

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

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

Ole Miss Rebels Yolett McPhee-McCuin Shakira Austin Angel Baker

Postgame Press Conference

Ole Miss 70, Florida 60

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Just grateful for the win. Real sad that KiKi did not have a chance to play today. I know what it feels like. We lost Donnetta to an injury two weeks ago, similar. When she went down, my heart dropped because I almost relived what happened to us. She was the star of the floor, so I know how that feels.

But grateful for the win. We have a lot of new faces. I thought there were a lot of good things. I thought that Shakira understood what she needed to do for the team to advance, because that's what was needed today.

I thought we were able to get some rust off, I guess, and I expect us to -- well, we're going to have to play better tomorrow in order to play on Sunday.

Q. Shakira, you ended up with 27, 13 and 6 blocks, I believe it was. Are there just days when you know that more is going to be on your plate and how do you approach that? And then to have this sort of performance on this stage, what does that mean to you?

SHAKIRA AUSTIN: I think just coming into the SEC Tournament, I just had a chip on my shoulder. I know the team did. We still have some new pieces like Coach just mentioned, and I just took it upon myself to just let them follow and not wait for them to try to come along and just let them come after me.

What was the second question?



Q. A performance on this stage --

SHAKIRA AUSTIN: I mean, it's great. This to me is the best league in the nation. We're going against the top every night.

I mean, just looking out and seeing the different broadcasting, just all the attention that the SEC brings to the women's side, you've got to love playing here.

Q. Shakira, is there a benefit to having just played South Carolina a week ago with the quick turnaround going into tomorrow?

SHAKIRA AUSTIN: I think there is. I think we're familiar with the scout. We've played them twice already. We know what they pretty much want to do, and we also know the reason that we lost.

Having a quick turnaround and coming into the second game of the tournament with a little bit more energy and effort, I think we'll know what to do.

Q. Shakira, Coach said she talked to you about what needed to be done. What did that mean for you individually?

SHAKIRA AUSTIN: Just to be efficient and lead. I just needed to be dominant, and yeah, that's pretty much it, just be efficient.

Q. Angel, there was a point in the third quarter where they cut it down to one and then you and Snudda that hit back to back threes. I think again in the fourth they cut it down to three and you responded. What does it say about this team when teams cut down deficits and get close that you guys are able to respond?

ANGEL BAKER: I think it just says we've got fight in us; know what I'm saying? Just being relentless, I guess, just always having to respond when they're cutting it close, just having a response and not letting it determine the game.

Q. Yolett, you've talked a lot about the importance of the NIT experience for your team and growing, but I'm

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

curious in the last year since then, are there any key moments or key times that you can point to that really either grew this team or matured this team or brought this team to this level?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I mean, tons. The NIT, of course. So funny that you mention that because I just texted JR after Colorado beat Arizona, and I said, let's go dancing, baby, we've got to go. You know, that was a promise we made to each other in the NIT, that we wanted to take the next step like Arizona did in previous years.

We've fallen some. Our loss at Mississippi State really allowed us to look at each other and own some truths. I thought as a leader I did not manage the group the best as far as the success we were having, and we started to lose our identity.

We had a heart to heart about that, and since then we've been on a roll. We've won five of our last six games.

We feel good about that, but we have learned a lot of lessons. Even the Belmont game, the first game of the season, after that, our players understood that no matter how much hype is about Ole Miss women's basketball, we're going to have to earn a win.

Thank God Belmont is balling because we need them to win to help us out. But there were tons of lessons through our failures but some through success. Playing South Carolina the way we played them the second time, beating numerous ranked teams, we've learned from all of those.

Q. I'm just anxious to know what your reaction was to the double technical late in the game. We see that in the men's game and it doesn't get called, but it often gets called in the women's game. What is your reaction?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, I was relieved once they said it was a double technical because as soon as I saw them call it, I just screamed out, "no!" Because we didn't need the momentum shift at the time.

I think society is still getting used to women being bold and competitive and brave. I get accused of being cocky all the time just because I believe and I want to win.

That's something that I'm not going to have my players apologize for. Both Zippy and Kiara wanted to win the game. I thought the officials did their job. They can't allow that. But I'm here for it. I'm here for the competitiveness, not the tech maybe, but the competitiveness, and that's what the game is about.

These young ladies have sacrificed a lot to get where they are. When you see them express their emotion, that's not who they are but that's a piece of who they are. They're competitors.

I think as we continue to grow the game of women's basketball, we need to support that.

Q. I think after the South Carolina game you said that --

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Which one?

Q. The second one. That part of it was you wanted to show that you were a team to be reckoned with and that's kind of what the SEC Tournament was a little bit about, too. What do you think today did for that message?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: I thought it just got us back into our groove. I told the players after the game -- well, first of all, they didn't know how I was going to come in. And I went in there and started clapping them up, like way to get 23, way to get 23, and they were like, oh, okay, well, let's celebrate because they know that we should have played better.

But I explained to them why I was able to let it go, because in the tournament you either win or you go home, and we won. There was some things that I didn't like, but we have to let that go. We know we have to play better tomorrow versus South Carolina. We know they're the No. 1 team in the nation. But we also know that this is a great stage and a great opportunity for us to show up and perform.

We are still chasing a great seeding in the NCAA Tournament. That is our purpose.

As far as us and South Carolina, our race is different. They've been here, been there, done that. This is new for us. Do we want to play Sunday? Yes. But I don't believe in skipping steps.

Now, if we give ourselves a chance and we figure out how to get there, great. But if we don't and we play good basketball and we can play against the No. 1 team in the nation, I like our chances in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Coach, what are you doing in preparation in order to beat the No. 1 team in the nation tomorrow?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, well, first of all, you don't really -- when you play South Carolina, you can't think about beating them. You have to think about things in small chunks. It's per quarter.

We have goals each quarter that we want to attain, and that is how we will approach it. If we go in saying, gosh, we've got to beat South Carolina, then we just played ourselves. 40 minutes in a long time, and they're a lot to handle. We're going to take it probably media at a time. But we know there are some things we want to do.

Our players can give me the scout, so it was kind of good that we just played them -- see, we hadn't played Florida in forever. I think when we played Florida we had just had COVID, we were out for like 10 days, they had people out. It was a mess, and it was in December.

This was like a really, really new game. Tomorrow will be familiar.

Q. I asked this question to Coach Neighbors, but I'm curious for you heading into the game, I think all of us can give you some big picture reasons why South Carolina is very good, but I'm curious for you as a coach that sees the game very differently, what are the small reasons why their team is not just very good but elite?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, South Carolina is elite. One, when you're elite, it takes a couple things. It takes experience; they have that. And their players know who they are and so, like Boston knows who she is. Every player does their job. I don't ever see them really shy away from that. They are who they are.

My team is very young, so sometimes we go through an identity crisis. We need Maddie to be extremely active on the glass, run the floor, put the ball on the floor here and there in her kill zones, and sometimes she forgets that. You know what, she's a sophomore.

South Carolina is a team that has been there numerous times, and so that is what makes them elite.

Then the things that -- you can say, oh, well, they don't shoot the three well. They don't care because they know they can rebound, so they're going to crash the glass.

I think that's what makes them special. Teams that know who they are. We're still trying to figure that out, and hopefully we can continue to grow in that, but we've got to grow quickly because we want to make a deep run in this tournament and also in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. I think I know the answer to this, but I need to ask it anyway to get you to say it. You said the performance wasn't good enough to win tomorrow. Was Shakira's performance good enough to win tomorrow?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: No. Just because they're not going to let Shakira do that tomorrow.

If she has to put out that type of energy to have that type of performance, she's not going to make it to the fourth quarter. It's going to be a total team effort tomorrow.

Now, would I love for her to have 27, 13, 4 assists, 6 blocks? Absolutely. But I'm telling you, then we're going to need some other people to do some things, as well.

Shakira just needs to continue to be efficient. She needs to lead. She needs to understand how important she is on the floor and use that for our advantage, but other players need to come to play. That is how we were in the game with South Carolina. Monk, Snudda, Angel, the whole gang came out and they were ready to perform, and we're going to just -- it's going to be a total team effort.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports