

# the Baylor Line

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## KIM MULKEY IN HER OWN WORDS

The iconic coach talks legacy, championships, parenting, loyalty, and believing in Baylor



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# KIM MULKEY IN HER OWN WORDS

The iconic coach opens up about life on and off the court

**As told to Peter Osborne**

KIM MULKEY has built a legacy at Baylor over the past 17 years. Two national championships. Seven consecutive Big 12 Regular Season Titles. 506 wins. Sixteen NCAA tournament appearances. Eight 30-win seasons. One of 14 finalists for the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. The only person in history to have won an NCAA championship as a player, assistant coach, and head coach. And a reputation for what she calls “brutal honesty” and an abiding love for Baylor University.

*Kim Mulkey says the greatest compliment she's ever received was when Baylor football coach Grant Teaff said, "That woman could coach my sport."*



TIM CLAYTON/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES

**I had no idea that night they were going to do anything for my 500th victory.** When they started doing all the 500 stuff, I walked up on the podium and saw about 50 girls who weren't athletes and they had tears in their eyes and were cheering. Then I looked over and there were my players. Then I looked and saw the female cheerleaders. It was a crowd of everything that's good about Baylor University. In that moment, all I could think of was this is what people need to see instead of someone on national TV and saying, "Don't send your daughters to Baylor." I was trying to reference that in a powerful way from the opposite end of the spectrum. And that's why I used the words that I did. Not to say literally punch somebody in the face, but to [respond] and defend the school. I tend to talk in different terms and coach speak and even

mentioned that Texas hit us right in the face after we played them this season. I would never mean punch them in the face in a literal sense.

**I didn't get into coaching for all this recognition.** There hasn't been a single day that I said, "Man, I want to be a Hall of Fame coach someday." I was actually pushed into coaching. And I just want to win the next game. I want to win the next championship. The Hall of Fame nomination is humbling. It's wonderful just to be nominated. But it's not why I coach. It really isn't.

**You can't explain the pure joy and happiness of a championship.** And after you've won

**The best thing that ever happened to me on a basketball court was winning championships. None of it was about the personal accomplishments.**

them as a player and as an assistant coach and as a head coach, your joy comes from watching those kids who've never won one, and those fans who've never experienced that. To watch people who were experiencing it for the first time, it brought tears to my eyes.

**My level of competitiveness has not changed over the years.** No, no, no, no, no. What you learn over the years is how to control things better. That's something you're born with.

**As a player, I saw the whole court.** I saw plays develop before they ever happened. I could see things through the eyes of a coach out there. But that's not something you can teach. You either have that instinct for the game or you don't.

**What drives me crazy?** Turnovers. You're losing another opportunity to score. And that drives me nuts because I handled

the ball as a point guard. I played the position and I'm probably most critical of point guard play. But I'm also the one that gives them the most credit. However, most of our turnovers are made by post players, so I need to do a better job getting on them about it.

**I have very realistic expectations for my teams.** When I got here 17 years ago, I didn't expect to be in a Final Four in my first year. You don't expect to win the league in your first year. You set realistic baby steps as your goals. At the beginning, it was to win more games than before I got here. Then it would become have a winning sea-

## the interview

**W**e scheduled this interview with Mulkey a week before she won her 500<sup>th</sup> game and seventh Big 12 championship on Senior Day at the Ferrell Center. In the emotional aftermath of a milestone victory, Mulkey spoke passionately and came to the defense of an institution she loves. The language she used drew some criticism after the game, and she has since clarified her words, but not the underlying sentiment. It would have been understandable if she decided not to do a 1:1 interview with this magazine.

This interview was scheduled to take

place at what turned out to be about 12 hours after the second-ranked Lady Bears were upset in the Big 12 Tournament Final by West Virginia. Again, we were a bit worried that Mulkey might cancel, but she could not have been more polite or generous with her time.

In addition to the victories, championships, recognition, high graduation and eligibility rates, and what she's done for Baylor's national reputation, Mulkey has earned the love of her players, her coaches, and the Baylor Family. She fulfilled her commitment to do this interview despite the

media flurry, and she spoke with the same candor that has marked her nearly two decades in Waco.

We considered writing this story as a traditional profile, but decided that it made more sense to publish it in her own words and voice, with no transitions from the interviewer and no comments from anyone else. In some cases, we've edited the transcript of our interview for clarity and length, but when your legacy is your passion and you're willing to speak your mind with intensity, it seemed to us that it should be presented without a filter.

son. And then it would become beating a ranked team. Now it's about competing for championships every year.

**Ten seconds left in the game. We're down by one point. What's going through my mind?** I wish I could be on the floor playing.

**Do I still play one-on-one?** I stopped that after about three or four years after I started coaching. I used to get on the floor and take charges and teach them how to do all that. And then I realized quickly, "You're going to get hurt. Stop." You think in your mind you can still do it, but your body won't let you. And so I wasn't too proud to stop doing that.

**I think it's our job as coaches to put our players in situations where they look good.** As a coach, I try to cover up their weaknesses.

**I would never say we played a perfect game, and I've certainly never coached a perfect game.** We've played some pretty darn good games through the years. People want to talk about that 40-0 team because it never lost. We were not good in some of those 40 games. But we were good enough.

**When you're young, it's very difficult to get back up after you've been knocked down.** When you're young, losses eat on you and you keep it inside of you for a while. But as you get older, you mature and you learn how to handle it better. But when you start out in the business, man, it's hard to let go of those losses.

**This game is really simple.** People want to over-coach too much. Just go play. Just teach them the fundamentals of the game, teach them your offenses, teach them your defenses, and let those kids go play.

**When I'm recruiting, I tell parents, "If you have a basketball question, please ask it now.** Because once they get to college I can't answer your basketball questions. I can answer your questions about your child's safety and your child's education

and your child's health. But once they get here, this isn't high school anymore. This is really a business. And any decision that I make, I can't have your feelings involved in it."

**The greatest compliment I ever got as a coach was probably from Grant Teaff when he said, "That woman could coach my sport."** I think

as a player, the best compliments were probably from coaches just saying how tough I was. That's all I needed to hear.

**I've always said I'm not a [coaching] lifer.**

I said that when I got in the business. And the reason I said that is I've seen a lot of coaches who don't know when to get out. I don't want to be that kind of coach. I still love it. I've just learned how to manage losses better, I've learned how to delegate more and I've learned to accept that there are some things I can't do now that I could do when I was first in it. But my love for the game, my intensity, my passion, my ability to relate to

players and to teach the game is no different than it was 17 years ago.

**I learned from my parents that your children come first.** They taught me that you have to work to pay your bills and yet they never missed ball games.

**As parents you set the example for your children.** And you let them know quickly what will be tolerated and not tolerated just by your everyday actions. My parenting is a little bit different than most, because anything that my children do, unfortunately, is going to make news. I would tell them that if they hung around anybody that gets in trouble, that person's name doesn't go in a newspaper. Your name goes in the newspaper, whether you did it or not. At the same time, you will be loved because of your mother's job by a lot of people. Just do good things, do the right thing and always be conscious of your surroundings and who you are with.



*The university surprised Coach Mulkey after her 500th victory with a big on-court celebration.*

**What am I proud of?** On the personal side, it's my children. They've turned out to be great kids. They've traveled the world. They've also handled criticism of their mother, and criticism of themselves well. And yet, they've turned out to have a moral compass that is just unbelievable. Professionally, my proudest moments are to graduate all the players that come here. And to help them achieve success and develop memories in their careers.

**The one thing I don't tolerate is missing class, abusing your scholarship.** And that does go back to how I was raised. You can stay in my doghouse a lot longer if you don't take care of your business in the classroom than you can by not doing well on the court. If a D is the best you can do and you're in class every day, we live with that. But you're going to go to class. You're going to go to tutors. You're going to attend study hall. You're going to do all of the things that you're supposed to do — or you're not going to play and you're not going to be a part of this team for very long.

**I have never had a player who was academically ineligible.** We've only had one player who has finished her eligibility in a Baylor uniform who hasn't graduated. And that's something that I'm very proud of.

**At the end of the season, I tell our graduating seniors that I hope their four years here prepared them for the real world.** We protect them here in that we love them unconditionally, we provide for them, and yet at the same time I don't want them to think the real world is like it is here. I don't want to be an enabler for them. You're going to have to go out there and survive now with people who don't know you like we do.

**All you can do is be yourself. I don't do what I do to please anybody.** I want to do the right thing by those I represent. Do the right thing by my players. Do the right thing by my institution.

Do the right thing by my bosses. There's no hidden agenda. There's no clique. I'm a mother. My children come first. And I challenge my players in a way that they understand that I'm for them. Just as I do with my two kids.

**The best piece of advice I ever got?** Gosh, I couldn't tell you just one. Maybe it was that the media is not your friend. And I never wanted to believe that. I always wanted to believe that if you're brutally honest they have to think that that's

a breath of fresh air. But I now understand that they're not your friends. A few other things:

- What you are is God's gift to you, and what you become is your gift to God.

- Today I gave all I had; what I kept I lost forever.

- From my wise mom: "You can't make chicken salad out of chicken s\*\*\*\*." Gotta love moms.

- If what you did yesterday still looks big to you today, then you haven't done much today.

- When you call on a thoroughbred, he gives you all the heart, speed and desire he has. When you call on a jacka\*\*, he kicks.



*University of Connecticut Coach Geno Auriemma shares a laugh with Mulkey before his Huskies beat the Lady Bears 72-61 at home.*

**I have always relaxed by doing yard work and watching my kids play sports.**

**I don't even know if it's a regret, really, but I think the most devastating thing to ever happen to me is divorce.** People don't understand the impact of divorce. I have old school values, and I won't ever, ever get over the divorce. I think I feel like a failure as a wife and as a mother. I didn't want the divorce. It's something that was really not in my control, but yet I guess if I would have been a different wife then it was in my control. I believe when you take your wedding vows, there's a reason it says in good times and bad times till death do you part. What does that mean anymore?

**I can't tell you that I have a best friend.** I make sure that my circle of family and friends is very limited, because I don't trust. I'm not sure

what little things throughout my life made me not trust, but if you're in my circle of friends, I trust you.

**My superpower?** Man, you're talking a foreign language to me. Is it my passion? I don't know. Is it that I'm not afraid to fail? I don't know. Is it my intensity? Is it my brutal honesty? The players like to say, "You're real, Coach. You're real." And I don't know. It could be all of those things. And I guess my kryptonite, the thing that gets in my way...maybe some of the same things that are my powers. I don't know that everybody wants brutal honesty. I don't know that everybody interprets my passion and my intensity as being a good thing. You know, what can be your strength can also be your weakness. Like loyalty.

**People just aren't loyal any more.** I honestly think I am loyal — to a fault, probably. I'm loyal to people. I'm loyal to institutions. That's just who I am. But I'm not going to be loyal to you if you're not a good person. I'm not going to be loyal to an institution if it's not a good place because I'm a very principled person.

**I was loyal to Louisiana Tech for 19 years, and they supported me throughout my career.** But I didn't feel like I was receiving the same amount of loyalty back from one person who was the most powerful person at that university, when I decided to come to Baylor.

**I guess timing is everything in life.** Like the timing of the phone call from [athletic director] Tom Stanton to come to Baylor. I had three other offers prior to Baylor to become a head coach and didn't feel I was ready. And the fact that the president at Louisiana Tech at that time didn't want to give me a five-year contract.

**Will I ever coach anywhere other than Baylor?** No. No. I can't see that ever happening. Baylor takes good care of me. And I hope that in return I've taken good care of Baylor.

**I still believe in Baylor University.** I believe

that you fix your problems. You acknowledge your problems. You help those whom you failed. From what I've gathered, we are fixing our problems and are trying to find out where those failings began. I want the truth and transparency, and I want to know why we failed in Title IX. But the University must continue on and continue to educate young people. I do feel strongly that this is a great institution. There is a difference between the bad things that happened at Baylor and Baylor being a bad

place. If you sum up my remarks that day, that's all I was saying.

**I've never been asked about the situation at Baylor by recruits or their parents.** Never. It's never discussed unless I bring it up because I want to be open and transparent with them. I know they are probably reading about it, but I've never had a parent ask about it or lost a recruit over it. We want our university to be the perfect place, but there is no perfect place. I don't know what to tell people other than we're trying to fix our problems, and whatever we've failed at in helping these young ladies. If we

haven't made that commitment known publicly then we have failed. I believe that we're trying to fix it. I know that's what we're doing.

**Do I see myself here at Baylor long enough to get my 600th win?** I don't know. That's a long way in the future.

**What's on my bucket list?** I just want to be a grandmother someday. It'll be fun. People tell me it's awesome.

**How do I want to be remembered?** I don't know that I can answer that. [People] can write their stories later. All I wanted to do was to improve the women's basketball [program] at Baylor. Win basketball games. Put a product on the floor everybody was proud of. And that's really what you get paid to do. And that's all that I wanted to do when I came here. **BL**



*Mulkey says her job as a coach is to put her players in situations where they can look good.*