

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 5, 2022

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Tennessee Lady Volunteers

Kellie Harper

Rae Burrell

Alexus Dye

Postgame Press Conference



Kentucky 83, Tennessee 74

KELLIE HARPER: Well, to say we're disappointed is an understatement. Love coaching this team, and would have loved to have been playing on Sunday.

Obviously Kentucky is playing great right now. They're sharing the ball. They're scoring obviously very well. We just didn't make enough plays on either end of the court to get the win.

That's tough. Tough one to swallow.

I'm really proud of our team and our effort and our fight and our no-quit attitude.

Q. Alexis, there's something about you in postseason where you turn into a different player. 26 points tonight, I believe 10 rebounds. What is it about you in postseason that gets you so fired up?

ALEXUS DYE: Winning. I wanted to help my team win a ring. I'm all about winning. It just turns me up even more because I know I have to be there for my teammates, I have to give, I have to push myself extra in order to help my team succeed.

Q. Rae, if there's another positive for you to take out of this trip, it's that you have definitely found your offense again. What has been the difference for you right now?

RAE BURRELL: Just like what Snoop said, we're trying to win. My team has been putting me in great positions to get

some good points, so that's helped a lot, and then, yeah, just stepping up because it's one-and-done now, so everybody has to step up.

Q. Rae, the team had 17 assists last night, 22 today. Even though it was a loss, what did you feel like that says about the progress this offense has made, especially going to the tournament?

RAE BURRELL: Yeah, we've been sharing the ball great. We've been moving it really well. It's definitely a positive for us moving forward, something that we've been getting better at, and we're going to continue to get better at.

Q. Coach, kind of multiple storylines here. One is the offensive resurgence of both Alexis and Rae. Two, your freshmen, the way they came forward in postseason, and was it just another case of a game where you just got in that hole early and it was too much to overcome?

KELLIE HARPER: Well, obviously you don't want to give a team nine threes in the first half. I think that's pretty tough to overcome. We had our chances. I'll tell you, we had it. We had a breakaway, we didn't convert. I think we could have cut it to one or tied it at that point, I think, or maybe even gone ahead, and we gave up an and-one on the other end. I thought that was a huge play.

You know, statistically, offensively we had a pretty good showing. I mean, 74 points, 47 percent from the field, other than making a few more free throws, statistically we were pretty good offensively.

Defensively is the area that we weren't able to win in tonight. It was definitely defense that we just couldn't keep up with Kentucky.

Our offense is better, but it's going to be hard for us to score more than 83. That's where your defense has got to be a little tighter.

I am proud of our freshmen. They came in and gave us good minutes. They came in and made plays. They battled. They didn't back down, and proud of them. But I



think everybody that we put in the game at some point made plays for us.

Q. Just wondering, how much of a challenge has it been to try to adjust without Jordan on both ends of the floor, and do you feel like you've kind of found some things out here and maybe some roles that have changed a little bit?

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah, for sure. I think the biggest adjustment that we worked on was our offense. Jordan has the ability to create shots for herself and others, and we had -- I had to tweak some things offensively to try to make up for that.

Defensively just had to have next man up. We had to have different people step up. Obviously we're missing her there. I think the biggest challenge for us without her is on the boards. We just lost a lot on the boards with her that we're not making up right now.

I can tweak some things on offense, and I might can do some different things on defense, but I'm very limited with what I can do with our work on the boards.

Q. You mentioned the nine threes in the first half. When a team is making 50 percent, I think they ended up 10 or so threes, is there any defense when a team is shooting it that well?

KELLIE HARPER: I thought we had some breakdowns defensively. It's one thing to make contested threes. It's another to make open threes. I thought we gave up too many open threes.

A lot of those threes -- not a lot. Several of those threes in the first half came off of offensive boards and kick-outs. That's deflating to a team, to give up an offensive board and then them hit a three. That's an area if we could have shored up some of those boards, then you may take off some of those threes.

Q. Following that, what were some of the defensive breakdowns that you saw that allowed some of those open threes?

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah, I thought our transition defense wasn't as good as it needs to be, and that doesn't necessarily just mean breakaway lay-ups. But our match-ups weren't always where they needed to be. We were a little bit late at times.

Our ball screen defense in the second half, we had some breakdowns, and then, like I said, we weren't going to affect them. I mean, we just didn't affect them. They did

exactly what they wanted to do with their pace, and that's where you're just trying to do something different defensively to try to help out there.

Q. Coach Elzy spoke on the bond that you two have, when you're not playing each other, you root for each other. How strong is that bond?

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah, I love Kyra and obviously love to pull for my former teammates. We were pretty close. She was a great teammate when we were at Tennessee. I'd call her a really good friend.

Q. By reaching the semifinal, do you think you've done enough to host the NCAA early rounds? And this time between tournaments, what can you use that for besides getting the team a little bit of rest?

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah, it's a great question. I think we have. I think we've been competitive. Our last couple of losses have been to teams that are playing well, but we were really competitive in those games, as well.

I think we've got good wins, and I think we've still been fighting. I hope so.

In terms of what we're going to do, I did tell the team, I'll tell you guys -- sorry for keeping you, but I'll tell you a story. I remember one year we lost in the SEC Tournament when I was a player, and Pat came in and said, we've got about two weeks, we have to get better.

I guess we just said, okay, and we got better, and we ended up winning the National Championship.

So I talked to our team about taking this time -- and it's not huge. We don't have to overhaul things, but just a few more plays here and there could really be the difference in one more ball game. I told them I love them and I would love to coach them as many more games as I can possibly coach them, but I did tell them there's a limit. It's six. That's all you get to play from here on out. I told them I would take six; that would be fine. Love coaching this group.

Q. First, Alexis Dye, I think impressed last night and today topped that performance. Can you talk about what's clicked for her confidence-wise going into this tournament?

KELLIE HARPER: She's just playing with great motivation. We asked her, what are you doing, what did you do, what did you eat, did you sleep great. She said, I'm trying to get a ring. I tell you, you go back and you look at this kid's history, that's all she knows, championships. She's got a

bunch of them. She was on a mission. Obviously she turned up her level of aggressiveness, and obviously we needed her. We were really, really trying to get the ball to her and give her some opportunities.

Q. In regard to now getting better as a team, taking this time to get better, your freshmen feel like they're on the cusp of that. How happy are you with their performance and how close do you feel like they are to closing that gap where you need them to be?

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah, I think they made good plays, and I think this will give them confidence. I think it will allow us to push them even more, I think, in practice to be able to find minute ways to get better.

But it's got to be from everybody. I think we can be a little bit -- I'll go back to the boards. If we could be a little bit more disciplined in our box-outs, we save four or five boards, and that might have been a different ball game.

I told the team, the further you play in a tournament, whether it's SEC Tournament or the NCAA Tournament, your margin for error gets smaller, and you can't make as many mistakes, and that's what we've got to do right now is start cleaning up some of those mistakes that we can control.

Q. As you all get better, gear up for the NCAA Tournament, what can you do to kind of learn from this two-day stretch as you get ready for the tournament?

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah, I think we can take a lot of positives out of this, to be honest with you, and then I also think that we can get our legs back under us. That'll be good. Continue to work on our offensive efficiency and execution, and then defensively a few less breakdowns. I think just a little bit more discipline with our box-outs, like I mentioned, and you've got to make your free throws, too. Hopefully this week we can shoot a lot of free throws because I think we missed seven, and that could have changed the complexion of the game, as well.

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