

# Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 7, 2021

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

## Georgia Bulldogs

## Joni Taylor

### Postgame Press Conference



South Carolina 67, Georgia 62

THE MODERATOR: We have head coach Joni Taylor. Questions, please.

**Q. In terms of the end of the game, how did you power your players through those moments of adversity? How did you work with them to keep them going, kind of like reiterate some of those things were not in their control?**

JONI TAYLOR: Well, we talked about it before the game. Actually the last two games, our conversations have been to stay present. Stay present in the moment, next-play mentality, don't live in the past of what happened the quarter before or even the play before, and don't look ahead.

What happened late in the game was definitely something we couldn't control. So actually today, Joi Williams who is at Clemson University, she was an assistant coach at Florida when I was in high school, recruited me, head coach at Murray State, won championships there, then went on to Central Florida. She's now at Clemson University. We talked last night. She actually talked about staying present, shared some things with me that I used today with our team. One of them was put everything on the board that you can't control - the rest, the fans, shooting slump, things that you can't control. Then in this little box is everything you can control. That's your energy, your effort, your focus, your determination.

It served us well. There were a lot of moments today that were up and down. South Carolina came out and made a heck of a run. We came back out at them, I think because we focused on what it is we can control, having the next-play mentality.

Obviously we fell short. It stings. It hurts really bad. But

we're not done playing basketball. I think we grew up a lot this weekend. I think we proved to everyone what we already knew, which is that we can play with the best of the best.

Fortunately for us, we have another opportunity to go play in the tournament coming up in a week.

**Q. Big picture, there was so much made about the first meeting of two black female head coaches in the SEC title game, the first Power 5 meeting. Obviously losing the game sucks, but big picture, what does it mean for black head coaches and black female head coaches to see you out there putting on quite a show for the fans today?**

JONI TAYLOR: Dawn said it best yesterday, right? It shows what we're capable of. Everybody won today. Everybody won today. It was a huge moment to be able to showcase what we were able to do, our two teams.

Dawn has been the leader of that in the SEC. She's the one who came in and got South Carolina to where it is now. Then fortunately enough, we've had obviously six other black females lead programs along with her.

Dawn is the one who started this. Currently obviously Bernadette Locke was the very first. When I was growing up in high school, I never witnessed two black female coaches coaching for a conference championship.

So I think you can't dream what you can't see. So today was a chance for people to dream something that they haven't seen before. I'm very proud to be a part of it. Just proud for both programs.

**Q. How did you get the buy-in? Last year, South Carolina beat you guys twice by more than 30. Today you take them into the final seconds, controlled the first half.**

JONI TAYLOR: The buy-in was already there. The buy-in has always been there about this group we had. We just had more help. They're older, more experienced. Our newcomers that came and joined us really helped us out to

complement our starters. The buy-in has always been there as part of our team.

Last year we played Jenna, Gabby, Maya and Que to death. They played for 38, 40 minutes, just ran out of gas. With our bench being a year older, with Sarah Ashlee Barker coming in, Mikayla transferring and just the experience we have coming off the bench, and the depth we have, we've been able to do some better things.

It was never a buy-in issue, I would say. More talent, more depth, in able to really, truly play our style.

**Q. Would you say the difference today was that last three minutes of the third quarter or did you see some other difference today?**

JONI TAYLOR: No, I mean, definitely I would say that. Then Jenna picking up two fouls obviously. She sat for a huge portion of the first half. But we let it get away from us in the third quarter. South Carolina is tremendous coming out of the locker room at halftime. I thought they pressured us a little bit, forced us to run our offense further away from the scoring line that we wanted to. Had some live-ball turnovers that allowed them to get out and run and score in transition. When we were able to settle that down, force them into a halfcourt game again, we were able to get ourselves back in it. But it was just too much of a margin to overcome.

**Q. Can you put the emotions in perspective for me. I know there's pain, I know there's hurt now. At the same time, as you said, there's more basketball to play. You also beat two ranked teams to get to this point, beat the top team in the country. How do you reach out to your team about the pain and the pride and the success?**

JONI TAYLOR: Well, it's tough. It stings. It hurts. A lot of people would say nobody thought we would be here. So it's not a moral victory. But I think as a team, we always knew what we were capable of.

It showed that South Carolina has been here before. They're experienced. Their experience showed up in terms of the championship game. This is our first time here.

Yeah, that locker room is sad right now. I'm sad right now. I'm sad for them. It's tough. We're competitors. We want to win. We know we were in a close ballgame with a really, really, really good team, one of the best teams in the country, and we had a chance to win it.

With that being said, again, our season's not over. We've got to sit in today because we don't want to just -- I don't

want to say not let it hurt, but we had a chance to win the game and fell short; that's going to sting. Then we've got next week to look at what we accomplished, go back and watch some stuff on film, get ready to go in with a great head of steam like we have. We're playing really well. We're peaking at the right time.

Again, I think this weekend shows what we're capable of.

**Q. Obviously not the result you wanted, but you said your team kind of grew up with this weekend. Looking forward, how has not only this SEC tournament but also the season at large really prepared you for what comes next?**

JONI TAYLOR: We've been in a lot of really close ballgames. We won two games in overtime. Two buzzer-beaters, one on of the offensive end, two on the defensive end. We've won tough games in a lot of different ways, up, down, overtime twice. All those moments give us great confidence in certain situations.

That's what the NCAA tournament is going to be, you're going to play against the best 64 teams in the country, it's going to take everybody, the same toughness and grit that we've had and played with.

I think our schedule, non-conference and obviously when you get to the SEC, prepares you for the NCAA tournament.

**Q. I'm sure it is frustrating to keep running into the South Carolina wall. How close do you think you are to maybe scaling that wall?**

JONI TAYLOR: Well, I think today us how close we are. A couple balls bounce a different way, a couple calls go a different way, who knows what could have happened. Obviously we know the outcome of the game. I'm not going to say if things went differently, it would be different. We have to do that. We knew we had to take that game from them today, and we didn't do that. We fell short.

But I think, again, what we were able to do today tells us that we're right there, we're right there.

**Q. What can you say about this special group of seniors and all that you have been through together with them, especially over this past rough year? I remember you were here in L.A., I believe in their sophomore year. I know you're pretty close with some of them. Do you feel like they've helped you take the program to the next step of development since you took over as head coach?**

JONI TAYLOR: Definitely. I'm so proud of them. I say it all the time, but four seniors, I'm going to throw Malury Bates in that number as well. She's a redshirt junior, but a senior in the classroom. Malury Bates, Que Morrison, Gabby Connally, Maya Caldwell, all signed in our 2017 class. We put an extreme amount of pressure, responsibility, expectation on them. Then Jenna Staiti transfers from Maryland and joins that group. That's a really special group.

The four seniors that are on the floor now have all graduated. Three of them in three years. That is unheard of. They're all into grad school. I think it speaks to their commitment on the basketball floor, it speaks to their commitment academically and in the community.

I think it also speaks to the culture of our program. How often can you pinpoint any freshman class, then look at seniors and they're all still there at the same program. Name two. Not only that, the easiest way to transfer and play immediately is to graduate. We graduate all of our seniors. They all make the decision to come back.

So I think it speaks to the culture that we have, what it is we're trying to do, how we're trying to build it. I know you and I had a long conversation about that my first or second year in, and what we wanted the culture to look like. To see that come to fruition, I'm so proud of them, I'm proud of their resilience, their belief in Georgia basketball, what it is we want to do, and their growth. If you look at how they've grown over the last couple of years, it's truly been amazing. Those are special young women. They are definitely rewriting their history, their story, adding on some history to Georgia basketball that I know they're going to be extremely proud of. I'm happy for them.

**Q. Seems like it's just what we talked about a while back. Congratulations, again.**

JONI TAYLOR: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you so much for joining us this afternoon.

JONI TAYLOR: Thank you.

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