

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

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Sacramento, California, USA

Golden 1 Center

LSU Tigers

Coach Kim Mulkey

Mikaylah Williams

MiLaysia Fulwiley

Flau'jae Johnson

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Kim Mulkey.

Q. You guys played Duke, obviously, a while ago. How much do you take from that game, if anything, to get ready for the game tomorrow? Do you watch any of the film? Do you focus on what's happened in the last couple of weeks versus three months ago?

KIM MULKEY: Certainly you look at that, but you understand, they're better today than they were in that game. And I think we're better today than that game. But you certainly look at every bit of film you can find.

So, yeah, we looked at it and kind of looked at things they did well and things that we did well and what we didn't do well. You do. You go back and look. But they're so much better today than they were then. But I think we are too.

Q. Before the first and second round, we talked about your big three playing together all at the same time. You guys have played your best basketball here recently. Flau'Jae talked about being locked in and focused. What have you seen that's been different over the last two games for your team?

KIM MULKEY: I think the loss in the SEC Tournament shook them a little bit. I think it was a lot of petty stuff going on in the huddles. And they were not real happy about how it was perceived. And I think they fixed it.

And we've been playing good basketball. I like, as I'm sure most coaches that are at this level, Sweet 16 now, like their



teams and how they're playing or they wouldn't have made it to the Sweet 16.

Q. When you talk about that, the, I guess, what the kids may have gotten out of that loss or just how this group has developed, can you give us a little bit more insight on that? This team has got a lot of experience, but they've also had to evolve during the course of the season.

KIM MULKEY: I don't know that I would say our team has a lot of experience. When I categorize "a lot," I think of, like, UCLA, six seniors. I have some returning players that have been to this level, and just one that has won a national championship.

Eight new players. It takes a while for all of them to get on the same page. You look at our five losses, we don't have bad losses. We were in every game. And that's unusual when you have that many new players. But you learn, why did we lose that game, and you try to fix it, and you try to get better.

It's a season that, not a lot of drama. Didn't have to deal with anything but coaching this year. When you have that many personalities on the same team, that's unusual, but it's also a pleasure.

Q. Haven't seen Divine Bourrage in a couple games.

KIM MULKEY: Concussion protocol. She hit her head really bad. She stayed in the game. And I think she scored a free throw. And then the next day, she came to practice with a headache and it never got better. So she's in concussion protocol.

Q. Do you think she could play this weekend, possibly?

KIM MULKEY: She's not here. They wouldn't even let her fly. That's a four-hour flight. I don't think you're going to put them on a plane if you're in a concussion protocol for that many hours.

Q. Question about Flau'Jae. You said after you played



Duke the first time that you had to rebuild her confidence from her experience over the summer with Team USA. What did that game do for her, her performance in that one do for her confidence --

KIM MULKEY: Well, that game didn't -- you know, that happened this summer. I think that question was asked about her experience playing with USA Basketball. I just answered it honestly.

I don't even know if Flau'Jae even thinks about it anymore. We certainly haven't talked about it. We didn't talk about it before we played Duke. I was just asked that question after the game.

Q. Your offense this year has been so dynamic, right, multiple hundred-point games. What is it about this group that has allowed them to be so electric on that side of the ball offensively in putting up these high-scoring games?

KIM MULKEY: Talent. You look at the talent. You added Fulwiley, who can score the ball. You added Mama, who was the leading scorer at East Carolina; Kate Koval, who was kind of on the bench at Notre Dame but has been so valuable to us. Just a lot of people who can score the ball.

It's not just one player that we rely on. Our offense doesn't run through one player to make everybody else better. We run a style of play that allows all of them a little freedom to score.

Q. A little outside of the game tomorrow night, but looks like Will Wade is making his way back to Baton Rouge. Just wanted to get your thoughts on Will making his way back?

KIM MULKEY: I'm just going to focus on my team.

Q. Obviously your fashion choices have been a lot of fun for women's basketball. But it looks like your assistants have kind of got their own style as well. I'm curious what it's like for you to see your assistants have fun in that way, and if there is a best-dressed assistant on your staff?

KIM MULKEY: I'm not a fashionista. So I couldn't tell you what they wear. I couldn't tell you, gosh, anything that they wear.

I do good to be talked into wearing what I wear. That was a thing that happened when I first got to Baton Rouge, got talked into doing it. And it's just kind of taken off.

But I'm not a fashion person. So I really don't know. I'm

glad you think they all dress good. I hope you think they dress professional. But yeah, I love my assistants, but I don't pay attention to what any of them wear.

Q. I spoke with you back in November about Flau'Jae and how entering her senior year, we were reflecting on how you've seen her grow over the last four years and become the true leader of this team. So over the last however many months since the start of the season, just how have you continued to see her grow, especially now as she's finished her career in Baton Rouge, still obviously games left, but how have you seen her approach these last couple of months?

KIM MULKEY: Flau'Jae, she won the national championship her freshman year, and, boy, she was on a team with some really outstanding older players. So I'm sure she learned a lot from those players.

She's never really wanted to embrace being a leader. She just kind of wants to do good and be a good player and a good person. And sometimes you have to be a leader. And I think she's embraced it this year.

I think that she's more comfortable being a leader because being a leader is not always when things go good. You have to be a leader when you're not playing good or when you're struggling or you're having a bad day.

I think she and Mikaylah Williams have really embraced being leaders of our team this year. And they're both captains. And it's good to see Flau'Jae do that. I think that's probably more so than the things that she does, scoring the ball or anything with basketball, is just watching her become a better leader.

Q. We were talking about the loss that you guys had in the SEC Tournament and how it was a gut check, right, for your group. You mentioned how Flau'Jae has embraced being a leader. Was there anything -- you don't have to disclose the conversations -- but that she did after that loss to kind of help get this team where it is now and how it's playing in this NCAA Tournament?

KIM MULKEY: I don't know about after that loss. I can tell you, after the loss where she missed the two free throws to beat South Carolina in the regular season, do you remember that? After she was initially in shock that she missed both of them, I remember in the locker room, in the film room the next day, how she stood up and she didn't apologize because you don't apologize in athletics.

She wanted to make those two free throws. But I remember what she said: Coach us hard, Coach Mulkey. That's all I remember is that she realized that we have a

special team, and that we had that right in our grasp. And all she said was, coach us hard, Coach Mulkey.

Q. When you were saying earlier about -- I want to make sure I got this right -- that they were not happy with the way the huddles were perceived, was that what you said?

KIM MULKEY: They were bickering. When you're in the heat of the moment, you might say something to a teammate that's not received the right way and they come back at you, stuff like that.

Q. As a coach, is there anything -- do you sort of just let that -- they have to figure that out?

KIM MULKEY: No, first of all, I don't know it's going on. I didn't know until after the fact. I'm in the middle of drawing stuff up and talking, and it's stuff going on. Then when you see it, you address it as a coach. And then you let them work it out. If it's something I need to get involved in.

But it was never anything where they were angry at each other, they don't like each other. It was just the heat of the moment, just like sisters. I'm going to get the last word.

Q. What did you see in your bigs in the last two games? What do you need to see here in California?

KIM MULKEY: I thought they were very productive. I thought the two bigs had the double-doubles. I thought the last time we played Duke, the two bigs played together on the floor. Duke has two bigs.

It's a good match-up for me to have both bigs on the floor against Duke. Do what you've been doing all year. We throw it in there, finish, defend, run the floor, get back in transition defense. But they're playing with a lot of confidence.

Q. You just said they're playing with a lot of confidence. When you look at what Duke has done recently, where have they been better now than they were back when you played them in late November, early December?

KIM MULKEY: I think their confidence is out of the roof too. They won the league. They didn't change anything. Their identity and our identity is the same as it was last time we played. You just perfect what you do.

And I think that they just do things better now than they did then, whether it's defense, whether it's executing things on the offensive end. And all that's because of playing games and playing more games together and having success.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by student-athletes Flau'Jae Johnson, Mikaylah Williams and MiLaysia Fulwiley. Flau'Jae, talk a little bit about your road to Sacramento through the postseason.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: It's been fun playing at home, being able to host. It's always a blessing. Play in the PMAC, I got to play my final game in the PMAC, which was beautiful, my senior night.

We're just excited to be here. We have a fun team, and I think that we're all starting to click. It's been an exciting postseason. Even from the lessons we learned in the SEC Tournament and just continuing to just appreciate every moment from Selection Sunday to playing in the PMAC to now being here in Sacramento.

Q. Obviously you had goals at the start of the year. Where are we on that journey and what ultimately is your goal for the season?

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: I'm one step away from that goal. I think coming into this season, I've gotten to Elite Eight and since at LSU, and it would be lovely for me to get past the Elite Eight and make it to the Final Four. So we're almost there.

Q. Flau'Jae, you alluded to it, lessons learned in the SEC Tournament. Kim kind of talked about it a little bit. You guys having, I don't know if it was a player-only meeting or whatever, but you guys clearing the air. She mentioned something in the huddle. If you want to get into it, what did you need to chop up and figure out?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: It wasn't more so clearing the air. It was more like accountability. We're all grown women at the end of the day. It's kind of just about what are we trying to do here? You know what I'm saying? Really breaking down what we need in our roles and what we need from each player.

I thought that it was a very intentional meeting, but I also believe it was a positive and good reinforcement that all our goals were still in front of us. You know what I'm saying? Our season didn't end at the SEC Tournament. You feel me?

And I think that was the main point, you see what I'm saying? I just believe that that accountability factor was big for us in that meeting, I feel like. Everybody has made progress, you know what I mean? So that's perfect.

Q. Following up on that, Kim was saying you guys

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

bicker like sisters sometimes but there's also really good things that come out of a sisterly relationship and, to your point, Flau'Jae, about accountability. What does having that kind of a relationship as a whole group do in those moments where you have to hold each other accountable and grow but also make sure it is never below the belt? It's nothing other than we want the best for one another.

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: I think having that relationship is kind of what we need to make it to this stage and make it to the next stage. I think the bickering and the arguing is just us wanting to win and us being competitors and knowing that the relationship is knowing it's coming from a good spot. It's coming from a place of love and coming from a place of I want to win and I want you to be better and I want to win with you.

And I think us having that mindset coming into the Sweet 16 and further down the road is good for us so we can hold each other accountable and fix those little details that we may need to fix moving down.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, that's just how you grow. You never grow from it though without being receptive, you know what I'm saying? You can't grow from one person is, like, I did this, and then the other person is still defensive. Nah, you kind of gotta open up and be vulnerable. And I think that's the main thing.

I feel like that's what I had to do too. Like I sat there and I told the team what I thought I did bad and what I think I need to do in this postseason for us to be successful. And I've been trying to work on that every day in practice.

So you've got to be receptive to it even though it hurt. And that's how you grow.

Q. Mikaylah, last year you talked about learning discipline and the small details that can decide NCAA Tournament games. Where have you seen the biggest growth in yourself, especially mentally, this season when the stakes are at their highest?

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: I would say, for me, my roles have kind of changed a little bit from last year to this year. We have a lot of freshmen and a lot of new people. So obviously I kind of had to step into that leader role and be a leader for the young ones and the new ones.

And for me that's a lot just knowing that I'm not one to say much, but I've had to say a whole lot, just knowing that that's what Coach Mulkey wants for me, that's what my teammates need from me.

And I think that's something that I've really locked in on and I've gotten so much better at. And that's something that I need to continue to do for us to continue to make our run.

Q. MiLaysia and Flau'Jae, a lot has been made about Coach Mulkey's outfits over the years. Obviously they're really colorful. But also her assistants get in on it, too. How cool is it to see everybody on the coaching staff get in on having those game-day fits?

MILAYSIA FULWILEY: It's cool. I be drippy. I be telling Kim I like her outfits and stuff. Jobie (phonetic) trying to match her energy. It's just great to see they still got it.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Coach Mulkey ain't really missed this season. She ain't been doing too much. Sometimes I be, like, I don't know, what she got on? But this season she's been coming. Her new stylist is heating up. The coaching staff, they cool. But it's Bob Starkey for me.

Q. When you hear your teammates talking about leadership and opening up, obviously you don't like to talk a lot publicly. How do you internalize that, how do you get your piece in and be a part of all this?

MILAYSIA FULWILEY: Definitely just listen to what they have to say and kind of just go out there and try to precipitate what they're saying. And just listen. I feel like you gotta be a good listener when it comes to this team because everyone knows what they're talking about.

And we have two leaders, Mikaylah and Flau'Jae. So when they talk you definitely gotta listen and just go out there and do what they're trying to tell you to do. And I'm learning, and I'll be able to talk probably next year or something.

Q. This is obviously a rematch. You guys have talked a lot about your growth over the seen. Duke's kind of had the same thing. They started off kind of rough, including that loss to you guys. What's the thing you guys think you've improved the most over the course of the season since that first game? And what are some things you've seen on Duke's film that they've improved the most?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: We didn't start off rough -- we didn't really start off, but I get what you're saying. I think our togetherness is my biggest thing. I think our mindset has shifted. I feel like, me and 12, we talked about it, it was, we so locked in on defense. We talk a lot of pride in that, you know what I mean? I think we take a lot of pride.

Have it Lay at the top, having people scared to dribble ball up there and then having the wings covered and then

having your post doing it, that's a scary sight.

So I think that we done locked in on that aspect because we know we can score at will. Last couple of games Lay has been averaging 20. I think 12's been averaging 20. We can score. Our defense is something I think that we've grown in tremendously as well as transition defense.

Q. Flau'Jae, what has it been like, this guard core? From the beginning of the season this has been one of the most fun teams to watch in terms of the way you guys are able to move the ball, the way you're able to score. What's it been like to play with, in particular, not trying to leave your post out, but to play with this much talent with the guards?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: We don't gotta talk about the posts -- I'm just kidding. Shout out to our posts.

It's been fun cause it's pushing me to run. When Lay in the game she's going to get her hood strip and go, so you gotta be real fast. You gotta be real aware. She's going to throw some dimes. It's just been fun playing with fast, dynamic guards. Anything can happen. It just allows me to get out and run.

And passers, I think their passing is underrated. In the tight areas they can get you the ball, it's been so fun. Just learning different things from Lay, like how she handled the ball and her reaction. Her instincts are just like one-of-one. I don't think anybody in the country plays like that.

12, she's butter from the midgy, from the 3, wherever.

I don't know, for me, it just made me want to up my game, like my all-around game. It's just so much to learn from. I'm that type of person. Anybody game where I feel like I like this, I'm going to take it.

So, playing next to them it's been great these are All-American guards right here. So it's just been a blessing.

Q. Mikaylah, obviously having someone like Seimone Augustus on staff, what is something that she has taught you something specific, whether it's a skill or a mindset that you use every day in your game that's helped you grow.

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: Confidence. Just be confident in everything I'm doing. Be confident in how I'm leading, be confident in how I'm playing. I've picked her brain about so many things. We've talked about so many things we've had so many conversations. And just to sum that all up, it's confidence, just stay confident, not to get too high, not get

too low. Just kind of even keeled.

Q. Lay, Flau'jae talked about it but the ability to get the ball anywhere. You're great at it, but Mikaylah's pretty good at it too. What do you see in her game as far as distribution and how, you know, it's a little, maybe, different than yours but still trying to do the same?

MILAYSIA FULWILEY: Yeah, definitely. I think 12 is a very underrated passer. She's throwing some crazy dimes. You know, she's very calm with her passing. Like Ma's is sometimes out of control, but hers is very calm, and you kind can read her mind, you can kind of know where the pass is going because she's very strategic with her passing. You just kind of try to take tips from her, just be calm. When you come off the screen, if the roller's open, hit the roller. If not, then reverse it. And she does a great job with that, so I just kind of watch.

Q. Flau'jae, you like talking about your posts. How good have they been the last couple of games, and what are you going to need out of them here?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: I just love my posts. Just like Kate and Mama and Grace and Z and Meg, they're all just so fun to be around, but they can ball. They can ball.

You know, we were watching the Duke tape and you know they were just ballers in that last game, and we need them to play at that level.

I feel like Kate had an amazing game against Texas Tech and that's the Kate that I know. That's the confident Kate that we want to keep on the floor.

Z, she's just an athlete. Leap out of the gym. Grace, her energy, her tenacity. Mama, just -- I mean when she's having a game, you just gotta let her go. And I just believe they're so dynamic more than they know and it's up to us to continue to build confidence in them, throw them the ball. They mess up, throw it again.

Just tell them they're big a part of the team. If you know Kim Mulkey, she's a post coach, for real, for real. Just tell them like we gonna feed y'all. Gotta feed y'all. But, you know, do your thing. And I think they're building that confidence game by game for sure.

Q. Mikaylah, want to hear from you about this. Flau'Jae, if you want to jump in. But you guys had such great freshmen seasons, right, and like you've talked about your freshmen this year are really flowing up, Bella, Grace. What do you see in them that gives you hope about this thing for years to come?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: You know, they're going to keep it going. They're going to clip hard. They're gonna (indiscernible) Bella Hines. They're really good bro. I told them, if y'all stay together, we got some good natties. We got some Final Fours. For real.

12 got more years with them than me. So she better do her thing. But them freshmen, they're good.

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: They're a handful. Let me just throw that out there. Those freshmen are a handful. They're a good time. They work hard. They're very willing listeners. I really, really, really enjoying playing next to them and being their teammate.

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