

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 5, 2021

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Georgia Bulldogs

Joni Taylor

Postgame Press Conference



JONI TAYLOR: Yesterday. Yesterday. There's a park around the corner that's beautiful. So I took off yesterday and got a nice run in.

Georgia 78, Kentucky 66

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue with Georgia head coach Joni Taylor. We'll get right into questions.

Q. Can you speak on your team's confidence. Felt like this was the most complete game you guys have had all year in terms of getting to the foul line, not turning the ball over, scoring offensively, effort on the defensive end. When was the moment that you were able to see this team was ready for this game, confident to have the performance they did?

JONI TAYLOR: First of all, Kentucky is really talented. They are a tough match for us. They have one of the best players in the country in the SEC Player of the Year Rhyne Howard. We knew we were going to have our hands full.

With all that being said, we didn't feel good about how we played them the last time. They made it difficult for us. They rushed us offensively. We weren't settled. Defensively we didn't feel like we were who we are normally are. They were even with us on the boards. As good as they are, as much as they challenged us and made us do some things uncharacteristic of us, we felt like if we came out and played Georgia basketball, we would give ourselves a chance to be competitive in this game today.

So I think when you look at the stat sheet and see the rebounding numbers, we took care of the basketball today. We were offensively efficient in terms of spreading out the basketball and giving different people multiple touches.

When we went back and watched the Kentucky game, they knew they left a lot on the table.

Q. Did you get a chance to run today?

Q. I asked this question to Jenna: Obviously this game tomorrow is big because it's the entryway into the finals. Does it have some other significance? Is this like maybe a game for y'all to show the conference and the nation, everybody, that you guys should have a seat at the table when we talk about the elite teams in the country?

JONI TAYLOR: Well, I think for us, we're taking every game like it's our last game. It's survive and advance or go home. So that's all we're thinking about. We've got to do everything we can to win, no matter who that is in front of us. Tomorrow it happens to be Texas A&M. I know they have the same mentality as well.

Everybody's playing for something. It's about us doing what we do. I think for us, we've got to get back and rest a little bit, have some lunch, let them get off their feet. This is where your experience comes in, your leadership comes in, because it's going to be all mental.

You flip that, Texas A&M has the same senior leadership. It's going to be a battle of wills. Gary Blair is an excellent coach. Texas A&M is SEC regular champs for a reason. They're tough in a lot of ways. We have to make sure we make the adjustments we need and, again, it's where you lean on your experience. Playing them the second time around, it's been a while. We have to make sure we're clear on what we're doing and are sound again defensively.

Q. The last time you played Kentucky, it didn't end the way your team wanted it to. What did it take today from your girls to finally break the three-game losing streak against Kentucky?

JONI TAYLOR: Number one, we took care of the basketball. We didn't turn it over. We forced Kentucky into 11 turnovers. What's really good about that stat is I think we got 21 points off of those turnovers. So when we're turning people over and then converting that into points, it makes us very dangerous offensively.



Again, we had balance and scoring in the halfcourt, getting out and running in transition. So when we are balanced that way, it makes things a little bit easier.

Finally, we had our hands full all day with Rhyne Howard. I can't say enough what a great player she is, a special player she is, and how difficult she is to guard. I thought everybody that guarded her did a really, really good job. That being said, she still had 33. But it was enough for us to get the win today.

Q. How important do you feel like it was in this game, Rhyne Howard did her thing, but she didn't really have the same support that she did the other night when they played y'all. How important was it to kind of lock everybody else up in order to have your defensive success?

JONI TAYLOR: That was what we were supposed to do the first time around (laughter). So I'm glad we did it the second time around.

I mean, I don't know if there's such a thing as stopping Rhyne Howard. That was never our goal. Our goal was to make her take tough shots. We did that today. She still again scored to the tune of 33. Our goal the first time around was to lock everybody else down and we did not do a very good job of doing that. Today we did and that's the difference in the ballgame.

Q. You guys played Texas A&M January 31st. How is your team different now than it was then?

JONI TAYLOR: Well, that game, too, Jenna sat out a lot in foul trouble. I think she's kept herself on the floor, which has been helpful for us. She's done a really good job of establishing post position and scoring. At that time she was posting some, but she was also floating a little bit. She's now really become a dominant force. She's going to have to do it again tomorrow.

Texas A&M does a really, really good job of trying to force you off the block, then score. She's going to have to get deep position.

I think the other way we're different is here shooting the ball better than we did when we played in January. We are shooting the ball much better. They play a tough, stingy matchup zone. You have to be able to make some outside shots. We struggled to do that a little bit the first time around. That's something since we've played them, we've seen a lot of zone, we're more comfortable in it, and we're more confident shooting the basketball.

Q. In terms of Maya, we talked about her a lot the other afternoon, but how important is it for her to get herself inside because she's got the body of a guard, made some plays tonight playing like a center over six foot?

JONI TAYLOR: She's so crafty around the basket. Dang it, that's my fault for not getting her at the four spot sooner. When we played four guards earlier, we put Sarah Ashlee there because we wanted Maya at three. She's so good around the basket and the rim. It also keeps her in attack mode, driving, playing around the rim instead of settling for the three. That's my fault for not thinking of that sooner and getting her there.

I'll tell you, she's just really, really been a huge lift for us these last two games and the excitement her teammates have. I say it all the time, Maya is the hardest worker we have. She's always in the gym. She trusts the process. She cheers everybody else on. She's been a little inconsistent this year scoring, but she's always trusted the process and keeps a smile on her face.

When you see someone like that now have the success they're having on both ends of the floor, you're just extremely happy for her because she did it the right way.

Q. Going back to playing a complete game, is it the type of thing where you get back to your team and say this is what you've been building towards and can continue? Again, like I said, I felt from the tip to the end of the game, you were answering runs and keeping that going off the route?

JONI TAYLOR: I think so. I'm trying to think, but it's definitely by far our probably most complete game.

I'll tell you what it speaks to, I keep saying our experience, but their ability to dissect information and make adjustments. So any time we play somebody a second time, especially if we weren't as successful the first time, they dial into what it is we could have done better. They dial into those tweaks and those adjustments and they execute it. Again, that speaks to the upperclassmen we have, their experience, being able to adjust. We adjusted some things today. Kentucky did a great job of adjusting how we were guarding the ball screens. We made an adjustment.

I think in years past when we were making those adjustments, it was fuzzy, a bit of panic because they were inexperienced. Now you can do that on the fly and it just shows up. I think all those things come into play.

Tomorrow is a totally different kind of game. So we've got

to get back. We've got to dictate pace, try not to let Texas A&M force us just into a halfcourt game. Again, you have to flush out the game plan for today and prepare for a totally different one tomorrow with a very quick turnaround.

Q. I know the one thing we always talk about and have talked about for the last six years is consistency. This is probably, I don't know, one of the most consistent games I've seen y'all play this year, probably the most consistent team in terms of consistency that you've had. The one thing I've noticed about this year that's different from the previous years is that, I can't speak to the very first couple of games, but through the bulk of the season you've had the same five gals as your starters. That hadn't always been the case. Of course, injuries and other things sort of dictate that from time to time. How big is it or what does it mean to have the same five in the starting lineup every night?

JONI TAYLOR: It speaks to just being able to be consistent in what we do. It gives everybody comfort. To me being a starter means that we trust you on both ends of the floor. It just means that's how we want to start the game. There's a lot of players who come off the bench who we could argue at some point in the year they deserve to start. That goes to them accepting their roles and understanding we need energy and certain things off the bench as well. It's about making the sacrifice, whatever that is, that fits best for the team.

I can't even say it's a certain rotation. It is predictable in a way. But Javyn didn't play tonight; it wasn't her fault. This was a ball screen defense game. That was Jenna and Maori. Tonight against Texas A&M tomorrow night it could be her night. I think it speaks to everybody being mature enough to be ready when their number's called.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

JONI TAYLOR: Thank you, guys.

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