Kim Mulkey, Baylor Head Coach

Q. How many phone calls or texts have you received from guys in Lincoln Parish ahead of playing Grambling?

KIM MULKEY: Quite a few. You spend 19 years of your life in Lincoln Parish. Ruston was dry. Everybody at Tech and Ruston went to Grambling to get alcohol. Went there or you went to Walmart.

Know lots of people still living in Grambling. I hope I see them after or before the game tomorrow. You can’t say Ruston without saying Grambling or Louisiana Tech without saying Grambling. I saw so many of Eddie Robinson’s football games.

I have to be honest. We stayed till halftime. After we watched the band perform, we left. That’s what you did in Lincoln Parish if Louisiana Tech wasn’t playing somebody in football that you wanted to see play.

Q. Talk a little bit about what challenges you face with Grambling.

KIM MULKEY: Guard play. Obviously we’re bigger than they are. We’re bigger than a lot of teams. But they have great guard play. We’re just going to have to defend Hill, just like we do a lot of great guards. Transition defense, a lot of motion offensively. I would imagine a lot of different changing defenses.

They’re going to be excited. Our kids are excited. Everybody should be excited this time of year.

Q. The one thing GSU has done pretty well is their outside shooting, better than inside. Do you feel you have the personnel to defend the three-point ball?

KIM MULKEY: I do. We’re a pretty good team. We’ve defended a lot of great guards. A lot of people want to bring the big girls outside and defend. I think if you watch us play, Lauren Cox isn’t afraid to go out there and defend a perimeter player. Kalani doesn’t want to do it, but she’s been made to do it a lot.
But we'll defend the three. If you look at the NCAA stats, our field goal percentage defense is ranked up there pretty high. We defend the three ball pretty good.

**Q. Is there any level of disappointment at all that you're not a No. 1 seed?**

KIM MULKEY: Not really. You know, I was just thinking the other night, talking to some of my mentors, if we were 32-0, which we very easily could have been with Cox going on that game, me possibly coaching in it, would we have gotten a No. 1 seed? Probably not. Think about what you just said. We could have been 32-0 and probably wouldn't have received a No. 1 seed.

I don't know. You can talk about non-conference strength of schedule. The bottom line is it's so subjective. I mean, it really is. The older I get, the longer I've been in it, we've been No. 1 seed, we've been No. 2 seed, we've won a national championship being a 1 seed, we've won it being a 2 seed.

Do I think that we're as good as some of those that got the 1 seed? Absolutely. We played Louisville last year in the semifinals. We played Mississippi State in the Elite 8. I thought we were as good as those teams. It's not like they've just jumped over us and leapfrogged us.

You can only pick four. They picked the four that they thought were worthy. If non-conference strength of schedule was the deciding factor, so be it. I still say if we were 32-0, we still wouldn't have received it. If we have Kristy Wallace, that became a factor. If Kristy Wallace was up here today, we still wouldn't have received a 1 seed in my opinion.

It doesn't matter. It really doesn't matter to me. Let's go play.

**Q. You said you weren't surprised by anything Alexis did. Did it help her, maybe the other players' comfort level, in terms of what she did, getting those games under her belt?**

KIM MULKEY: I'm sure it helped her. But honestly we expect that. Kristy Wallace was a senior, this is a freshman. We have watched them every day in practice. We have scrimmaged every day and watched them go at it. The scores in the scrimmages with Alexis' team versus Kristy's team, guys, that was no fluke. The kid can play. She's got a swag about her that she expects to do it.

She's not Kristy. We miss Kristy's leadership. She's quieter than Kristy. When Kristy was a freshman, she was quiet, too. That's why she's lucky to have these three that were up here today help her. Lauren Cox will be a leader for us and help her because Lauren is not afraid to open her mouth and say things and help her get through that.

It helped her probably to play it. In her world, in my mind, all she did was expect it, and we've seen it every day.

**Q. How beneficial has this time off been since the Big 12 Championship to allow your team to rest up for this run?**

KIM MULKEY: Well, I think it's beneficial to all teams, but especially when you're limited in numbers like we are. Having only eight players that can play, these two big girls playing 40 minutes, three straight days, that's asking a lot of their bodies. But they gutted it out. We don't have to do that any more, thank goodness.

**Q. How have you seen Didi's play grow and improve the past couple weeks?**

KIM MULKEY: Didi Richards, she doesn't get the credit she deserves. I think Didi Richards, her activity,
her quickness, her length, she can guard any perimeter player. She just has an intuition on when to help a post player. She's just somebody that I'm as confident in her ability as I am Alexis Morris.

Q. How do you not overlook the 15 seed, Grambling, and just think it's an easy spot to the second round?
KIM MULKEY: You're looking at her. You're looking at her. I will never let a team I coach overlook anybody. If we get beat by a team that should not beat us, it won't be because we overlooked them. It won't be because we're not prepared. It will be because they absolutely played better than we did and they deserved it.

That's happened to us, not with 15 seeds, but if you look at the history of our program, our losses in the Elite 8, Sweet 16 games, a player either had an unbelievable game that they've never played like that in their life, or a team that went on to win a national championship after we had an injury that they couldn't beat us the whole year. That's something that you can't prepare for.

It won't be for lack of preparation. It won't be because we overlooked a team. We'll do our scouting report. We've done our scouting report. They know personnel. They know tendencies.

You can't help the unknown. The unknown is some great performance that you just can't stop them. But it won't be for lack of preparation.

Q. You've won a bunch of NCAA games on your home court. How big of a deal is it to play once again the one game and possibly two games here at home?
KIM MULKEY: Well, you know, in the women's game, we tried to go to neutral courts several years ago. In my opinion, it was a disaster. It was a disaster when we tried to do that. We're not ready for that. I don't know that we'll ever be ready for it.

In the women's game, fans follow their teams. You better do good during the season because you're going to be rewarded with a top four seed if you do good. That's just the nature of our sport. Nobody was in the stands when you did those neutral sites.

So is it an advantage? The advantage would be that you have a better team than maybe those that come in here. But the home court doesn't win a game for you. The advantage may be that you have more fans in the stands than the opposing teams, but you still have to play the game.

You have neutral referees that come from all over the country. Those guys are professionals. They don't know what court they're really on. They're just calling a basketball game.

It doesn't give you a win. It just gives you a little comfort. You get to stay in your same bed, eat the same food. But that's the way the women's game is. It's the way it's going to probably be forever because I don't see that changing. I've been around the game 35 years now as a player, and it's never changed. You're not going to be able to go to neutral courts early and sell many tickets.

Q. As head coach here, then a player and assistant coach elsewhere, what are your fondest memories of March? What stands out in your mind of the NCAA tournament?
KIM MULKEY: Lord, you're asking me to sit in a rocking chair and tell you every one of them? I can't remember them all, man (smiling).
At Baylor? It would have to be 2005. We were a 2 seed. We beat three No. 1 seeds to win the first championship. It would have to be before that, the very first NCAA tournament we participated in, which was my second year here. No, it was my first year here actually. We had Lambert and Crockram in that group.

Then it would be just the 18 years that have been remarkable. What a tremendous ride it has been. To build it as quickly as we built it, just stay up here, got a few more gray hairs, a lot more wrinkles, a few more pounds, but still hanging on, still doing what we do.

Q. What is your relationship like with the people at Louisiana Tech? Do you still talk to people over there?
KIM MULKEY: I talk to Coach Barmore regularly. I talked to him the day the announcements were made. I told him to hop on that Grambling bus, come with them. He doesn't like to drive, stays on the golf course there at Squire Creek.

I have many what I consider family, but they're really friends, just like family that I stay in touch with there in Ruston and in north Louisiana, the little surrounding communities. My children were raised by a lady that lives right there in Simmsboro. All her family live in Grambling.

We've laughed about playing Grambling, me making sure Grambling brings their band. If you've not ever been to a Grambling football game, do that before you die because their band is unbelievable. I know it won't be a football band here, but it has to be some of the same band members. They're entertaining, full of life. As I told Baylor band, you better get ready because they're going to blow you out the water when it comes to instruments.

Q. You talked about Natalie getting in a softer, smaller cast. Is she able to do everything you need her to do? Can you trust her to play more minutes?
KIM MULKEY: Well, yes. I could have before she got the smaller brace. The problem with that is Juicy is playing so well. You don't want to mess up a rotation of kids that are playing good. Now, she certainly is not the player that she was before being injured as far as her timing on her shot, maybe conditioning just a little bit. It matters.

But she can go. She can play. If I need her to, I will. I may. It's four weeks now since the surgery. I would imagine each day her confidence grows. But she's doing reps in practice like the rest of them. There's only eight, so she's going to have to help us.

Kalani Brown, Baylor Forward
Q. Kalani, the NCAA starts now. What is the excitement level? This is your third go-around.
KALANI BROWN: The excitement level is high. There's nothing like this time of year. Different teams. I'm excited to play someone new. Coming off of conference playing everybody second or third time, seeing new opponents is good.

Q. Have y'all ever seen a player, even guarded a player, like Shakyla Hill?
KALANI BROWN: No, not really. I'm a post and she's a guard, for one. But no. Closest person I've seen I will compare her to a Kelsey Mitchell. Makes a lot of shots, penetrates, yeah.
Q. How do you not look past the fact of a 15 seed? How do you keep it one game at a time, an opponent like anybody else?
KALANI BROWN: Upsets happen all the time because teams take 15 seeds, lower seeds, for granted. That's how you get upset. I feel like you have to play to the height of your potential every time or you're going to get beat. Like Lauren said before, we're one-and-done. You can't play games with everyone.

Lauren Cox, Baylor Forward
Q. Have y'all ever seen a player, even guarded a player, like Shakyla Hill?
LAUREN COX: I mean, she's a real unique player. We put a lot of focus on her. She's their best player. All conference player. Like Kalani said, she hits a lot of shots, she's quick. We have to stop her in transition.

Q. Lauren, you were in a position last year being a freshman playing your first tournament game. You have big contributors on this team that are freshmen. What advice would you give them?
LAUREN COX: Just to stay focused. Don't let the hype of March Madness and all that get to your head. We're one-and-done now, so we have to stay really focused, take it one game at a time.

Dekeiya Cohen, Baylor Forward
Q. Dekeiya, what is the comfort level playing the first game, and if you win, the first two games here at home?
DEKEIYA COHAN: There's definitely a lot of comfort just knowing that our fans are here, we're going to have a lot of support, like a home court. It makes it more comfortable. We don't have to travel. We can just do our normal routine of a home game. It definitely makes it a little easier for us.

Q. How do you not look past the fact of a 15 seed? How do you keep it one game at a time, an opponent like anybody else?
DEKEIYA COHAN: Yeah, like Kalani said, that's how upsets happen, you take them for granted. We just have to take advantage of playing a lower seed, just do what we're supposed to do, which is to try to dominate the game.

Q. Dekeiya, being the only other senior, how much do you miss Kristy? How much did it help to have those games under your belt with Alexis?
DEKEIYA COHAN: We definitely missed Kristy a lot. We missed her leadership on and off the court. Just her being a great person in general. We're going to miss her. I mean, it's a given.

But Alexis Morris, she's definitely stepped up. She's done a great job. We're definitely proud of her. She's doing everything we asked her to do. A couple games under your belt before going into the tournament, it means a lot to us. It gives us comfort, reassurance. I think it gives her confidence, as well.