

Big 12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Monday, March 11, 2019

Kim Mulkey
Chloe Jackson
Lauren Cox
Kalani Brown

Baylor Lady Bears

Baylor 67, Iowa State 49

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by the Baylor Bears, head coach Kim Mulkey and her three student-athletes, Kalani Brown, Lauren Cox, and Chloe Jackson. Coach, I'm sure you're going to want to make an opening statement.

KIM MULKEY: I think I'm going to pass tonight.

Q. I guess both Kalani and Lauren and Chloe if you want to jump in on this one too, that fourth was complete dominance. Can you talk about what happened there, how you were able to take over the game?

LAUREN COX: I think we locked down on defense. We started getting steals, getting out and running and I think that eventually wore them out.

THE MODERATOR: Anyone else want to comment on that?

KALANI BROWN: She got it.

Q. I know this is part of what you came here for and you've still got another big tournament to play. What's this experience been like to be part of this and win this championship for you?

CHLOE JACKSON: It's a blessing with this team. This is a special team, and it's just surreal. This is what I came here for, like you said, and I wouldn't want to do it with another group of girls.

Q. Kalani, every game is different and this one, I mean, you guys got out to a quick start. They answered and it was kind of back and forth. When that fourth quarter run comes, we asked you yesterday about when you guys get on a run like



that, when it's in the fourth quarter and you guys are able to kinda land that knock-out punch, what's that feeling like?

KALANI BROWN: It's a good feeling, because the momentum is with us. We have all the energy and we play with high energy. We play some good basketball and good team ball. You just start having fun with it after that and I think that's what we did in the fourth quarter.

Q. Lauren, was there any frustration setting in or was it more what Iowa State was doing, the way they were controlling y'all a little bit on the defense end.

LAUREN COX: I think we were missing easy shots. We were letting them be physical with us, and I think that got us a little tired. But we pushed through that and our shots eventually started falling. Chloe was hitting from the outside and Lani hit a couple from the outside. So that started to open it up down low.

Q. Chloe, your step-back jumper that you hit in front of the bench with three minutes to go, how nice was that? When you do it right in front of your teammates like that?

KALANI BROWN: Pretty great.

CHLOE JACKSON: Yeah, it was pretty great. But all credit to my teammates. They gave me that confidence that I could knock down a shot and Coach talked about it earlier, pay attention to the shot clock. I knew I had to do something with this.

Q. Kalani, I know you've talked about this a lot, the disappointment, if you will, in the NCAA Tournament and how you didn't really want to think about that or focus on that. You just wanted to focus on this season, but here we are again. How cohesive, how good does this team feel going into the NCAA Tournament as a number one seed?

KALANI BROWN: We set goals in the beginning of the season. This was pretty much the final little mini goal before we make our run for the NCAA Tournament. So I think that's the only thing we haven't checked off our list is the Final Four, and if anything, winning tonight should make our team more focused.

Q. Chloe, you struggled at times against Alexa

Middleton. Talk about Moon and maybe DiDi switched to her in the fourth quarter and she didn't score. Talk about their defense?

CHLOE JACKSON: They're amazing defenders. That's all I can say. They're great. They do a great job!

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, congratulations and best of luck. Questions for Coach?

Q. Can you talk about the job that DiDi Richards did on Bridget Carleton tonight?

KIM MULKEY: I thought DiDi did what she has done all year. DiDi is our defense stopper on the perimeter. When she got a little fatigued, we could move other people. When she wasn't looking for her shot on the offensive end, as I told her, you can't be an offensive liability or I can't play you. She started cutting to the basket. She was just standing there. She works hard. She has the body and the conditioning and the length to make it difficult. She didn't bite on the fakes all night. She stayed on the floor. You know, how many times do you play Iowa State and the majority of their game are post-up moves by the perimeter players or drives? When you describe an Iowa State team the first thing you say is you must defend the three. They only made three threes tonight. So their game plan obviously was a little bit different. Why was it different? I have to give credit to our kids and their effort on the defense end of the floor. We change people's approach to the basketball game because of our defense, whether that's Cox and Kalani's presence in the paint, whether it's DiDi Richards is not going to give up as many threes as you're used to taking. But I've never played an Iowa State team that drove with their guards like that. I love that kid's energy. You gotta talk about Moon Ursin tonight. She was so valuable on the defense end as well.

Q. Coach, how does a game like this, a tough, hard-fought game help you guys going forward as you enter the NCAA Tournament?

KIM MULKEY: We've had a bunch of 'em, Nick. It's good. It's good. We've had a bunch of those. Look at the last of our schedule this year. Three of the last four games were teams that were vying or fighting for second place in the league, so it of wasn't like the hard part of our schedule was played early. I think that will only help us down the stretch.

Q. NaLyssa Smith seemed to get in that game just when you guys needed her and be a spark on the offensive of side of the ball. Talk about her and what she did in this game?

KIM MULKEY: It's not just tonight. NaLyssa Smith started the season. We don't win against Arizona State and Connecticut without NaLyssa Smith. When you head into conference she is not the forgotten one

anymore. Everybody knows everybody's strengths and weaknesses.

So that freshman came out in her in that she is going, wow this is a lot tougher in conference, man. I can't turn. I can't do that and I just kept telling her, stay with it, stay with it, stay with it. I thought NaLyssa Smith in the last part of the season is going back to being a big-time player and an offensive threat for us. She just, I don't want to say hit a wall, but she hit that freshmen frustration thinking this is supposed to be easier than this is right now. There is nothing I can tell her. There is nothing her parents can tell her. She has to live it and it's good to see her this time of year because we need that kid and that's what I told her coming off the floor. It's good to see you're back.

Q. Going back to Moon, what can you say about her transformation this year alone? Especially in the last three days for these games. What can you say about that?

KIM MULKEY: It's not just the last three days. It's all season. I'll tell a quick story. Moon is from the state I grew up in, my home state and I watched a kid with a tremendous body in high school and I watched a kid with tremendous speed and quickness and vertical leap and I just thought her best basketball is ahead of her. When her mom dropped her off at the dorm at Baylor I put had my arm around her neck and said she is going to call home homesick many days. She is going to think she is the worst player ever. You just keep telling her, stay in there and hang, hang, hang. It was just a matter of time. The kid has a beautiful mid-range jumper. She has speed and quickness. Confidence would be a good word to use. When you're a freshman you think you're the worst player ever and when you hit that point, usually about your sophomore year you realize, wow, I'm pretty darn good. Moon has just really done what I had hoped she would do. She is a crowd favorite. She goes in the game because she plays so hard, but she is really a crowd favorite because of her presence.

She is a happy kid. She speaks well. No matter how down she is, you want to be around her.

Q. Kim, it's 48-44 going into the fourth quarter and Iowa State is making y'all work down low and you guys immediately go into Kalani, go into Lauren. They score. Do you have the utmost confidence that they're going to continue to get it done even when it is a grind?

KIM MULKEY: Well, for me it started at halftime. If you look at their shooting at half I challenged both of them. I said to both of them, you're a combined and I forget what it was, it wasn't very good. I said if you're as good as people say you are, then you will work your

way through it. And they did. They got fatigued. Everybody gets fatigued this time of year and I gave 'em rest and that's when NaLyssa Smith went in and helped us maintain what we had at that point. Those kids are experienced players.

They've seen it all. You go with the kids that are experienced, but what you saw is you finally saw Kalani find the second gear when she was fatigued and run the floor. You gotta push no matter how tired you get you gotta push. I thought her running the floor late, I thought we get to 50-50 balls better in that fourth quarter than we did in the first half, 50-50 balls, steals, balls loose, active, and we were very poor in the first half.

Credit Iowa State. Chloe didn't pay attention to the shot clock a lot of times and that's not Chloe. So I addressed that at halftime. That was really the difference. I just thought we had more energy in the fourth quarter.

Q. Kim, you usually don't reflect during a season. You usually wait. But you your comment out there, does it hit you when this program has done during your time, 13 times in this game in 19 years and I can rattle off the numbers. But does it hit you what this program has done?

KIM MULKEY: Actually it did today. I don't know why. I don't know somebody just talking to me before the game and just said, Coach, do you realize y'all have played in 13 of these championship games; and I said, no, I didn't know that. I've only been at Baylor 19 years. I said, I didn't know that. And that person said you've won 10 of 'em if you win today.

I kinda knew that because somebody said a total of 20 championships in 19 years if you count the regular season. I knew more of that than I did that we've played in 13 of 'em. That's pretty remarkable.

I can't say enough about the Baylor fans today. They were loud and proud. They were here. Gotta keep doing it. Gotta keep feedin' that monster. I think Michelle brought it up, the disappointment we've had in the NCAA Tournament. See I don't view that that way. Last year Kristy Wallace gets hurt. Did anybody expect us to go to the Final Four without your quarterback? Think about that. We got it to a Sweet 16 and that's a disappointment. I don't view it that way. That's why I cried when she tore her knee up against West Virginia in that game. I'm a realist. Too many things can happen that affect a basketball game. We have been very fortunate to stay way from injury and we have been very fortunate that I've got a deep, deep bench and those kids never pout on you. Those kids are a joy to be around. They pull for each other and that's a

rarity in today's society. That is a rarity as a coach that you don't have one in that locker room that's pouting. They all want to play. Look, I want 'em to want to play. But they understand their time and their role and we'll see what we can do.

But I can tell you this: The public might say it's a disappointment and a failure and I didn't feed the monster if we don't get to the Final Four, so be it. We're still relevant and we'll fight till the last second ticks off that clock because I know how hard it is. And a lot of things have to go right. A lot of teams get on a roll. We're pretty good. We'll see what happens.

Q. Coach, how much of a luxury is it to be able to beat a top-20 team by 18 points, not even make a 3-pointer, only attempt three of them. The luxury of having a team that can play that style of ball in this day and age to be able to do that?

KIM MULKEY: Well, how smart would I be if we shot threes with a 6'5" and 6'7" post out there. You know what? Those two kids can shoot the three ball. Those two kids can shoot the three ball as good as anybody I have. I think our record speaks for itself.

You know, it's just going to be interesting to see when Cox and Kalani leave how they're used at the next level because I know what strengths and weaknesses they have; but, boy, they sure have won a lot of basketball games. Kalani Brown is 70-2 in the Big 12. Check it out. I believe she is 70-2 if you don't count this tournament in regular season games.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, congratulations on a great season. Best of luck in the Final Four.

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Alexa Middleton
Bridget Carleton
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Baylor 67, Iowa State 49

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Iowa State Cyclones head coach, Bill Fennelly, and his two student-athletes, Bridget Carleton and Alexa Middleton. Coach, your thoughts?

BILL FENNELLY: First of all, I want to congratulate Baylor. That's just a really, really, really, really good team. I wouldn't be surprised if about a month from now they're holding up another trophy. Congrats to them. I want to on behalf of our team and our university I want to thank the Big 12 for running an amazing event. I want to thank the people of Oklahoma City, the people here at Chesapeake Arena. Our kids have been smiling since they landed and I'm going to get them to smile again before they leave. They provided our kids with a lot of memories and I hope that the people here enjoyed having Iowa State here.

Lastly, for our team, I thought our kids played as hard as they could play. I couldn't be more proud. It's kinda the same cycle when we play Baylor. It's been these two and they didn't get a whole lot of help. For us to be down 4 going into the fourth quarter, we gave ours a chance, but Baylor's defense was great and we just couldn't get some offense from some other people. The best part for me is this team is tremendous to be around and the best part is we get to play again, and I get to keep coaching them for a little bit longer. I'm not looking forward to the end, but we're going to celebrate what we're doing right now. These two have a little time left, and we're going to make sure they enjoy it.

Q. For each of the players, I know it's disappointing, but for three quarters you were neck and neck with the best team in the country. Can you reflect on what that means for this program especially considering where it's been the last couple of years?



BRIDGET CARLETON: For sure. It was exciting to be in that game, going into the fourth quarter. Obviously Baylor is a great team and they're hard to compete with. Our bigs were battling. Maddy was battling a long time against 6-4, 6-7 and it gets rough down there and they're a really good team, and to be down only 4 in the fourth quarter our spirits were high. We were ready to go. Obviously they made a run. Their defense was really good tonight. It's good for us going into the NCAA tournament and it's good preparation for that because we're going to see some really good teams.

Q. What did happen there in the fourth quarter? You hung with them for most of the night and then kind of the last six, seven minutes is when things kinda changed direction.

ALEXA MIDDLETON: You look at the box score we only had five points in the fourth quarter. They had 19. That was a lot of it. Like Coach said, their defense was really good in the fourth quarter. We weren't able to execute like we wanted to and right there with them in the third quarter, we survived the surgery they usually have in the third quarter, just couldn't get it done in the fourth.

Q. Coach Fennelly was talking about how excited he is for what's still in store, I guess. Given what you were able to do tonight and just all season, what's your guys' excitement level as you get ready for the NCAA tournament now?

BRIDGET CARLETON: We're really excited. Obviously some rest is going to be necessary in the next week. But we're excited for Selection Monday and we're hoping we get to host, hoping we get to win some tournaments and win some games in the tournament. You know, playing college basketball you want to get to the NCAA tournament. That's what it's all about. That's where the best memories are made, so we're looking forward to that. I can't wait.

Q. You guys both played a lot today, yesterday. Alexa, your most minutes of the season. What was it like in the second half? Were you all pretty fatigued? How did you feel today?

ALEXA MIDDLETON: Yeah, it was a lot of minutes. Like you said, the most I've played all year. The third game in a row, three days in a row is tough. Coach Steyer talked to me before the game yesterday about

they're tired, too, and you've got to think I'm going to attack that on them and I'm telling myself I'm not tired. I think we were mostly able to do that, but fatigue is in the back of your mind. You're tired, your legs are dead, you've got to get more lift on your shot, but overall I think we did a pretty good job of pushing through that and doing some great things on the court.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, congratulations. Best of luck. Questions for Coach?

Q. Bill, with about a minute left you took Alexa and Bridget out and you talked to them. What words did you have for them?

BILL FENNELLY: I just told them I wouldn't be more proud of the effort that they gave. When you're on the court and playing at the highest level against the best team in the country to play that well and I took 'em out because obviously they were tired. Bridget dinged her ankle a little, but I wanted our fans to acknowledge them.

I wanted the Baylor fans to acknowledge them. And I just told them that they're not done playing. I told them to wipe the tears out of their eyes, get their head up and cheer for their teammates, but mainly how proud of them I am and that they still get to play and that's the biggest thing for them. They're pretty down, which is probably in a weird way a good thing. But they'll be okay. They'll be okay.

Q. Bill, you know you're not going to go against anybody tougher than that in the NCAA?

BILL FENNELLY: I hope not. The only team tougher is our football team, probably.

Q. I know it's disappointing, but having played a team this good three times how does that prepare you for March?

BILL FENNELLY: You must have been in the locker room because the last thing I said was there isn't a team in the country that got better preparation for the NCAA tournament than us. This is the best practice, obviously we're disappointed we lost the game, but I can't imagine anyone being that physical at both ends of the floor that we're going to see. Maybe there is, but I don't know who it is.

That hopefully is the message that our kids will take out of here is we played really well for two games and three quarters. Hopefully that's something that we can build on moving forward.

Q. Bill, that was a recipe, the first three quarters that has knocked them out of postseasons before. What changed? What makes them different that they can handle that now?

BILL FENNELLY: Well, I think the biggest thing is that they continue to just do what they do. They're not going to take a bad shot. They don't lose their poise on offense. You don't see many teams go 0-3 from the 3-point line in modern day basketball. And obviously their defense is really good. When Kristin Scott got in foul trouble I knew we were in trouble. We had no spacing. We can't create space against their big guys. They do such a good job of that. If they're guarding you really well and you can't get to the free throw line they're hard to score on. We had a hard time certainly in the fourth quarter.

Q. In three words, how would you describe tonight's game?

BILL FENNELLY: Physical, emotional, fun!

Q. Just your thoughts on how Alexa Middleton played tonight. Looked like she took the fight to 'em and was aggressive and kept you guys in it?

BILL FENNELLY: Alexa played really well. She had a great tournament, had a great game last night, had a great game tonight. We played her two many minutes, but I kept telling her, we're not taking you out. You got us here, you gotta finish it. With her and Bridget, they play really well off each other. Like I said earlier, for the third time against them, you're not going to beat Baylor. I thought our defense was fine. I thought we completed defensively, did the right things, transition baskets and inability to score in space when Kristen got in foul trouble put us in a position we could not overcome.

Q. Bill, can you put in perspective how Cox's overall game has grown? Seems to me she is able to hurt teams in a lot of ways on both ends of the court.

BILL FENNELLY: I think she is a great player and her numbers are always -- she scores, she rebounds, she blocks shots, she defenses multiple positions, she passes the ball. I mean, obviously she's going to be their preseason Player of the Year in our league next year. Her ability to do other things at that size and length just adds so much to their team that I don't know other team in the country that has that. I'm sure there is, not that I've seen.

Kalani Brown is a great player, but part of the reason Kalani Brown is a great player is because she is playing with Lauren Cox. I think what she does and how she does it really impacts their team and it's a credit to the way they play and the way they've coached her.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, congratulations on a great season.

BILL FENNELLY: Thank you, everyone. Appreciate your time.