in the bag for this game. They were super physical. I tried to just work around it, but it's still a learning process and I'm excited to keep learning.

Q. I know it's fresh, the loss, but do you have a sense of appreciation for the fact that you made it this far, you earned your right to play against a team that might win the national championship here and representing Springfield, the Ozarks. Can you just talk about, put into words what it felt like to be on this stage, the biggest stage?

KAEMYN BEKEMEIER: Yeah, it means a lot to us. I know our younger selves dreamed of being on this stage for sure. To be able to be here and represent Missouri State and Springfield as a whole I know means a lot to me just being a hometown kid.



But I know our team, we're really happy for each other. Being able to go into as a six seed and win our conference tournament was awesome. We're going to be excited to get together 20 years down the road and share a lot of memories from this season because there's a whole lot of those behind the scenes, things that don't even happen on the court, so we'll be excited for that.

But, yeah, just to be able to represent Springfield means a whole lot to us.

Q. Kaemyn, this is still a pretty young group. I think your youth was pretty apparent this year but you got better and better throughout the year. How much would you like to see this group come back. Obviously anything is potential with the portal and all that stuff, but this group kind of proved that they were a pretty solid young group. How much would it mean for you to see this group come back?

KAEMYN BEKEMEIER: At the end of the day, we're going to lose five people with just being seniors, but with being a young group and having all three of those or four or those freshmen step in in key moments throughout the entire season and just be but in those big positions and in these big moments is just going to help them thrive as student-athletes later down the road.

There's a whole lot of growing that we can do, but there's a whole lot of growing that we did this season that will definitely help us as a team next year.

THE MODERATOR: All right, ladies, thank you so much for your time.

Now we'll direct our next set of questions to Coach Cunningham.

Q. Obviously not the start to the game that you wanted. You have to call a time-out three minutes in. What did you see in the first three minutes and what did you tell the team during that time-out to try to get them to regroup and settle in.

BETH CUNNINGHAM: What I saw was exactly what I was worried about. I was hoping we didn't get off to that type of a start, but just knowing the defensive pressure, the physicality. They just make it hard to get the ball in bounds, so they obviously came out and got some baskets early and then we were struggling just being able to get down into our offense. Just trying to just talk them through settling in.

There's no substitute for the experience of getting out there

and doing it. You can't simulate a game like this. No matter how hard you try, it's just hard to simulate a game like this with their physicality, their athleticism.

It took us a little longer to settle in than I would have liked, but really proud of how we came out of halftime. I thought we talked about some things at halftime and I thought Kaemyn with much more composure and understanding of trying to do what we were trying to do and executing it a little bit more. That's what you worry about going into a game like this, playing in this environment and then just as talented of a team as they are, they just don't make anything easy for you. They're not going to allow you to settle in. That's credit to them.

Q. Coach, I asked Kaemyn, you guys were so young this year and you have so many good pieces coming back for next year. You have an opportunity, if you can get them all to come back if this word climate we're in, how important is it to make sure all those young pieces are still back next summer?

BETH CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, hopefully -- you know, last year we had completely new starting five heading into this year and our turnover last year really was in large part due to graduation and that's my hope this year, our turnover would be due to graduation. Obviously having five seniors, was really thrilled with our freshman class and how they impacted us.

I mean, Lainie is still just a sophomore for us. Kaemyn obviously a junior but I think then with the addition of a really good -- which will be another impactful freshman class coming in, it's too early to think too far ahead now, but I'm excited about the group that we have assembled and hopefully we can keep this group together and it's a group that will continue to grow and build. But the way the landscape is, whether it's due to graduation or otherwise, you feel like a lot of times, you're kind of reconstructing your team every season.

I think more my goal is that our reconstruction is from a graduation standpoint versus a portal standpoint, but that's hard to know exactly what that looks like.

Q. When you look at Texas on film and what you saw in the SEC Tournament, what stands out? What makes you think they have a chance to win it all?

BETH CUNNINGHAM: I just think that they have so many great pieces and then just the style that they play is going to give them a shot in every single game. The way that they defend, the way that they rebound, the way that they just sit down and guard and make you uncomfortable and can take people out of being comfortable and what they

want to run. That's just one side of the floor and it's relentless for 40 minutes.

And then you look at their offensive weapons and their offensive pieces. It's hard to find anybody much better than a Maddie Booker and then you look at Jordy Lee and how she complements them and Rori -- you can just go down the line. They have so many great pieces and seem to play so well together. They're very unselfish. They understand their identity. They play to their identity.

And so regardless of what happens on the offensive end of the floor, defensively and the way that they rebound and defend is going to give them a great shot every single night. There's no question about that.

Q. Can you talk about what the team accomplished this year? Obviously today is probably a tough one to swallow, but like Kaemyn said, 20 years from now they'll have a lot to talk about and remember. What are some of the things you're going to remember about this team and what they were able to accomplish this year?

BETH CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, I just told the team after the game, there's very few teams that really get to finish how they want to finish. That's the reality. You look at Division I, Division II, Division III, you have your national championships but other than winning a national championship, there's very few teams that get to finish it how they want.

Obviously I think today stings and we would have liked the outcome to be different. You want another game on your schedule, but it certainly doesn't take away from what this team accomplished this year, and I think as a coach, one of the things you strive to do is accelerate the learning curve.

Today's landscape, you're kind of reconstructing your team every year. So you're trying to accelerate the learning curve as much as possible and it's been a group that's been together, seven new players, seven returners, been together since June and as a coaching staff, you're trying to find the best way possible to accelerate that. It's not that you've -- you probably don't have the luxury of coaching kids four or five years anymore as you did in previous times.

Just, I think, our growth was tremendous. I think individually our kids got better. I think collectively we got better. As a coach, your goal is to be playing your best basketball of the season at the end of the year. So I think for the way we continued to grow from some of the successes, we grew time from some of the bumps in the

road to then turn it into learning those tough lessons.

And to be playing our best basketball at the end of the season, not just the conference tournament but prior to the conference tournament, we no question were playing our best basketball and that carried over to conference tournament. The opportunity we had the other night against Stephen F. Austin.

I just think the growth, the development, I really appreciate the kids' approach and their mentality. A lot of times -- I'm a little old school in how you approach adversity. Don't throw in the towel and fight through those things. So to see our kids just stay the course and learn from those experiences to be growth opportunities.

I give a lot of credit to the kids and just their mental approach and in the course of a long season, to feel like the way we finished is they're going to remember that stuff for the rest of their life and to have that opportunity to come here and win on a big stage in the NCAA Tournament and then to come out with a conference championship.

I told them 10, 20, 15, 20 years from now, they're not going to remember who scored the baskets, who rebounded, who played, but there's going to be a lot of journeys throughout the season that are going to be lifelong memories.

Q. Are there certain characteristics that you think are kind of common denominators for national championship teams?

BETH CUNNINGHAM: I've been on one so I can only speak from experience. Certainly you have to have enough talent. There's no question about that. You have to have enough talent on your team to compete. To win a national championship you have to have enough talent to compete at that level.

From there, you look at the elite teams across the country. They're all talented, but the same things that those coaches preach to an extent or the things that we preach to our kids about winning a conference championship, it's being tough and hard-nosed and selfless and fighting through adversity, handling success, handling failure. We preach being unselfish and playing for something bigger than yourselves. There's so many intangibles and characteristics that never show up on a stat sheet. Those are things that I know have helped us be successful in our program but at the same time, having won a national championship, that was things that separated those teams as well.

There's no secret ingredient, but I know how important

those intangible characteristics are. There's no question about that.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time this week. We enjoyed having your team here in us a ton. Congratulations for your team's successes this season. Thank you.

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