

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

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Albany, New York, USA

Times Union Center

LSU Tigers

Coach Kim Mulkey

Angel Reese

Flau'jae Johnson

Hailey Van Lith

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference



great player. She hit some tough shots. There's not a whole lot you can do about some of the threes she hit.

I think the team around her that plays a role, they did a good job of executing their role. Ultimately they played better than us, and that's what it was.

Q. Flau'jae, going off that last question, you had a few possessions against Caitlin down in the fourth quarter, you were able to force some turnovers, force some misses. What went into taking on that matchup and trying to help spark a run?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: I mean, we studied her film. I think my length kind of bothered her. I'm aggressive. I just wasn't scared. When you play a player like that, you've got to look them in the eyes and really take on that challenge.

Just tried to force her to her left. I know she wanted to step back, and my length can bother her a little bit, but I've got to be better.

Q. Flau'jae, if I could hear you on Angel and the type of leadership that she's provided for this team. And, Angel, could you talk me through what it meant to see what Flau'jae was able to do in a game like this, put up 23 points and be a factor on both ends?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Man, let me tell you something. Everybody can have their opinion on Angel Reese, but y'all don't know her. Y'all don't know Angel Reese. I know Angel Reese. I know the real Angel Reese, and the person I see every day is a strong person, is a caring, loving person. But the crown she wears is heavy. She's the type of teammate that's going to make you believe in yourself.

The leap that I took to my freshman to sophomore year, Angel gave me that confidence to go be a dog, playing next to a dog every day, just to see how the media ridicule her. Went through our problems, but this is my sister right here, and I'm so proud of her.

The media, y'all, how they like to twist and call it a villain and all that, y'all don't know Angel. I'm just happy that I get

Iowa 94, LSU 87

Q. Angel, I know it hurts now, but you had mentioned just kind of what a wild ride this team has been on for the last year. Can you kind of describe what it's meant to you, what it's been like for you, both the positives and the negatives?

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, we've seen everything this year. We have been through so much adversity. I'm more than proud of this team. We don't have that much depth. We have some injuries. I took some time away from the team.

So many things happened this year, so many things hit us, and we never folded. Just being able to come out tonight and give our all for 40 minutes, we came up short, but we have to keep our heads high.

Q. Angel, we saw you go into -- fell into the cameras in the second quarter. Did you twist your ankle, and did that affect you for the rest of the game?

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, I did roll my ankle on one of the cameras. I'm tough, so I tried to play through it, of course, and this is something that has been going on for a little while now. But I played through it, and I'm not going to make that excuse for the rest of my play for the game.

Q. What a tough cover Caitlin is. Obviously you were fighting all night. Just the challenge that she presents.

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, Caitlin is very skilled. She's a



to play with her. I get to be around her presence. Her energy is different. She just makes me a better player. She makes me a better player, and that's what great players do.

HAILEY VAN LITH: I'll say something, too. I think Angel is one of the toughest people I've been around. People speak hate into her life. I've never seen people wish bad things on someone as much as her, and it does not affect her. She comes to practice every day. She lives her life every day. She lives how she wants to live, and she don't let nobody change that.

That's the key to life right there. Y'all do not get to her. Let me say it again. Y'all do not get to Angel Reese. So you might want to throw the towel in because you're wasting your energy. Angel is one of the toughest people I've been around.

Q. Angel, do you have any thoughts on your future plans in basketball?

ANGEL REESE: I'll make a decision when I'm ready.

Q. The third quarter, what do you think kind of went wrong there? Seemed like you were a little snake bit, balls rolled off the rim and some tough turnovers?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, that's pretty much it. They outscored us in the third quarter. I think that was just experience, turnovers, like you said. I'll take that on the chin. I feel like I've got to be better just communicating with my team better, getting us into the offense better. I've got to be better.

I think as a team, that third quarter kind of went under, never came back up per se. But it was small mistakes. Those everyday things we do in practice that -- bad pass here, turnover here, defense, missed execution, transition. So it's going to be things that we've got to clean up when we take that on the chin.

Q. Angel, when you fouled out you walked over to the sideline and you put your arm around Flau'jae and Flau'jae put her arm around you, what did you guys say in that moment, and what was that moment like for you both?

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, just telling her just to keep leading the team and don't give up and keep fighting. Flau'jae has done a great job when I'm down and not having my best game. Being able to have a player, a teammate like Flau'jae as a sophomore, only a sophomore, step up and lead the team through everything. She's led the team throughout the whole year. We've had that relationship,

and just being able to talk to her in that moment was great.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, just like she said, she was just holding me accountable. I was telling her, cheer us on. Cheer us on, keep us going. That's all I could do right there.

Q. Angel, if you were willing to share, what was going through your mind as you heard your two teammates right here on the dais take the opportunity to stand up for you and what your journey has been like that we don't get to see?

ANGEL REESE: I don't really get to stand up for myself. I mean, I have great teammates. I have a great support system. I've got my hometown. I've got my family that stands up for me. I don't really get to speak out on things because I just ignore. I just try to stand strong.

I've been through so much. I've seen so much. I've been attacked so many times, death threats, I've been sexualized, I've been threatened, I've been so many things, and I've stood strong every single time.

I just try to stand strong for my teammates because I don't want them to see me down and not be there for them. I just want to always know, I'm still a human. All this has happened since I won the National Championship, and I said the other day (indiscernible) happy since then. And it sucks, but I still wouldn't change. I wouldn't change anything, and I would still sit here and say I'm unapologetically me. I'm going to always leave that mark and be who I am and stand on that. And hopefully the little girls that look up to me, and hopefully I give them some type of inspiration that know hopefully it's not this hard and all the things that come at you, but keep being who you are, keep waking up every day, keep being motivated, staying who you are, stand ten toes, don't back down, and just be confident.

Q. What is the impact of the LSU-Iowa rivalry on women's basketball?

ANGEL REESE: I think it's just great for the sport, just being able to be a part of history. Like I said, no matter which way it went tonight, I know this was going to be a night for the ages. And just being able to be a part of history is great. Playing against another great player, of course, is always amazing, and our viewership going up. And I'm sure so many different people watched us tonight. I'm happy to be here, I'm happy to keep raising women's sports, not just women's basketball but women's sports in general.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, it's good for the game.



Women's basketball has gone to new heights. I'm happy to be a part of it. Just happy to be a part of it. It's not all the time you get to see players like Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese. I'm just blessed. Last year I was a freshman seeing everything. This year I'm a sophomore able to contribute. Next year I'm going to leave my mark, grow the game.

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, like they said, it's an honor to be a part of it. It was an honor to be in that moment. The best thing about rivalries is they don't end. LSU and Iowa will play each other again, and we'll have another opportunity.

Q. Angel, it seemed like you had a nice exchange with Caitlin in the handshake line. Do you mind sharing what you told her?

ANGEL REESE: Yeah, she just told me, continue to be a great player, and I told her continue to be a great player, as well, and keep elevating the game and go win it.

Q. Coach, what went into the strategy in terms of how you wanted to defend Caitlin Clark, and then also wondering, it seemed like you had a long embrace and some kind words for her afterwards in the handshake line. Just wondering what you said.

KIM MULKEY: Well, there's not a lot of strategy. You've got to guard her. Nobody else seems to be able to guard her. We didn't even guard her last year when we beat them. She's just a generational player, and she just makes everybody around her better. That's what the great ones do. I think they had a kid that scored 21 and 18. She had 12 assists. Caitlin Clark is not going to beat you by herself. It's what she does to make those other teammates better that helps her score points and them score points to beat you.

What did I say to her? I said, I sure am glad you're leaving. I said, Girl, you something else. Never seen anything like it.

Q. Were you surprised at all at the pace of that first quarter?

KIM MULKEY: Yes. In talking to my team, we played to their pace. We ended the first quarter with the lead, but I think their pace dictated that third quarter. I think it really hit us in the third quarter, that pace.

Q. How hobbled or how limited was Angel, and can you talk about the performance that she had despite that injury?

KIM MULKEY: I didn't ask anybody how bad the sprain is, and honestly I'm assuming it's the same ankle that she sprained in the SEC tournament.

But you're in the heat of the moment. She's playing. Trainer never came to see me to give me any details. I don't know that Angel or I, either one, would ever make an excuse that her being hobbled was why we lost the game.

Q. Coach, your team wasn't on the floor during the National Anthem, first part. Was that a conscious decision on your part? Second, can you say what the team was doing during that time?

KIM MULKEY: Honestly, I don't even know when the anthem was played. We kind of have a routine when they're on the floor and they come off at the 12-minute mark. I don't know, we come in and we do our pregame stuff. I'm sorry, listen, that's nothing intentionally done.

Q. Your players had some very passionate and animated comments just now about Angel and treatment and criticism and whatnot. Just your thoughts of what you just listened to?

KIM MULKEY: I'm going to assume something here now. I'm going to assume they're talking about social media attacks, and I don't see all that. I don't do social media.

I thought it was heartwarming. I thought it was touching they are young people that are on social media, and that is their teammate. It sounded like to me they've been wanting to get that off their chest, so I just listened like you guys did.

Q. When you look back at the season, what do you think you're going to remember and feel the most?

KIM MULKEY: Proud. I'm going to feel very proud. I'm going to think of the little things that we overcame, that put us in an Elite 8. You're one game away from going back to the Final Four. I'm going to eventually think of how did we get here. How did we get here? What did we do as a team and as a staff to get to this moment?

So basically I guess what I'm telling you is you learn. You learn. I learn every day as a coach. I look at the stat sheet, and I just put a lot of little notes down there, and I'll file it away and think about it when the emotion of the loss goes away.

We shot the ball almost 20 times more than they did. So that's the pace I'm talking about. Then you look at that second and especially the third quarter where we just missed shots. You'll dissect things like that. Yeah, I could

probably tell you a bunch of things you'll dissect X's and O's-wise. Reverse the ball, just a little bit tougher in the moment, depth. I mean, you can just sit and talk all day about the game.

Only one team finishes the season happy, and boy, we got to do that last year. Somebody will get to do it this year. But everybody else is going to come up here and be sad. You know, there's nothing wrong with being sad. If you're not sad, that means you didn't invest much. So those tears are tears of investment.

Q. Your players have talked about how since a calendar year ago they have become world famous for good, for bad. How has that strengthened your team, changed these young women, and what does it mean for the group that will be coming back and going forward?

KIM MULKEY: I've been doing this almost 40 years. That doesn't count as a player. We've changed, people. We've changed. And we've changed in so many good ways. These young people will have a memory of being a part of something that was this great tonight, many of them being a part of winning a championship last year.

I can't describe to you how good it is right now in women's basketball. That's why I wished this game could have been at the Final Four. Wow. Sure was good for an Elite 8 game.

We're proud to be a part of that. Good, bad, indifferent, our world has changed a lot when you talk about what they were just talking about, social media. I am honestly so oblivious to what those kids see, hear and even participate in when it comes to social media. I know things when I need to know them from coaches or administrators or I need to address things, but I don't invest in any of that. I just don't.

So if you want me to know something, you'd better send it to me; otherwise, I don't see it unless a family member or a team member or somebody brings it to my attention.

Q. I wanted to ask you, Hailey Van Lith, it's clearly her last game, and I'm pretty sure having the night she had, if you could just speak to the contribution she brought to this team and everything she's done because one game doesn't define anything. I'm pretty sure if anybody can speak on Hailey and her contribution, you can.

KIM MULKEY: Well, I hope it's not her last game. But if it is, I'm proud to have been her coach for a year. She's got another year if she wants to come back. So does Angel. I

know they have to make decisions.

But the thing that we talk about a lot, on the men's side, we talk about one-and-dones and how terrible that is. You go through a period, you can't have these players for long periods of time, they're selfish, they're going to take care of themselves. Look, everybody is different and everybody has to do what they're going to do.

Hailey Van Lith came to LSU after being an abundant shooter. Shot it a lot at Louisville. Had great success. Was on good teams. But she graduated in three years with a finance degree. She wanted to experience all the things I guess she saw from afar with our championship last year.

For her to take that leap of faith and leave her comfort zone at Louisville, you don't see many players do that when she was that big a piece to their puzzle. She has embraced learning a new position, taking less shots. Our last game against UCLA, I thought her stats were very good, but I'm an old point guard, and I see all that.

Forever indebted to Haley and her unselfish play to come to LSU to play with a lot of great players and learn a new position.

Q. Just the growth that we've seen from Flau'jae and for Angel to sit there and say the leadership qualities that she showed this year, what does that do for your team coming back next year?

KIM MULKEY: Well, all three of these young ladies were voted captains, and for Flau'jae to be selected as one of the captains as a sophomore pretty much sums it up. She is just a person of joy. She just plays the game with a lot of heart, and she's learning to become a leader at a young age. I'm glad I get to coach her.

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