

# Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

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

## Tennessee Lady Volunteers Kellie Harper Rae Burrell Tess Darby

Postgame Press Conference

Tennessee 74, Alabama 59

KELLIE HARPER: Proud of our team. You know we knew Alabama was coming in and playing really well, playing with a lot of confidence. I probably was most proud of our defensive effort to start the game. I thought we really locked in with a game plan. Thought Alexis Dye did a great job on the boards. We had players that made plays, Rae and Tess were able to knock down shots. Really proud of our effort. And like I said, beat a team that's been playing very well.

**Q. Rae, how important was it to get started the way you did? You guys got into a hole the last time you played Alabama and you came right out of the gate in this game.**

RAE BURRELL: It was important to set the tone for the game. We knew we needed to come out aggressive. We knew what our game plan was, so we needed to execute that. I think we did. We got the energy going and the fans helped with energy as well.

**Q. Rae, obviously Sunday was a devastating result for you guys. How much of maybe a motivator was that for you and how did that feel to have a night like you did today?**

RAE BURRELL: Yeah losing is always motivation enough but like we said, we knew what we needed to go into the game. This was good for us to know as a team we could focus and lock in on what we needed to do.

**Q. Rae, how beneficial was that double bye for you**



**guys? Because you came out with so much energy right out of the gate.**

RAE BURRELL: Yeah we were able to take time off, rest, also watch the game yesterday. So we got to take a look at what we was going against today. So I feel like that really helped us and we just came out fresh today.

**Q. Tess, I'm seeing a lot of 21 jerseys out in the stands. I know this is a little closer for west Tennessee. How many fans or family did you have in attendance today?**

TESS DARBY: With it being closer, I did have a little bit more than I would at Knoxville. But you know Lady Vol fans travel with us everywhere. They're one of a kind for sure. And just the energy they brought to the game just fed on the floor for us. And made it a better environment to play with whenever you have that much energy coming from the crowd.

**Q. Rae, you had the job of guarding Brittany Davis, who scored 73 points in the last three games. What was your mind set coming in and approaching that?**

RAE BURRELL: I mean, I knew what her strengths were, so my goal was just to lock up what she's good at. So shooting a three, driving. Just making sure I'm there.

**Q. Tess, you can score from the arc obviously but you got a couple run-out baskets tonight. Was that part of the game plan, after a made Alabama basket to just get down the floor?**

TESS DARBY: You know, just sprinting the floor was a big emphasis for us, transition buckets. I can shoot behind the arc or whatever but just -- (laughing) sorry, I didn't mean to say that. But just making the opponent have to treat me better -- or okay. Wait. Let me rephrase this. I panicked.

Okay. But just being able to also shoot behind the three. Having another part of my game so the opponents just know that I don't just shoot the three.

**Q. Second straight semifinals in two seasons, Tess,**



**how exciting is this for you and how badly do you want to win this next one?**

TESS DARBY: It's very exciting to be back in this position but to get further than last year.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Rae and Tess. You ladies are free to go.

**Q. Alexis Dye kind of sparked that run early. How big was her performance in the first half?**

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah. I thought Alexis Dye's production on the boards especially and her offensive play to start the game really sparked us, really energized us and gave us some confidence there. I think you could see we were going to start the game pretty aggressive and, you know, she was a big part of that.

**Q. Coach, 17 assists on 26 made field goals, nine of Tennessee's 10 players scored that entered the game. What does that say about the offense?**

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah, you know, it took us a minute but we started sharing the ball. You know, Rae had seven assists herself. And I think Brooklynn had four. So we were really looking to move the ball. You know, we knew that the ball movement was going to be important in this game. We needed to try to find ways to get the ball inside. You know, could have had a few more touches there. But thought we did a nice job of sharing the ball. That's always a great number for us to see.

**Q. Coach, just wondered how important Brooklynn's performance was tonight with Jordan in foul trouble, and how have you seen her grow recently?**

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah. Well, Brooklynn is a ball of energy. And she loves playing defense. She comes in, plays hard, gets excited. I thought she made several hustle plays. She battled on the boards; four boards, that's pretty good. And then handled a lot of the pressure with Jordan Walker on the bench in foul trouble. It's nice to have that energy, when she comes in off the bench you know what you're getting with her.

And, you know, for a freshman, she's had a lot of growth this season and has been a big part of what we've been doing.

**Q. Speaking of Brooklynn, her and Kaiya were key in holding Alabama to low shooting percentage and also breaking the press for a lot of the game. What do you feel like that says about the future both of them? And I know you said Kaiya has been close to this kind of**

**performance. How happy were you with her?**

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah. Really excited about how Kaiya Wynn played. I looked up and we had several freshmen on the court all at once, and I thought they played well. You know, Kaiya was aggressive handling the basketball. She did a really nice job defensively. She does a pretty good job on the boards as well.

I thought the two of them looked pretty comfortable out there considering this is their first SEC Tournament.

**Q. Coach, you got rid of the hex on a late-night game. You pointed out it was a Friday, but it was still a late-night game, and you came out so fast. How key was that start to not get yourself buried in a hole, like you did when you last played at Tuscaloosa?**

KELLIE HARPER: Our team did a great job of preparing for this game. I thought we were really focused on knowing the scouting report. We were focused on executing our game plan. And I could just tell before the game, you know, they had a great mind set and great focus. Now that doesn't always win the games. But, you know, to win a tough game like this, you've got to have great focus and great energy, and we had both to start the game. And I thought that was critical for us.

**Q. Coach, Brittany Davis and Megan Abrams scored 50 points on you guys 17 days ago and tonight they scored 23. What did you guys do to kind of stifle them tonight defensively?**

KELLIE HARPER: Well, you know, those two have been absolutely dynamic in the last few weeks. They have done a terrific job. And, you know, I thought our team did a nice job of trying to take away easy looks for them. Really trying to pressure them behind the three-point line and obviously Tamari Key, I think she had five blocks at half time. You know, so when she's able to patrol the paint, it shuts down opportunities for drives. And our guards did a much better job avoiding screens, fighting through screens and defending one on one.

**Q. Kellie, you kind of touched on it but you brought a bunch of players into this tournament without any postseason experience. How nice was that to get that experience under their belt in what seemed like a very friendly environment for you guys?**

KELLIE HARPER: I thought before the game I tried to give them the confident, have fun vibe. I didn't want them to be uptight. I think sometimes you can be when you go to a tournament. But, you know, I thought they handled it really well. Obviously there was a lot of orange in the stands and

the game was very intense to start, especially that first half. And I thought we handled it. I thought our players stayed pretty mature and our freshmen didn't look like freshmen.

**Q. Going back to Rae Burrell, really set the tone in the third quarter, strong defensively on Davis. How important is it for her to be peaking right now and leading the team like this?**

KELLIE HARPER: This game was really good for Rae and for our team and how she played. She was able to make shots. She did a nice job defensively. I thought she -- and she obviously had a really good floor game with her seven assists. So I thought she played really well. Good for her confidence and, like I said, really good for our team, I thought. Proud of Rae and how she played.

Thank you guys.

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