

University of Kentucky Practice Day Quotes

Kentucky Head Coach Matthew Mitchell

(On having multiple players from Kentucky and the importance of that) “I think Kentucky is such a unique place and the passion for basketball is so strong here. The love for the University of Kentucky is so strong throughout the Commonwealth. I think that it’s a little extra special when we have Kentucky players playing a significant role on our team. Our recruiting philosophies always start with the best players in Kentucky is what our goal would be to have them on our team. I think it means a lot to our fans and our supporters. For our players from Kentucky, especially Lydia Watkins who in her senior year, has overcome so much adversity throughout her career, and she plans to make a home for herself in the Commonwealth. I think it’s really special that she played at Kentucky and advanced to the NCAA Tournament in her senior year. Those are the kind of stories that I think are really neat to our team as it relates to our Kentucky natives.”

(On Donovan Rogers) “Donovan is a really dedicated young man. He embodies what our program is trying to be about. He is just a really honest young man and a disciplined guy. He is a great representative for us, who works really hard. He has a service heart with the approach he brings to work every day. I’m real proud of him as I am with everybody in our program right now. He’s a really good guy.”

(On getting back into the NCAA Tournament and having the first round in Louisville) “I think that just getting into the tournament is significant progress for us. It is a year that started with a lot of people having doubt in these players and what we could do. I’m sure that every team in Division I starts the season with a plan as to how they’re going to make the tournament. There’s a lot of competition out there and if you’re one of the 64 that makes it, it’s clearly significant. As it relates to the progress of our program, it’s a great measuring stick to see some tangible results to all of the hard work that’s been invested by these players, so I’m thrilled for them. Then, as you add the bonus of being able to share that with people who mean a lot to you, we have a very dedicated group of parents and supporters that these players are close to. For them to be able to share that because we’re so close is a pretty neat thing. We’re trying to take that part in stride and know that it’s an excellent opportunity, but it doesn’t guarantee us any success on the basketball court. We’ll have to go out and make the plays and play close to their identity, I think we’ll have a chance for success. To have that in front of people that you care about is a tremendous thing.”

(On Victoria Dunlap’s improvements) “She’s definitely gifted. She just has some gifts that she’s been given that not everybody has. She’s a tremendous athlete. You see a lot of those at this level. What I was taken by early on by her was her willingness to work and keep plugging even when she was tired, mentally fatigued, or maybe didn’t understand what situations she was in as a freshman. She would always invariably find some way to be productive. She is a good fit for our program because there will never be a time that defense is not emphasized. She has a passion for defense so that allows her to be a great leader in the program. There are a lot of intangible things that I saw in her and when you have a real gifted player that is willing to work harder than everybody and is willing to not get by just on her talent, I think that you have the possibility for something special to happen. The scary thing with Victoria is we’ve been working this week on trying to help her get better. She is just starting to scratch the surface as to what kind of player she can be. If she can expand her perimeter shooting, which is getting better every day we go along, she is going to be very difficult to guard and a very difficult match-up. I give her a lot of credit for working extremely hard, and I think that her work ethic gives her a great opportunity to be a very good player at some point.”

(On the change of goals to win a National Championship) “I think last spring we came off of what I wouldn’t say was an unsuccessful season, but it was a very difficult season. I felt that the team worked as hard as they could and with what we had, we probably got close to maxing out. I was real concerned with just the mindset of our players and the way they viewed the opportunity to play at Kentucky. I always felt that if we could get them to understand how special it is to be at a place like Kentucky that values basketball so much, and people are passionate about it. I felt like the people inside the room need to be more passionate than the people outside of the room. We worked on that last spring, and I thought that people like Victoria and Amber stepping up and starting to be leaders and have a change to make other recognize that this is a pretty good situation that we’re in was the first step. Once you have leaders that are invested, it’s pretty easy for the others to get on board, and I think that when they were picked so low, as players I never talked about that. It doesn’t matter where you’re picked, what matters is what you think about yourselves. I think that it’s a credit to the players that they recognize what we as coaches try to tell them. They are a special group and a determined group, so I think that answer has sort of evolved over the course of the season. There’s games here and there where you perform well and start to build some confidence. I don’t think it was one moment that led to that answer, but a gradual thing that started last spring and continues on now.”

(On loving the University of Kentucky) “We try to talk about it an awful lot. We had them bounce the blue and white basketballs around and that was not a ball handling exercise. That was I need to keep this close to me all of the time and identify myself as one of the special people that has a special opportunity to play basketball here. Things like that of trying to be mindful that you’re one of 12 people that currently have the opportunity to play for this program. That is something that needs to be cherished and if it’s not, you need to go somewhere else and find something else to do. Things like that, and I don’t think those things happen overnight. It takes time to build, and I think that it’s been happening for awhile. I told them before we went and played Tennessee for the SEC Tournament Championship, that I was looking for that moment when I felt like when the people in the room and locker room understood what it was, what Kentucky was and now that’s Kentucky. When you see them on that court and when you see those players play, that’s what I’ve been looking for. I’m real proud of them and it took a lot of hard work to get there, and we’re not done by any means. You’re slowly starting to see it take root and that’s a good thing.”

(On Liberty forward Avery Warley) “She looks and plays like a very high level post player, and we’ve discussed that at length with our team. Not only her, but you cannot be number one in the country in rebound margin if you’re not committed at all five positions to get on the boards. We really emphasize defense and rebounding, so we have a lot of respect for a team that makes the commitment. Rebounding has so much to do with heart, effort and toughness. That gets your attention early on. She’s sort of at the lead of the pack there. She’s so physical and active and can rebound out of her area. She is another tough matchup for us. I feel like I say this every game because we don’t have anybody that looks like her that’s playing right now. It’s another challenge. We’ll have to guard her with five people and have five people committed to boxing out and rebounding. I will be a tough matchup, but she is one in particular that really concerns us.”

(On being picked 11th in the SEC and now being a fourth seed in the NCAA Tournament) “Well, just to be honest with you, I’m not real sure with what they’re comfortable with and what they are not. I understand what you’re saying, but we just haven’t approached it that way. What I’ve tried to get through to them is that they need to view themselves as the most dangerous team in the tournament. I say that because they have a style of play that is difficult this time of year if you can get it going. It is difficult to prepare for on one day of preparation. All I want them to worry about is the Liberty game, and going out and doing everything that they can to win the Liberty game. If you can do that, now that the next game, I feel like we can have an advantage because of the work that they put in to be able to play as aggressively defensively as they can. We haven’t talked, but I’ve tried to give them

confidence that we can win this tournament. I think that's important because there's no use coming here if you don't think you can win. Once we believe that we can get that done, let's just make it very simple and focus on Liberty and then we'll move forward. I'm not sure, I would have to believe that they're up here saying that they have no pressure on them, but I'd have to sense that they think that it's a big moment and I think it's our job as coaches to help them with that as much as possible. We haven't played in several days, and there's a lot to deal with there. Liberty is a good team, so I'm not sure with how we're going to come out and play. I would be lying if I told you that I knew. If they can find some way to settle down and get over the nerves of playing in the tournament, and settle in and play our style against Liberty we have a chance to win. That's really all they need to worry about right now, and I think that they're doing an okay job with that is my sense."

(On the plan to get the team loose for the tournament, maybe sing to them a little.) "It's a possibility. I think that it's important right now. As coaches, you want to will them to win and inject yourself into the situation. I'm just trying to get them to know that they're the ones that are going to make it happen and trying to keep it as loose as I possibly can because we have a lot of discipline in our program and they do the right thing most of the time. They have a lot of discipline on the court. There is a trust level that we have and I just have to trust them that they're going to play right now. I just have to go and let them play. We've had great practices and so we'll just try to keep the mood as light as possible and stay as loose because I think our team needs to play with a sense of aggressiveness that you can't do if you're tied up and bound up with expectations. I think that's important in our mindset."

Freshman Guard A'dia Mathies

(Talk about your freshmen year and playing in your hometown) "I'm just excited coming in my freshmen year and doing something this big and I get to do it in front of a home crowd, I'm just excited and ready to get the show on the road."

(Feeling any added pressure with being from Louisville and this being your first year) "No I really don't feel any more pressure. Since this is my first year I really don't know what I'm supposed to be feeling right now. I'm just going to go out there and play."

Junior forward Victoria Dunlap

(On exceeding expectations for this season) "I think we still have a lot more to show of our self's. We had a great season but it's not over for us and coach talks about us doing better and instilling more and we still have to improve."

(When did it click that your season will be turning around) "It's kind of hard to say. I think just from the beginning, we always knew that this team was special. Just the way we were practicing and what coach put us through. We just won a lot of games and played as a team and our defense has improved a lot against other teams. Also going through the SEC Conference and playing those teams, we just knew that we were going to go a long way this year."

(Did you think you would progress this quickly from your freshmen year) "Personally not really, but the coaches always told me that I had a lot of talent and was pushing it out of me and they knew that I could be that type of player. The confidence that my teammates and coaches had in me has helped me get better also."

(On using the men's basketball program as motivation) "No, we just see them practicing or in the weight room and we just talk about our game that we just had and that's about it. We just have to play our basketball. They are well known for the way that they have played in the past. We don't look at it and say 'they are getting all of

the highlights' and we have to win as many games as they did or win the SEC Tournament in order for us to play hard."

(What was the team's mind set when they was picked 11th) "Just the message of the team and the coaches that we were better than what people has seen us, and we been working hard to show people that we are. Everybody has a strong mentality and the work that the players and coaches have put in over the summer and during the season has paid off. Everybody just bought into the concept of what we were trying to accomplish, which was not to be selfish and that we are a team. I think that was a big part of it."

(Liberty style of play) "Coach told us that they are aggressive and they go after rebounds. They are a physical team on the inside and their guard play is pretty good going to the board. So we just have to focus on keeping them contained and keeping them off the boards."

(Facing a small school but with a lot of NCAA experience and this being the first appearance for a while for Kentucky) "With Liberty having more experience in the NCAA, I think their coaches just say 'that you have been here before and you know what to do'. With this being our first time here we can't just go out there and walk around, we have to go out and play hard because we know they are going to play hard."

(What are your goals now) "Our goal is to go out and when a National Championship. "

(On your improved free-throw shooting) "Just a lot of shooting, coach gave us a goal for shooting over the summer and also my teammates helping me with my form and my confidence. Amber was definitely a big part in that."

Junior guard Amber Smith

(On being able to play close to home) "It means a lot because we have great fans and they can come out and support us, so by having that it will give us a big boost and provide a lot of energy. It just means a lot being able to play in Louisville, since it's close to Lexington."

(Was it easier for you all being picked 11th in the SEC in the pre-season and not having all that pressure to be one of the top teams) "There really wasn't any more or less pressure; coach still always said that we have to play hard no matter what. If we were picked 11th or higher than that he would still say the same thing."

(Having a break between the SEC Tournament and the NCAA Tournament) "I think more than anything we are ready to play, we had a lot of time off, our legs had a chance to rest, and we are just ready to play. I know that I'm excited and I think everybody else is too. I think we are good mentally and psychically as far as being prepared. So we are just ready to play."

(Personality of the team) "We are very energetic. We have a lot of fun on and off the court. We build great chemistry off the court which then carries over when we step on the court. We are a very energetic group. "

(Any added pressure) "No, not really, we are just looking at it as the next game on our schedule. I know that it is the NCAA Tournament but we are just going to approach it as our next game, but there is really no added pressure."