

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 4, 2022
Nashville, Tennessee, USA
Bridgestone Arena



Arkansas Razorbacks Mike Neighbors Samara Spencer

Postgame Press Conference

South Carolina 76, Arkansas 54

MIKE NEIGHBORS: It's great to have South Carolina in the SEC. At other times it's bad. We love that they're in representing and doing what they're doing, but it makes it really hard when you have to play these guys a couple times a year because they're very, very physical, they're talented, they're well-coached. They've got everything that makes the No. 1 team in America what they are.

But it's a good gauge for us. We embraced the opportunity. We just didn't make enough shots. They get a lot of credit for that.

But this group right here just finished playing seven games in 15 days. That's hard to do.

I've got no disappointment. That's why you shoot 5 for 31. That's why we have a hard time making lay-ups. It's nothing wrong with our kids, nothing wrong with our team, but it's seven games in 15 days, plus travel. That's four road games in that.

I was proud of how our group embraced it. I was proud of how we fought yesterday on no legs today, I think fought the best in the country.

Q. Samara, what is the challenge when you're on the court trying to get into your offense and trying to get around some of the bigs that they've got?

SAMARA SPENCER: Just the fact that South Carolina is such a good defensive team. 1 through 5 they're all good, and when a big switches on you, they're still defending you like a guard is. Just the fact that when you get to the basket, having composure, finding somebody, we consider them like trees. And getting in there, getting down there, it's kind of hard to find that open person because they're so

much bigger than myself and Makayla and the rest of our teammates. Just the fact that they're so good defensively.

Q. Coach, you said yesterday that that Missouri win was so important for your NCAA hopes. Now that we're looking forward to the selection show, do you feel your team has done enough to vie in that field of 68?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: Absolutely. There's no question in my mind. There's not a metric that I've ever heard them talk about that we don't pass that test. You look at who we've played, where we've played, how we've played, that's what we always talk about. We went on the road, we played people, we brought people home, we accepted the challenge of playing every single night. We didn't COVID out of one thing in two years. They said that was going to go into play.

So everything that's ever been talked about, it's just a matter of where. There's not a metric -- we're going to plan a party like we're in it because I've been studying it for a lot of years. If I'm wrong, I'll be very, very surprised.

Q. You mentioned that you think South Carolina is the No. 1 team in the country in your view.

MIKE NEIGHBORS: Yep.

Q. There are some pretty obvious reasons, I think, to those of us in the room who haven't coached college hoops for 20 years about why that is. I'm curious for you as a coach what are the small things they do to differentiate themselves from good to elite?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: Yeah, Sam brought it up. Their bigs can guard your guards and their guards can guard your bigs. That makes -- everybody is like, how do you get space against them? Stefi asked me that at halftime, how do you create more space. I said I'm not sure you can. There's not an offense that's been able to do it. I think Stanford runs some of the best offense in the country, as well, and they had a hard time with it.

I think we are all witnessing what it looks like when you

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look at what the roster is that Dawn has put together and her staff. They bring in -- I looked at one matchup card, Lacey Goldwire that does our match-ups, I said, are you sure that's who they have in right now? It was just size after size after size, and it's athletic size, and they play together. It's just the total package.

I think that's what -- I just don't think there's -- there may be a day that they're off, but you're going to have to beat them. They're not beating themselves.

I think the first loss of the season when they lost at Missouri, we were all like, oh, man, now they're going to be so focused, and they have been. She's really got them locked in.

It's demoralizing at times, too, in that you think you're playing good and you look up and you're down 12, or you think you've had a little good run. We held them scoreless for three minutes, and it felt like a small victory, but next thing you know it's back to 15 and 17. It's just got a compounding effect that wears on you, and I know it gets frustrating for me and I know it gets frustrating for kids because it is so hard to just function because you think you're open and then they're there.

I looked down, we had 11 blocked shots, they only had eight. Now, that's not a stat that matters, but I do think it matters to us that we're not backing down from it. We're taking it in there, and Jersey having to guard the people she's had to guard this year out of position.

But to your point, your question, I think it's the fact that they're good at a lot of things. There's not one thing -- I think if you asked 10 different coaches, you'd get 10 different opinions because they're good at so many things.

Q. How will the team spend the next week and a half before Selection Sunday?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: Yeah, resting the first three days of it. I'll give them off until Monday. We'll start rehab, prehab, get back in the gym on Tuesday and Wednesday. We'll probably have another day off in the middle of the week. Then we'll get back together for Sunday and get back to work, find out who we're going to play and turn our attention there.

It's a long gap. It's really hard for the conferences that have their tournament this week. You've got to stay sharp. We'll have a scrimmage game. We'll bring our white squad guys in and have a scrimmage game kind of mid-week to kind of simulate staying in game shape.

But a lot of rest, a lot of film, a lot of recovery, a lot of time

in the training room, and then back to the practice floor middle to the end of the week.

Q. How much did the second-chance points for South Carolina affect the game?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: That's probably the difference. We held them to 37.3 percent field goal percentage, which is really good to hold them to. But again, when they're sticking back 20 offensive rebounds and 42 points in the paint, 19 second-chance, that's got that demoralizing compounding effect that we were talking about.

I wouldn't say it's the difference in the game. Again, they do so many other things well. But it was the difference in this particular game.

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