

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Rice vs LSU

Friday, March 22, 2024

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Pete Maravich Assembly Center

LSU Tigers

Kim Mulkey

Last-Tear Poa

Mikaylah Williams

Media Conference

LSU - 70, Rice - 60

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. We welcome you back to Baton Rouge. LSU gets the win over Rice by a score of 70-60. We're joined by Head Coach Kim Mulkey and Mikaylah Williams and Last-Tear Poa.

With that, we'll open for questions for Mikaylah or Last-Tear.

Q. Last-Tear, how important was it for you to get out and play, and how did you feel about a good number of minutes today?

LAST-TEAR POA: I was really nervous, obviously coming back from the injury. I was really excited to play with the girls again and obviously getting the feel of the court with them again. Yeah, it was good.

Q. Mikaylah, it's a similar situation working your way back even though you were playing in the SEC title game. How was the pace, and what was it like playing in your first NCAA Tournament game?

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: The pace wasn't anything different. I came in expecting it because we played like this all season.

I was excited. We got a W, but this is not how we wanted to start March Madness off. We can't do anything but go back to the drawing board and pick it up for the next round.

Q. For both the players, it kind of felt like you guys finally got into a rhythm in the third quarter, 23 points.



Just kind of what led to that in that frame?

LAST-TEAR POA: Obviously we had to pick up the pace. It was a sloppy game. I felt like we were just out of rhythm at first, missing shots. There's other shots that we normally make, and it just happened to be one of those games.

Obviously in the third quarter we picked it up, and yeah, we continued.

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: To piggy-back off of Poa, I think -- we picked it up, yeah, but I think that's just us hitting shots. We still had a lot of turnovers, and we still had a lot of sloppy possessions. We just happened to make shots at the right time.

Q. This is for Last-Tear and Mikaylah. What do you all -- you all had 24 turnovers. What do you think you've got to do next game to correct the problem?

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: Take care of the ball. That's really all there is to it. Take care of the ball and pay attention to the details. Take care of it. Look who you're throwing it to, stop making careless turnovers.

LAST-TEAR POA: Yeah, I agree. Take care of the ball, but I feel like just making the right plays at the right time, and obviously being more patient and being more of a leader.

Q. How good was it to be tested right out of the gate and feel the intensity that is postseason play?

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: It's always good to get your feet wet early so we don't get shook later in the tournament. It's not how we wanted to start because we had higher expectations for ourselves. So just going back to the drawing board and picking up all the sloppy mistakes.

LAST-TEAR POA: Yeah, I agree. Obviously we've got to focus on our next game and shake it off.

Q. The job that Aneesah did, I think it was the third quarter, where she had four buckets in a row or something. Her physicality down low and kind of



helping you guys get back on track, what kind of teammate and important part of this offense and defense especially is she?

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: Aneesah, as soon as she came in, she was a leader, especially for me. Just her picking us up. When she goes at a full head of steam, we're all right there back to follow her.

LAST-TEAR POA: Just like M.K. said, Aneesah is just a beast obviously. Once she gets her role and gets the hot hand and the feel for the basket, we kind of piggy-back off her. She's just an amazing player, so she did really good.

Q. You all outrebounded them by over 15. Was that a point of emphasis to get the ball to Angel and Aneesah? Was that the point of emphasis to get them the ball and to get the ball in the paint?

LAST-TEAR POA: Yeah, the main focus because we pretty much have the best bigs in the country, and I truly believe that. I feel like the first thing while playing should be looking inside.

Obviously once they start doubling and trying to piggy-back off how they're playing them, then we kind of can run different plays.

Q. For both of you, Angel struggled. She was double-teamed, had a lot, but she also dominated the boards. What did you see from her knowing that, hey, maybe she's not getting the looks or the shots that she wanted but making up for it on the other side?

MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS: I think Angel is just a good teammate. Even though she had an off night, she was there for me every time I missed a shot encouraging. She was talking about how she was just going to rebound and do her part on the defensive end. I appreciate her for being a leader and not getting down on us in the game.

LAST-TEAR POA: I've been playing with Angel for a while now, and I feel like the expectation, especially for women's basketball, she set it so high. Obviously when she does have one of these games, she does show the leadership on the other side. Like it's okay, keep going.

People don't obviously see that part, but she's a great leader.

Q. You talked about this yesterday, just the concern about the time off between the tournament and this. What did you think about the team and the way they came out and eventually settled?

KIM MULKEY: I want to give credit to Rice. I'm just a coach that believes Rice was excited. They have a new coach. Two of my former managers are coaches. I'm proud of those guys.

I just thought it was a feeling about us, that maybe lack of urgency in thinking that you could get beat. But at the end of the day, you have 24 turnovers, you're going to look bad, and 24 turnovers -- it almost became comical because I thought are they in a contest to see who has the most turnovers? Because that's how many each of them had.

Q. Coach, you mentioned one of the points of emphasis that you carry around in practice all the time, not having an off day. Today it wasn't so much an off day, but it was just?

KIM MULKEY: It was an ugly basketball game. It was an ugly basketball game. It's okay. You won't hurt our feelings. It happens, but you won. Keep perspective. You won. You survived, and you're going to advance.

If I remember last year against Miami in the Elite Eight, that was an ugly basketball game, and I told the audience I'd turn my TV off. I wouldn't watch this. It was ugly today.

To emphasize the good things, we did hold them to below 39, 9 from the field. You're going to win games when you do that. We didn't shoot it bad with the exception of a couple of players. I thought the other players had good shooting percentages in the shots that they took. I thought we got to the foul line, like we have all year.

We put them at the foul line, if I remember, right at the eight-minute mark of the fourth quarter. That's bad. That's bad defense right there. And we were not very disciplined in that fourth quarter.

I thought our crowd was outstanding. Very, very good crowd today for a 3:00 game on a Friday. We don't work in Louisiana. Friday is the first day we get to party. The weekend, baby.

Q. Mikaylah and Flau'jae, especially Mikaylah coming back from the injury, how did you evaluate them offensively and how were they able to get their shots?

KIM MULKEY: They both shot it pretty good. I think Mikaylah was 5 for 10, Flau'jae was 5 for 9. That's a freshman and a sophomore. I thought they did just fine shooting the ball.

It's just the turnovers. 24 turnovers, that's bad.

I'd like to give Rice some credit for their 1-3-1 half-court

defense that may have created maybe half of those. But a lot of those turnovers were just us. A lot of them were just unforced.

Q. Kim, would you talk about playing Poa, how you've planned to play her today. Did you think you'd get that many minutes out of her?

KIM MULKEY: Yeah.

Q. How did you think she looked?

KIM MULKEY: I thought she did fine. I thought she frustrated me at times, just like Hailey did. Those are your two primary ball handlers. What did they frustrate me with? Turnovers. So it was flipping a coin which one was not going to turn it over.

But I'm grateful that Poa is healthy. I'm grateful that she's back, and we're a better basketball team, we have more depth with Poa. She's not under any constraints as far as playing time or anything like that.

Q. You kind of mentioned earlier to the players, but just your kind of initial reaction to obviously Aneesah as a tone setter. I know you've seen this all year out of her, but especially in that third quarter, it felt like she could really set the tone. Both players mentioned we follow when she gets rolling.

KIM MULKEY: Aneesah, her motor never stops. She has the same pace the entire game, and that pace is just really good. She's just been an outstanding player for us, undersized post player.

Probably don't use her enough on shooting the three ball because of our offense, but she battles in there for rebounds. She's -- I'm just grateful I get to coach her and she's on our team.

Q. In my first statement, you kind of had a feeling like they thought they couldn't get beat. Did you like this was a reality check or a test for them?

KIM MULKEY: I mean, they won. I'm not going to sit here and critique everything we did bad. What good is that going to do? There were a lot of good teams that got beat today that weren't supposed to get beat. We won.

We advance to play an outstanding Middle Tennessee team and program. I have much respect for Coach Insell and the job he's done. I have a former All-American player of mine on that staff. So I'm getting old.

Q. What do you think of Angel's leadership abilities

despite her having an off shooting game?

KIM MULKEY: Angel got 19 rebounds. She didn't shut it down. She got 7 shot attempts. So it's not the Angel Reese show with us. We've got other people that can score.

She brings a great deal of attention to us, and we're so glad. She's an All-American. But everybody's entitled to a bad game. She's entitled to one, and her teammates picked it up for her. Freshmen scored points. Poa came in from being hurt. You just help a teammate. You just battle through.

The only time a coach or the only time I would get upset with somebody that has a bad night is if you just quit on us, you don't give us something. She had almost 20 rebounds. So she was trying.

Q. Coach, you mentioned earlier not wanting to really dwell on all the bad things, it doesn't do a lot of good. What do the next 24 hours look like for you all in terms of moving on from this and kind of prepping for Middle Tennessee?

KIM MULKEY: Well, we're going to have dinner tonight. We're going to recruit tonight. We're going to watch film tonight. We're going to get in bed late tonight. We will sleep in a little tomorrow. We'll come and watch film as a group tomorrow. Come meet with you guys again tomorrow. I can't wait.

Get back on the floor very limited minutes because we played a hard game today. Do we know what time we play Sunday, anybody?

Q. Won't know till late tonight.

KIM MULKEY: Won't know till late tonight. Is that before my bedtime or after my bedtime?

Q. Sounds like you're going to be up late.

KIM MULKEY: So before? Because television dictates everything, right?

Q. Why are you looking at me?

KIM MULKEY: Some whiskey? You like whiskey? You're new. Where are you from? You haven't been in my press conferences before, so you're new. Where are you from?

Mandeville, St. Tammany Parish. They got a lot of whiskey and good boiled crabs in St. Tammany. Come back. Don't make this your first and last trip here.



