

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 5, 2021

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

South Carolina Gamecocks

Dawn Staley

Postgame Press Conference



South Carolina 75, Alabama 63

THE MODERATOR: We are ready to continue with Coach Dawn Staley. We'll start with questions.

Q. Obviously the first 16 minutes you guys were completely in control, the lead is up to 27, then it's down to 7 in the fourth quarter. What happened? Was it Jordan Lewis or something y'all weren't doing?

DAWN STALEY: Well, it was Alabama. If you ever tried guarding Jordan Lewis, Copeland, Walker, you'll know that it's a hard guard because they space the floor and they pick you apart.

We did the best we could under these circumstances. I'm glad we found our offense to get out to a lead, which we just held on to win the basketball game. At this point I'd rather be on this side of not playing our best basketball than not. We lived to see another day.

It's a dogfight out there winning in our league.

Q. You mentioned circumstances. Zia said something about the wind or air in the arena. What was that about?

DAWN STALEY: No, I don't want to start anything. All these people on social media say I have all these excuses for this or that.

It's the players getting their feet wet. They adjusted and we won the basketball game. I don't even want to get these people started in my mentions. I don't care if they say something about me, but when they direct it to me, it's hard for me to ignore them. I do my best.

We got the game against a tough NCAA-bound Alabama team, and we're happy about it.

Q. Do you feel like at times during the game when you got off to the good leads, maybe your team is letting their foot off the gas or losing focus? If so, what can you do about that?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, we have to just stay engaged, stay engaged. This time of the season, we want to stay locked in for 40 minutes. That is our plan from the beginning of the game until the end of the game.

You know, what happens in between, it's a hard-fought game. At this point, again, we just have to figure out how do we make more plays than the other team. Defense was the thing we hung our hat on. But we had to hang our hat on offense tonight. I'm glad it made an appearance at least for two out of the four quarters.

Q. I want to pay you a compliment to start off with: I thought that was as locked in I've seen your team play all year long, particularly the deliberate pace that you talked about. Really impressed with your ball movement and ball reversal, playing through Aliyah. I thought she got Destanni and Zia a couple of great looks from the ball going into the post, then reversing it to the weak side. After about the timeout in the second quarter, though, it seemed like some of the uneven play reared its head. Is it you got up so big so early, you just let down and it's hard to get it back, kind of a human nature kind of deal, or you're just going to roll with this? What is the real lesson for your team?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, it wasn't a lack of effort, for sure. They're out there trying to do what we're asking them to do.

We don't take our foot off the gas. It's the shots that were falling for us in the first 15 minutes of the game weren't falling for us. We got layups, missed layups. We got in transition, we turned the ball over. We had a couple of empty possessions.

But what I do like about what our team did was the ball movement. If we can continue to move the ball as well as we moved the ball, we should at efficiently, especially with

Henny and Zia and Aliyah, those three are able to do that, then we bring another player or two, get them close to double figures, that's as even as we can be. A lot of teams aren't putting five people on the floor that can score the ball.

So we're going to take the good from this, and that is our offense got jump started, and hopefully that continues throughout the tournament.

Q. You said at the beginning of the season this team was a little bit too nice. Tonight obviously when the flip had to switch, you saw Aliyah being deliberate, really everybody on offense. You saw a different kind of swagger on defense. Do you feel like they rose up to the occasion? How key is it to emphasize to them that you have to recreate this tomorrow night same time?

DAWN STALEY: Our team is really nice. We need to figure out how to continue being this type of nasty and stay energized. I did have to tell them during the timeout, a nice team is not going to win a National Championship nor an SEC tournament championship. We got to find some grit, I thought, at times throughout the game we had several plays that we weren't making, throughout the season as far as jump ball situations, diving on balls, 50/50 balls, all of those intangibles that had been missing.

So I hope that continues. We're going to continue to try to see it when we break down film. If they see it, they can recreate it.

At this time of the year, you just got to make more plays. Whether we play Ole Miss or Tennessee, we just have to make more plays on both sides of the ball at this time.

It's not going to all look pretty. I kind of like to muck it up a little bit, especially defensively, at this time of the year.

Q. That opening stretch, do you credit that to the ball movement? Is that the best you think you guys have played in a quarter-long stretch this year?

DAWN STALEY: It was pretty close on both sides of the ball. Our ball movement, we made a concerted effort. I don't think there wasn't a time in which we did not have a ball reversal. If we didn't have a ball reversal, Aliyah Boston touched the ball on the block. We were deliberate in what we were trying to accomplish tonight, getting the ball inside, putting her in a position where she can score on the block, and ball reversal.

If you look at our guards' shooting percentage is great. They haven't shot 50% in a long time together, together

along with Aliyah.

That's what we were trying to convey to them. Get the ball to Aliyah, but we're not saying you stand around with the ball over your head and be robots. It is, you're going to benefit directly from her. Her, D and L.A. getting the ball in the paint. We saw that tonight.

Q. What emotion is going to drive you the most as you get ready for your next game? Satisfaction of getting out to the great lead or the disappointment of having some of the same problems pop up and make the game a little more interesting than you would have liked?

DAWN STALEY: I like getting out to a big lead, obviously. But we still have to coach them through those moments. The most important thing is to be able to continue to coach them the next day. Like we are able to continue to coach them the next day. Some teams are going to leave here, some of them will be NCAA tournament bound and some of them won't. But we lived to see another day, to continue to coach them to a place in which they're getting better and we're getting better as a team.

Q. When you talk about mindset for a tournament, do you focus on more, this is what we're doing well, let's focus on this, or is it more about this is what we need to improve? Which mindset do you focus more on when you're trying to win three games in three days?

DAWN STALEY: You have to keep it even. Obviously we're very proud of what we were able to do at the start of the game. Something that we wanted to accomplish. We wanted to do it for 40 minutes. But we got a great quarter out of it. We won that quarter. Lost all three as far as scoring.

When you build a 27-point lead, I think it's fun basketball at that point. But it can't be too much fun to where you are trying new stuff. We have to continue to do things that work for us.

I thought we got off a little bit at certain possessions, but then we got back on track. So I'm very happy with where we are. We're going to point out the things in which we had some lapses. Fouling was the thing that got us tonight. Hopefully we can clean that up.

But you're looking at Alabama, they got seniors that do things extremely well. If you take that one thing away, they go right into their secondary stuff, their delayed actions. It's really hard to stop all of them.

Q. After Alabama cut the lead down to 7, you held

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

them without a field goal for the rest of the game. Did you make an adjustment there on defense or was that just kind of some better execution?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, the adjustment was we got smaller. We inserted LeLe into the basketball game. We could switch a lot more and a lot better having that matchup.

I think what I was really proud of is our ability to guard Jasmine Walker, just keep her the an inefficient rate, moving her around. They also used her as a decoy to get other people shots. That was the adjustment.

I thought we turned up and we wanted to win the game. Our tentacles went up when they got it close. The job we done at the end was pretty good in shutting them down. Now we got to work at keeping them off the free-throw line.

Q. Getting off to the big lead, you were able to substitute the only player that played over 32 minutes, Zia. She got 36 minutes. Any concern with her or do you think she'll be good to go?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, Zia will be ready to go. She's probably the person that can play the most minutes and be ready the next day. I mean, she loves basketball. She loves being out there. She's highly competitive.

She has opportunity on the floor to rest, whereas Henny, I'm glad we didn't have to play Henny as many minutes because she has to quarterback both sides of the ball for us. We were glad to spread the minutes out. Hopefully we can afford ourselves to do that again tomorrow.

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