

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 3, 2022

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Kentucky Wildcats

Kyra Elzy

Rhyme Howard

Jada Walker

Postgame Press Conference



Kentucky 83, Mississippi State 67

KYRA ELZY: I'm just thankful to be here. Thank you for being here. So proud of this team and the resiliency that they have shown and the toughness. We're blessed to get a win today.

Q. Jada, I'll start with you. 21 points. How good did you feel out there tonight?

JADA WALKER: I felt real good. Especially coming back with the mask, I wasn't really sure how I was going to play, but I played well.

Q. Jada, as a follow-up to that, we obviously all did see the mask. Was that affecting your play at all? We know you hurt your nose last game. Kind of how did that play a role in tonight's game?

JADA WALKER: I don't think it affected my play, but it did -- it was an adjustment for me just because I'm not used to wearing something on my face while playing, but, yeah.

Q. Rhyme, when you look at a performance like Jada did as a freshman here in her first SEC Tournament game, how far do you think she's come as a freshman, and how do you compare that to maybe you were as a freshman four years ago?

RHYME HOWARD: I've had pretty much the same numbers when I was a freshman in my first SEC game too. Jada has done this before, so it's not a surprise to me. I know that she can continue to play like this, and it's great to have a freshman as confident as she is.

Q. Jada, where do you think you've grown the most in terms of either being comfortable or just a specific skill set from way back against Presbyterian to now?

JADA WALKER: I definitely think my confidence has grown a lot. Just starting off with SEC, Georgia, I feel like that was a good test, but after I got through that, I felt like I got more comfortable with the different types of teams and physicality.

Q. Obviously, last time you played this team you guys were down by 15 in the fourth, and today was a pretty thorough victory. What was the biggest change you saw in your tomorrow today?

THE MODERATOR: Rhyme, if you could go first, please.

RHYME HOWARD: I would say just being more locked in and more focused. We knew what happened last time. We didn't want that to be the case because tournament is a new slate. It's a new season, and you won't always be able to come back from down 15 against any SEC team, but especially in the tournament.

Q. Rhyme, you have been through as many ups and downs as anyone. To be on a 7-0 run in March, what does that do for your mentality?

RHYME HOWARD: It just boosts my confidence a lot to be able to keep myself going and keep my teammates going, and it's just -- it's great to be on this run. Especially with how we started out. A lot of people had doubted us, but now everyone is, like, oh they might be able to do this, they might be able to do that. And we can only continue this run, so we're looking to make it 8-0 tomorrow.

Q. Do you see that mentality affecting your teammates? How do you see them reacting to this win streak?

RHYME HOWARD: If one of us is on a high roll, we're all on a high roll. If somebody is going at it, we're all going at it, and he with all are on the same page. We all know that we have nothing to lose, so we got to go out and just play,

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Q. Early in the game Dre got into foul trouble, but she was able to post the numbers that she did by the end and has a double-double. What can both of you say about what she's able to do even when her minutes might be limited because of stuff like that.

RHYNE HOWARD: Dre can do that whenever, limited minutes, a lot of minutes. She can get the ball in the basket, and we're going to give it to her every time she's down there. She can score on all three levels and we trust her to make the right decision like she does and just if she's scoring, we give her the ball, if she's not scoring, we're giving her the ball to score. She believes in us, so we believe in her.

JADA WALKER: Going off of what Rhyne said, I think we trust her. She's smart with not fouling, so if she gets three fouls, she knows how to handle those type of situations, and she'll continue to go out and be a dog like she always has been.

Q. Rhyne, so much of the story of last year's NCAA tournament was about the inequities between the men and women's side. This year what would you like to see as some of the things that are different?

RHYNE HOWARD: Anything really. Any type of equality or same type of treatment that they get I feel like we've deserved it thus far.

Q. I guess, Kyra, first off, just seeing what Jada was able to do tonight in her first SEC Tournament game, we've seen it a lot this season, but just why do you think she's been able to be such a dependable presence from October, November all the way through now and this performance?

KYRA ELZY: Well, she's grown up, and I said all year Jada is a fearless competitor. She wants to win. She has that dog mentality, and I told her before we left Lexington, you are no longer a freshman. You have played enough minutes to be a veteran point guard. So I'm proud of her.

You know, the game has slowed down for her. Her confidence wavered early on. When you are the lone freshman and you are looking around at the other guards at a Rhyne Howard, a Robyn Benton and Jazmine, and she's, like, Coach, they know how to do all of these things. I was, like, yes, they're basically seniors in college, and you are a freshman.

So she's had to learn, but she's been baptized by fire, but she has answered the challenge.

Q. Coach, Dre and Rhyne both had some foul trouble early in the game today. Dre especially. She picked it up two minutes in the quarter, second foul. What was the message to your team during that tough circumstance?

KYRA ELZY: Well, that's why we always say the next man has to be ready, and that's why it's a team sport. I talked to Dre when she came out. I was, like, You're still going to have to play. Make sure you remain locked in to this game.

But Nyah and Treasure, they know what we need to get done in the post, and they've been doing it all year, so next man up.

Q. Kyra, rebounding has been such an emphasis for you this season. Outrebounded them tonight 47-25. What did you see that was working so well for the Cats?

KYRA ELZY: We went into the game saying we had to own the boards. We had to make sure that everybody -- we rebounded by committee, and I really challenged the guards, you can't stand. You have to help us rebound. Offensively we wanted four people on the boards. Defensively five. I'm so proud of our heart to go rebound. It has been a big emphasis. So I am smiling because we did rebound well.

Q. Just going back to Jada for a second, you talked about her growing up. You are no longer a freshman and stuff. In what ways have you either added responsibilities or just asked more from her as the season has progressed?

KYRA ELZY: The good thing is we put pressure on her early. We put her in tough situations so she would be ready for this moment, and she's had some freshman moments, and she had to cry about it, and we had to go back and watch film, but one thing the game has slowed down for her. She knows when to push now and when to bring it out, what's a good shot, what's a bad shot, and as you are a freshman, just learning the intricate details of your offensive system and your defensive system, it is a lot.

But she is a student of the game. She wants to learn. She wants to get better, and it has helped her prepare her for now.

Q. Looking ahead to tomorrow night, what do you expect out of the Tigers?

KYRA ELZY: Well, they're well-coached, obviously. Coach Mulkey has them playing well. They are tough. We were in a dog fight with them at LSU. We were in the game until the last three minutes. Khayla Pointer is what I'm having nightmares about right now as she was driving to the basket. I think she had 28 if my memory serves me correctly.

But they're physical. They're extremely athletic. They're going to get into our bodies, and we're going to have to battle on the boards, but we're also going to have to push in transition. One thing that I didn't think we did well at LSU, we didn't finish in the paint.

Q. Kyra, I just wanted to follow up on the question about the tournament from last year and this year and the inequalities. There have been a couple of changes. 68 teams now instead of 64, and the March Madness branding. What is your sense of kind of how many -- I guess are the changes that have been made that you know of, is it enough? Is it a step in the right direction?

KYRA ELZY: I think it's a step in the right direction. For them to own up to it that there was some inequality and that they're willing to make things right and the branding in itself, but just the exposure for women's basketball. So 68 teams, the more teams, the better. It's hot right now. Women's basketball is something to watch. Our game is growing and evolving, and I'm glad that the NCAA is evolving with us.

Q. Was there anything in the Kaplan Report that I guess got your attention that you thought, hey, this would --

KYRA ELZY: No, just overall. I think the branding in general. That in itself was huge for women's basketball, so we're excited about the direction in which we're headed.

Q. You guys had five players score double figures today. What was so special about your offense out there, and why was it working so well?

KYRA ELZY: Well, the last six or seven games we've talked about ball movement, player movement. Any time we've moved the ball, three or four passes and played inside-out, rhythm shots are great for us. So it's good to see that we've had a balanced attack, so they can't just load up on Rhyne. You could tell that's the confidence of our team right now, believing in each other.

Thank you.

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