

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

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

Ole Miss Rebels

Yolett McPhee-McCuin

Postgame Press Conference

Ole Miss 69, Arkansas 60

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thanks for joining us. We'll take questions.

Q. I want to get to Shakira Austin's performance, but first I want to talk about your defense. Held Arkansas 24 points under their average for the season, 32% shooting from the floor. What happened differently tonight than what happened in Fayetteville a couple weeks ago?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, we didn't have a snowstorm, so... First of all, shoutout to Arkansas, Coach Neighbors. I think they're going to do well in the tournament. I have an incredible amount of respect for him. I just know they're just a tough out in the NCAA tournament.

But as far as we're concerned, we made adjustments. We just did not feel -- you all heard the interview, I told you, I didn't know that team. I don't know what we did in Arkansas, but I know we didn't think about it and we focused on shrinking the gaps, making Dungee take really tough shots. I thought our defensive intensity and our rotation was so good that we were able to wear them down.

When they needed those threes, they didn't have the legs to shoot it.

Q. How about Shakira's performance tonight?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Just incredible. I mean, this is why a young lady leaves a team like Maryland and comes to Ole Miss, to do stuff like this, to have an incredible legacy, to make her statement. We think she's one of the best players in the conference. Obviously they think that, as well. I thought her leadership, I know her



points looked good, but her leadership and her presence on the floor was just phenomenal.

Q. Obviously you had to get this one tonight to keep the dream alive of getting to the NCAA tournament. What do you feel like is remaining left for you guys to do in Greenville to build up your case?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I mean, they say the NET is good, eye test. I think we're a fun team to watch. They say we got to win games. We took care of business tonight. We're focused on Tennessee.

We thought we played them well at Tennessee. Ended up losing that game by one point at their place. So they're going to be primed and ready to go, but so are we. We're just going to take it 10 minutes at a time.

Q. A couple days ago you said you didn't know exactly what you needed to do to get in, but you thought if you beat Arkansas, then beat Tennessee, a couple of ranked teams, you would have a really good case.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Right.

Q. Are you treating tomorrow like a Game 7? Is that the way you all are looking at it?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I mean, win or go home. We got to control what we can control. Here's another point I want to make for our case. That's an Arkansas team that beat UConn, you know? That is a legitimate team. They're going to be a 3 seed, and we beat 'em. My young pups, I had four freshmen on the floor at one time. We are a team that can go in the NCAA tournament and create havoc.

I think the SEC is that strong. So they say they look at your last seven to 10 games. We beat Kentucky, we lost to Tennessee by one, 10-point game versus A&M. We're just building our case.

It is what it is. It's COVID season. Tomorrow we're going to focus and try to see if we can control our fate a little bit



more with Tennessee.

Q. You mentioned earlier in the year how young you guys were, how much experience mattered. Now later in the year you are doing earlier in the year what was tougher in closing out these games. What do you think your young bunch has learned throughout the year that's helped them be able to close these games out now?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Listen, you get punched a couple times, if you have any type of toughness in you, you're going to swing back. I thought we got our fair share of punches in this conference.

I think, again, it's the leadership of Shakira. When she's confident and she lets her team know she trusts them, they follow it. They have believed in her from day one. When she got eligible, they all jumped and piled on top of her and was excited.

It matters to them how she feels about them. The way she shared the ball, just encouraging them, giving them that motivation I thought carried them through. My quote before the game is, What you think is what you are. I said even during the game, As the game goes, it gets tough, as I think it, that's what I am. If you think, Oh, man, this is going bad, that's what's going to happen.

When they cut it to one, I looked in my team's eye, they didn't budge. One thing we're going to pack in our suitcase is our defense. We did that tonight. We felt confident. Even if it had been a tied game going into the fourth, we felt confident we would be able to get stops. Holding that team to eight points in the fourth, how could you not look at us?

Q. You talk about maturation of this team in closing games. What changed? Something changed. That was such a struggle about a month ago. What got you over the hump with that?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: A couple things. Experience is one hell of a teacher. That's first of all. Experience does that. You got to grow through things. You know how people say you got to go through things? I believe you got to grow through things.

Those losses, the crazy travel, all that, we felt like it paid off for us right now. You want your team playing their best basketball right now. That's the first.

The second is, our team started understanding that no one's going to give us anything. If they want it, they got to go take it. And then they started understanding that they're

in these games with these teams. So we have like this little joke going on. If we beat a ranked team, so I think Kentucky was 16, I'm like, If Kentucky is 16, then we're 15. So tonight we're like, If Arkansas is 13, then the whole team goes, That means we're No. 12 (laughter).

It's what you think, it's what you believe. We're just having fun. It's a fun group. My freshmen don't know what they don't know. That's a good thing sometimes. That's what it is. It's no special sauce, it's just them being connected.

Q. How is Maddie? Looks like she got shaken up in the fourth.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: She's fine. She needed that. She'll be ready for tomorrow (smiling).

Q. Looking ahead to Tennessee, what is the early scouting report? What did you do well in the first game and what do you need to improve on?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, I remember we had a considerable lead, then we let it go because they got loose in transition on us. They got some transition baskets. I felt like that hurt us.

Then I remember us fouling with like 30-something seconds to go, putting them at the free-throw line to win the game. If we could not do those two things, we're going to be fine.

We rebounded well. We did a lot of good things offensively. We're just going to have to compete. They're a really good team, too. That's the SEC, though. But our girls feel confident about that game. That's when we started to turn the corner. That was the game where we started to be, like, maybe we are legit. So we're a different team now. We're excited about the opportunity.

Q. A real quick question, could you talk about putting Arkansas on the run in the second quarter.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I mean, I liked how we finished the quarter. That was not, honestly, a time in the game where I felt like, Oh, man, this is getting out of control. I would have used a timeout. I just didn't feel that way. Even when they got it down one, we felt confidence in our defensive performance. That's because that's how we started the game, and that's how we finished the first quarter.

We really felt confident. I hope I made my guys down there at Florida State proud. We pattern our defense from Florida State's men's basketball. We knew that if we got our hands on the line, we jumped to the moon, we

challenged passes, we just felt like we would have a chance.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much for joining us tonight, Coach.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Thank you.

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