

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 2 Final - LSU vs Iowa

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Times Union Center

LSU Tigers

Kim Mulkey

Angel Reese

Hailey Van Lith

Flau'jae Johnson

Elite 8 Pregame Media Conference



KIM MULKEY: Well, coaches don't want the attention. It's all about our players, and that's probably the first thing she would tell you. You don't have those wins without players.

I'm not sure where all Lisa has coached in her career, but she's been at Iowa a long time. We talk about growing the game; look at their fan base.

Lisa, I just have much respect for what she does with her players. I think the sign of a great coach is you adapt and you adjust to the personnel, and while each coach has a different style, if you don't adjust and adapt to each team you have, you become stagnant.

I think that the team she has and the things that they do to be successful tells you that she understands and knows the game.

Q. Two questions, just to put a pin on yesterday. The first one is whether you've heard from Cori Close after she issued her statement over re-tweeting the LA Times story that you mentioned yesterday? And the second one is whether you can use -- this is about the game. Whether you can use any part of your game plan from last year's championship game as you go ahead and game plan for tomorrow?

KIM MULKEY: I have not heard from Cori Close. Now, let me back up a little bit. Guys, I don't know social media. I don't read newspaper articles unless somebody gives it to me. I was actually in the bed sleeping with my grandson, and my assistant sent this Cori Close apology. I didn't even understand what that was about. So they had to explain that she re-Tweeted something. Is that the right word? Because I guess she re-Tweeted that article. So I read it.

Second part of your question?

Q. Whether you can use any part of your game plan from last season against Iowa as you game plan now.

KIM MULKEY: Well, each of us are a new team. We're not the same team we were last year, nor are they. But you certainly have some key pieces on each team.

Q. I've heard you say in the past, Flau'jae has more joy in her heart than any player you've ever coached, if you can expound upon that. Second, if you can talk about her mother Kia. She obviously got very emotional, Flau'jae did, up here yesterday talking about her mom.

KIM MULKEY: I can describe Flau'jae in so many ways because I get to see her every day and coach her on her good days and her bad days. As you watch Flau'jae play and you're just a casual fan that has no allegiance to LSU, you watch her and you go, wow, I just like watching her perform.

An example of that, maybe the blocked shot yesterday. She giggled and grinned all the way down the floor. She was so proud at 5'9" that she could get up there and block a 6'7" young lady's shot. The joy, she was just like, wow, that's a memory for me.

When you hear her talk, she just has that joy about her. She has no agendas. She gets very little sleep. That kid is probably up at 5:00 every morning writing stuff for her career and goes to class and comes to practice and works out.

Q. One of the great things about so many more eyes on women's basketball is people get to learn about some of the names that people who are in women's basketball know about. I wonder if you could talk about Lisa Bluder and what she's done for this game.



Our game plan will not even mention what we did last year because we don't have the same personnel.

Q. Kim, piggy-backing off of that, what have been the biggest differences you've noticed between this year's Iowa team versus last year's Iowa team?

KIM MULKEY: Well, the biggest same is Caitlin Clark. The difference is the personnel. The difference is those that were role players last year are now big players, which is what all coaches hope, is that you respect the process, and when your time arrives, you take advantage of it.

They're still going to shoot a lot of threes. But Caitlin Clark is a generational player. She's not all about threes. She can pass the ball. She can take you off the dribble.

Obviously our focus will be on her but not solely on her. Caitlin is going to do what she does. You're not going to stop her. You just hope that you can contain her a little bit and make sure that you do your job on the other four players.

Q. When Lisa was speaking last night, she said it's unfortunate that you're meeting this early in the tournament. What are your thoughts on the matchup in the Elite 8 given that this was the matchup in the national final last year?

KIM MULKEY: This is not to take away from any other team remaining, but I understand her point. We talk about growing the game. Didn't that National Championship game have the highest ratings ever in women's basketball? You're probably going to anticipate this one will, too, but it needs to be at the Final Four.

That may be what she's talking about. I'm not going to speak for her. But man, this would be special if it was at the Final Four.

Q. The LA Times updated their story and took out the line dirty debutantes. I just wanted to know did anyone reach out to you from that organization, offer an apology, and second, do you have any further comment?

KIM MULKEY: I'm going to answer like I did hers. At I don't know what time it is -- y'all have to forgive me. I am old generation. I just don't spend time reading stuff.

Maybe an hour and a half ago, I had someone say the LA Times updated, rewrote, did something, and they did it at 10:20 last night or 10 something, and I said, okay. That was the extent of it. So I'm not sure what the rewrite was.

I'm not sure if it was an apology. I'm not sure of any of that.

But personally no one has reached out to me, nor do I require that. I don't need all that. I just like to recognize when I feel something was done inappropriately to young people that I get to coach.

Q. You touched on it a little bit last night, just the total team effort that it's going to require to win this game. Obviously Aneesah and Mikaylah knocking down jumpers, but the minutes that Del Rosario gave you, what's it going to take in this one?

KIM MULKEY: Well, it's going to take all players that play, and I'm going to give you examples of that. We're not going to have to knock down jumpers to beat Iowa. We're going to have to play good. We're going to have to play hard. We're going to have to defend. We're going to have to get back in transition defense. We have to do a lot of little things to beat them.

Hailey Van Lith had a heck of a game yesterday, and people don't even realize it. Five assists, one turnover, three steals, took a big charge at the end, got her one and only rebound at the end. Those things matter when you're a point guard trying to control a game and hang on to a win. She's got to keep doing that. She'll hit some jumpers.

Aalyah coming in when Angel got in foul trouble, she has the body to bang. I've been begging her to be a Mack Truck and not a Kia, and she was a Mack Truck yesterday. She got down in the stance. It was like she was loving that I'm getting to guard somebody that's my size. She was big for us yesterday.

All of them had to do something good yesterday. Not spectacular. You don't have to play out of your mind. Just everybody contribute.

Q. When you play a team again in close proximity, is it easier or harder to be the team that has lost?

KIM MULKEY: You're talking about -- I'm speaking like for Iowa? I don't know how to answer that. I remember one year in the NCAA playoffs, we had played Texas A&M three times in conference and we won all three of them. They matched us up again I think in the Elite 8 in Dallas, and Texas A&M won.

I don't know if it's harder. I don't know if it's easier. I can tell you that competitors kind of flush the past maybe and focus on the job at hand. It might be a little motivating factor, like if you lost the game to them before. But I can't imagine them being more motivated than my team. I can't

imagine that.

But I think internally, you try to find something that gives you an edge.

Q. Since yesterday I was wondering if either you've read the Washington Post story or had your lawyers read it and if you have any comment on what was in the story.

KIM MULKEY: I haven't read that trash. I'm not going to read it. That's why I hired lawyers. The lawyers will review it, and when this season is over, they'll give me a call and say, this is our next step. I'm not reading that stuff.

Did I answer all of it? Okay.

Q. A lot of people like to point out sort of the differences between Caitlin and Angel. They're sort of the superstars of these two teams. I am wondering if you see any similarities between them in terms of their competitive fire --

KIM MULKEY: Heck yeah. Heck yeah, you see similarities. You've got two very talented players that have brought a lot of attention to our sport. They both trash talk. They both make their teammates better. They both have their teammates' back. They have both elevated our game to where we have people watching that never watched women's basketball before. Yeah, those are tough women.

Q. I can't recall whether Lex or Kateri guarded Caitlin last year, but Angel said Flau'jae got that assignment last year --

KIM MULKEY: Unh-unh, Alexis Morris guarded her the majority of the time. Maybe when Poa, if I remember, took two charges off of her, Poa came in and guarded her. We'll probably have a combination of it's your turn, you go guard her.

Q. Defensively the improvements you guys have made in the last month and a half, does it give you confidence in big games?

KIM MULKEY: Yes, yes, yes. We're going to defend. We're going to defend, and you can be very good defensively and she can still score on you. She's that good.

Q. You talked about Caitlin and Angel both liking to trash talk. Would you like to not see that boil over like it did at the end of the championship game last year, or is that part of the competitive fire?

KIM MULKEY: I turn on ballgames all the time. Was it Luka Doncic the other day waved bye to Vlade because he didn't draft him? You see that all the time. One of the greatest memories I ever have as a former player, won't ever forget it, 1984 Olympics we're at the RCA Dome, the men's team and the women's team coached by Bob Knight and Pat Summitt were going to get to play against pros.

I had front row seats watching Larry Bird, Kevin McHale, Bill Walton, the list goes on, play against our '84 Olympic team, which was Michael Jordan, Patrick Ewing. You can go get the list. I was in heaven. The crap that came out of those guys' mouths, I couldn't quit watching. It's sports. It's sports.

I mean, have you ever thought watching games in the NCAA Playoffs how much you could write about a lot of players and the stuff that's come out of their mouths, not just Angel and not just Clark? Anybody else know what I'm talking about? You can do whatever you want if you choose to focus on that. I don't choose to focus on that because you see it all the time if you turn on and watch pro games.

I was a trash talker. I mean, thank God I didn't have all of y'all following me, cameras and everything else. You're out there, you're trying to get after it. Don't make more out of that than has already been written.

Q. I'm curious, what have you seen from Iowa's role players? Where do they excel and how do you think you can --

KIM MULKEY: The three ball. You'd better guard the three ball. They play their roles extremely well. They have such a connection with Clark that when you think you have the three ball covered or the denial, they'll backdoor you. They're going to run. When you look at Iowa, you may not think they get a lot of transition baskets, but they do.

Yes, they're a three ball shooting team, but they do other things. They're good. They're just good. We're going to have to play extremely, extremely well.

Q. Angel, this is coming from an old guy, but Larry Bird and Magic Johnson played each other in the National Championship game, and then the rest of their careers were kind of linked by the matchup between the two. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about your relationship with Caitlin and how that might define you guys.

ANGEL REESE: One, I'm a little too young to have seen them, so yeah, I'll start there. So people do compare that matchup all the time, but I never seen the matchup, so I'm

not really familiar with it.

I've been playing Caitlin since we were in high school. I played her in my AAU Championship when she played for Iowa Tech, played her at Maryland, and then of course played her here at LSU. Just so super competitive relationship, being able to play against each other and then last year at the National Championship. Being able to just grow women's basketball and just being able to help the game is just something that we've just had.

There's no anything else than that.

Q. Angel and Hailey, your coach was just up here saying it's kind of unfortunate that this game is a regional final. It might be better for the game if you were playing them in the Final Four. I wonder if I could get your thoughts on that.

ANGEL REESE: I mean, it's just another game to help grow women's basketball. It's going to be unfortunate, of course, to play them just in the Regionals, but of course we're just happy to be a part of it. We're happy where we are right now. We really can't complain about it.

I know a lot of people are going to watch the game, and then the next round more people are going to watch that game. Just keep bringing attention to the game. So I wouldn't complain about it.

HAILEY VAN LITH: I don't really think it's necessarily a bad thing. We were going to have to play each other at some point. Maybe it is a little early for some people's liking, but that's nothing that you can control.

Q. I don't know how much time you've had to watch film, but I was curious looking at sort of the post player differences, one big thing for Iowa, what does Hannah Stuelke present that maybe Monika didn't present last year? What are the similarities or differences there, and how does she change this year?

ANGEL REESE: I really like Hannah's game. She's a strong post player. She's more versatile than Czinano, so I know I'm going to have to guard her much higher than I had to guard Czinano last year. Czinano was very, very efficient around the basket as well, and Hannah is, too, but I'm going to have to guard her more out of the paint this game. She also rebounds. She rebounds really, really well.

I think our advantage is going to be at that 4 spot. Aneesah is going to do a great job and then Aalyah being able to come in, too. We have some depth this year being able to do that.

Q. Flau'jae, guarding Caitlin Clark, you're going to spend some time on her, I assume. What does that mean to you, and how will you go about doing that?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: She's just a great player. Last year I got to switch on her early in the game, and I was like, she's not going to pull that for real, and then she pulled it for real from half court, and she made it. I was like, whoa. Kind of had spurts and moments getting in switches with her.

So it'll be a good display for me. It's just like I want to compete at the highest level, and right now Caitlin is the highest level. So if I can defend her, try to contain her and get the win, we'll be fine. There's no stopping her, but containing her, I'm going to take on that challenge.

Q. Hailey, last year the championship game, where were you watching the game from, and what were your impressions of it?

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, I was actually watching the game back at my place at my old school, and I just remember just the excitement of the game and the emotions that you could see through the TV, and you just felt like it was a huge moment for women's basketball.

I felt like a weird, like, drawing to how emotional the game was, and I felt like I really related to that, and that's how I played and stuff. I remember exactly where I was when I watched it.

Q. Hailey, last night's ballgame you didn't have a ton of points, but you did a lot on the stat sheet. Coach Mulkey talked about your contribution. How has it been for you in this tournament and even though you might not be getting the points that you're accustomed to but you've contributed to this team?

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, I mean, I think at the end of the day, I'm just trying to make winning plays, and I think in the fourth quarter I was able to come up with some winning plays for us.

I would rather be known as a winner than a scorer because at the end of the day, if all you're going to ask me to do is score, that's something that I can definitely do.

Yeah, I think at this point it's about making winning plays.

Q. When you play a team in a rematch in pretty close proximity like you guys are going to have tomorrow, is it easier to be the team that has won the first game or the team that has lost the first game?

ANGEL REESE: Obviously the team that has won the first game. The scouting report going into the game last year is the same scouting report going into the game this year. Caitlin Clark is who she is. We're going to have to contain her as best we can. She's an amazing player.

Of course last year the scouting report was just to contain her as best as we can and not let the surrounding players score as much as they could. So we're going to do the same thing again this year. She's scoring 30 when they win, and she's scoring 30 when they lose. It's a win-win-lose situation with it, so we're just going to have to not allow those other players to score.

Q. Kim was just up here and saying that we make too much of the trash talk. Both of you were at the center of that circle last year. Now a year later, how do you view it? Is it just something for y'all on the court and everybody else should just let it be what it is?

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, I mean, it's part of the game. It's a part of why people want to watch the game.

I think, when you think about hockey and the fights, people like to see that. That's not why we do it. It's our personalities. It's what makes the game fun for us.

I think a lot of times people make assumptions, and they don't really know what we're saying and they don't really know the backstory or anything leading up to it. That's nothing that we can control, and at the end of the day, if that's what people want to complain and talk about, it is what it is, but that doesn't mean we're going to change.

I think enough people enjoy it, obviously, because women's basketball is doing better than it's ever done.

You can choose to focus on the people that say bad things about it, but at the end of the day, they're talking online for a reason. If they were in this situation -- they would never be in that situation to begin with because they're too busy commenting on other people's lives.

ANGEL REESE: Respect. For me, I don't think people realize it's not personal. Once we get out between those lines, if I see you walking down the street, it's like, hey, girl, what's up, let's hang out. I think people just take it like we hate each other. Me and Caitlin Clark don't hate each other. I want everybody to understand that. It's just a super competitive game.

I just wish people would realize that. Once I get between those lines, there's no friends. I have plenty of friends on the court that I talk to outside of the game, but like when I

get between those lines, we're not friends. We're not buddies. I'm going to talk trash to you. I'm going to do whatever it takes to get in your head the whole entire game, but after the game we can kick it. I don't think people really realize that.

That's fine. I'll take the villain role. I'll take the hit for it. But I know we're growing women's basketball. If this is the way we're going to do it, then this is the way we're going to do it. You either like it or you don't.

Q. Hailey, you had said you felt drawn watching LSU in the title game. How much did that title game and watching it impact your decision to join them?

HAILEY VAN LITH: I had watched LSU before, and just the excitement that the bench had, the coaches had, the players had playing with each other. I don't know if the title game was a huge -- it was more just the energy that I could feel through the screen, the energy of the games that I had seen before.

Yeah, I mean, it made me -- like I was like, I want to play on that team, and so obviously the emotions I felt in that moment definitely played a part in who I chose to reach out to when I was in the portal.

Q. Angel, you talk about the trash talk. I'm wondering, do you use it as part of your strategy to try to get opponents off of their game?

ANGEL REESE: I think honestly it just gets me going. It's where I'm from. I'm from Baltimore, so that's just kind of what we do. I like to get things going. Especially if I'm having a rougher game and I get a basket, I'm trying to hype myself up and get myself going. It's not -- like I said, it's not personal to the other player on the other team, but it is what it is. You take it how you want.

Q. Angel and Hailey, regardless if you decide to come back or not for another year, you left the game in a better spot than it was before you came in and started playing. Is that something you think is important for your legacy is, hey, women's basketball has been lifted because of what you guys have done on and off the court?

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, I always wanted to leave my impact, just being able to have people say that she changed my life, she gave me inspiration, she gave me confidence, and I think I've done that in so many different ways.

Being a great player is amazing, but being able to have little girls or even grown women come up to me just like,

thank you, thank you for being who you are, thank you for speaking out on things that I'm too scared to speak out on or I don't have the platform to use, just being able to have that person.

If basketball was taken from me today, I would know my impact that I've left on so many different people.

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, I agree. When it goes back to the younger generation -- I just remember being a kid growing up and there was never any women's basketball games on TV. You didn't really hear about the WNBA. I was looking up to men's players. I wanted to be Kyrie, and I wanted to be Steph. I wasn't like, I want to be Sue Bird. There just wasn't any coverage.

I think today young girls can see themselves in other female athletes. We're there on TV. We're in their face. They can relate to us.

I think that that's really special. At the end of the day, that's what it's about.

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