

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 2 Semifinal - UCLA vs LSU

Friday, March 29, 2024

Albany, New York, USA

Times Union Center

LSU Tigers

Coach Kim Mulkey

Angel Reese

Flau'Jae Johnson

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



KIM MULKEY: I'm a lot younger than you want people to believe. No, I have been around a long time, since I was 23 years of age, and I have seen a lot of wonderful things in this game.

I don't know that I have ever seen anything like now, and I keep asking myself why. What is making it this way now. I don't know that I have the answer. I have lots of thoughts, but it's wonderful. It's off the charts.

We have people watching our game that never gave a flip about women's basketball before, and I love that.

Q. Another big picture basketball question, but curious your thoughts on the transfer portal opening up the day after Selection Sunday. I know a lot of coaches that have made the tournament have spoke about the fact they should be able to focus on the postseason.

KIM MULKEY: Well, I do just focus on the postseason. That's what you have assistants for. Obviously it's the rules, and my coaches work it hard. It's like free agency in baseball. You'd better open that computer and see who's in the portal. I don't.

It's the same way with NIL. I don't deal with NIL. We have people that do that. I just want to focus on X's and O's and coaching basketball.

Q. A logistical question for you. Can you talk about what it's like with these new super regionals in terms of locker room changeovers and knowing when to get here and shootarounds? Is there something you would change, and is there something they learned from last year that is helping this year?

KIM MULKEY: Last year was the first year, I think, wasn't it? Eight teams have to be accommodated for in Albany. When you bring in eight teams, do you have eight hotels that are all of equal value, that are all the same? Probably not. I don't know how many cities do.

That's a concern, is that when you get to a Sweet 16, some

Q. Kim, since you made your statement I think a week ago, I'm wondering if you've heard from the Washington Post, and B, what it's been like kind of waiting for that story to come out?

KIM MULKEY: I did make a statement, and that's all I'll comment on at this time because all I am focused on is to try and win another basketball game. Thank you for asking, though.

Q. Not to belabor the point, but from what you have been told or what you have been asked --

KIM MULKEY: About?

Q. The Washington Post story --

KIM MULKEY: I'm only here today to talk about the next game.

Q. Can I just ask do you think that would've been written about male coach or a coach in the men's game?

KIM MULKEY: That's for you to write.

Q. A big picture women's basketball question which I hope doesn't offend the rules of the NCAA, you've been around the game for a long time playing in it and coaching in it. Can you talk about the growth of the game, the viewership, the attendance. This region has some very big games in it, including yourself, Angel, Caitlin and a few others. What you've seen in your time as far as growth.



people won't ever go past a Sweet 16. It's a big deal. So are the accommodations, whether it's food, hotel, anything, are they all going to be of equal -- what's the word I'm looking for? Value, I guess.

I get concerned about that. Is that hotel as nice as the next hotel?

I know we do seeding. The higher seeds get the nicer hotels, but maybe we'll reach a place one day where we can give the bids to people who can say here are our eight hotels and they're all great. That doesn't mean they're bad hotels, but I think kids look at stuff like that.

Unfortunately, the bids go out before I don't know how many years ahead of time. Are we getting enough people bidding on the women's game, and maybe that's why one is where it is and one is where it is. I don't know. That would be an NCAA question.

I know with the personalities and the ratings and how good the game is right now, maybe we will get more bids to host.

Do I like the eight? I'm pretty good with what we used to have. I'm pretty good with what we had.

But that doesn't mean having eight in one spot is bad. But just make sure if you're going to have that many in one city that everything is pretty equal.

Q. Two things on just strategy for the game tomorrow. I'm wondering for Angel to have gone up against Kamilla Cardoso, how much does that inform what you're going to be using as strategy for her with Lauren Betts? And then in terms of the pace of the game, you guys played real fast this year, which I know is not typical for you guys. Is that something you're looking to do to push the pace more against UCLA which was more middle of the pack?

KIM MULKEY: Well, I would correct you there. We play fast. I want to run. Does playing against Cardoso help us with Betts? Height-wise, absolutely. They're tall. So Angel has guarded Cardoso numerous times in the SEC. That will help.

They're two different kind of players in a lot of ways, but the height obviously is a big common deal amongst both of them.

Q. How well are players today equipped to deal with distractions? Your team in particular, how well do you think you're able to deal with that? There's a lot of stuff that goes on with these players, the fame they have and that sort of thing.

KIM MULKEY: Are you talking about social media and media in general?

Q. In general, yes.

KIM MULKEY: I'm not on social media. I don't know. My team seems to be as focused as they were when we won it all last year. I think that's what you do in film work and on the court and all that stuff.

Now, I don't walk behind them and say how many times have you turned your phone on today or anything. It's the world they live in. We're focused. I don't know if I can answer that for them because I don't know what they do in their personal life when it comes to all that stuff.

Q. You talked a little bit about the post matchup, but what specific skills does Lauren Betts have that you guys are going to try and neutralize?

KIM MULKEY: Well, the first skill she has is not a skill. She was blessed with height. Lauren is -- she just has post moves at a young age. She's pretty young, and she's got good guard play around her to where when she gets double-teamed or gets in trouble down there, she's got outlets and people to throw it to. She's very skilled.

I could give you a million great things about that young lady. I recruited her out of high school and she's just good. She's just really good.

Q. I'm curious over your career, over all the NCAA tournaments you've been to, have you changed anything about how you approach overall the tournament and trying to get back to the Final Four?

KIM MULKEY: Well, you mean strategy-wise, X's and O's-wise or preparation or what?

Q. In general has anything changed at all?

KIM MULKEY: I think you live and you learn. I think we mature as coaches, and things that you used to do you might not do anymore. I think each team is different in how you approach it, what they need and what they don't need.

Coaching is coaching, but each team is different, and so you might do something a little bit different this year than you did 10 years ago. You just have to go with your gut.

I've always had a good read of my team, and you don't just get stressed over it. You don't over-coach. You don't overthink it. Go play ball.

Q. Following up on Lauren Betts, she had said that she played with Angel for Team USA last summer. Does that help Angel or you guys having a familiarity, the fact that the two have played together in addition to seeing them on film?

KIM MULKEY: You're telling me something I didn't even realize. Angel hasn't mentioned it. I never even thought about it. We're just in the film room watching games of who they've played this year, and unless she's mentioned it to any of our assistant coaches, I can't tell you that I've ever had a conversation on what she does good or does bad or how I'm going to guard her.

Angel just listens to scouting reports and chimes in if she sees something on the scouting report that she doesn't understand or on the film that she thinks would be better. But hasn't even mentioned that.

Q. Kim, in your experience, how much stock is the NCAA Tournament in terms of players that you have that are weighing the option of potentially entering their name into the WNBA draft? In your experience do you have scouts and GMs that talk to you about how they played during the tournament down the stretch? Does that factor in at all?

KIM MULKEY: Most of the -- I don't talk to a lot of scouts. I think they probably talk to my coaches, but I don't even know that. If they do talk to them, it's personal relationships and asking about things.

Scouts will call me -- when I say scouts, I'm talking about WNBA coaches, and they'll ask me things throughout the course of the year.

But yeah, I don't know that it -- at this point, I really don't think competitive athletes think about the next level. I think they just want to win. They're in the moment. They're enjoying themselves. They know that when it's all over, they'll have a decision to make: Come back on go. But we don't sit around and talk about it.

I've said many times through the course of the year what I thought Angel and Hailey would do, but we don't talk about all that. That'll take place when it's all over.

Q. UCLA was talking about watching Carolina tape and Cardoso, the way they played against you. I was just wondering having just played Middle and having played Carolina, having talented bigs but also dangerous guards, how much does that help your prep?

KIM MULKEY: Well, if everybody looked at the Carolina

tape, we'd all be scared because they're that good.

Everybody is good. At this stage, this is the most wonderful thing; we talked about how the game had changed. The game has changed because of the transfer portal, in a lot of ways in a good way.

Now, the portal hurts a lot of coaches and can devastate your program, but you also gain. But what I'm thinking is happening is you're seeing parity in the women's game because of the transfer portal.

You've got 16 teams here. They're good. They're good. I don't know going all the way back to when I was a player if we ever thought there were more than one or two or three teams that were going to win it all.

Now you really don't know. We're a classic example of that. Last year nobody thought we would win a National Championship, but we did. I like that. I like the fact that we all have to stay on our toes and recognize that there are more than two or three teams anymore that just dominate the women's game.

Q. Everybody is going to look to the post play, but how important do you think guard play, especially you being a former guard, is going to be in this matchup?

KIM MULKEY: Well, you're going to look at post play because post play is going to be the taller players out there, and both teams use their posts. But you don't think UCLA is loaded at every position? Look, they're supposed to win the game. They're the 2 seed, we're the 3 seed. But we're not going to go away. We're going to fight hard.

They're more than post play. They're good.

We're not just focusing on Lauren Betts and their post play. She averages, I think, nine shots a game. Somebody has got to be shooting those other shots. That answers your question. They're good at all positions. They have depth coming off the bench, and probably even more productive depth than we have had of late.

But they're good.

Q. Angel, being from Baltimore, I wanted to ask you about what happened with the Key Bridge. Are your people okay? And if you have any thoughts about it?

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, I'm not exactly sure what happened, but I know a ship crashed into the Key Bridge, and that is a bridge that my auntie drives over every day to go to work and we drive over it to get to her house.

So I'm not sure the route she's taking right now or if she's been able to go to work since then, but my prayers are to everyone that hasn't been found yet and the ones that are found and are still suffering from injuries.

I'm praying for Baltimore right now, and I hope everything gets resolved.

Q. Question about the game, the matchup specifically. Lauren Betts obviously a different player from Kamilla Cardoso but they share the height. I wonder what you take out of your matchups with Kamilla that you're going to plan to use her playing against Lauren Betts?

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, both of them are great post players. Luckily I was able to play with Lauren this summer with USA Basketball, so kind of understanding what she brings. She's a really skilled post player.

I think the difference with -- Kamilla is a really great defender, so just being able to understand how I can play 6'7", 6'8", so being able to bring them out of the paint and just use any speed and quickness around them I think is going to be my advantage.

Q. Angel, their ability to pass out of the post, as well, and Flau'jae, Middle Tennessee had great guard play that you had to keep in mind. How much is this team similar, and did that last game prepare you for this?

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, for sure. They have great shooters on the wing, and it's crazy because we're familiar with most of them, Londynn, and Kiki is from my area as well. Played with Charisma as well this summer for USA.

We know these players kind of like the back of our hand and understanding when we can dig in, when we can double the get out on the shooters, as well.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, I think it's just going to be understanding matchups, shooting percentages, where they shoot from, where they don't. For me, that's going to be a part of my decision making when I'm guarding the post.

We have a good game plan that we're working in, and as long as we execute that, I think we'll be fine.

Q. Angel, this might be a silly question, but facing a big like that who has more size on you, do you get excited? Does it fuel that fire to -- let me show you what I can do?

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, of course people are going to think that I'm not at the advantage, of course, and I'm not going

to be as well against bigger players, but I think I've proven myself a lot this year playing against bigger players.

Again, I know my matchup, and I can't just take this one matchup and let it dictate the whole game. Being able to stay out of foul trouble is going to be important, but just knowing my matchup and being able to focus on it but also help my teammates, as well.

Q. Angel, there seem to be more big names in women's college basketball this year than ever before, whether that's because of NIL or whatever. I was wondering as one of those big names, is there somebody other than someone on your team in college basketball that you would pay to see or a player out there that you think has flown under the radar that you think people should be aware of, a name that they may not know?

ANGEL REESE: Dyaisha Fair from Syracuse. Flau'jae just gave me that one. That's crazy. She didn't get a lot of publicity this year. I don't know what was the reason, but scoring was just up there, I think she was third in scoring this year.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, all time.

ANGEL REESE: All time scoring and she didn't get that for whatever reason, but I think she deserved that and she played amazing this year.

I played with her too this year. We learned with her this summer with USA Basketball as well. She's a great player.

I think the game is growing in a great direction. Being able to be a part of it, being a part of history negative or positive, I'm really happy where we are right now and being able to grow the game. I know we'll look back in 40 years and understand that we were trailblazers.

Q. Angel, you guys lead the nation in terms of getting to the foul line, and you've been able to convert there. Can you talk about how big a factor that game -- of the game that that is for you guys this season, and how that might be a factor against UCLA?

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, we get people in foul trouble as best we can. Our team is aggressive. We drive to the basket a lot and draw fouls as best we can and get to the line. I think that's our advantage.

So being able to do that -- because we do get a lot of rebounds, I think we are second in the country in rebounds -- so getting rebounds and putting it back up and getting fouled and getting and-ones I think that's something we

love to do, and Coach emphasizes that a lot in practice.

Q. This is for both players and we can start with Flau'jae. You guys have been here before. You've won the championship. What's harder, winning it last year or trying to get back to it again this year and win it again?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: I think this year for us -- for me, I'd probably say Angel, too, I kind of know what it takes. So I think the experience for me makes it easier, but our whole team doesn't have that experience. It's like you're the defending national champs, whatever, but we've got new pieces, and we're just digging deep roots.

I think that our team is just a special team when we all come together. Last year was fun and it was kind of unexpected because we weren't supposed to win, so now we're just trying to build, build, build on that.

Of course we don't want to get home, but we're definitely fighting, and it's exciting for me. I've got anxiety. I'm ready to play.

ANGEL REESE: I would say definitely this year for sure because, like she said, the expectations are higher. We have two players on the team that's never played in the NCAA Tournament, Aneesah and Mikaylah. Understanding experience matters and last year we had much more experience. And last year I just was like, we're winning and winning and winning, I'm like, okay, let's keep going, let's keep going.

Now it's like y'all know we win or we going home. We didn't really have that mindset we're winning, we're winning. But this year of course anybody can beat you, and understanding like everybody wants to beat LSU and understanding those three letters on your chest mean something.

Q. Angel, at this time last year you guys go through that run and your life changes and you become a household name. How has the 365 days since then been? What's the last year been like for you on and off the court?

ANGEL REESE: It's been great. Not everything has been great, but I take it in as a blessing. We were just talking to Holly about how she asked me how I take everything in, how I stay so strong through everything and I just try to stay strong for people that don't. Understanding being an athlete is hard, being a student-athlete is hard, and especially where we are right now where we're household names, we're technically famous, we're celebrities not just in basketball but to everybody in the world.

So just being able to be inspiring, being able to have an impact everywhere we go. People are running and chasing and want autographs. It's been great and it's also a downside of the negative stuff, too. I wouldn't want to be in a negative place right now.

I'm just happy and blessed and just continue to keep praying for better days and great days.

Q. You talked about the experience of last year. Is there one thing in particular that you learned that will be helpful to you this year or that you've passed on to the players who have not been through this before?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, just letting the game come to you. I think when you do that, you just play it like it's another game. You know it's win or go home, but you try not to put that pressure on yourself.

I try to tell that to Mikaylah, our freshman, our star freshman guard, one of the best in the country may I add. I try to tell her like just play your game. And I had to learn that. I was so nervous last year. I was fumbling the ball, and last year Miami game I was so nervous, turned the ball over.

I just told her like just have fun and play and just let the game come to you. I think that's a part of that poise and that experience, knowing that the game could change on the drop of a dime, so you've just got to play hard.

Q. Flau'jae, we talk about celebrity, so I'm curious about the intentionality with you and your team last year when you were saying yes to some projects more than just a sports drink or just rapping. You also chose Experian, and that seems -- I thought that was an interesting choice. Can you tell me about what was the decision making there? Like I didn't want to just be sports drinks or shoes, I also wanted to do something that was like that?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Absolutely. My NIL deal with Experian is like you get the sports drinks, you've got the shoe deal, but something important is financing and being able to have education behind that. I think a lot of NIL college athletes don't really understand the education behind finances and money and credit and things that we can do.

I always tell people I want these four years to set up my next four because I won't be able to live this again. So me partnering with Experian to educate teens and people in my position about money, about credit. That NIL deal was definitely important for me just to grow my knowledge in

finances but also other people in my position.

Q. Those of us that talk to Kim a lot, do you guys ever feel the need to defend her?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Me, that's my coach, and I love Coach Kim. She believed in me when nobody believed in me. When I was in my recruiting process, every school told me you've got to pick music or you've got to pick basketball, but she didn't. She let me be who I wanted to be. She supported me all the way.

I love Coach Mulkey. She always tells us don't defend me, don't defend me, but you kind of get that from a person that really has your back. You want to have their back, too.

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, I feel the same way.

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