

Matchup gets its national attention

BY JEFFREY LUTZ
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ST. LOUIS — Wichita State's unbeaten season grabbed plenty of national attention in recent weeks, culminating with Sunday's game against Kentucky in the second round of the NCAA Tournament. Here's a look at Sunday's game as it unfolded on Twitter.

Dick Vitale @DickieV
Will the Shockers be 36-0 or will Big Blue nation dance?

This was arguably the NCAA Tournament's most anticipated game because of the simple story line Vitale — and many others — introduced before it began.

Wichita State could extend its NCAA record by improving to 36-0 or the Shockers would be felled by Kentucky, one of the most tradition-rich programs in college basketball and one of this season's most talented despite its No. 8 seed.

Pat Forde @YahooForde
Wichita moving ball faster than UK's feet and drilling shots. Clutchitude.

The Shockers led for much of the first half — by as many as nine points — with a focus that Kentucky couldn't match. WSU was steady throughout the 35-second shot clock on both ends, wearing down Kentucky with extended but efficient offensive possessions and guarding them tight despite several size mismatches.

This was also the beginning of the recognition the Shockers would earn throughout the game for hanging with the Wildcats, and often outplaying them.

Jeff Goodman @GoodmanESPN
All these likely pros — and Cletcherry Early has been best player on court today thus far.

Early earned a mention among possible NBA candidates by breaking through in last season's NCAA Tournament, but he never had a game like this. It wasn't just his 31 points that earned Early the "best player on the court" distinction, but his effort.

"He's a pro," teammate Tekele Cotton said. "The whole world just saw that."

Jeff Goodman @GoodmanESPN
Julius Randle playing like a man coming out of the break. Needs to take over this game in the paint

In the first four-plus minutes of the second half, the 6-foot-9 Randle had four rebounds — three offensive — and helped lead Kentucky back from a nine-point deficit early in the second with a three-point play.

Size may not have affected 80 percent of the matchups, but WSU never found a consistent defensive answer for Randle. He finished with 13 points and 10 rebounds.

"Julius Randle comes really, really hard," WSU coach Gregg Marshall said. "He is a grown man."

Andy Katz @ESPNAndyKatz
This Kentucky-Wichita State game should not be in the round of 32. Too good. Seeding?

This narrative began soon after the bracket was released, and it picked up steam for a week.

The game lived up to the hype. WSU's fans stood for most of the final minutes, and the loud applause for encouragement became prevalent on both sides. Kentucky's faithful roared when it had baskets to take the lead and the yellow-clad Shocker supporters tried to will a rally.

"I thought it was a great game the whole time it was going on," Marshall said. "It was back and forth and they would have the lead, we would have the lead."

Jay Bilas @JayBilas
Narrative may be otherwise, but this was an upset. Shockers are legit, and worthy of a Championship. Look what it took to beat them. Props.

Kentucky escaped with what Marshall called, "one more play."

The Shockers, though, were the story in many ways. Even in a loss, they seemed to answer the critics who questioned their worthiness of a lofty seed.

That talk seemed to die down during the week and was essentially completely eliminated as the Shockers came a shot away from beating the preseason No. 1-ranked team.

"I'm not really too worried about anybody's questions or what they think about us," WSU center Chadrack Lufie said. "It's what I think about my team at the end of the day, so that don't really matter. Regardless of whether we played well (tonight), we've been proving it all year."