

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 5, 2021

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Tennessee Lady Volunteers

Kellie Harper

Postgame Press Conference

Tennessee 77, Ole Miss 72

THE MODERATOR: We are ready to continue with Coach Kellie Harper.

Q. Obviously the fourth quarter was huge. How did you flip that switch and come back yet again against Ole Miss?

KELLIE HARPER: I'll tell you what, obviously Ole Miss had momentum most of the game. Our players never panicked. I thought the timeout between the third and fourth quarter was big for us in terms of settling us down, getting us locked into what we needed to do. The coaching staff were getting ready for some backup plans in that quarter. But our players stepped up, made plays on both ends of the court, really swung the momentum our way.

Q. You talked earlier in the week about how important preparation was going to be this week, how important practice was going to be. How did you feel about that preparation leading into tonight?

KELLIE HARPER: I thought our practices were good. I thought our mindset was good. I think we went in, we had a game plan. We had to make adjustments throughout the game. So really proud of our players for doing that.

But they've been good. They had a good week.

Q. What is something that you saw tonight that you would definitely like to improve or have not be there when you face South Carolina?

KELLIE HARPER: Well, obviously our turnovers stand out. You pick up a stat sheet and see that. But I thought we had a lot of mental breakdowns defensively. I thought we weren't as tough one-on-one as we needed to be. I think



you got to clean up your defense playing anybody at this point.

Q. You see Rennia go down in the first half, have to go back to the locker room. What is going through your mind in that moment? How do you feel the team responded?

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah, well, obviously you never want to see a player get injured and have to go off the court. Obviously we don't want to have that with Rennia. We want her out there.

But, again, I thought our team stepped up. I didn't think they slumped their shoulders at that point. We look to her for so many things. But I think our team in that moment knew we needed to step up and try to make some plays. We were really excited to get her back out there, though.

Q. Tennessee had 70% on the three-point shot. Two shots stand out for me: Jordan at the end of the fourth quarter, and Rennia at the end of the second quarter. How important were those two clutch shots for the team's momentum? Without those two shots, the team would not win today.

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah, you know, I'll be honest with you, Jordan's, especially Jordan's I thought was critical for us. We had gone, I didn't think we were scoring. We needed something to help us get over the hump. I thought that was important.

And then Rennia's ended up really big to cut the lead going into halftime. Rennia got a good look at it. Maybe a little bit uncharacteristic. But they were big. I have to say they were big.

Q. With Rennia getting hurt, what can you say about her response tonight coming back for a double-double? What is her treatment plan going into tomorrow?

KELLIE HARPER: I'll answer the second part. I'll have to go and here and we'll talk with our athletic trainer, Rennia, talk through it. I know they have some ideas going

through. I haven't heard what that is yet. I think rest, period, is going to be important for our players that played heavy minutes. Obviously rest and treatment for her is going to be important.

But Rennia in this moment, if she can get out on the court and halfway walk, she's going to play. She wants to play. She loves the game. She loves to compete. She loves this team. I knew if there was a chance, she'd be back out there. I know she didn't feel 100% when she came out, but it just shows her toughness and grit that she has, really desire to play.

Q. They say every moment is a teaching moment. I believe that's what Pat said all the time. The way you closed out that game, is that a teaching moment to not fray the fans' nerves in the final 24 seconds?

KELLIE HARPER: One of our managers said we don't like to do anything easy and we want to keep everybody on their toes. Just when you think you know what's happened, we change it up (laughter).

Yeah, obviously, gosh, there were so many teaching moments out there that we would want to sit back and talk through. Let's not do that this time. We're trying to teach on the fly as we go.

But honestly, in this moment, in this particular moment, it's one of those that you've really got to move on pretty quick. I told the team it doesn't matter what all the numbers say, except for the final score. That's what matters now. That's what matters now moving forward. Nothing else matters.

That's where you just have that tournament mentality. Gosh, tournament game. That was a tournament game right there. You just got to figure it out at the end.

Q. What do you think led to the uptick in turnovers? How big was Kassie and Tamari fighting through the foul trouble in the second half?

KELLIE HARPER: Well, I had a tall order for Kassie and Tamari in terms of guarding Shakira Austin coming off a terrific game. And, as well, they had not just guarding her, but they had to guard some other folks. They had to help us, had to board. They had a lot on them in a very physical game.

I think Ole Miss did a really good job of being active defensively. They had several deflections that led to steals on their end, at least turnovers on our part. I thought we got a little careless with the ball a few times. I thought we had a few decisions that weren't the best decisions in those moments.

Definitely got to give credit to Ole Miss with their defense, how they were playing, getting their hands on some balls, then partly on us.

Q. You talked about turning around quick within the game. Obviously a quick turnaround is the theme of the weekend with South Carolina. Kind of an epic game when you played them during the regular season. How much different or do you expect it to be any different now that it is the SEC tournament and there's a little bit more on the line?

KELLIE HARPER: Well, I think it's going to be a tough, physical game. I think that's what we have to expect. They're going to come in with great confidence. They're coming off a terrific game today. I think feeling good about how they need to play.

They're the most experienced team here. They're the most experienced team at this conference tournament, so they're going to have a lot of confidence.

It's going to be tough. It's going to be really tough. But we gave ourselves the chance because we advanced. We advanced and we have an opportunity to play them. We're excited.

Q. I want to ask you about both of your Jordans. Horston, 12 points, seven boards, five assists. Really gave you a jolt especially in the first quarter. It seems like Jordan Walker hits a big three in the fourth quarter every game for you guys right now. How much are you getting out of your double Jordans?

KELLIE HARPER: Well, I thought aside from the turnovers, and that was everybody, they were having to handle the ball the majority of the night, I thought they played really well. I thought Jordan Horston gave us a great punch especially offensively in that first half. Then both of them defensively I thought were really good. Jordan Horston, I think she guarded everybody on the court at one point. I thought she was tough and physical. I thought Jordan Walker's defense in the second half really set the tone. I thought she did an excellent job. Folks just didn't get by her. I thought they played well.

I know Horston, can't remember stat line there, 12 points, but then Walker, her plus-minus was the highest on the team at plus 12. Good, big minutes from both of those players.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

KELLIE HARPER: Thank you, guys.



