

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 5, 2022
Nashville, Tennessee, USA
Bridgestone Arena

Kentucky Wildcats

Kyra Elzy

Robyn Benton

Rhyne Howard

Postgame Press Conference

Kentucky 83, Tennessee 74

Q. These past couple games here in the tournament have come against a team that you lost to in the regular season. Now that you're at full strength and playing so well, how enjoyable and what does it mean to be able to kind of exorcise those demons and get some revenge for what happened in the regular seasons?

RHYNE HOWARD: It means a lot more when you beat them in the tournament. Yeah, we did lose to them. We weren't playing to the best of our ability, but to be playing how we are now and as confident as we are now, it just means more than when we lost. Like they can't say they're going to the ship like we can.

ROBYN BENTON: I agree with my friend, Rhyne Howard.

Q. Robyn, you see the first shot go in. After that did you know it was going to be that night, and to see everybody step up on the bench, what kind of effort did that take from you guys?

ROBYN BENTON: You know, coming off the bench, I just know I've got to be a spark for my team. We all know what this means. We know what we're playing for. We're playing to win.

Q. Robyn, yesterday Coach Elzy said that you're "showtime," and that's your nickname. Did you feel like you hit showtime levels tonight?

ROBYN BENTON: Yeah, when I hit that fourth three, I was



like, (singing) ooh, child, things are gonna get easier...

Q. You guys, I think your first 12 points tonight were all three-pointers. Lately you guys have just been getting off to really hot starts. What's been the key to that?

RHYNE HOWARD: We like to shoot, and when we see it going in, we're going to keep shooting it. We are moving the ball really well to find the open person. We're just connecting on all levels.

ROBYN BENTON: Yeah, my girl Rhyne, she's been hot for these past couple of games. I'm just glad I can heat up a little bit.

Q. Could you guys both describe the emotions of playing in a rivalry game like that with the crowd seemingly against you guys tonight?

RHYNE HOWARD: It was a lot like the first time. They had the heavy side of the crowd since we're in Tennessee, but it's great, we know how to step up to the challenge. We love when the fans are going against us. It's not something that we're new to, but we love showing people wrong and just showing what we can do.

ROBYN BENTON: I mean, we've been playing in hostile environments all year. We're just stepping up to the challenge and taking it head on.

Q. Rhyne, you guys led the whole and the closest Tennessee came was within one point and Rae Burrell had that block and you called a time-out. What was going on in that time-out and then you guys came out had a 10-2 run started by your and-one play and how important was that in the grand scheme of things?

RHYNE HOWARD: We just said we had to lock back in. We knew that was their run and we had to answer.

Q. Kyra, when you look back at the non-conference you guys played, you played in really tough road environments in Indiana, Louisville, and conference opponents, as well. How do you think that prepared



you to succeed in a similar type environment tonight?

KYRA ELZY: Well, first off, hats off to Kellie Jolly Harper, what she has done this year at Tennessee. She has this team playing extremely well, and proud of my former teammate.

As far as us, yes, we've been in hostile environments all year. Our non-conference prepared us for this moment. We're accustomed to playing in hostile environments, and we stepped up to the challenge today.

Q. Kyra, you touched on it a little bit yesterday, but the team meeting you guys had after you lost, I think, four straight, the South Carolina game being the last, could you just expand a little bit more on that? Who called the meeting, where did it happen, who spoke up specifically?

KYRA ELZY: You know, we'll keep that private, but at that juncture, it was do or die for us.

I talked about it yesterday, I had to hold myself accountable along with this staff and each individual player, and we knew it was either we're going home and the season is going to end like this, or we're going to step up to the challenge.

I thought all year long we had enough, and even when we first faced adversity, I think that brought us together closer as a team because we didn't have anyone else but each other, and it's paying off now.

Q. How key was that fast start? You basically put Tennessee on its heels and they never quite could overcome that deficit. And also, do you have anything left in the tank on day 4 going up against South Carolina? That is a tough stretch.

KYRA ELZY: You know, we knew we needed a good start. We needed to come out and be aggressive offensively, but I was more worried about the defensive end. I wanted to make sure that we brought the defensive heat and pursued the basketball. We knew that Tennessee is a great rebounding team. I just challenged our players, find a body. We're not going to out-jump anyone; get a rebound and run. That was the theme: Rebound and run. That's what we needed to do.

Day 4, you know, that's part of March Madness. We've played four games in eight days twice, so when you get to the championship game, you leave it out there. There is no saving, you rest after the game is over. You're there, you give everything that you have.

Q. You talked about it after the Louisville game, needing more conditioning, needing to execute down the line. To see them take those punches every time Tennessee came tonight and find a way to close the game and execute, that's got to make you feel great.

KYRA ELZY: Yes, I do feel great. I'm just so proud of this team, the tenacity, the toughness, mentally and physically. You know, when we were taking our hits down the stretch, I could see us getting better even though it wasn't showing up on the scoreboard. We worked a lot on our offensive execution, so when teams make runs, I thought we stepped up and answered them, so it's good to see that.

Q. You touched on it a little bit earlier, but you're facing your former teammate in an SEC final. What does it mean to see each other have success and face each other in a game like this?

KYRA ELZY: I love Kellie. We're teammates, we're lady ball sisters for life. A lot respect for her. Obviously I have a lot of love for the Tennessee program and what Coach Summitt has built and the sisterhood that she has built. We were kind of joking before the game when we gave each other a hug and said, we wish we weren't playing each other so we could cheer each other within. But we're both competitors, and when we're not playing each other, we want the best for each other.

Q. To that end, last year Joni and Dawn made history as the first Black coaches to be in this game. Now you get to follow this up and be the second one against Dawn. What does that mean for you personally and for getting Kentucky to this point?

KYRA ELZY: You know, so proud just to help get Kentucky back to the championship game, and as far as making history, you know, that's amazing. Representation matters. Coach Staley has been a voice for women's basketball, women and women of color.

I grew up respecting and idolizing Coach Staley, but tomorrow it's going to be two coaches, competitors, and I'm glad people get to look on TV and see women of color in leadership roles. It matters.

Q. The South Carolina game was a loss in the regular season, of course, but you mentioned that that's when you first started seeing your team really come together despite that loss. What else do you remember from that game, and what do you expect out of tomorrow's matchup?

KYRA ELZY: Well, South Carolina is a tough team. Obviously they're the No. 1 team in the country for a

reason. And what I'll remember is the offensive rebounds and them pounding the ball in the post. We'll have our hands full, but you know, at the end of the day it's 40 minutes, and bring your best.

That's all we can do, and we're going to come and compete and do what we do best.

Q. This is Rhyné Howard's last season with the program, and given where you guys were midway through the conference schedule, what does it mean to see her find the success at the end of this season?

KYRA ELZY: You know, I get emotional thinking about it. She started the season really stressed out and pressure filled, and I thought she played that way.

She and I met -- and I just told her, I was like, what you have done for women's basketball, what you have done for Kentucky, if you don't do another thing, you're accolades speak for themselves.

I knew in the back of my mind what the end game was, but wanted to free her along with this staff to let her have fun, enjoy her senior year, because these are memories in time she will never get back.

It's good to see her having success but also having fun.

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