

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 3, 2023

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

Texas A&M Aggies

Coach Joni Taylor

Aaliyah Patty

Janiah Barker

Postgame Press Conference



nothing you can do. That first week I was here I was definitely like, is this something I want to do? Because it's something that's so, so hard, and especially playing in this conference against the people we play against day in and day out, and it's hard.

The advice I would give is go to a school that you know you will be welcome and have a family atmosphere, things of that sort.

Q. Janiah, you are the only high major freshman in the country with a 4% block rate, 2% steal rate. Can you talk about your ability to create havoc on the defensive end?

COACH TAYLOR: Talk about your instincts defensively and how you can affect the game on the defensive end.

JANIAH BARKER: I would say my intuition, just knowing when the pass is coming. Like I said, one thing, me and Joni watch film and she was like, if someone should ever come and set down screen on you, just know that that person is probably going up to get the ball.

So just knowing basketball stuff like that and like I said, studying film and knowing when that person is going to jump and that person is going to pass the ball.

Q. Aaliyah, you are a fifth year senior. You would probably rather be playing tomorrow, but to do what you guys did this week, what did it mean to be make some noise here?

AALIYAH PATTY: It means a lot. Just being able to go out there and fight with my teammates, um -- sorry. This was a really special team. I think this year we were all really close and we all just wanted to fight for each other, so that was really the main thing.

I think we shocked a lot of people the past two games. I don't think tonight was our night, and, you know, that happens. But I think the past two games we really came out and played for each other, we played for Joni, we played for the coaches, and it was just really special to be out there and share those moments with my teammates for

Ole Miss 77, Texas A&M 60

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Texas A&M head coach, Joni Taylor and student athletes Aaliyah Patty and Janiah Barker. We will begin with questions for the student athletes.

Q. For Janiah, first of all, congrats on the double-double. Can you speak a little bit to what went well tonight and just -- seems like you always know what to do at the right time, and can you talk about your intuition on the court?

JANIAH BARKER: I would just say, you know -- I said before going into this game we watched a lot of film. I know it was a quick turnaround, and we watched film making sure we know what to do.

I would say my coaches and teammates are the ones who have the confidence and trust in me for me to do what I do, so my intuition goes out to them. And you watch film and study.

Q. The transition, obviously y'all were very, very successful in high school. The transition to Division I and even more so to the Southeastern Conference, just the best in the nation because you know it does mean just a little bit more. Tell us about your transition from your high school being so successful to the SEC.

JANIAH BARKER: I would say it's definitely something that you can't prepare for. You know, you try to prepare to come to college before you get to college, but there is



the last few times.

Q. Can y'all speak to the mental challenge of this year, not always getting the wins that you wanted and how you continued to overcome that and getting an end like this?

AALIYAH PATTY: I think mental toughness is -- I will say this for everyone, coming into this league and into any league, mental toughness is going to be the number one thing you have to have. There's games where you're going to be high, there's games where you're going to be low, and fighting through those highs and lows is really going to make you a great player.

I think the season that we went through, just trying to play game-to-game, quarter-to-quarter, possession-to-possession, you know, I think we learned how to be mentally tough, and I think the past two games that showed.

When we were down, we fought back. We stayed together. We stayed mentally tough through those hard moments, and I think like I said earlier, mental toughness is really key to being a great player.

Q. So Janiah, there were some moments today when you were extremely comfortable in the mid-range. Talk about how you can create your own shot and create space in the mid-range with your shot.

JANIAH BARKER: I think me being 6'4" is a disadvantage for a lot of things, but just being able to raise over the defenders and get a good look at the goal before I shoot the shot, I would say that's something that it is.

Q. There are a lot of young players on this team, freshmen like Janiah and Sydney had great games this week. What do you think that says about the future?

AALIYAH PATTY: I wish y'all can hear what Joni told us in the locker room. I know this program is going to be something special in the next few years. Like you said, we have some great freshmen, some young players who really stepped up this year. Janiah, Sydney, Money, Mya Petticord. Excited to see what they do here.

I think they're going to be great players and I think they showed up for us this year, and I think starting early is really good for players in the future.

Starting as a freshman, coming in as a freshman and playing all those minutes, it puts you into the position to be a great player in the future.

I think as long as they keep putting the work in and Joni doing what she does, she is a great coach, and I'm really excited to see what she does for this program.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies. Questions for Coach Taylor.

Q. Joni, what did you learn about yourself and this team in the year that you guys just went through?

COACH TAYLOR: I think the first thing is, you know, trusting our instincts. We knew when we came and got this team that it was going to be a process. That's the reason why our motto for the year is "becoming." We knew we weren't going to arrive at any final destination.

So from the very beginning we started planting seeds about how we were going to measure success, and this is a season of sewing. There will be a season of harvest later, in the future, but for this year it's about laying the foundation, and every day showing up, being better than you were yesterday.

So it's honestly back to the things we always talk about: building a foundation, trusting the process, and putting people around you who are going to be on the same train with you going in the right direction, and we're building a bridge as we cross it.

That's who we are and that's what we started building in this team when we got here, and you can see that. I think over the last two days and moments today you can see the growth that happened over the year. We've had a lot of challenges, and I'm happy for all of them, because that's how you build resilience, that's how you get tougher, and that's how you have to go through things.

To take a team who none of them have ever experienced playing in this league, whether they were seniors or juniors, they were on the bench last year. So for them to play the minutes they played this year, Patty said it, it's invaluable to them, our younger players, and we're just going to keep plugging along.

This was a great way for us to -- obviously we didn't end it the way we wanted to today, but what a great way to end our season, and for them to have a little bit of reward for all they went through this year.

Q. Aaliyah said she wishes we could hear what you said in the locker room. Would you share that, and what was your message to the young players about the potential they have?

COACH TAYLOR: How did I know you were going to ask

me that? What I told them is we've got to continue to be consistent, right? There was a team that showed up Wednesday and Thursday and there was a team that showed up today, and which team are we? That's part of our youth. We have to continue to put games together and put quarters together.

And then I told them the future is going to be really bright here, and we need to make sure everybody returning is on the that same page, because we don't want to play again on Wednesday. We don't want to have another year where we only have two games -- only win two games in a year.

That's why you're in the SEC conference. Let's get back to school, get back to the books, get things in order, and evaluate how much you're committed to this, because this train is moving in one direction, and everybody needs to be moving that way and making sure that we understand this spring, this summer is going to be challenging.

We have to continue to make strides and so I think what we have to continue to put in place for our players is be proud of what we have done. We grew a lot this year. But even in that growing we have a long way to go, and so I just want to make sure they don't think we have arrived anywhere, because there is a ton of work still to do in College Station.

Q. Joni, the SEC Conference is tough enough as it is, 1-14, I will take our No. 14 team and line it up against anybody in the country, maybe except the top two or three. With Oklahoma and Texas coming in, does it get any tougher?

COACH TAYLOR: Of course, Mack, it's good to see you first of all. Yeah, Texas and Oklahoma are both great programs, great traditions. They're going to make it tougher. We have 16 teams now, so, again, I think what they bring to this league, their style of play is similar to what we're used to, but it's teams that you are going to have to battle with every night. It's why you come to this league.

If you're a competitor and have any blood flowing in your veins you want to come to the SEC, and I stand by that. I've always said that. I've been in this league a really long time as a player, as an assistant coach, and as a head coach, and there is no other place you want to come.

Q. Joni, I have a couple of off-the-court, bigger-picture questions. One, couple years ago with Sedona price's video it seems like since then attention on the game has grown, and the level of attention and people watching women's basketball has grown as well. How sustainable do you think that is going forward with the

new contract, TV contract ahead, to keep things going and making this sport kind of on a level with some of the other bigger college athletic sports?

COACH TAYLOR: What Sedona did the year -- I call it the year of the bubble, right, when we were all in San Antonio. A lot of things were exposed, and I think it shined a light on the disparity that there is.

Especially now that we're celebrating the 50th anniversary of Title IX this year, what a great time to continue talking about gender equity. We have come a long way, but, again, we are nowhere close to where we need to be.

In terms of being a guardian of the game and what women's basketball is going to look like, can we sustain it? Absolutely. Have you seen the players that play basketball at our level? Not only the SEC, but if I get to naming players, right, the future is bright from our WNBA players to our college players who are about to be pros.

What we have to do, and what the media has to do, what coaches have to do, is continue to put our student athletes into a great position, because they are. I don't know if Sedona posts that if it gets the attention it gets. It wasn't us. It was a player who did that. With NIL and the all the opportunities they have, absolutely they're on the right track and they're fired up about our sport, as they should be.

But can it be sustained? Sure. We just need to make sure we are putting them in a position to be the spokespersons for our sport.

Q. The NIL, too, obviously that's a new dynamic for college athletics. Maybe the chances to be a pro -- I know all your players want to be pros, but maybe the chances given what happened to Brittney overseas, maybe there is reticence. Do players mind staying four years, five years, before going pro?

COACH TAYLOR: I think it's a game changer. What a great opportunity for them to take advantage of marketing themselves with image and likeness. I think every player has to make that decision, and at the end of the day, everybody cannot be a professional. I think it's up to them to know when that time is and the people around them to make that decision.

Q. Joni, a number that sticks out from the box is the turnovers. How much of that do you feel like was Ole Miss' defense and how much was fatigue?

COACH TAYLOR: Fatigue, I'm not going to give us that. Ole Miss put pressure on us. They are really good

defensively. They have been playing at a high level and we knew turnovers were going to be a factor. They thrive on turnovers, and it gets them offensive points. They're really, really good in transition.

So playing three days in a row is hard. We talked about that from the beginning. I think more than anything, not having our point guard today played a factor. Not having Kay Kay on the floor, she is our point guard and gets us settled, and not having her had a lot to do with us not feeling settled on the floor.

Q. Can you speak about Janiah this game? She gets a double-double, but throughout the year, following you from Georgia, what does this kid mean to the program?

COACH TAYLOR: She is a really special player. Pete asked a question earlier about is it sustainable. You take a player like Janiah Barker, and she has the personality to match her game, and that right there sells tickets. She is gracious and humble and has a big personality and is a lot of fun to be around, but wants to win and compete and cares about other people.

When you have that type of combination and when your best player is your hardest worker, it makes it really, really easy to coach her, coach her hard, and to coach the players and the people around her.

Again, there is a trust between Janiah, and not just me, but our entire staff. We recruited her since the 7th grade and when we decided to make the transition to College Station.

She didn't flinch. She was like, I'm there. I've said this before, I could tell Janiah to go stand on top of a building and jump and she would say, tell me what time.

That's the type of trust we have with each other, and when you have that with a player, it's just a fun dynamic.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.