A look into Nalyssa Smith’s career pg. 2

NICKI COLLEN | HEAD COACH

“The Baylor women’s basketball program, its players and all of Baylor Nation were shocked in spring 2021 when Head Coach Kim Mulkey announced she was leaving to go coach at Louisiana State University. ‘Unbelievably hurt, just came I’m a very loyal person,’ said forward Caila Buckley, who was coming to Louisiana State. ‘That’s who I came here for, like, I think a lot of people when Kim was here would say, I came to be coached by Kim Mulkey. But that’s what they came here for: It was just a known and a given.’

While director of intercollegiate athletics Mick Rhoades sought the next leader of the powerhouse program, the senior trio of Queen Egbo, Nalyssa Smith and Buckley had to make a decision on what they would do in their final year. ‘I remember once Kim left, we kind of had all tested about it we were like, “What are you going to do? There are no going to move forward?”‘ Smith said. ‘We all just came to the realization that we were just going to stay and just keep competing. And as long as we get each other, we can do anything.’

Eventually Rhoades announced the hiring of Nicki Collen as the new leader of Baylor women’s basketball, and the trio was happy with their decision. ‘I was glad I stayed,’ Buckley said. ‘I was glad I stuck it out until they had found another coach because I didn’t want to look back and say I should have transferred.’

However, it wasn’t just current players that dealt with a different coach than the one they signed up for. Incoming guard Jordan Lewis had made the decision to transfer from the University of Alabama after five seasons to play but under Mulkey. The in the end, Collen was able to win her over and keep her on board as well.

“I know this was the right decision,” Collen said. “Obviously, there’s an enormous amount of pressure as a result of that. A lot of it was just living up to the expectations that everyone was trying to do it authentically my way — to put my stamp. The only way I know how to coach, I feel very deeply, I’m pretty emotional, I say what I think.”

Collen initially wore the face base over of her inexperience press conference, but it didn’t take long for time to start coming up when she was doing to what Mulkey had established. ‘We’re still in the nitty-gritty of trying to do it all over again. This is the only way I know how to coach, I feel very deeply, I’m pretty emotional, I say what I think.’

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Brittany T ankersley | Photo Editor

the Ferrell Center.

Brown drives it to the rim on Feb. 12 at MOVING FAST

school, Smith earned multiple awards 2018 USA Basketball Women’s U18

Smith made a name for herself in the sticks with me. “ So going

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The Baylor Lariat

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

meet the Staff

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Baylor Lariat

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high school basketball in last decennium. “It helped a lot actually, ” Smith said. “Being on such a superior program where you’re playing around
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March Madness

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Mayer stresses defense, looks ahead to NBA future

Senior forward Matthew Mayer has become a staple for the No. 4 Baylor men’s basketball program, and he has grown over the years into a national champion and potential NBA prospect.

Coming off a 2021 national title run, Mayer was in a key bench role, stepped up in minutes when needed, and even got a starting role this year, the 6-foot-9-inch forward knew he had to work to help not only his team, but also his future.

“I was considered a bad defender last year, but I was good at offense,” Mayer said. “It was in the second round on draft boards, and I was like, ‘If I get that defensive tag, one that will help the team, and two, that’ll boost my draft stock. That was the main goal, and I think I’m doing pretty well right now.’

Head coach Scott Drew has been there for his entire journey and said Mayer has done much improvement.

“He’s a lot quicker, a lot stronger than last year,” Drew said. “His heart is more consistent. His mechanics are a lot better. Defensively, knowing our system better, rebounding better, and his passing has really improved. This became more evident with that. Matt’s somebody that each and every year, he’s become more consistent and bigger, better and stronger.

Looking at film sharing Mayer’s freshman year, Drew didn’t recognize the forward anymore, showcasing how far Mayer has come.

“You watch film as you prepare for other games and you look back [at his freshman year] — I was watching Oregon, and I didn’t even recognize him out there,” Drew said. “Physically goes in not only playing defense, but holding your position and being able to fight for rebounding. That means he’s put in the effort on and off the court in the weight room.”

For Mayer, the growth over his four years at Baylor has come in ways outside of potential performance.

“Caring out of high school, I was labeled as talented but not a winner,” Mayer said. “It just took time for me to prove myself that I’m gritty and can help my team win when I play a lot of minutes.

Juniors guard Adam Flagler hyped up Mayer’s defense, saying the best one-on-one in practice are between Mayer and senior guard James Akinjo.

“Take a lot of pride in fighting them down,” Flagler said. “It’s really good defense.”

These practices and end up being intense, healthy competitions for the seniors, as Akinjo tries to single Mayer out among others.

“We have a thing called ‘Trash’ and ‘the Drill,’ you go to the mismatch,” Mayer said. “The ‘Trash’ is on me, which doesn’t make any sense because I look him up. I feel the country in most percentages last year. What do you understand? I’m not a ‘Trash’ player. He does it on me, and then we just talk trash, but it’s good fun.”

Drew said he has also noticed the defensive improvements and intensity from Mayer over time.

“I’ve been Proud of him hard-working, making the right plays, defensively putting in the effort to get better,” Drew said. “It’s like parenting. As kids get older, you expect better behavior, performance, execution, maturity. I think Matt’s somebody that definitely, that doesn’t have to being a lot more solid and done a much better job.”

Wednesday, March 30th
3:30 p.m. Student Literary Awards, Armstrong Browning Library
6:00 p.m. Poetry Reading by Todd Hearon, Bennett Auditorium

Thursday, March 31st
3:30 p.m. Virginia Beall Ball Lecture in Contemporary Poetry by Chad Bennett, Armstrong Browning Library
6:00 p.m. Poetry Reading by Vivee Francis, Bennett Auditorium

Friday, April 1st
3:30 p.m. Panel discussion, Armstrong Browning Library
6:00 p.m. Poetry Reading by Ilya Kaminsky, Bennett Auditorium

The Beall Poetry events are free and open to the public.

The evening events as Creative Arts Experience credits.
Starting five players

1. Sarah Andrews - “The Silent Assassin”
   13.4 points, 5.7 assists, 2.1 steals
2. Adam Flagler - “Hot Shot”
   13.4 points, 3.1 assists, 1.1 steals
   13.4 points, 5.7 assists, 2.1 steals
4. Jordan Lewis - “Ms. Dependable”
   11.7 points, 3.6 points, 5.3 assists
5. Nalyssa Smith - “The Chosen One”
   22.5 points, 11.5 rebounds, 1.2 blocks
   10 points, 4.9 rebounds, 1.9 assists
7. Queen Egbo - “Your Highness”
   10.9 points, 8.3 rebounds, 1.8 blocks
8. Ja’Mee Asberry - “The Sniper”
   9.8 points, 2.8 rebounds, 1.3 steals
9. Matthew Mayer - “Air Mullet”
   9.4 points, 5 rebounds, 1.2 steals
10. Flo Thamba - “The Rim Protector”
    6.2 points, 5.6 rebounds, 1 block

NORFOLK STATE

- Going up against the men at 1 p.m. on March 17 at Dickies Arena in Fort Worth
- Won nine of their last 10 games, including six consecutive
- Only played twice in history, Baylor is 2-0
- 24-6 record, 12-2 in the Mid-Eastern Athletic
- Second straight NCAA Tournament appearance, third overall
- Pulled off one of the biggest upsets in tournament history when they beat No. 2 Missouri as No. 15 in 2012
- 1-5 all-time against Big 12 teams
- Senior guard Joe Bryant Jr. leads team in points (16.8) and assists (3.3) per game
HAWAII

- Going up against the women’s team at 3 p.m. on March 18 at the Ferrell Center
- First Rainbow Wahine team to win both the regular season and tournament titles in the same season, spanning more than 35 years of conference play
- It’s UH’s third Big West Tournament title and first since 2016
- 20-9 overall, 20-3 in the Big West
- Won 14 of their last 15 games, dating back to Jan. 29
- Graduate student forward Amy Atwell leading scorer (17.4 points per game) and rebounder (6.7 per game)
- Baylor is 2-0 against UH in its history, the most recent matchup a 77-42 win on Nov. 18, 2012
Reliable and dependable are the two words used to describe No. 4 Baylor basketball senior forward Thamba, who started all 36 games in the 2021 national championship run for the Bears. The four-year journey has been a learning experience, with Thamba justified behind some stellar talent and waiting to nick down the big-man position.

“I learned a lot about myself,” Thamba said. “One of the biggest things I learned was my ability to be a leader on this team. This has basically been the whole time I’ve been here, so long and also looking at all the predecessors who were out there, like Freddie [Gillespie], Mark [Vital], from Davion [Mitchell] and even all the way back to my freshman year with Randy [McClure] and Jake Lindsey. I’ve been blessed to be around different coaches and also just have the opportunity to learn a lot from them.”

Senior forward Jonathan Tchatchoua netted an NCAA tour in Feb. 12, a milestone for the Bears. This was a big hit to the one and only senior, leaving Thamba to take over the roles and responsibilities as a senior leader.

But head coach Scott Drew, the key adjustment for Thamba was to limit him to not cut the ball in the court and give Baylor more options.

“I think the thing of all that shared with him is just to give him a tone about how things need to be done,” Drew said. “I think he has a loud voice with the young players and by your voice, he allows you to be able to get your point across. I think it’s the same thing that he’s able to do.”

The adjustment went well for the 6-foot-8-inch forward, who has started to aggressiveness in order to keep the best for the team.

“It’s been working with the coaching staff to get a key piece to the game — my physical presence, especially on the defensive end and how the offense side and offensive rebounding. I’ve always been aggressive with but with being out I have to be more cautious about getting to certain areas where I can really pick up easy and quick fouls. But I feel like I’ve done a good job of that and also not taking the coaching because.

Another area Drew Thamba has become better at finishing around the rim. Drew is still not very happy for Thamba to be doing it so well, but glad to see that success being looked at.

“This is a great job, a great shooting and finishing. He’s been working hard on that,” Drew said. “I like how he is and how is really good friends. I know how he really important it is in our team’s first and I’m really happy for him because he has worked really hard”

Thamba hopes to reward himself after cleaning up the offensive glass, something extra the coaching staff helps Thamba to do.

“I consider myself an elite offensive rebounder, so I’ll just catch the glass and finish my breakfast,” coach likes to say.” Thamba said.

The forward from the Republic of Congo has spent his entire collegiate career away from his family, who were in attendance and watch me play an actual game.

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“I’m not really the type to be emotional like that, but it’s not a good feeling,” Thamba said. “More so for my mom because she’s always supported me a lot in the way. But she’s also just seeing the fruits of the labor (of) being away from each other for so long. Seeing how special it is to us like, ‘Wow, we got to celebrate this thing in caucus’”

Thamba’s career at Baylor is now one loss away from coming to a close. He said he is grateful to Baylor for his four years as a student-athlete and believes he is a better leader as a result of it.

“Very hard was worth it. Very hard to help Baylor to be a better leader as a result of it. Thamba’s career at Baylor is now one loss away from coming to a close.”

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ANNAGRACE HALE

March Madness
New faces in green and gold guard legacy

ANNAGRACE HALE

MAKING HER MARK

"Just getting to coach this special group of players was a big enough reason why I decided to stay," Collen said. "As much as anything," Collen said. "As much as anything, I wanted to see if I could mentor some of these players, teach them, and believe that their basketball would come into its own. So for that to be the case, the Bears won on win of 15 of their last 17 games to make the Big 12 tournament regular-season meet with the 15-7 Buckeyes and enter the Big 12 tournament as the No. 3 seed, and one of the four teams that received a spot in the top two seeds, Collen said. "They've had a history of winning and doing tournament success before," Drew said. "They've got a lot of confidence in themselves and the program, and that's really helped them in the last few games." Collen said. "I feel like she's doing a great job, though. I just feel like the world should know this lady."

While it took some time to get the fans back on board, it seemed if she had won the players over instantly with the confidence and belief she instilled in them as they fought their way into the NCAA Tournament. "That's always an awesome moment," Collen said. "You want to cherish every day. I have this group."

Collen said. "I want them to cherish every day that they have together, to understand this might be the best team they ever play on. Hopefully it's not, but it is, that they're really proud themselves into it and get a lot out of it."
CALLING ALL FRESHMEN - JUNIORS

Save the Date!
April 4th-6th

Last Chance
YEARBOOK PHOTOS

DID YOU MISS YOUR PORTRAITS EARLIER THIS YEAR? MARK YOUR CALENDAR BECAUSE WE ARE TAKING THEM ONE LAST TIME!