

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 4, 2021
Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Missouri Tigers

Robin Pingeton

Postgame Press Conference



Alabama 82, Missouri 74

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Coach and we'll take questions.

Q. You had to go really small ball there to start the fourth quarter. What did you think of the way your team performed down the stretch tonight, how you were able to defend Alabama?

ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, not good enough (smiling). I just felt like our first and fourth quarter really, really hurt us quite a bit.

I didn't like the way we started the game. Just didn't feel like we had that dog, that grittiness that you've got to bring to post-season. And I also think you've got to give Alabama some credit. There were some tough shots in there, too. They connected.

But proud of the girls' poise. Second and third quarter we continued to battle. Made big shots from a rebounding standpoint. I thought we did a good job taking care of the ball. Shot the three ball really well. Did not shoot well inside the arc.

But to me it was all about our defense. I just thought there were some breakdowns with our communication. You've got to be able to guard one-on-one better than what we did tonight.

Their ball screen action hurt us a little bit. They've got some great players. I thought we did a good job on Walker, I really did. Copeland had size on us inside. She really did a nice job for them. Obviously Lewis is a great player, too. But had other kids that stepped up and made shots.

Q. 28 points for Aijha Blackwell tonight. You probably

are thinking about the end, she can't foul out in that scenario. How do you see it from her perspective where she kind of gets you back into the game, but has some defensive errors down the stretch?

ROBIN PINGETON: I thought she battled her tail off. I thought defensively it was not just one player, it was honestly all of us. We've got a kid that we said we were going to guard her on the drive; she gets to the free-throw line nine times. We collectively, I didn't like the intensity, I didn't like the communication. I think that's probably the most frustrating thing is because that's something you can control.

Offense you might have nights where you're not knocking down shots. But you definitely have to give 'Bama some credit. They're a veteran team. They've never been to the NCAA tournament in Kristy's tenure there. They've been knocking on the door. You've got to give them credit. Like I said, they're a veteran team.

They got to the free-throw line 30 times. To me, that's a huge part of this game. We shot seven free throws; they shot 30. They were aggressive. We had a hard time keeping them in front. They converted on a pretty high personal, 80% of their free throws.

To me that's the stat line that really jumps out. I mean, they almost had as many made free throws as they did field goal attempts -- or made. They had 25 made field goals and 24 made free throws. That's tough.

Q. You went down double digits early. I know you talked about intensity to start the game and end the game. What was your message to the team at that point midway through the first quarter? How do you feel they responded?

ROBIN PINGETON: I thought we were in a really good place going into this game. I thought we understood that our defense had to dictate our offense, the grittiness we had to play with, I felt like we got a taste of that against Mississippi State. We thought maybe we had turned the corner in regards to what that had to look like to have a chance in this tournament.



But we came out of the gates and just kind of took it. I didn't like the energy. I didn't like the communication. I didn't like the effort. Second quarter I just really tried to challenge them going into that second quarter that they had to dig in a little bit deeper, get a little bit grittier.

That's the thing about this team all year long, they've responded. They really have. I thought we came out in that second quarter and did what we needed to do, carried it over into the third. The fourth we had a hard time with the ball screens. Again, just too many free throws. I mean, that's a glaring stat to me. I know I just said it. But when you've got as many made free throws as you do field goals, that's going to be a tough night out.

Q. What is next for your team when it comes to hopefully probably playing in the WNIT?

ROBIN PINGETON: We're going to have to regroup. We got some kids that are hurting quite a bit, as you'd expect, as all teams do at the end of a season. It's a hard one. But if I know the team the way I think I do, we'll give it a few days and have to regroup.

I hope we get into the WNIT. I'm not ready for this season to be done yet. At that point that becomes a brand-new season, too.

If we can't be in the NAAs, that's certainly where we want to be, that's the standard for this program, if this is a WNIT year, by golly, let's try and go get a banner. That's my mindset. Let's go battle.

I really do feel like as of late we're playing better and better and better. We've been in games all year. But I feel like this team's finally coming together in the locker room, on the court, the way that we had envisioned the season to start. I still think this team has a little bit more in them.

We'll rely on some leadership to make sure the heads are thinking straight. We're handling it. It's hard, but this is where we're at, so we're going to have to rely on some of our leaders to make sure they got the locker room right.

Q. You touched on Aijha briefly. You were down five in the middle of the third quarter, she personally had a 7-0 run. What can you say about her individual will to win, her determination in this game?

ROBIN PINGETON: I think her and I are on the same page. I think we both were fierce competitors. We've got a vision for where we want to see this program go to. I think Aijha over the last -- it's been so cool to see where she started as a freshman to where she's at now. She's grown

up in front of my eyes on the court, in the locker room as a leader. I'm super proud of her.

I just feel like she plays with passion, but there's not a lot of highs and lows. She's right here even though she brings that passion and grittiness. As she's gone through this year, she's learned a lot of things about herself, a lot of things from a leadership standpoint that we need for our team.

It's pretty special to see her grow right in front of your eyes.

Q. You said the team is hurting right now. Is that physically, just mentally? You need a break right now before what would be the Women's NIT?

ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, I just think that last horn sounds and you don't know what the future holds. I think emotionally it's hard. You pour so much into a season. This year has been so filled with just adversity and challenges.

You just hear that final horn sound. You got seniors that don't know if they'll ever put a uniform on again. You got young kids that just have a vision for what we want this to look like, where we want to go. You pour so much into a season. My thing is if you're not hurting, this probably isn't the right program for you. It doesn't mean enough.

But you still have to handle it. We still have to handle it. And they will. We'll lean on our leadership in that locker room and they'll make sure this is part of it. Right now it's basketball, later on it's life.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we appreciate you joining us this evening.

ROBIN PINGETON: Thank you.

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