

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - North Carolina vs West Virginia

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Carmichael Arena

West Virginia Mountaineers Coach Mark Kellogg

Media Conference



Yeah, these games seem like they take forever. You hang onto every possession. The intensity is ratcheted up several notches than throughout the regular season. They just have a different feel. And you really truly hang on to each possession, one at a time.

And valuing the basketball and rebounding and cleaning up some things that, we're not really a time-of-possession game like football, but in a sense you need ball in hand and you want to control the game as much as you can.

I thought yesterday North Carolina took control of that game in the third and the fourth.

Q. How do you go about just preparing for North Carolina's size advantage?

MARK KELLOGG: Do you think they have a size advantage? I'm just kidding. That's every game. We go into every game and we don't have a size advantage. So that's not new for us.

We do have to game plan for that. So I'm not trying to downplay it because Gakdeng is having a really good year, and I've coached against her when she was at BC.

They have size. They have athleticism. Ustby is fantastic. She's the heart and soul of that team from my vantage point. I don't know if they say the same thing or not.

But you just have to game plan for it. I'm not going to give you the game plan. But, yeah, it's a part of what we do. But it's every night. Every night in the Big 12 we were bigger or smaller. People are bigger than us.

But I think Columbia said that about us, too, that they had a size advantage over the Power Four school and those types of things, too. But we have other things we can do to combat that.

Q. On that note, does it help that you are experienced with that and that's something you've had to deal with time in, time out?

MARK KELLOGG: It makes the preparation a little better

Q. Obviously you were watching the game yesterday. What stood out to UNC maybe that you thought presents a couple of challenges for tomorrow?

MARK KELLOGG: Obviously two different halves, I think. First half was a little bit slower. They came out and kind of changed defenses and looked like they made some nice halftime adjustments, really turned it up, turned up the pressure.

This is an elite defensive team in North Carolina they're extremely hard to score against. Then they pose all sorts of problems on the offensive end just because they can spread it out. They're very balanced. Lots of different kids, kids that come off the bench that can score. And they do it in multiple ways.

This is what happens when you get into these round-of-32 type games, Sweet 16-type games. You're getting quality teams that are very well coached. They spread you around sand, like I said, and do it in a lot of different ways. Really good on the offensive end and elite defensively.

Q. You spoke a lot this year how the elite teams will play a full 40 minutes of good basketball. After seeing UNC only up by two at halftime yesterday and then go on a 30-9 third quarter, how important is that, and how much more emphasized is that message about playing a full game?

MARK KELLOGG: I don't know that it necessarily -- I mean, we'll watch more than one game, and you take data from more than one. Certainly their adjustments were fantastic and they dominated that third quarter.

But, yeah, it's this time of year -- you do need to play 40 minutes, without question, and you need to sustain it.



because you're just drawing off a game plan that we've already had. When you're playing the Ayoka Lees and Audi Crookses and Vonleh at Baylor -- you can go through the whole Big 12. There's elite talent at the five position, or even at the 4, where we might be undersized.

And our guards are always smaller. I think we have the smallest backcourt in all of Power Four so that's nothing new for us either.

All it does, I guess maybe to answer your original question, it's a short turnaround, short prep time. You have to draw off of game plans we've already utilized at some point throughout the season. That makes it a little bit easier for our kids.

Q. You mentioned UNC as an elite defense. What have you seen that specifically makes them that elite defense?

MARK KELLOGG: First it's a mindset, first and foremost. But their positioning is great, they're rotations are great, they're tough, they're physical. They do a good job rebounding the basketball.

Some of it is even just like in transition, they don't turn it over very much offensively. And a lot of people don't realize, your defense starts with, I think, shots you take. What you do on the offensive end dictates what you do on the defensive end. And they do a good job with the right stuff offensive end, taking the right shots. So their transition defense is really good. And then they can set and get set defensively. And that's when they're pretty elite.

Q. Do you look at when they went and played Duke, with them also pressing, do you kind of look at that tape to kind of see what Duke did to mess with them? They had 20 turnovers against Duke. Do you go back and look at that tape and just kind of base things off of that?

MARK KELLOGG: I think you try to find any teams that have similarities to the way you play, whether it be Duke or anybody else within their league. You just try to find, yeah, do they have any holes, any weaknesses? How can we capitalize on that? What can we take advantage of?

I think you game plan and you always have game plan A and you have, if this doesn't go right, what are we going to do? So you have like A, B, C. Hopefully you don't get to C very often because you might be in a little bit of trouble. If you can stay within A and B you might have a fighting chance. To answer your question, yes, we go back and find as close to like-minded teams as us.

Q. How does the experience last year playing in Iowa in that crowd translate into what the environment's going to look like tomorrow and how you prepare for that?

MARK KELLOGG: I think we can draw off of it. I think we've talked about that even a little bit in your prep, how you go about it here for the next day and a half and what your focus needs to be on, which it was a year ago. And our kids did a great job getting ready for that one.

I've said for most of the year, if you played in that game at Iowa with those 15,000 people, and several people that were there that have been in some other big-time venues have said it was the loudest environment they'd ever been in.

So we can draw off of that. Now, it got pretty loud in last night when Donarski went on that 13-0 or 14-0 run. That place got rocking.

They're all loud. I'd say you're used to it. It's how you respond to it, and do you let the environment and the things you can't control affect your mindset? Or can we stay in the moment and tune it out a little bit and stay together, which is what this takes?

But you work hard to get these home games. It was one of our goals. If we got to this point of the season we could be at home. Obviously we fell a little short of that. North Carolina did what they needed to do. So we have to play really well and overcome playing on somebody's home floor. So advantage them, and we will draw off that experience.

Q. When Coach Banghart was up here, she brought up playing against your SFA team in the 2022 tournament. Do you draw anything from that experience? I know it's very different at this point, it was three years ago, but do you draw anything about what she may try to throw at you tomorrow?

MARK KELLOGG: Maybe a little bit. Completely different rosters. Different teams other than I think Ustby was on that team. I don't think anybody else on their current roster was. Zya Nugent is on our team now, who played really well in that game and had 26, but has battled injuries and not quite able to help us as much as she was able to back then.

We'll draw off maybe a little of it. But I don't know if three years ago is quite relevant enough today. But that's the one time we coached against each other was in the first round in 2022.

Q. Coach Banghart said there's bits and pieces of ACC opponents that she sees in your guys. Is there a Big 12 opponent that UNC reminds you of or is it bits and pieces of maybe teams in the league?

MARK KELLOGG: No, good question. We've talked about that a little bit which we really try to do this time of year. I think I said it even about Columbia and personnel. When you don't know their personnel quite as well we try to make references to teams within our league.

So there's parts of it that, yeah, I would see some Big 12 teams. Nobody that's like completely identical obviously.

But I think we can take parts of certain players off certain teams, is probably what we've done a little bit more. And then some stylistic stuff, like offensively they play like this team and defensively they play like this team. And we try to package it for our kids to understand.

Again, those were game plans and we're trying to get our kids to go back to maybe game plans that we've used throughout the year to make it just a little simpler on the quick turnaround.

Q. Unrelated to tomorrow, there's been talk on the men's side, of course, of expansion. I was curious from your standpoint, as someone who has bounced around, bigger, smaller schools, do you think the women's game is for that? Or is that something that maybe is further down the line?

MARK KELLOGG: I don't know. That's a good question. Like I don't even know how we got from 64 to 68. Now you hear maybe we should go to 76 or a different numbers, 74. I don't know how we even come up with some of those metrics.

I think we're getting into this world where everybody gets to participate type stuff. I don't know that I always believe in that. I have been at the mid-major level where it can get a little frustrating you have a good year and on the wrong night in the conference tournament you don't get an opportunity to make it.

We felt that pressure. It gets frustrating if you're one of those coaches when you think you have a team that's certainly qualified for this stage and could probably do something pretty special. But at the same time there's opportunities at the Power Four for those teams that are really good that maybe go .500 that should be in the tournament.

So I don't know, if you expand it, does it get watered

down? We had some scores that weren't great, weren't overly competitive. I think that creeps into people's minds.

I think if we do, it's how do we set it up to make it competitive as much as possible? Are we playing obviously there's extra rounds to this, so who is playing earlier in it, can we get those games to be competitive, almost like conference tournaments, where as it goes it should get more competitive. But can the first-round game stay a little more competitive than some of the ones we get right now? So that would be the challenge.

I don't of a great answer for you because that's something I really don't get paid to make those decisions or think about it. I just roll with it.

But I've been at both levels. And I think there's advantages both ways.

Q. With the win against Columbia that's 25 back-to-back seasons program history, third time that WVU has won 50 across two seasons. I asked the players, as far as a culture perspective, when you came into the program, is there something that stands out that you wanted to establish that you feel like you have that has allowed you to have that kind of success almost immediately?

MARK KELLOGG: Well, certainly. I said I think even at the press conference, I was a sustained success guy. I think that's one of the hardest things to do in college athletics, maybe more so this day and age with everything going on.

Yeah, we were fortunate. I was fortunate to walk into some really good players that chose to stay. That was important. We pieced together some really good ones a year ago and added some transfers and then were able to do that again to sustain it.

I never set out, I guess, necessarily saying we need to win 25 or I was going to try to win 50 in the first two years. It was, how can we leave a mark? How can I put in a style and system and develop this culture with great character kids and staff that allows us to do that?

That's really all it is for me. I'm just loving this right now because I get to go to work every day. I'm watching the team achieve essentially at the highest level. We've done some remarkable things in two years. I think we've risen the bar for our program; you can tell with the attendance increase and the media coverage and all you guys are here today. There's a few more than even a year ago. We must be doing something right.

But it goes back to the players and the staff and the administration that just gives us the resources to have success. And I just try to implement a few things here and there and be a consistent guy for everybody and then let it kind of shine.

But I still think we can get more eyes on us. I don't think, maybe on the national scene, we've gotten the level of respect we deserve. I don't know that JJ Quinerly has. I think she's a phenomenal talent that hasn't been talked enough on the national level. And there's narratives that we get focused on certain teams. I think there's even more stories to be told.

I hope ours continues to be written. I hope we can do something really special tomorrow and continue to get more eyes on the West Virginia women's basketball program.

Q. You talked about it a little bit this weekend, but a win tomorrow would be the first time WVU has gone to a Sweet 16 in a 68-team field. What would that mean to make that mark in the program?

MARK KELLOGG: It would be huge. Our players have talked about leaving a legacy. As a coach you want to leave a legacy. You want to be a part of the best teams in program history.

If we get there, I don't want to stop there either. I don't want it to be that's the all or nothing for us. But there are steps to it. And we need to pass that step. We need to pass that test and we know it's going to be awfully difficult to win it here against the level of competition that we have.

I don't know if I've allowed myself to get there yet mentally. But if we do, when we do, ask me and I'll give you maybe a little better answer on what it feels like to get there.

But we'll dream about it and we've talked about it. But I've not allowed myself to go there yet. Too much work to be done.

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