

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 1 Final - LSU vs UCLA

Saturday, March 29, 2025

Spokane, Washington, USA

Spokane Arena

**LSU Tigers**

**Kim Mulkey**

**Flau'Jae Johnson**

**Mikaylah Williams**

**Aneesah Morrow**

Elite Eight Pregame Media Conference

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

**Q. The challenge of defending Betts and how much better do you feel about that now that Sa'Myah has really kind of come on the last couple of games?**

KIM MULKEY: She is so talented. Just watching her from high school until today, it's amazing how good she is. Certainly her height is an advantage and we're not going to grow that tall overnight. But we have to battle and do the best we can. But she's not all they have. Certainly everything they do goes through her, as it should, but they're talented at a lot of positions.

**Q. A follow-up on Betts, you have coached some really dominant post players with size, and I guess where does Betts stack up when you think about great centers in the college game and how does that experience having coached players and seeing different defenses against them maybe help give you an edge in some way to know how to tackle that?**

KIM MULKEY: I can't speak for UCLA, their history of post play, but if you're just asking me to compare it to those that I have coached through the years, number one, her height is really an advantage, but it's also her skill level. She's learning how to really post you deep, and that just comes with experience and age and just probably them working with her every day. She has just improved so much. Every time I watch her play, she does something really, really good, and I go, Hmm, that's a lot of work. She's a special talent.



**Q. A lot of UCLA folks up here were talking about how last year's loss to you guys in the Sweet 16 really fuels this season and the mindset that they have had this season. Curious, what do you remember about that game last year and how much has each team changed or grown in the past year?**

KIM MULKEY: So they used our loss to fuel their season?

**Q. They talked about how --**

KIM MULKEY: I would think USC probably fuels their season. You know, that's quite a rivalry.

Yeah, I don't know that we've really thought about that win very much. I'm sure if that was the last game of the season for them, maybe it does fuel them. But I just remember we won. I can't remember details. I can remember a lot of off-the-court stuff that took place with the media, but I can't remember what specific thing in the game. You know, we had Angel Reese, and they had Osborne. But it's different teams, but they have more of the returning players that are so important for them, and we have some new ones.

**Q. You talked about Betts not being all they have. Cori talked about the rest of their team needing to be elite teammates. How do you approach this game? So often we have seen you say in the past, make sure they don't let somebody else get off. Is that kind of the approach again?**

KIM MULKEY: Well, that would be for every game, but unfortunately, this game is so good and players are so good, that that's tough to do. We have to take care of the ball. We have to somehow, some way score with them but also be smart in possessions. If they start just really lighting us up, how do we shorten the possessions.

So you go over plan A, plan B, plan C, but continue to do what you do because they still have to guard us too. So I think it's a game that will be very physical. They play physical and we play physical. I think it's a game where there's a little bit of history, from what you said, from last

year. They are the overall No. 1 seed, and so we recognize what we face, and we'll play hard, and we'll do the best we can and hope that we can make it a good game.

**Q. Building off of that idea of the Sweet 16 matchup last year, is there any maybe film watching from last year's game or is it just a completely new team? Is there anything that you have drawn on from that game or is it just the personnel's so different, do you look at UCLA with those returners and see how you played against them or is it just more looking at how their season has been?**

KIM MULKEY: You look at as much film as you can. We don't have the same personnel we had last year when we beat them. So you look at sets, you look at how we guarded 'em, maybe things like that. But then you move on to this year and what they're doing better and their personnel. And, yeah, you watch so much film, you forget what all you've watched.

Coach Bob Starkey, he lives in the film room, and he brings me things, and I finally have to just say, Coach, we can't over-coach. Let's go play.

**Q. Rebounding is a key thing for your team, obviously, and last night Aneesah, out of the nine offensive rebounds she had, she scored on seven of those. How big is that going to be? And I would assume that Aneesah's got to be a big factor on their scout.**

KIM MULKEY: I think we rebound the ball pretty darn good for our size. Nees being an undersized post player, she can get up. Now, we're very cognizant of the fact that Betts is pretty big in there, and whatever offensive board we get, we may not score on it because she can block it.

But just getting an offensive rebound against UCLA would be good. It gives us another chance to try to score the ball. But we're going to rebound. We're going to try our best to rebound with them. They're big, they're big at all positions, they're bigger than we are. But, you know, I'm an old point guard that was always told how little I was, and I always have a philosophy that you can't measure heart. Go play.

**Q. What are you expecting to see from Flau'Jae tomorrow coming off what was not her best game and then having to watch the end of it from the sideline?**

KIM MULKEY: She's good to go. She's ready to go. She will bounce back just like All-Americans do. She's an All-American, and she struggled, and we won without her, basically, and now she wants to try to do more on the floor. But I don't anticipate anything. Flau'Jae's Flau'Jae. She's

going to bounce back and beat herself up probably all night. But today's a new day, and she's got that smile on her face and that joyful spirit that makes her Flau'Jae.

**Q. People back home said they heard the LSU fans through the TV, and you're obviously 2300 hundred miles from home, you've got a pep rally today and so forth. Even being so far away, how much do the fans and support help you at this time of year?**

KIM MULKEY: I wish our fans were here. I know those of us who came from far have great fan bases, and I agree with Geno on everything he said about these super regionals only being in two places. We sold our soul too early. This game has gotten better. And, man, if you still had four regionals, can you imagine the attendance? I know our fan base. They can't afford to come to Spokane. But they could if it was a little bit closer.

It does matter. It matters a lot. Maybe it doesn't win a game for you, but the reason it matters is you build programs a lot of times, and you can sell to recruit your fan base, your attendance. And I agree with Geno. We need to fix this. We don't have to wait until the contract's up. Let the people keep their super regionals. Just go add two now. I've never ever been one to believe that you can't work things out if it's better for the game.

**Q. Why play Sa'Myah the full 40 minutes last night and how important is she going to be tomorrow defending Betts?**

KIM MULKEY: Well, I played her because she was playing good. She wasn't in foul trouble. She's playing with unbelievable confidence, and we needed her to win the game. So that's why she played 40 minutes.

And what was the second part of your question?

**Q. Against Betts, how important is she?**

KIM MULKEY: She has her hands full. She's going to do the best she can. She understands how we're going to try to guard her, as all of them do. But if you focus too much on Betts, she will pick you apart and find her open teammates. So do what we do, make a few adjustments, and go have fun and play and see what happens.

**Q. Sorry to keep focusing on Betts, like you're talking about, but when you say she gets deep in the paint, from a coaching perspective, is it about heart keeping her out when you are undersized or is there anything else you can tell your players to kind of push her out and keep her away from the rim?**

KIM MULKEY: We'll try to do a lot of things. I'm not going to tell you what we're going to do, but we will try to do a lot of things. We have seen so many teams and film do different things. We watch and we study defenses a lot. Sometimes you can have a great game plan, and they still expose you, and they're still good. She's good. So we're going to try what we can do, and if we don't succeed at that, we'll go to plan B and try that.

And you know, hopefully she will get tired. I think I saw something where she said she was tired. I was like, Woo, I kind of like that (smiling.) She won't get tired. Great players don't get tired. They fight through it.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, Coach. We'll be back with LSU student-athletes.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll get started with questions for the LSU student-athletes.

**Q. Aneesah, I'm sure the name Lauren Betts has come up in the scout for tomorrow. Tell me, how do you guys attempt to corral her, contain her?**

ANEESAH MORROW: My name is Aneesah, yeah.

Yeah, we've been paying attention to our scout and our detail, and we know that Lauren is a great player and a post player. Being able to be as active as she is and being that big post presence in the inside, we know that we'll be up for a challenge, but we're ready.

**Q. Flau'Jae, what happened on the play last night where you went down and how are you feeling today?**

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: I feel good. I think her elbow just hit me in my eye, and I couldn't really focus my eyes. I was seeing double. So I was trying to go back in the game, and then I was like, I can't see, so I just sat down. But I'm good, though.

**Q. Aneesah, how much have you put into this NCAA tournament in terms of putting together the best possible film for what's coming up here in just a few weeks in the WNBA draft and just how important do you feel like what you've shown so far has helped you?**

ANEESAH MORROW: I put in a lot of work all four years that I've been in college. I know that some people are saying that I've been in college for five years. No, I haven't. What I've done has been accomplished in four years, and I've been able to be dominant and consistent.

But just trying to stay focused on the task at hand. That's one thing that I've been trying to do, just stay present in the moment. Every play is one of the most important plays and think about that throughout the game or even while preparing for the game. I pay a lot of attention to my scout and a lot of detail as well.

**Q. There was a few UCLA players that kind of said that they were really looking forward to this matchup, just considering how yesterday -- or last year went. Excuse me. What were your thoughts when you saw the bracket? Did you look at it or think about that at all?**

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Well, last year, we were very motivated because of an article that came out and then their coach's affiliation with the article, and re-Tweeting it and stuff like that. And we were just very motivated by it because it was something that hit below just basketball. You know what I'm saying? It was just milk and cookies. You know what I'm saying? Us being Louisiana hot sauce and them being -- they even called us dirty debutantes in the article, and that they were America's team. You know what I'm saying?

So for us, we took that personal, and I think the core of us who the article was about, we still here. We're quote/unquote the big three or whatever. So we definitely -- when we seen them, we was like it could be another matchup. But I don't know, I feel like we have confidence. We did win that last game. They are a great team. They have a great player. But I believe in my team. I think we rolling right now, so we just got to come and put our best foot forward. If we play together for 40 minutes, we'll be very happy with the outcome.

**Q. With last season's game, one -- kind of following up on that question. Now that the bracket is set and it's not an if, it is a yes, you are facing UCLA, A, what can you take from the basketball side of last game -- or last season's game? Are you watching a lot of that film or do you have to take a different approach just because of personnel changes? And is that still a motivation, knowing kind of what happened leading into last year's game?**

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: I don't think -- no, we -- I mean, of course we look at last year's film because they're still centered around one player, essentially. I think that we look at that, and then we look at the games this year because they are a completely different team. I think they're a better team than they were last year.

So we just take it one game at a time. The thing about us

is just experience. I think we experienced -- last year, I had a great game last year, but I feel like this year, Nees is rolling. I feel like this year, Mikaylah is rolling. So of course we don't have Angel here, which we had last year, but I feel like Sa'Myah Smith has been playing on an All-American-type level, and so I think with the experience that we have, along with just our toughness. I think it's just us being tough. They're a very physical team.

But I believe in these two right here. I believe in these two, whether I have an off game or -- like, they're going to come and dominate. So I think that if we all rolling, it's going to be a beautiful site.

ANEESAH MORROW: Last season was focused on the details of the game and how to be in the right position to help a player, your teammate, if they get a beat off a drive, know your scouting report, who is a shooter, who has a quick release, knowing to force somebody to the middle instead of the baseline, like, those are the things that we focus on.

**Q. Obviously so much of the focus will be on that matchup down low, but they're pretty potent from everywhere. How much of it is sticking with your man and helping when you can, but not necessarily helping off too much?**

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: He's always looking at me, but I can't sit by her. If I look at her, I'm going to laugh. (Laughing).

You go.

MIKAYLAH MORROW: I think to what you said, obviously their 5 player does demand a lot of attention, so we'll help when we can. Like Nees said, we'll follow our scouting reports, help when we can, stay out when we need to. So I think the biggest thing for us is just following our scouting report.

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: Yeah, I feel like Lauren Betts is a great player -- (microphone muted.)

**Q. Aneesah, is that a decent impersonation of you? (Laughing).**

Flau'Jae, I think you had said that Sa'Myah's really rolling right now. She just had her first ever back-to-back double double of her career. How important is it for her to be peaking right now and did you see a difference in her coming into this tournament?

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: (Microphone muted.)

**Q. Mikaylah, coming out of high school, you were consensus top-2 recruit coming out of Parkway. For you to be a member of this Louisiana State University women's basketball team and for your first two years with it, you've been on deep runs in the NCAA tournament. Being a Louisianian, being from the state, how much has it meant to you to play a very integral role in how well this basketball team has played the last two years?**

MIKAYLAH MORROW: Right. I think for me, it's a really, really good feeling, but the first thing first is that I'm blessed, just blessed that God blessed me with the talent and the ability to even be on this stage to play basketball among some amazing, great, talented athletes.

I think, like, my goal as a basketball player on this stage is to just be a role model and an inspiration to the people in Louisiana, the little girls in Louisiana, to show them that it's possible to do some hard work and believe in God and be humble and it works. Like, you get to be DI, you get to go to that next level of basketball, you get to continue to play a sport that you love.

**Q. Flau'Jae or either of you, you guys have done such a great job of growing the game, especially at LSU. Kim talked about maybe the two site regionals somewhat limiting the game because last year and this year were on the far East Coast or far West Coast. Just your thoughts on how the game could grow if it was maybe a little bit more regional and accessible for fans.**

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: (Microphone muted.)

**Q. Aneesah, I'm sure you saw the Tweet from Angel last night about you and her killing each other for rebounds in the W. Do you have any response to that?**

ANEESAH MORROW: I say, for sure. Me and Angel went at it in practice all the time. We used to talk stuff to each other. She a dog, and you got to be able to play against her, have that dog mentality. So seeing that Tweet is just typical of -- like, we went at it all -- all year, and even in the game, sometimes you see us snatching each other rebound out of our hands. So it's definitely going to be a sight to see.

**Q. Curious, what was your reaction to Doug Bruno's retirement news yesterday?**

ANEESAH MORROW: I was a little bit surprised. He always told us, like, he wanted to coach until his career was over. And also getting the news that he had a stroke, I believe, that was, of course, sad and upsetting. He gave



so much to the game, and I know how much he loves the game, but to see his retirement and how much he gave to the game and the history that he made and the impact that he made on teams and players is amazing.

**Q. Flau'Jae, I think you touched on this so we'll start with Mikayla and Aneesah, but the "take it personal" has been a little bit of a thing for the last couple of games, back in Baton Rouge as well. How big has Aneesah's leadership been in clutch moments in the game as far as, and kind of like reminding you guys the finality of what you're doing right now.**

MIKAYLAH MORROW: Without Aneesah we don't win. We don't win games. I think that's just a testament to the type of player that she is, the type of leader that she is, the type of captain that she is. She works extremely hard. She always works hard. So it's like, when she's working hard, she doesn't demand anything else but you also to work hard and reach her level of working hard. So, yeah, just her being a great leader.

ANEESAH MORROW: I would say Coach Mulkey challenged me at the beginning of the year. I remember I sat down and I talked to her and she was like, Nees, like, we know that you can lead them physically, but you have to be able to be more verbal, that's when you become an elite player. I had the same conversation with Coach Money and she said, Your words are valuable. And one thing for me I always felt like I didn't say a lot because I didn't feel like people listened to me. But Coach was like, If you're putting in the work, they have no choice but to listen and follow. And that's something that I've learned this year. And my teammates have not only been able to hold me accountable, I've been able to hold them accountable, and they take the criticism that I might give them, but they know that it's coming from a good place.

**Q. Flau'Jae, for you, when have you the type of performance that you had the other night, what do you like to do in between that game and the next game? Like, what is your -- like what's your shoot around look like, what's your workout look like, where do you get yourself sort of rebalanced so when the game starts tomorrow afternoon you'll feel as good as possible. Talking about you scored three points yesterday and --**

FLAU'JAE JOHNSON: For real? I forgot about it. (Laughing). That's the mentality you got to have.

(Microphone muted.)

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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