

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Columbia vs West Virginia

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Carmichael Arena

West Virginia Mountaineers Head Coach Mark Kellogg

Media Conference



I think they're very tough. I thought we learned that a year ago when we played Princeton of the Ivy League just how tough that league is. And just physically, they just battle. They're an elite offensive rebounding team. One of the top-10 offensive rebounding teams in the country.

They can play at pace. They like to pressure a little bit and turn teams over. Offensively they can get in rhythm. They got a ton of different actions, some quality talent. Very, very well-coached.

Yeah, they have our full attention is what I like to say. We'll prepare for them like we have all year.

Q. Did you notice Columbia using those cue cards on the bench? Have you ever seen a team do something like that?

MARK KELLOGG: Yeah, I think we've seen it a little bit. Obviously not nearly as much as the football world does that, and they have a little bit more time. I don't know if Columbia has done that all year, but we noticed it in their last few games for sure that they were doing that.

Yeah, we took notice of it. I don't know that we know what all of it means or even want to spend our time trying to figure it all out, but it's certainly a way to communicate for them that they've found a little niche with.

Q. The experience last year in Iowa City, what do you expect and I guess what do you kind of hope that the girls that played there have taken and learned from that that they can apply tomorrow?

MARK KELLOGG: I mean, obviously experience. Every time you go through it, you get a little bit better. You understand what to expect. Whether it's game, it's what leads up to the game, it's these press conferences, it's all of it. You know, but playing in the Big 12 I think also gives you lots of opportunities to play in front of whether it's fans, great venues, big games. Big 12 Tournament has that similar feel, some of the rules and how you prepare. You can't touch the balls, and you get your limited practice times and all of that prepares us for these opportunities.

THE MODERATOR: We're with Head Coach Mark Kellogg. Questions, please.

Q. Just curious, going into last night obviously there was a possibility you face Columbia or someone else. How did that affect your preparation in terms of not knowing who you would play until that game was over?

MARK KELLOGG: Yeah, well, it added a little work on the front end of the week for sure. So this was our first time having to do this in the NCAA Tournament and not necessarily knowing your opponent.

So we just kind of divided the week a little bit as in a couple of days, all right, let's prepare for Columbia, a couple of days maybe we'll prepare for Washington, so we didn't get to this point and not have any preparation at all.

It was just, yeah, maybe a few less days than you normally would if you were waiting to play on Saturday and know your opponent. You have a few more days to prep. They're different teams, so that didn't completely help either. They do play a little bit differently, but I liked our prep.

I thought we were good. Once we found out who won, it was a little bit easier for us to now reflect on some of the things we had talked about earlier in the week.

Q. Just on paper what stands out -- not on paper because you saw them last night, but what stands out about Columbia that you feel like you really have to hammer home today?

MARK KELLOGG: Yeah, I think it showed through on film too. It always helps to see teams play live, and you just get to see them in realtime.



So, yeah, you just want to be playing well. You want to be healthy. I always say mentally and physically fresh. If can you do that on March wherever we're at these days, then I think you're in a pretty good spot.

So, yeah, we'll just draw on those experiences and stay the course. These games seem to take forever, and you hang on to every single possession, which is what you should do. So we'll just kind of condense it and play some small four-, five-minute games. If you win more of those, then you typically get the outcome that you want.

Q. You've coached at a few different levels in women's basketball. How big is it now for the sport to have units attached to the tournament that the men have to have financial incentives to winning games and playing in this tournament now?

MARK KELLOGG: Yeah, long time coming is what we would like to say and a reward. I think the female athletes were working as hard. The viewership, the excitement, the commitment level is at an all-time high. We want to continue to play off of that.

I think it's a reward for our players, our programs. We're getting a lot of eyes and attention on our sport right now. So I think it's just a reward for not the current kids, but for all those that have played for many, many years.

Yeah, I did it at a lot of levels and not that all the other lower levels are getting it, but maybe it filters down in some capacity, but certainly a reward for the kids in the NCAA Tournament that are doing right by their school and university.

Q. I asked the players about it. What's it like preparing for a team in Columbia that is going to pressure you knowing that you like to do the same thing? It seems that sometimes their pressure doesn't necessarily try to accomplish the same things that yours does, but we saw you guys against Niagara take care of a team that really tries to pressure people and turn them over earlier in the year. What's that process like in terms of trying to get ready for a team that is going to pose some of the same challenges to you that you are going to them?

MARK KELLOGG: Yeah, I think you're just at this point drawing off previous game plans of teams that have played a similar way. Not that we have a lot of those in our league that play like Columbia does, but we have some. So those are game plans that you just go back in, and you draw off of that game plan and remind them of some familiarity, even from personnel. You know, we like to compare them

to kids maybe from our conference that we're familiar with so we can say, Oh, this No. 24 at Columbia plays like so and so in our league. That's just because we're not quite as familiar. Then that resonates.

It's just going back to game plans that work. Yes, we do it a little bit differently in what we do with our press or pressure, but we'll be prepared. We've seen things like this, but you just never know if it's going to be the same or not until you get out there and play.

Q. You're kind of in a unique circumstance. There's a few teams where you haven't played for a couple of weeks and you're facing a team that played last night. So just how important is the first few minutes to where if you guys have any rust, you imagine Columbia is going to be ready to go.

MARK KELLOGG: That's the part that's probably not ideal about the early conference tournament is we haven't -- the last time we had two weeks between games was before the season started, so this has been a long time since we've had this big of a break.

I don't know if it was two weeks, but it was fairly close last year. Yes, you're right, the first few minutes, first quarter is really important. If we fast forward to the conference tournament, it was the same way. Kansas State played the night before. We did not. That wasn't a very good first quarter for us. Maybe the worst quarter we had played all year.

We do need to settle in really, really quickly. Again, hopefully we just had that experience, although it was a couple of weeks ago. We've tried to keep the rhythm and flow through these two weeks, give them some time off, stay fresh, but at the same time you have to be ready to play at the speed in which we're going to have to play at to have success tomorrow.

Q. What has JJ meant to the team in terms of just her experience and what she brings on the floor, and how key is it to have someone like that in an environment like this?

MARK KELLOGG: Yeah, it's huge. The kid has played in some big-time games. She's an even-keeled, level-headed kid. I've called her the unassuming superstar since I've been here.

Yeah, it's just a kid that she's a ball hawk on defense. She's an elite two-way player we think. Defensive Player of the Year obviously in our league, two times in a row now. She's pretty dynamic in the open floor, and in the half court she can get you points.

She's been on a pretty good... I've used the term heater here lately, but she's just kind of found her rhythm and her way here as this year has gone on and settled in. She's just wanted to leave a legacy.

She's played through three coaching changes. Stayed here through three coaching changes, which is very rare these days. So very, very loyal kid. Great teammate. Easy to play with. Easy to cheer for. As a coach, she's everything you would want a kid to be in so many ways.

I just think she's a calming influence for her teammates. If we're not going very well, let's kind of get the ball to JJ and get out of the way, so to speak, at times and let her be as dynamic as she can be.

Q. To piggyback on the previous question, did you guys do more live scrimmaging the last two weeks to keep them fresh? Did you adjust maybe more than you might have done during the regular season when you have games every three or four days?

MARK KELLOGG: We did a little bit of everything. We took time off. We played some short games. It wasn't like it linked, but we wanted their lungs to go a little bit. It's late in the year, and some kids have played a lot of minutes, so we've run through with quite a few groups, put different line-ups out there so they can play with more line-ups that they might play with for a few minutes. Use our male practice team to do it just to get us at the right speed.

You shorten practices. You don't go as long, but you try to keep intensity up as much as you can. Then there's always the thought of somebody getting hurt or injured in the back of your mind, so you want to be a little careful there too.

It's a balancing act for sure, but I would say we've did a little bit of get up and down and get their lungs going to pull back and really focus on us. We've spent a lot of time on us, which is a little weird late in the year getting kids excited to practice ask just worry about us is not always the easiest part late March.

Q. With as good an offensive rebounding team as Columbia is and as physically as they want to play inside, with the way you've kind of rotated your front court throughout the year finding the right matchups, how important is that to get the right mix of players inside on the floor when you play against a team like that?

MARK KELLOGG: Yeah, there will be some fun matchups in this one for sure. They can kind of go smaller where

we're maybe a little bit bigger. So do they match us? Do we match them? That coaching back and forth.

That's what's fun. That's what makes the preparation as a coach. You're trying to prepare your group. You're trying to think through every game plan that you can ahead of time, but then half the time you've got to throw it out once the ball is tipped anyway, and you have to adjust on the floor.

It looked like Columbia made some good adjustments at halftime in that game yesterday, and they kind of probably tweaked the game plan they had going in, and that seemed to work in their favor.

So I think you try to prepare as much as you can as a coach, but then know that you may have to make some adjustments, but no, they're certainly elite on the rebounding side of it, especially on the offensive end. They're very physical, tough. We're fully prepared and expect it to be a dogfight and a battle.

Q. You kind of alluded to this a little bit earlier, but I'm curious just what's your reaction to this being the second straight year you're getting an Ivy League team in the NCAA Tournament? Obviously different programs, different coaches, but does having that experience against Princeton last year prepare you in any way for this game or help you kind of approach that matchup?

MARK KELLOGG: A little bit, but not a ton. Like you said, two completely different teams. They play a little bit differently. I think you have a ton of respect for the Ivy League. Princeton battled us. We were down at half going into that game, and I think we had a pretty good third quarter to kind of separate a little bit. Then we got to watch them play another Power 4 team last night and ultimately win that one.

Like I say, they have our ultimate respect, our ultimate attention. We're excited to play. We understand everybody is good at this point. They've had a phenomenal year. They have a great culture. They have a championship culture. That group stays together. They've got a really good thing going at Columbia, and like I said, we're very well aware of it, and it will take our best effort to advance.

Q. Over the last couple of weeks between starting with the Big 12 Tournament and the high school tournaments in West Virginia, there's been a lot of tournament basketball for the Kellogg family. Have you guys had a chance to breathe yet?

MARK KELLOGG: No, and it's still going. Yeah, we played in the conference tournament. My daughter played in the West Virginia state tournament. Got beat in the championship game, state championship game, a year ago. My son will play tonight in the state semifinal. Then if they were to advance, they would play tomorrow night for the state title. We are full force.

It hit us last year. You know, growing up I thought I was prepared as a coach for these moments when your kids are having their opportunity too. It's hard. The dad strings, it pulls on you pretty hard when you're not there for your kids.

Duty calls for now, and so we'll see what we can do and hope for the best for the boys team, and daughter fell one game short, but had a great season in her sophomore year.

Yeah, really proud of them. Happy for them. They're chasing their dreams, and I guess Dad is still a little older but chasing his.

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