

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Middle Tennessee vs LSU

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Pete Maravich Assembly Center

## Middle Tennessee Lady Raiders Rick Insell

## Savannah Wheeler

## Jalynn Gregory

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We welcome you back to Baton Rouge. Middle Tennessee just finishing up practice, now nice enough to join us in the press room. We're joined by Jalynn Gregory on the far end, and immediately next to me is Savannah Wheeler. Thank you all for coming.

**Q. LSU is a team that obviously attacks the boards really hard at all five positions. How are you all planning on attacking that as a unit? Is it going to be something that's going to require all five of you all to really crash the boards hard?**

SAVANNAH WHEELER: I mean, it's like you said, their physicality is a big part of the game. I think the best thing we can do is match that physicality and keep playing Middle Tennessee basketball. Ultimately just all five committing to the boards and just pushing in transition

**Q. For both girls, what kind of confidence do you gain -- obviously you're on such a heater, right? But what kind of confidence do you gain from a win like yesterday without making too much of it and carrying it over into the next game?**

SAVANNAH WHEELER: Our coaches do a great job of just preaching every single game, just play Middle Tennessee basketball and just win another 40 minutes. That's the big emphasis that we've been doing this whole season is just playing Middle Tennessee basketball and just focus on one game at a time.

With last night's win, that's in the past. The only thing we can do now is look forward for tomorrow.



JALYNN GREGORY: We're just Middle Tennessee, and so we've just got to keep playing that way. We won last night, so we enjoyed that. Today we turned our focus to LSU.

**Q. Jalynn, LSU looks to shoot the two on offense. Defensively how can you help each other out in keeping them out of the paint and forcing more jumpers?**

JALYNN GREGORY: Just playing our regular defense. It's not just one person guarding their man, it's all of us guarding each other. So we have help side, just cover downs, and everything. So we're just going to keep sticking to our fundamentals.

**Q. While it's not impressive, not a lot of elite college basketball players get to win 20 games in a row. I was just wondering if you could comment on how a streak like that affects everything from confidence in yourself and your teammates to chemistry, trust, and what it's been like to go through that?**

SAVANNAH WHEELER: Like our nonconference, we had a very challenging nonconference, and it's got us to this point. So like I said before, like our coaches just preach every single day just one game at a time. We're not only competing against other people, but we're competing against ourselves.

So really just focusing on who we're playing and really focusing within ourselves.

JALYNN GREGORY: Just the same thing that Savannah said, just playing like being ourselves and playing how we have been all year.

**Q. Coach Mulkey was in here a minute ago, and she was talking about how both teams run an extended amount of sets. How much attention to detail do you have to put into the scout on such a short turnaround on a team like that?**

JALYNN GREGORY: Obviously we look at what they run and stuff. So we're going to study that all today and



tomorrow before the game.

At the end of the day, it comes down to fundamentals. So if we stick to all of our principles on defense and just executing on offense, then it's really like it doesn't come down to what they run, it's just how we play defense.

**Q. This is open-ended, but I assume you watched a video of LSU's game yesterday, is that correct? What went through your mind when you saw them like traveling and throwing the ball away like again and again and again? Did you think it was maybe not indicative of who you're going to see tomorrow? What did you think about that?**

JALYNN GREGORY: I know they can play better than that. I've seen them, and I've watched them. So I know what they're capable of. We're going to expect their best. So they're also going to get our best.

So we are not going to underestimate them just because of how they played yesterday.

**Q. For both girls, take it for what it is, but is there any wow factor to playing LSU? Is that a team that you look at and you're like, oh, they're personalities as much as they are ballplayers? Is there any of that to matching up with them, or is it just strictly ball?**

JALYNN GREGORY: I feel like it's just strictly ball. We try not to get caught up in all that because it's just another game. We're looking at it that way and just saying, hey, this is another game for us to get 40 more minutes. So we're going to approach it just like we do any other game.

**Q. A quick one on if you could provide some insight on the frontcourt players that you have, including the two Russians that are 6'5" and 6'6", and what kind of element they've brought to your team this year has really helped out?**

SAVANNAH WHEELER: Obviously size. We've got 6'6" and 6'5", so having good physical post players is always beneficial. One good thing about it is that Anastasiia, she can stretch out and shoot the three. Really just a lot of high-low, and each post player can do certain little things that can bring something to the table for this team.

JALYNN GREGORY: Yeah, they both bring in a lot of stuff for us. So that's a good thing about our team is we each know what we're good at and what we're not good at, so we just try to stay within ourselves.

**Q. As a follow-up, could you provide with Anastasiia any insight into what kind of competitor she is and**

**how you would expect her to approach a very high profile matchup against LSU's frontcourt players?**

SAVANNAH WHEELER: Really just think about the growth that she has gotten compared to last year. She's done a tremendous job in the off-season to help us get to this point right now. So it's definitely going to be a good matchup.

Really just the whole season long she's done a tremendous job playing into other people. So really we're just going to treat it like any other game.

**Q. Do you know any Russian?**

SAVANNAH WHEELER: No, don't know any Russian.

THE MODERATOR: We'll be right back with Coach to wrap things up here in Baton Rouge.

We welcome you back to Baton Rouge. We're joined by Head Coach Rick Insell from Middle Tennessee. We just saw him not too long ago after the win on Saturday, so we're just going to open up the floor for questions for Coach.

**Q. I talked to Coach Mulkey about Nina Davis at her press conference earlier. I was hoping I could get some insight on how Coach Davis came on your radar in the first place to join your staff and maybe what Kim said about her when you were looking to hire her in the first place?**

RICK INSELL: Nina was working for Fox in Los Angeles, had a great job there. In the summer she was working for my oldest son in travel team ball, kind of traveling with them, helping them coach, things like that. I kind of watched her, and I liked the way she handled it. She was working with the girls. I like the way she handled a lot of the situations that was going on there.

I taught to myself, if there's ever a chance, then I might want to hire her. So when Shalon left to take over at Florida A&M, I asked Matt to call Nina and see if she's interested, and he did. She was working in Los Angeles with Fox Sports. She said, Yeah, I've thought about it, and I think I might like to try it.

So we flew her in for an interview, and we hired her. I mean, I saw right quick -- she's had her jersey retired at Baylor. She's won wherever she went, high school, college, right on down the line. She's been under Coach Mulkey.

I guess more than anything I wanted to hire her for that



because she had some experience there. We didn't bring her in to sit on her hands. We brought her in to coach. She's got the scout tomorrow. Probably how we do tomorrow, if we lose, I'll probably fire her.

(Laughter.)

And Coach Mulkey may hire her if I fire her, but yeah.

(Laughter.)

No, she's really good. She works well with our girls. She works well with the university. She's very personable. She's a rock star. I think one day she'll command her own team, and she'll do a good job doing that.

**Q. The girls describe their style of play as just Middle Tennessee basketball. So obviously you have an idea of what you want them to be. I think one of them said -- it sounded like the sum is greater than the individual parts. Is that it?**

RICK INSELL: It is. It's kind of like the part, the part/whole process or method in teaching. We work individually with all of our -- we recruit to our system, and each one of those young ladies was recruited into our system.

When we go out recruiting, we pretty much know what we want in every one of our positions, and we're looking for those young ladies to fill that position, to fill that role. So what she told you is exactly right. They know what we expect of them. They know their role. They know where they need to be shooting the ball and where they don't need to shoot the ball. They know what we want to do when we go into a game.

We call that the Middle Tennessee way. I'm sure a lot of people have terms that they use for their program, but we want to just be Middle Tennessee. We know what to expect.

Like yesterday a lot of people said did you panic? A lot of my own people, did you panic when we went 18 down? I really didn't know we were 18 down. I thought we were 14, 15, 16 maybe down. I was more concerned about our players executing what we needed done offensively and defensively.

After the game somebody said it was 18 down. If I had known that, I probably would have panicked. But I knew, I never did give up hope or faith in what was going on yesterday. I felt like, if we could hit a shot or two, then we would get rolling.

We pretty much have commanded the third and fourth

quarters all year. So going in at halftime, the big thing we, as a coaching staff, we were 11 down, and we felt like we could come back from 11 down. And we were trying to cut that in half in the third quarter, and we were able to tie it up and take the lead. So that kind of played into our hands, and we felt like, hey, now we're in command.

I didn't like -- I know you didn't ask this question, but we gave up three little quick jump shots in the lane. I didn't like that. I thought we needed to make them work a little harder for that. That cut it from 9 or 11 to 6 or something like that. But I was pretty confident still with what was going on out there.

**Q. LSU's obviously one of the most talented teams on paper in the nation, particularly on the frontcourt when they attack the boards, one of the best rebounding teams in the country. How are you going to have to work as a team to win on the boards tomorrow?**

RICK INSELL: For us to win a game, to be in the game, we've got to rebound. I think that's one area we've got to do a better job at. We can't go out there and give them 18 to 20 offensive rebounds. If we do, we're not going to win the game. We've already talked about that with our players.

We've got to rebound. They are an extremely talented rebounding group. So we worked on that this morning, and they've got all kinds of film that they're going to be watching the rest of the day and through dinner and then even into tonight before they go to bed.

This bunch pretty much gets into the scouting report. We've got a program that we use that we know who's getting into their scouts and who's not getting into their scouts. You can pretty much bet that those six or seven that we've been playing all year long, when we open up that program, you can bet that they're going to be the ones that are watching their scout.

**Q. All season long you guys have talked about how you take it one game at a time. Jalynn and Savannah said that they're going to treat tomorrow like just any other game. How does that kind of level headedness help you guys do what you do?**

RICK INSELL: I think that's coach speak. Most coaches say, hey, one game at a time, one play at a time. We're guilty of doing that too.

But I don't think you take tomorrow's game as one game at a time. You're playing to get into the Sweet 16. You're playing an extremely talented team. You're playing them at home. Everything's got to be landing in their favor, and we

know that.

But we have been in some uncomfortable situations before, this year and last year, and we've come out on top, and we've lost some of them. I would say that coming in tomorrow, that our team will pay less attention to the crowd than probably any team they've had in here, including a lot of the SEC teams. We've played before packed crowds before. They don't seem to get rattled.

Now, they may get rattled tomorrow, but if they do, that will be a first. If we can get what we want to do across from the bench, I think we'll be okay.

Y'all have been there, some of you have. Education Day is pretty tough. I don't know that it can be any louder than Education Day. When the dogs howl eight miles from Murphy Center, that's pretty loud.

**Q. Coach Mulkey talked about how both of you all as coaches are more of that old style, traditional --**

RICK INSELL: We are.

**Q. And you run sets offensively. So what do you expect to see from this team and vice versa?**

RICK INSELL: Well, I'm a lot older than Kim. I remember when Kim was playing. I was coaching in high school at that point. So we knew all about her.

Then of course she played at LA Tech for Leon and Sonja, and I knew Leon a lot better than I did Sonja. The way she commanded her basketball program there is the way she commands her college team right now and the way she's done.

I knew she was going to be a great coach when she got into coaching because point guard, they've got to know everybody's role and everybody's position.

Kim has got a very talented team right now. They've probably got as much talent as anybody in the country. When they turn it on, they're tough. I mean, they showed that last year when they won the National Championship. How many people, didn't really anybody predict they would win.

A lot of people like to say now, well, the reason they won it, South Carolina got knocked off. I don't know about that. When you get into the tournament, it doesn't necessarily come down to the most talented team. It comes down to the team that's playing the best who wins the National Championship.

So I think that's what we're looking at. Right now we're playing pretty good. If you went and talked to our girls, they would probably talk the same way that the LSU girls have done. We're here to get to the Sweet 16 and the Elite Eight, and that's kind of been our goal all year long. So now we're one game away, they're one game away.

So it's probably going to come down to who plays the smartest and the hardest.

**Q. Speaking of executing, were you a little surprised to see LSU as careless with the ball as they were yesterday?**

RICK INSELL: Yesterday? No, I didn't see the game. My coaches did. I listened to them last night, but they didn't really say a whole lot about them not handling the ball. They were saying a whole lot about what they could do with the ball.

We watched a lot of film last night. The thing about playing Kim and LSU, we don't play on Sundays and Thursdays. We play sometimes on Thursday, but not very much this year. We were able to see them play a lot of games this year against Tennessee, against South Carolina, Mississippi State. So it's not like we hadn't seen them all year long.

As a coach, and all my coaches in particular, we're taking notes thinking that we might one day be down the road like tomorrow and have a chance to play an LSU or to play a South Carolina. So it's not like, when we went in last night to look at LSU, we pretty much knew their personnel and what she wanted to do.

Plus kind of an advantage for us is Nina has been on Kim's -- she's played for Kim, and she knows her like the back of her hand. So that helps us out a little bit there too.

**Q. As a guy who's been around the game for this long, what are your thoughts on how good women's basketball is running right now?**

RICK INSELL: Oh, it's great. It's great. You go back, this is what Pat wanted. Pat is the greatest ambassador the women's basketball world has ever seen. They may say this one or that one, and I could list some names, but I'm telling you I've been around through it all.

Pat Summitt has made it where we got good salaries. She made it where our players are a lot better now than they were back then, because the emphasis has been placed the last 10, 12, 15 years on women's basketball, and we're still growing.

Look at the WNBA. I've gone to a WNBA game before where you could have shot a cannon off and not hit anybody. Now you can't even get in the game. Everybody's got a packed house.

You've got to take that back -- and I'll mention another name, Betty Jaynes. A lot of people, they either don't know who Betty Jaynes was or they lost sight of the fact she's the first one that started the WBCA, Women's Basketball Coaches Association, and she started pressing to have more regulations. She started pressing to have more rights.

No telling how many times she went to Washington, D.C., to lobby for the women's game. Now, Betty's passed away and you've got other people that's taken over, but Betty Jaynes, Pat Summitt, to me, were two of the most important names in the game of women's basketball. I think a lot of people will remember Pat, not many people will remember Betty, but they both kind of ran hand in hand.

I love both of them, and I miss both of them even today.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we appreciate your insight. Thank you very much. We wish you good luck tomorrow.

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