

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 3, 2023

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Yolett

McPhee-McCuin

Angel Baker

Elauna Eaton

Postgame Press Conference

Ole Miss 77, Texas A&M 60

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Ole Miss head coach, Yolett McPhee-McCuin and student athletes Angel Baker and Elauna Eaton.

Coach?

COACH MCPHEE-MCCUIN: Grateful for the win. Happy how our team came out and played on both ends of the floor. One of the things that was a little concerning for me was the fouls. I thought we were just excited to play, and usually when we are excited, like ramped up like that, we will foul.

I just think once you get a couple then, you know, it's human nature for people to assume that's what you're doing. We will have to clean that up. I don't think we would want to give South Carolina 28 free throws.

Nevertheless, we were still with them, making 25 free throws, holding them to 60 points. I thought it was a good effort overall. Really proud that I was able to play everybody that was healthy to play today. We're just going to try to build on this.

Q. I know you guys always say we defend. That was one of the hotter teams in the conference coming in. They were lighting it up from three yesterday. You shut them down today. How much pride do you guys take in being able to do that?



ANGEL BAKER: We take a lot of pride in defending. When you think of Ole Miss, you think of defense. We dictate and disrupt. We take a lot of pride in that.

Q. Angel, what went right tonight? You had something like 23 points. You were cookin'. What was good? What did you feel around your team? Yeah, say more.

ANGEL BAKER: The first couple shots went in and then the rim got a little wider. Shout out to my teammates for putting me in positions to be efficient and score the ball.

Q. I don't know if you guys have thought about it, but South Carolina is coming up. How excited are you looking forward to that one?

ANGEL BAKER: It's pretty exciting. It's always a pleasure going up against the number one team. We respect all, we fear none.

ELAUNA EATON: It's written on our board every day. Like she said, we respect all, we fear none, so like she said, it's an honor to play the number one team, but we're coming in for a fight, and we have a good chance of winning it. We feel that way.

Q. Angel, you are a veteran in the college basketball world. How much does that experience kind of give you a lift in a tournament like this where it's, you know, win, on to the next, and so forth, especially in the SEC Conference?

ANGEL BAKER: I'm getting old, Jesus Christ. But I think it allowed me to give my team some leadership, and also poise when it's like a roller coaster during games. Just trying to be a leader for my team, knowing that I've been here a few times.

Well, we have a lot of upperclassmen, but just trying to lead. I think that's the biggest takeaway that I have.

Q. In your eyes for both of ya'll, how has the season gone? What have been the ups, the downs, and knowing that there is more to come tomorrow?

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ELAUNA EATON: I feel like all teams go through ups and downs, ebbs and flows throughout the season. As Coach has always said, we want to make sure we keep going up.

So I feel like being intentional about things that we didn't do good or things that she didn't like or ways that we do not play, which she stated, we just continue to try and get better at those things each and every day.

We're still climbing and we're still trying to get better each and every day.

Q. You made all three of your 3's today, Elauna. At what point do you know you have it? When do you know?

ELAUNA EATON: Well, Coach Yo and all the coaches has put confidence in me to knock down shots. I feel like with that confidence I feel like each one is going in.

I feel like it all starts with my preparation, getting in the gym with coaches, just staying ready and being ready when my name is called, because that's my job, to hit 3's. That's what I tried to do today.

Q. Angel, I want to go back to that matchup with South Carolina tomorrow. How much confidence can you take into that knowing how you played them before, and how much more difficult do you expect it to be given that you took them to overtime last time?

ANGEL BAKER: I think we learned a lot from the first game. We are going to go back and learn some stuff, fix some things, but I know the coaches are going to have a great plan for us and we're going to come out and do our best to execute that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies.

Questions for Coach Yo.

Q. I know you talk about how much you respect Dawn. How much do you look forward to these matchups against a mentor like that?

COACH McPHEE-McCUIN: I'm excited about it. That's why I came to the SEC, to be able to coach against the likes of Dawn Staley, and at the time you had Vic Schaefer was in the league and Gary Blair. Come on, those are some Hall of Fame coaches.

And now you have Kim Mulkey in the league, and there are a lot of coaches that have coached in the Final Four. Anytime I get to stand up on the sideline against one of the

coaches in the SEC, I'm excited.

Q. Same question I had for Angel: How much confidence can you guys take knowing that you had South Carolina in overtime, but also knowing they are going to be very, very prepared?

COACH McPHEE-McCUIN: I want to -- I don't think South Carolina is never not prepared. They are a championship program. I've seen them move and shake. I don't think they took us for granted. Let's not let that be the narrative. We really just played well and had a chance to beat them, and their experience kicked in.

So as far as -- I got a text from Dawn as soon as our game was over. Obviously there is a respect level with both teams and I expect it to be a great game. One of the things that will be different, I won't have to convince my team that they can play with them this time. I can just focus on the X's and O's.

Q. I was hoping you would just speak to Angel. Had a great night tonight, been great all season, a first-team player. What does she mean to this team?

COACH McPHEE-McCUIN: She is really an angel for us, literally. Angel came here, and like me when I was at Jacksonville, we would watch SEC games all the time. We would always envision having an opportunity maybe to be at this level.

Same for her at Wright State. She used to watch SEC games all the time. So the fact that she is living what she watched coming up, there is a level of gratitude that you have, humility, but also excitement.

I think when you see Angel play you are seeing a little bit of that. She is a veteran on our team and we're depending on her to help us go to this next step.

Q. Coach, if I remember correctly, after the South Carolina game you were talking about wanting to be able to beat teams like South Carolina, Tennessee, LSU.

COACH McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah.

Q. You have the opportunity tomorrow to face South Carolina again. What do those wins do from a program-building standpoint to be able to play teams like that and potentially be able to knock them off?

COACH McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I mean, here is the thing: When I first got the job I always thought about wanting to beat the bottom teams first. I don't believe in



skipping steps, you hear what I'm sayin'?

So even like in year one and two Dawn would say, Yo, you're not going to sneak me. I'm telling you, I see you. And I'm like, I'm not even worried about you. I have to start at the bottom. I've got to work my way up, but when we do, we are coming for you.

This is our second season in the top four, and there are only three teams that I haven't beat, and I'm not going to sleep until I do it. I don't know if it going to be tomorrow. I don't know when it's going to be. If we want to be considered a top program like they are, then we have to go through them.

Q. Elauna seized her moment today. How as a coach do you keep players ready for that moment?

COACH McPHEE-McCUIN: You know, when Elauna was in the office with me in the beginning of the year I said, this is going to be a tough year for you. I'm surprised you want to come to Ole Miss because we guard and you don't necessarily guard.

So we're going to push you and really challenge you. We recruited Elauna out of high school. I said, if you would stay with it all year, you're going to have a moment that's going to be huge.

So I treat the best -- the number one player to the number fifteen player the same. I spend time with them. I text them. We all have great relationships. I value them all as people.

I just kept telling her, you gotta be ready to go. I coach her just how I coach Madison. So she just understood that, and one of the things I enjoy about coaching Elauna, she is incredibly coachable.

Like, you can get on her and she doesn't say, oh, you know, she doesn't try to compare her journey to anybody else. Elauna is a competitor.

I felt good about her coming into the game because she had been real close, rimming out, missing shots, and I just felt like tonight would be a good night for her.

Q. I wanted to ask about Texas A&M. Obviously y'all won pretty handily, but what about this team tonight is different from the rest of their season? And specifically also Jannah Barker, what did she bring that was tough?

COACH McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, you know, there are only a few players that break my heart in the recruiting process,

and Ms. Barker was one of them. Obviously I have a lot of respect for her and I'm really glad she found a home with Joni.

As far as Texas A&M is concerned, we were excited to play them, because for us, we felt like we were playing a brand new team. When you are in conference -- especially in conference play it can get kind of like repetitive. Like, oh, we already played South Carolina.

Had we played Mississippi State that would have been our third time. I would have had to pump my kids up. It would have been a drag.

But for Texas A&M it was like a brand new team. They have five new players, so our team was, like, excited! I thought that helped us prepare for them. We didn't take 'em for granted. We didn't even think about what happened in January, what was it, our fourth game? We're not even the same.

So we were excited about the opportunity, and we weren't surprised, though, you know? Joni has coached in a championship game. She is a veteran coach, and she showed it yesterday.

We played -- we played hard be tonight. You know, we not didn't take them for granted. We respect everybody.

Q. Coach, a big talking point when people play South Carolina is the size in the post, obviously with Aliyah Boston and then Cardoso, Saxton, things like that. I guess from a preparation standpoint, what are some ways in which that preparation is different, playing a team with that size versus some of the other teams and other styles that you face?

COACH McPHEE-McCUIN: I think that -- oh, man, I almost gave a game plan away. I'm team SEC, so I don't want -- here is the thing: When you play South Carolina you just can't be defeated. They are who they are. They're going to rebound.

As long as you fight you should have a chance, but what makes them so difficult is they're like a tsunami wave. They don't stop! So Aliyah Boston, all them, they will start and then they bring in another 6'6" and then a dunker will come in, and then a vet, you know, all-freshmen team, and then they got about five All-Americans that are chomping at the bit.

So you can't be defeated. You have to run your own race when you play them, and I thought we did that last time. I thought that was good for us. We will try to do it again.

Q. I was wondering if you could speak to your transfer class this year. Talk about the individuals, Myah Taylor, a great example of what they've brought to this team and what they have brought to the program?

COACH McPHEE-McCUIN: We are "Transfer U" over here at Ole Miss, and we have five freshmen that have committed, and I'm going to get me three animals, and I mean that in the respectful way, in the portal as soon as it opens up. That is our philosophy at Ole Miss.

We want a healthy balance of both. Myah was important for us to have, because Myah had a lot of experience. Myah sat on the bench with a Final Four team; she has played in Elite Eight games, and for where we are, I thought that was important. Tyia brings a level of toughness that does not always show on the stat sheet, but she is the muscle behind our team.

Marquesha and Elauna, we recruited them out of high school, so when they got in the portal, basically I just had to say, hey I told you the first time you should have come to us. We have a mix, a batch of both. I hate Ayanna didn't get to play, our freshman, because we think she is special as well.

As long as I'm the head coach here, we're going to have a mixed bag. We are going to have freshmen that we will be able to groom, but I don't think you can be young in the SEC. The SEC is too good to be young. Because by the time they get older, you got the fan base calling for your head, so you've got to mix it up with a balance of experienced players.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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