

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 3, 2022

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Missouri Tigers

Robin Pingeton

Haley Troup

LaDazhia Williams

Postgame Press Conference



battle on the defensive end, and I'm really proud of them for that.

I love this team. I just feel sick for them, but the good news is this is not the end, and we get a chance to spend some more time together. I think this time off is going to be really important. Coming up a couple of days after this SEC tournament we can recharge our batteries, regroup and see where the chips fall.

Q. Haley, what was working for you today? Career-high 21 points. What was working?

HALEY TROUP: I think myself and the team was just so prepared, and it allowed me to come into the game and play free, and I knew exactly what I needed to do to help the team win, and today that was score the ball. So night in and night out it's whatever I can do to help the team win, and tonight I felt like I just needed to be more aggressive, and they were going in, so that felt good.

Q. LaDazhia, what happened there in overtime when they were able to go on the 8-0 run? What was the biggest thing that led to Arkansas being able to kind of get hot at that time?

LaDAZHIA WILLIAMS: They were just executing their offense, I guess. I mean, we were playing defense, trying to get our assignments done, but they were just going.

Q. LaDazhia Williams, how was it in the paint as far as guarding such taller players, as tall as you, but how is it and how do you think you became more aggressive as the season continued to go on?

LaDAZHIA WILLIAMS: Just making sure I boxed them out and just be more physical than them, and just making sure I helped my teammates out on the drive and making sure I also get a body on my man too.

Q. Haley, with you not getting the win today and now you guys are kind of going to be sweating it out a little bit going into Selection Sunday, just how tough is that just kind of now having the next kind of two weeks or so of not really knowing whether you are going to

Arkansas 61, Missouri 52

ROBIN PINGETON: I think these games are always hard. I've got a pretty disappointed locker room in there. This was not one of the prettier games that people probably have ever watched. I think both teams struggled offensively. I thought Arkansas in that overtime obviously came out of the gates, and they attacked us.

I feel bad for our players. I thought defensively we did a really nice job. I thought we really made some strides in the last two times that we played them. So I thought our execution was really solid. A couple of things that we knew going into this game, we had to outrebound them; we didn't get that done. And we had to have ten or less turnovers; we didn't get that done. Those are things that we talk about all the time, the controllables. You're not going to play perfect, but you got to be able to do that to give yourself a shot.

And then we wanted to win with our chest around the rim. We didn't want to put them at the free-throw line. They shot 25 free-throws, and we weren't nearly as aggressive. We shot eight, and it's not like we were just settling for threes. I thought we did take it, tried to play downhill when our shots weren't falling, but had some good looks and didn't just didn't convert. I thought it was a muddy game on both ends offensively, but we had some looks that didn't fall.

Bottom line is Mike Neighbors does a tremendous job. He has a great squad. I thought our girls really battled and thought they were resilient. Probably the first time all year when our offense wasn't in a flow that we just continued to



make the field or not?

HALEY TROUP: It is tough, but it's also just March Madness. We put ourselves in the position to be on the bubble. If we get in, we get in. Either way, we're going to go in confident and work our tail off in practice the next few weeks, and we're going to prepare whether or not we're going.

So I'm excited. I love this team. I think we could make a run in March Madness if we really wanted to, so I'm excited to see where we fall.

Q. Haley, what made you decide to use your COVID year to return next season?

HALEY TROUP: So it's pretty funny. I actually had COVID right after the South Carolina game, and at that point I was on the bubble whether or not I wanted to come back, and it just -- being away for that week I hated it. I hated watching on TV and not being able to practice, and I came back, and I immediately told Coach P, I'm coming back, I can't stand this.

I just love playing. I love competing. I love this program and the culture and the coaches and the players. So I just am thankful to be able to represent it for another year.

THE MODERATOR: That's all we have for you guys. Thank you. Opening questions for coach?

Q. Robin, what went into the decision to not play Aijha in overtime?

ROBIN PINGETON: Well, the challenge was she wasn't with our team for seven days, and we had one practice going into this tournament where she was available. Practice, obviously, got canceled yesterday because of travel and late arrival and so we didn't have a chance to practice here. It's just we won two big games where she wasn't in the rotation, and being out for seven days is a while.

We have tweaked some things offensively, and I'm sure conditioning is a little bit of a factor. I felt like we gave up some -- a couple of transition because we weren't matched up, which is to be expected when you haven't had a chance to practice with a team, and so really it's hard. You kind of feel like your hands are tied a little bit when somebody is away from the team for seven days, two games, handful of practices. Just had to find a way to try and battle through it without her.

Obviously, she's a huge part of what we've been able to get done this season. She's an elite-level player, for sure,

but we had to go with who has been in the rotation and we felt like that was going to give us our best shot.

I don't know if I think it's really fair to the other players to all of a sudden change something after not being with a team for seven days. You know, that's a challenging call as a coach. We love Aijha. We met before we even came down here to the SEC Tournament. She knew that it was going to be a different role and just with the quick turnaround with being back with the team, that her minutes were probably going to be limited, but there's an opportunity we said after SEC Tournament where we've got about a week to a week and a half before you go into postseason play, and that's going to be the opportunity to kind of get her feet wet again and get her reacclimated and hopefully be able to get her rhythm back a little bit.

Q. Coach, going into overtime what do you tell your team when the circumstances are that big for a postseason play?

ROBIN PINGETON: I felt like we had been pretty resilient. It was an ugly offensive game for both sides. I mean, neither team could really get into a flow or get into a rhythm. I just told them how proud I am. We had some big stops there at the end. Big stops. To put ourselves in that position, and I just said I'm so proud of them. Offense, we're struggling right now, but you've got to continue to lock in on defense, and that's something we've really struggled with. I think a lot of times this year our offense dictated our defense, and I felt like tonight we were really locked in, and we were able to kind of next-play mentality. I thought we did a great job with that.

Just tried to encourage them. You know, they looked tired. Shoulders were slouched a little bit, and I just said, hey, shoulders back. Remember why we're playing this game. Play for the love of the game and play for your sister to the right and left, and you cannot be fixated on the outcome. It doesn't work that way. You've got to be in the moment. You've got to play one possession at a time and then it's the next possession. We just wanted to come out of that overtime. Thankful that we had an opportunity to be in overtime and with an intact mentality, and really Arkansas flipped the script on us.

Q. What was different from the job defensively you did against Ramirez from the first half to the second half?

ROBIN PINGETON: Late in the game we wanted to blow up some ball screens with her if she was going to come off. There wasn't that many opportunities really. I think her threes that she got, and I'll have to go back and watch film, but two if not all three of them, I believe, came in transition. So again, being assignment correct and understanding

where she's at, that's a kid that you're not going to shut down. You absolutely are not going to shut down. You just have to be able to contain her.

To be honest, I thought we did a pretty decent job of her. I thought she got away from us a little bit in transition. But as far as ball screen coverage defensively I thought our kids were really dialed in. They understood players' strengths, and I thought -- I thought defensively we really had a solid game today. Obviously, gave up too many offensive boards, put them at the free-throw line too much. We talked a lot about winning with your chest because they play downhill with a full set of steam. We can't be shot blockers at the rim. We have to win with our chest, show our hands. Still, I think any time you put a team like this at the free-throw line as much as we did, you are going to make it awfully hard on yourself.

Q. What impact do you think the travel difficulties and the inability to practice had on your team?

ROBIN PINGETON: Well, it's unfortunate for sure. That's not how you want to go into the SEC Tournament. We talk a lot, E plus R equals O. Events are going to happen. How we respond a lot of times dictates that outcome.

It's definitely not an ideal situation. I definitely don't think it helped us, but I don't feel comfortable making excuses. You know, it is what it is, and you have to pivot, and you have to be able to respond, and so I thought our girls really handled it well too just with all the change in itineraries. I wish our game might not have been at a noon game. That could have helped us a little bit, but still.

I think you have to focus on giving Arkansas some credit. They found a way to punch through there in that overtime, and really were the aggressors that last five minutes.

Q. Robin, with Haley Troup scoring a career high in points today, just what did you like about kind of her performance and like she said, kind of stepping up when you guys needed someone to step in and score?

ROBIN PINGETON: We've always felt like she's so good at coming off ball screens, and I felt like you saw that today where she got the defender on her hip. I think when you've got perimeter players that have the ability to shoot the three ball, and they've got to go over top of those ball screens, it really puts them in a situation to play a lot of two v. one.

I thought Troup got back to being who she was on that ball screen action. She kind of got away from it for maybe a couple of weeks, but I know her and Coach Bracey watched some film, and she was dialed in on that part of

the game. She is so good coming off ball screens. She did, she had a very aggressive mentality and obviously hit some big shots for us.

Q. Did not having a practice yesterday impact your decision to not play Aijha for most of the first half?

ROBIN PINGETON: Again, I'm going to go back to what I said before. I think any time you have a player away from your team, hasn't practiced, hasn't played in two games, you know, hasn't had a chance to -- wasn't at practice because she couldn't be, but also as you tweak your offense in that timing, there's a big difference between getting in the gym and getting your shots up and being on the treadmill and really I think having your timing offensively and defensively for that matter, you know, coincide with your teammates.

And so we knew it would be a tough turnaround, unfortunately. Didn't anticipate she would be play extended minutes tonight. I thought it would be a process to get her feet wet again and get that timing back. I think next week will be a big week for her, and it will be good that we've got some extended practices for sure.

Q. What will the next week and a half look like as you wait for Selection Sunday and what do you think of your tournament résumé so far?

ROBIN PINGETON: I think -- well, first of all, it's been a lot over the last couple of weeks. I think just allowing that space for our players to be able to exhale is going to be really important. I love this team. I think they're a special group, and we're obviously very disappointed. Big growth from a year ago for sure. I'm proud of them for that, but we're still not where we want to be.

We're not real pleased with obviously the outcome and having to be on the bubble. I don't think we're a bubble team. I think we're a team that has the ability and talent to play in the NCAA Tournament. Obviously, had some big wins, had some tough losses. SEC is a tough league, and we battled, 7-9. Had a big win. Obviously, everybody knows South Carolina, but some other too, and then we had some tough losses. It's hard. It's hard to have to sit and wait, but bottom line is we can't do anything about that, right? Résumé has been written. There's a handful of games with COVID, just like every other team in the country had to deal with, and then we had some discipline issues that we had to deal with, and now the résumé is done.

I think in the meantime you've got to control what you can control. You are going to go to postseason. I certainly hope it's the NCAA Tournament. I think we deserve to be

in the NCAA Tournament, but regardless we have an opportunity in front of us after a couple days' pause to get back to work and get after it and try and make a postseason run.

Appreciate you guys. Thank you.

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