

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 1 Semifinal - LSU vs NC State

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Spokane, Washington, USA

Spokane Arena

LSU Tigers

Kim Mulkey

Mikaylah Williams

Annesah Morrow

Flau'Jae Johnson

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for Coach.

Q. You guys obviously met NC State earlier year this season. How would you say both teams are different from November and where they're at right now?

KIM MULKEY: Well, I wouldn't say the style of play is any different. We're not going to create new players. I think both teams are obviously better, and we just have a lot of respect. We don't look at the previous game. We just think that we're both trying to advance to an Elite 8, and we don't really even think about that game.

We talked about it once or twice. We've looked at some film. But they're better, we're better, they're ACC champs, we finished third in the SEC, they're supposed to win, they're the 2 seed, we're the 3 seed.

Q. How has the SEC prepared you in this season for this moment here in the Sweet 16?

KIM MULKEY: I just think the SEC is unbelievably tough. We still have, if I'm correct, six teams left, and to me, that speaks volumes. We have a league that has different styles of play. We have a league that has unbelievable talent, individual talent. I think all of us, not just in the SEC, but across the country and other leagues, we're all kind of relieved when you get a chance to go to the playoffs and you don't have to see each other again.

Q. You mentioned how both teams have gotten so much better since the beginning of the year. NC



State's posts in particular have really developed. What have you seen on film from them that has impressed you or that you're going to have to watch out for?

KIM MULKEY: Well, I'm sure their posts have developed and are better, but they have four outstanding guards, and they're not going to change their philosophy and all of a sudden become a post-dominant team. So we know what their strengths are, we know what their improvements are, and we're going to try to win one more game.

They shoot the ball 15 threes in a game. I don't even know if we shoot 15 threes in a game. But we have great post play and we always have had great post play on the teams I've coached throughout the years. So I don't know that it's an advantage when you reach the playoffs. A lot of people tend to think guard play is the team that advances with great guard play, and we feel like we have a balance of great guard play and post play.

Q. I was talking with Bob Starkey earlier and he was telling me that you more than any other coach he's been around kind of has a great feel for when and how to motivate a team, like when to dig in and when to pull back. Just curious how you developed that through your coaching career, if you feel like that's sort of carryover from being a player or how exactly you developed that.

KIM MULKEY: Well, Bob has coached with some unbelievable coaches, so for him to say that about me, it's flattering, it humbles me, it makes me feel good. It may just be my experience having been a player and the great ones that I played for, Leon Barmore, Pat Summitt, Theresa Grentz, Fran Garmon, the list goes on.

I think that maybe being a player and knowing what motivated me in the time of year and what you need to do on challenging young people and then loving on young people, maybe it's just who I am, and I have a good feel for the game. But, yeah, thank him -- I'll thank him when I go to the locker room.

Q. Coming off consecutive 100-point games, I wanted to ask you what has it been that's allowed you to attain



that level of offense to start the tournament?

KIM MULKEY: Health. They're healthy. Flau'Jae is here, Morrow is here, they're all playing very good basketball, they're excited, everybody's looking to score, they're looking to share the ball. I just think just having everybody back and everybody healthy and it's fun to watch 'em right now.

Q. You talked about finishing, in the last game especially. What goes into being able to finish, raising your level of finishing, for Sa'Myah and Aalyah, especially. They had really good nights around the basket.

KIM MULKEY: You have to keep coaching. You have to keep demanding. I think our practices do that. You have to understand there are going to be down moments throughout a season and yet, you don't get too high or too low and you just keep coaching them.

I think the players around Aalyah, the players around Sa'Myah can make them better, more so than a coach can. Give them the ball in positions to be successful. Don't ask them to do things they're not capable of doing. You saw in the last couple of games just the sharing of the ball, the confidence that everybody has in each other.

Q. I've talked to you about your different coaches over the years. Tell me about Chante', what are her responsibilities, what does she do for this program? She's worked with you for six years?

KIM MULKEY: Actually, Chante' was the first graduate assistant that I hired when I was at Baylor, and she was with me for a little while, then she went other places. She was in the WNBA a little while, then she's been with some other coaches.

What's the name ya'll give Chante'? Ya'll call her, like, an auntie.

So I guess that's great description. Chante' does a little bit of everything. She helps with travel arrangements. Doesn't do as much on the court stuff because we have plenty that do that. But you can ask Chante' to do anything and she's capable of doing it. She's very loyal, she understands me. She can help recruit. She was a recruiting coordinator at another university when she was there.

So she's kind of done it all. She just wanted to come back closer to home, Texas being her home, and sure am glad we have her.

Q. I think you were asked about the improvements for both teams. In what way are you seeing NC State being visibly better than the last time you faced them?

KIM MULKEY: Physically better?

Q. Visibly.

KIM MULKEY: Oh, visibly. I'm sorry. Just, they've played together awhile. Those guards just have unbelievable range, those guards can dribble penetrate, they have to rebound as guards because that's -- they usually play their four guards together, they have won games on the road that were tough games, they were in tight games, they made the plays to win those games, well coached. I've known Wes a long time. He now gets to coach alongside Will Wade. We all know Will when he was at LSU. So other than when we play tomorrow, I'm always pulling for Wes Moore. He is a great guy.

Q. You mentioned Will --

KIM MULKEY: You jumped at that. You weren't going to say anything or ask any questions until I gave you something to talk about. All right. Go ahead.

Q. You mentioned Will. What was it like working with him and seeing him operate as a coach?

KIM MULKEY: I was with Will only one year. He treated me with the utmost respect. When I got off that airplane and took the LSU job and before the press conference, he and Paul Mainieri were the first two people to hug me when I got off that plane, and to me, that showed respect.

He is going to be a totally different personality than Wes, but he's a winner. If you just look at it, he won at LSU, he won at McNeese, and I would imagine he's getting ready to wake the Wolfpack up and win at NC State.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, Coach. We'll dismiss Coach and then turn questions over to the student-athletes.

Q. Flau'Jae, first, and then Aneesah, if you would, the idea of finishing and you guys distributing the ball was really evident in your last game. How much more fun is it when you're getting your teammates involved, especially on your runoff passes that you're making and letting the girls finish?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Definitely fun. It's just something that I seen that we was missing. When I was hurt, I was like, okay, we got to make some changes. I think everybody just bought in. I think it's been -- for me, it's

been easier just to play, just to see everybody winning. Like, that's what basketball's about. That's how you win championships and that's the business that we're in.

ANNESAH MORROW: I would say for me, I was extremely happy for Sa'Myah, just being able to get off, when one person eat, everybody eat. That's one thing that I pride myself on, and if I could put my teammate in a right position for a great pass for them to finish around the basket, that's something that I would do over making a shot myself.

Q. Could you follow-up Coach Mulkey talking about Chante' and what she does with you guys. Are academics a big part of what she does with you?

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: Coach Mulkey pretty much covered it. Yeah, she does academics for us. So we basically go to her for whatever we need, and she kind of relays that message to Ms. Carole, so...

ANNESAH MORROW: For me, I feel like everybody's relationship is different when it comes down to Auntie Chante'. When I first got here, she was the first person to take me out to dinner and have a conversation with me, actually get to understand me as a person. I feel like I could come to her when it's not involving basketball, which is a good thing.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, I feel like on a spiritual level, too -- we all say different things, but spiritually, me just building my relationship with God, she's been there. And she's just like auntie. Like, if we out of line, she going to come tell us. She kind of just keep it light.

Coach Mulkey is super serious, right? And then you got you got everybody, they want to play for -- she's like, Okay, don't play. You know what I'm saying? So she kind of just keep the balance.

Q. What does this game mean for Mjrcle being closer to home and having her family be here?

ANNESAH MORROW: I think I can speak to that coming far away from where I grew up. It's sacrifice. It shows selflessness. She's just selfless and she come in and she work hard every day, and you get to see that on and off the floor, but her being able to play in front of her family is going to mean a lot.

Q. Aneesah, how do you think that your career up to this point, starting in Chicago and then now in last two years at LSU, have led you to this moment where this is kind of it for you and this is when legends are made?

ANNESAH MORROW: I would say just growing up on south side of Chicago and my parents sacrificing so much -- I was just thinking about this this morning while I was brushing my teeth, actually. My parents just sacrificed so much for me. I tried to be as successful as I could be to give thanks back to them for as much as they sacrificed for me.

But honestly, I want to be that person that either could be a mentor or somebody to look up to to show them that it's possible. You might come from places where you might feel like you have a disadvantage or you're not able to accomplish things that God have for other people, but you can. It just comes with consistency, putting the work in, and just being yourself.

Q. Flau'Jae, you've already won a national championship. I was wondering, what team in the SEC does NC State remind you of as you look back? And also, how do you manage your basketball with the celebrity and everything else and your focus on the game? Because you obviously can do that because you're balling out. But how do you do that?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Okay. First question, I feel like NC State probably remind us of Tennessee. I feel like they play four guards, right? They get up and down, can score the ball really well, has a dominant post. So, yeah, I would say they remind us of Tennessee in the SEC, and Tennessee's a great team. We only beat them by single digits every time we played 'em. So you got to have that mindset. We don't look past nobody and we don't -- just because we won last time. Coach Mulkey always say, it's hard to beat a team twice, so we just go in there with the mindset of just being the most prepared team.

Speaking of, like, just doing my music. Like, a lot of people ask that question. How do you stay focused? But, like, I'm not focused on my music, I'm not focused on my podcast, I'm not focused on none of this stuff. I'm focused on winning the National Championship. Because if I won the National Championship, then can I focus on everything I want to.

So I know how to use my time, I know how to focus. I'm not on social media right now. I'm letting my team handle everything, and I'm just focused on the task at hand. I'm trying to win.

Q. After the game the other night, all three of you said, We're going to stay on Sa'Myah and tell her that it's not going to stop here. We expect that from her every night. How is that going this week, preparing her for this game and to keep her a big force for you guys?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: I think she understand how much we need her. I've been with Sa'Myah since my freshman year, so like, we was going at it for, like, two weeks. I don't think she even talked to me for a week after some stuff I said to her in practice. But we know this is what she's capable of. We know we can throw the ball up above the backboard, she going to go get it.

I think she now feels more confident, and that's where we need her. We don't have to say nothing else to her for real, for real. She knows what she can do. We just keep pouring into here, pouring into her, and Nees pour into her that confidence. I always tell Nees, You need to get your post together. So I think that she's done a good job with, like, just giving them confidence.

Q. Flau'jae and Aneesah, you can chime in on this too, being here now at LSU for this many years. But this group is special. This group has its own kind of dynamic. What do you feel like this group -- what separates this group from other teams that you've been on? And why do you think you guys can use that whatever you have, whatever is that secret sauce, to go back to the Final Four?

ANNESAH MORROW: I would say we're, like, a team-coached team. Flau'jae can get on me, Mikaylah can get on me, and I can get on them, and no nobody take it personal. We hold each other accountable, and we accept the challenges that we have for one another, and we set a standard, and we don't lower that for each other.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: I just think we're just a really good group. I've never -- I mean, I've played with All-Americans and stuff like that, but I've never played with two All-Americans and it's just different. They make you want to be better. That's why I feel like this dynamic is so different because you really get a challenge every day in practice, and I think -- I don't know. I just -- I never seen three dominant people, like, you would say, like, alphas, like, work so well together, and we don't have egos. Like, we all pull for each other. Like, we all on the same thing. Like, we all want to win.

And we know that this is Aneesah's last year, so we all just kind of take that personal, like. And just knowing -- and having the Final Four experience, I just try to tell them all the time what it was like, how I felt, what it feel like. Like, we're blessed to be one of a couple of teams that still get to play. Like, that's a blessing. A lot of teams going to be watching us play.

Yesterday, G was like, A lot of people don't get to practice today. And I don't know, I just kind of thought about it

differently. Like, we really are just grateful. If we have three players that can buy in, everybody else buys in, so it's just up to us.

Q. General question, have you guys seen and felt a shift in the atmosphere and attention received in women's sports, specifically women's basketball, over the last few years and if so kind of what's the biggest change you've seen?

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: I think the biggest thing is that people are actually paying attention to women's basketball. I think we're finally getting that platform to show everybody what we've been doing this whole time. I think -- like what the TikTok said, we had the plan, we just needed the platform. So I think we just needed the platform and that we finally get to showcase all of our abilities and talents.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: And that money, no I'm just kidding. No, for real though, like, we're getting paid. For real. I just think it's just so cool. And then for me it's like looking at the little girls that's going to come in way after us -- like when we go to the WNBA we might not get those multi-million dollar deals. But think of the high schoolers and the young girls, they going to grow up and they going to be having those deals and there's going to be a whole shift, and it's starting with something that we're doing. So that's why you got to play the game with some type of intensity and passion, just because it don't end with us, like, we just trying to leave it better than we found it.

Q. Flau'jae, or anybody, on note of Kim being a unique motivator, from the outside we see a very intense personality on the sideline. But LSU is a program that has had lower attrition into the portal than a lot of other programs, so she can obviously keep teams together. Curious what it is about her as a motivator and a team builder that you think makes her different from other coaches or other coaches you've seen, and again, Aneesah or Mikaylah if you have thoughts as well I would love to here 'em?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: I think Aneesah can speak to this because I only played under her, but for me it's like she keep it real. Whether you like it or not she going to say what's on her mind. She going to stand on that. I think that's the realest thing. Because when you look at it at the end of the day everybody just want to be pushed to they best abilities. Some days you might not like what she got to say, but most of the time you're like, she kept it real. And I think she just teach you to hold yourself accountable and you can take that throughout life, not just on the basketball court. So I think if you really sit down and really take it in and reflect and not be bitter about what she says, you will be like, Wow, like, it's going to help me in life. So I

think she just keep it real, and people like that. Whether they hate it in the moment, and be like, I'm going to leave, I ain't -- you always come back, because she's just, she's genuine, she real.

ANNESAH MORROW: Yeah, I would definitely say that about Coach Mulkey, that was one thing that she kept it real with me. I remember when last year she took me out the starting lineup and I had a conversation with her and I was like, Dang, I really got humbled, because I was underperforming. But she have a standard for me and she know what I'm capable of. So that's why every night I step on the floor I tell her, like, I got you. Like, I got your back, you got my back. And that's how it always been with Coach Mulkey. I feel like coming here I got to see a different part of myself. She makes you feel more confident, continue to push who you are, and just be as dominant as you could be on the floor. But overall Mulkey is a great person. Like, I know media might portray her to be something else, but she is an amazing person. She's very nurturing. She has children of her own, so she always talk about her children and how much she love us as if we were hers.

Q. Flau'jae spoke to it earlier, but playing the same team twice, what do you take away from that first game and improve upon?

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: We obviously played a good game in that first game, but I think there's a lot of stuff we can clean up. You can always clean up rebounds. You can always clean up those extra possessions they had off those rebounds. You can clean up turnovers. You can clean up those transition points just knowing where your man is and talking and communicating, which is why I think we've gotten extremely better at just communicating with each other and being on the same page.

ANNESAH MORROW: Yeah, I would say when we played in the Bahamas we were a brand-new team. That's one thing like keeping me going, because we didn't really know how each other played we didn't have that connection. Now seeing us click in March Madness right now it's, like, it could be scary. But of course never take anybody for granted, never come in and just think that you're going to win a game. You have to come in and put the work in.

Q. Mikaylah, when you have a game like the other night, or maybe Stanford, do you sense it early, like in terms of tonight's my night? And to the other two, do you sense something from her, you can tell, okay, tonight Mikaela's maybe going to take over?

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: I just know when the first shot goes in -- I always say when the first shot goes in I know

it's going to be a good game for me, so, yeah.

ANNESAH MORROW: I would say -- I never told 12 this, but it's something that I watched, like in shoot around -- and I always pay attention to all my teammates, I'm very observant, just in case I'm going to have to come to them before a game and be like, Are you okay, or checking up on them. And when 12 is having an on shooting time in shoot around I know it's on. And that's kind of been 12 the majority of the season, honestly. So just seeing before the game and in shoot around or sometimes the practice before.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, I think I kind of try to just get -- I try to get her in a flow early. I throw the ball to her and just be like, Shoot it, like, immediately shoot it. Just because I know she got to get those touches early when she feel confident it's lights out. Nobody in the country can guard her. I say that all the time. It just good for her when she get going and I get to get going and Nees get going it's just a beautiful sight. So I really think she's just that motor for us. And then she could create her own shot, but I think her passing is just so underrated how she can get everybody involved. And I think that's one part of my game I got better at because I seen her do it so much in practice I'm like I want to pass like Magic (laughing). So, man, I think she's been underrated, not any more then, she's an All-American now, but I still feel like it's, like she's just scratching the surface. So when it's an on night for 12 and she hit that first three or step back, we in good shape.

Q. Aneesah and Mikayla, every time Flau'jae is up here in game she always seems to bring like a light, a joyful spirit to everything. What's it like being around her every day?

ANNESAH MORROW: It's fun. Sometimes I see her and I'm like, Dang, she's got a lot of energy. It's 8 o'clock in the morning. But it's great to be around that positive energy. She comes in, she has this bubbly spirit. She's one of the most genuine persons that I've come across in my life and she's just a great person. I've seen her grow so much as well, like off the court, on the court, maturity-wise, being a better leader, and I'm just proud of her, honestly. I know that the sky's the limit for her and she's able, she's going to be able to accomplish as much as she want.

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: Yeah, to piggyback off that, I love Flau'jae. I mean, ever since -- like I always tell this story -- ever since we came on our visit together we knew that we were going to be teammates, we knew we were going to do something, we were going to shock the world pretty much. I think that kind of speaks to the type of person she is, the bubbly person, the person that motivates you, the person that also keeps it real, but the person that's going to

love on you at the end of the day, so that's just something that I really love about her is the person she is outside of basketball.

Q. Flau'jae and Aneesah both talked a lot about the team-coaching team aspect and motivating each other, and so I'm wondering from your perspective how is that to have these players as your leaders, and also what do they do that really does motivate you to say, Hey, I'm following you no matter what you say, I'm ready to run through a wall for you.

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: Right, I think just the work, their work ethic alone wants you to -- it gives you that extra drive to be like, Okay, I'm not going to be the one left behind. Because they're working hard, they're doing everything that they can. And then just we have a National Championship winner right here. We have an All-American. Nees has everything but a National Championship. So it's, like, why not listen to them, they have done it, they have done it on the biggest stage, they have been here, so who am I to not listen to the people that's been in my same shoes.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports....