

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

Saturday, March 30, 2024

Albany, New York, USA

Times Union Center

LSU Tigers

Coach Kim Mulkey

Angel Reese

Flau'jae Johnson

Aneesah Morrow

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

LSU 78, UCLA 69

Q. Flau'jae, was this the best game of your life?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: No. I've played better games. I feel like my whole life, I've been hooping a whole long time.

This is just a bigger stage for me, and just give all the glory to God and working. That's it.

Q. Angel, can you talk about that closing 14-2 run? You guys were down 67-64 and it seemed like you had another level there at the end.

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, we've known all year it's going to come down to the last plays and last possessions, and Coach Bob tells us all year, one possession, one possession.

And being able to get stops and scoring and being able to get stops and continuing to score, which is really vital for us.

We also had a thing tonight was, no rebounds, no rings. And I think we kind of did a good job of rebounding. We still got out-rebounded, but as a team and our guards did a great job tonight rebounding.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, I had more rebounds than Angel.

ANGEL REESE: Just one. Just one.



Q. This question is for Angel. You D'd up Lauren Betts pretty well, especially the second half. It didn't look good in the beginning, but clearly you adapted. But it's not the first type of big. You've played obviously with Cardoso; how does playing her help you?

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, at the beginning of the game I was trying to see how the officials were going to call the game. I think I only had one foul going into the second half, so I was trying to feel out the officials, and I had to be smarter and I think I've matured in that way seeing how the game is going to be officiated.

But playing against a great Kamilla Cardoso and then being able to be teammates with Lauren, I kind of know how she plays. She's great player, great post player, and I give kudos to her.

She worked all night for her points. I think I did a great job, but it was a team effort. My teammates dug in sometimes and got double-teams. It wasn't all on me tonight, and I appreciate my teammates for really helping me.

Q. Angel, how proud are you of your ladies? I know you and I have talked all season long about this is not the Angel Reese Show. When you had to go to the bench in foul trouble they did not allow things to get out of hand. Talk about how the team was able to be a team today and win this as a team.

ANGEL REESE: Apparently people thought we were just a bunch of individuals so we took that personal, and we do have stars on our team, we do, and people don't think that we're supposed to gel together.

We've gelled together all year. Some nights it's me, some nights it's Neese, some nights it's Flau'jae. It's so many different players on any given night, and people don't realize that.

Like we have a purpose, and our purpose is to get to the championship, and we don't care who scores. I didn't lose confidence in my team. I knew they were going to come out and continue to do what they do because we have



great players on our team.

The best team won tonight. Also the best individuals on the team won, as well. Let's get that straight.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: I agree. When Angel fouled out, it was like, Flau, you've got to step up. Know what I'm saying? You've got the most experience, know what I'm saying? With Hailey and Neese -- we've played in this tournament before, so it was like, you've got to be the one to step up, know what I'm saying?

I think that I wasn't scared of the moment. I really loved the delight. I love that underdog feeling. Coach Mulkey told me go do what you do, and I did.

Q. Angel, looked like you might have said something to Cori Close as you came out of the game and then again in the handshake line. What were you guys saying to each other?

ANGEL REESE: No, she told me good game. It was another coach that was talking a little crazy.

Q. As we cap off March which is women's history month, can you let us know who inspired you to be who you are today?

ANEESAH MORROW: My mother inspired me to be who I am today.

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, I would say my mom. My mom is a single mom, and being able to -- me and my brother being able to go to college for free will always be something that's inspirational for me.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah. I'm going to get emotional. Sorry. My mom, too. Like before the game I was trying -- I'm just emotional. I was trying to figure out what's my why, and I kind of just looked at my mom today like I never looked at her before, and I was like, I know my why now, and I had just a different level of passion.

I knew I was going to play with today, and I seen my mom out there and she just sacrificed so much for me, so it's definitely my mom.

Q. Flau'jae, can you talk about the run to try to repeat, and how did being on this stage before help you guys tonight as you're coming down the stretch?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: I think we just take it one game at a time. We're high right off after of this dub, but I think we'll give ourselves until like 4:30 and then we're locked into the next game. You've got to have that mindset going into the

tournament. You've got to have a short attention span.

That's the route that I'm taking. Yeah, I had a good game today, but now I have to flush it if we really want to go far in the tournament. I just love this team's togetherness, and we just have that experience. My experience to the team, just flush it. Game was good, okay, cool, but we got to watch film and we got to dominate the next one, as well.

Q. Angel, when you said it was another coach who was talking to you, can you give us more information?

ANGEL REESE: Next question.

Q. Flau'jae, your emotion showed when you were on the court tonight. I was just wondering, I saw you also kind of go over to their fans and kind of point after the game was over. Was there something you were saying to them?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, it was just their fans talking, saying -- it's just regular basketball stuff. Stuff like that gets heated in the moment.

Q. Angel, it's almost like the world is against y'all. Is it the motivation within because of that? Is that why y'all are out to prove a point?

ANGEL REESE: We're the good villains. I was talking to Kramer about that. Everybody wants to beat LSU. Everybody wants to be LSU. Everybody wants to play against LSU.

You've got to realize like we're not any regular basketball team. Like Coach talks about it all the time, she calls us the Beatles. People run after our butts. People are coming at games. You're seeing sellouts, you're seeing people buying jerseys, you're seeing more sellouts than the men.

We're impacting the game so much and all of us are super competitive and want to win and do whatever it takes to win. We're just changing the game.

We were talking about we're doing the unknown. Me being able to be on the court but also off the court, I like to model and do other things. I can do both.

Flau'jae can do both. Aneesah can do both. We can all do both. That's what people don't believe in. Like they don't think that we're focused, and we prove every single night when we get between those lines, we're focused.

That's what we're worried about. Just being able to have teammates that have my back, have teammates, have

coaches just have each other's back this whole time, I don't care what the outside thinks. I know what's going on in that locker room.

Q. Angel, not so long ago we passed the 50th year of Title IX I think in 2022, which was an important fight for women's equality in sports. As we look at women's basketball today, as much as it's grown, can you guys talk about how important it is to be a part of that history, how much you guys have grown women's basketball in general?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, it's like we're doing it because we're so -- we're kind of setting the blueprint and people always tell us how we should act, how we should dress, how we should talk.

But there's never been people who have done this before and in the light and in the social media before. There's going to be kids after us that follow and we try to set a good example for them, but we have a coach that yesterday she told us, be you.

She's had like a 30-written speech, but the only thing that I really heard was, be you. That's the only thing that I heard because it really struck me in my heart.

As long as I produce on the court she wants me to be who I am, and as individuals I think you kind of need that confidence from your coach. Coach said, I don't care if you're an astronaut, as long as you land on the Moon and come back before 1:30 practice, so to have a coach support us we're able to blaze those trails, we're able to be who we are in this world.

We only get four years to do it so you've got to maximize it.

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, I think it's just important being able to take scary steps. I've said so many things that a lot of people are scared to say and I'll take the hit for it.

But I know I've impacted so many different people, young Black girls that look up in New York City like you said and see Angel Reese. They know they can do this. They know they can be in this position one day.

It's crazy, full circle. It's almost a year since everything has transpired and our life has changed. Since the National Championship we ain't had peace, and it's crazy to say that, that we won at the highest level in college and we haven't had peace.

But I wouldn't want to change this day. I wouldn't want to change where we are right now. I wouldn't want to change the three letters across my chest because it means

something, and I want to be a part of history.

I want to be a part of this culture, this sisterhood and just keep winning and winning and winning, and when we look back in 40 years and when we are old and sitting in our rocking chair like Coach Mulkey always say and just be like, we did this. We made history. We were a part of that, and we were trailblazers.

Q. Kim, how did you think the officiating affected the game? There were a lot of close calls being called both ways. Both post players got in a lot of foul trouble.

KIM MULKEY: Yeah. It's basketball. I thought the officiating was fine.

Q. The Washington Post story about you published today. Have you had a chance to see it, and do you have any comment on it?

KIM MULKEY: No. When did it publish?

Q. A couple hours before the game.

KIM MULKEY: Imagine that. Must have thought y'all would look at it, get some clicks or be a distraction. No, ma'am, I haven't read it and I probably won't read it. I probably will have my attorneys communicate with me to see if there's anything in there that we need to be concerned about.

Q. Kim, your players kind of said it; they've kind of embraced this us-against-the-world mentality. Is that something you've embraced, as well? Do you tell them to enjoy having the black hat on, enjoy being who you are? What is your message to them in terms of that us-against-the-world thing?

KIM MULKEY: How many of you in here are mothers? Raise your hand if you're a mother. How many of you in here are grandmothers. Damn, I'm the only one.

I hope this kind of answers your question.

These young ladies -- I saw an article -- I didn't see it, someone sent it to me. It was a commentary from the LA Times. I'm not sure if that young man is in here.

You can criticize coaches all you want. That's our business. You can come at us and say you're the worst coach in America. I hate you, I hate everything about you. We expect that. It comes with the territory.

But the one thing I'm not going to let you do, I'm not going

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

to let you attack young people, and there were some things in this commentary, guys, that you should be offended by as women. It was so sexist, and they don't even know it.

It was good versus evil in that game today. Evil? Called us dirty debutants? Take your phone out right now and Google dirty debutants and tell me what it says. Dirty debutants? Are you kidding me?

I'm not going to let you talk about 18 to 21 year old kids in that tone. It was even sexist for this reporter to say UCLA was milk and cookies.

Now, you women sit there and you keep your mouths shut if you want. I'm in the last third of my career, but I'm not going to let sexism continue. And if you don't think that's sexism, then you're in denial.

How dare people attack kids like that. You don't have to like the way we play. You don't have to like the way we trash talk. You don't have to like any of that. We're good with that.

But I can't sit up here as a mother and a grandmother and a leader of young people and allow somebody to say that.

Ms. Armor, I think you asked me the other day and I cut you off, didn't I? Maybe that's your story to write. Didn't you ask me something about a man and I cut you off? Think about what I'm saying, okay?

Because guys, that's wrong. I don't even know what dirty debutants are, but I know when I Googled it, I went (gasps). Growing the game was a part of it. How many of you have been to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, raise your hand, and seen our games? How many of you have been to an SEC game when you played on the road?

You want to talk about growing the game? Go see our crowds, people.

I don't get that. I'm sorry. I come from a different generation. I get it. But I know sexism when I see it and I read it. That was awful.

So I hope I've answered your question. We just play hard. We play competitive. It doesn't matter if it's my son out there. It doesn't matter if it was anybody's brothers out there. We're out there to kick your rear end, and that's how they play. It's how I was taught by the greatest in this business. Look at the people I played for. They're Hall-of-Famers, legendary coaches. They probably couldn't coach in this generation.

But that's who I learned from.

I'm done.

Q. Do you have any plans tomorrow either personally or with the team to celebrate the Easter holiday?

KIM MULKEY: Absolutely. Absolutely. Every Sunday if it wasn't Easter, we have devotion. We have devotion as a team. Every morning and every noon and every dinner meal, each kid is asked to pray, and we don't have a roomful of Baptists, Methodists -- we have Muslims, we have Jewish kids, we have all walks of life, and we respect whatever prayer they want to say.

To answer your questions, you'd better believe that we will do that. Thank you for asking that.

Q. You've always said from day one when UConn was running the show, you hadn't made it clear, and now you saw what's happening now. In this tournament everybody thinks the team out there playing now, everybody thinks they can win it. Of course you guys with being champs, there's a variety of teams -- what are you telling your team or what are you saying to your team to make sure the other teams -- this isn't always guaranteed? What are you telling them that's helping them keep this run going?

KIM MULKEY: I'm just me. I'm real. They feel me. I say things in that locker room that if you were just on the outside and you heard, you would go (gasps), but they love it. They feel my energy. They feel my warmth. They feel my realness, and I'll do the same thing in preparation for this next game.

All I want those young ladies to do, all of them, I want them to graduate, and I want them to go in this real world and kick ass. If I can prepare them for that through the good, the bad, the ugly, the ups, the downs, you learn everything about the world through sports.

That's all I care. That's all I care about.

Q. Kim, regarding the game, what did you see from your team as UCLA was making its run and obviously came back from the deficit, first off? Then why do you feel like they responded, particularly Flau'jae, the way they did to get you guys the win?

KIM MULKEY: We extended the lead a couple times; we just couldn't get over that hump. We should have gone in at halftime with a 10-point lead and we gave up a three.

Then we took another lead. I'm not sure if it went up to eight or nine or whatever it was, and then they would chip

away at it. So you're continually telling them the little things you have to do to win this ballgame.

I thought Aalyah Del Rosario was big for us tonight. She has the size and the height to compete in there with Betts, especially when Angel got in foul trouble. I thought that Morrow took over a little bit offensively when we got really, really tired. We got tired.

I just thought a lot of individual players did a lot of little things to help us just keep playing the game. One of the ways I've always thought that we can win a lot of games is we get to the foul line, and we did that again tonight. I can't remember did we shoot 20 something, 30, I don't know what it was, but get to the foul line, attack.

You can't be afraid of height. She's going to block your shots. Just take it in there and keep going at them. Run the floor. We didn't get enough run-outs and enough transition buckets, but we got just enough at the right time.

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