

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 3, 2023

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

Tennessee Lady Volunteers Coach Kellie Harper Jordan Horston Rickeya Jackson

Postgame Press Conference

Tennessee 80, Kentucky 71

THE MODERATOR: We are here with Kellie Harper, Jordan Horston, and Rickeya Jackson. Coach?

COACH HARPER: Obviously excited to be advancing in the tournament, but at this point I told the players, you walk in the locker room, the stat that matters is we had more points. That's what happens when you're in March and you're in tournament play. Hopefully we can recover quickly and be ready to go tomorrow.

Q. Jordan, can you talk about your pick and roll operation, just the versatility you have out of those two-player actions, and also how you can play with pace as a good ball handler.

JORDAN HORSTON: I'm sorry, what are you asking?

Q. Talk about your pick and roll action.

JORDAN HORSTON: I usually go at my pace, pretty slow, change of pace and I read the defense. If one is hedging up I got the dish or I got the rise. It just depends on how the defense is playing, but if they're backing off I got the pull-up or the drive.

Honestly, like I said, just depends on how they play me.

And the pace of the game, I always want to play fast. I feel like we're better in transition, so as many times as I can push them in transition, I'm going to do that.

Q. Y'all are heading to LSU tomorrow. You're one of



the few teams that played them to single digits last time. How much has that rematch been something you are looking forward to and where is your confidence level heading into that matchup?

RICKEYA JACKSON: We just have confidence within ourselves no matter who we play. We treat every team the same, so we're going to go out there and do what we do best and continue to cut down on turnovers and do the little things.

Q. Y'all have had such a challenging preconference schedule and then also just going up against SEC play. Looking to now, how do you think that's helped you in today's matchup and also going forward?

JORDAN HORSTON: I feel like it's helped us build who we are. It allowed us to build character, figure out what the culture of the team is. It allowed us to go through adversity at an early stage.

I feel like having those games under our belt now has prepared us for a long tournament run, so I'm very happy at the schedule all that we played. We learned from every loss that we took and we're continuing to grow.

Q. You had a career high and your free throw attempts and free throws made, season high 34 points. You love being down there in the paint, the aggressiveness there. What was it like to be so efficient on offense today?

RICKEYA JACKSON: It's just fun being efficient for my teammates and just me being aggressive down low. My teammates kept getting me the ball in my spots, so I just tried to convert for them.

Q. Jordan, you had a nice block late in the game. Would you credit that to your vertical or what did you see on that play?

RICKEYA JACKSON: Her vertical.

JORDAN HORSTON: I was baiting her, so I was, okay, I'm going to let her dribble two more times and then I'm going



jump up there and get it. Definitely have to say the work I put in in the off season has helped me be able to get up there.

Q. How do you feel like you are able to leverage your size and your physical tools as a defender just defending multiple positions, 1-4, a little bit of that?

JORDAN HORSTON: That's a good question. I can guard anybody. I want to do what's best for the team. Whatever spot they need me to play I'm going to play it and I'm going to give them my all for it, but having that vertical going up has allowed me to bang down there with the posts and allowed me to hold my own and be quick and athletic, guarding the small guards and stuff.

So I feel like, you know, like I said, the work that I put in in the off-season has helped me develop my game.

Q. Jordan, what do you think makes Rickea so effective, especially in games like tonight?

JORDAN HORSTON: Man, just get her the ball. That's it. That's all you got to do is just get her the ball when we see her in her spots. Like I always say, I just be watching sometimes, not gonna lie. I be watching and I be like, they be yelling at me like, go rebound, Jordan. I'm like, dang, that's pretty. But, nah, she's a beast, like I said. Nobody can stop her, period.

RICKEA JACKSON: That was nice.

JORDAN HORSTON: Shut up.

Q. Rickea, you've been to this tournament before; how does it differ this year and playing on Tennessee?

RICKEA JACKSON: I would say the team chemistry. It took us a minute to get where we are, but it's great to play on a team where each and every person knows their role and we have structure. It just really fun playing here, yeah.

Q. Can y'all speak to the fourth quarter? You finished well. I know sometimes that's been a challenge in some games, so talk about finishing strong even when they cut that lead close.

RICKEA JACKSON: Yeah, we knew at the end of the day Kentucky was never going to back down. They could be down 30 and they will never give up to a team. That's just one of their identities.

We knew we had to close that game out and be smart and be productive. I feel like we did that, but, you know, they was never going to lay down and we weren't either, so we

had to put our food on the pedal at the end to close it out.

JORDAN HORSTON: At the end of the day, the person with the most points is all that matters. No matter how ugly it is, no matter how many turnovers we had, we still won and we still playing basketball, so on to the next. We're going to get better from there.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies.

Q. What do you feel like was different in this matchup compared to the last one you had with them?

COACH HARPER: I thought they played a lot better. They're playing with momentum, nothing to lose, they're in a tournament, they're feeling good. I think the challenge of playing for us -- obviously we played them back-to-back. The challenge is you want to keep doing what worked, but you have to anticipate changes needing to be made.

So that's where we were. We went in wanting to play the same way, but ready to make the adjustments that we saw from the previous game, and their two games since.

I think the quick turnaround, that was probably the biggest challenge.

Q. Going off that, I would love for you to elaborate on the momentum part of that. Obviously 14 seed, but coming in with so much after these last two games. What was the mindset going into that, and then on the court how did the momentum translate?

COACH HARPER: Yeah, I think for us, we're playing -- we're playing with confidence. That's where we're having momentum. I think Kentucky comes in with two big wins and that's their momentum.

Again, they have nothing to lose and they're going out and they're going to give it everything they've got. I think for our team, we obviously played well enough to win.

It was not going to be easy. We did not expect it to be easy. That's why we won the game. I think there were a few plays that we had to make and we made 'em.

Q. Jordan mentioned it at the end, she had brought up the turnovers. That was an issue in the last meeting with Kentucky; didn't really solve it here, but I think the offensive and defensive boards masked it a little bit. What was it like in game seeing how many turnovers were being forced?

COACH HARPER: It was very frustrating. I think a lot of our turnovers were self-inflicted. We were trying to make a

tough play when the easy play was the right play, and in games where you don't have a big margin for error those can really bite you.

So we've got to do a better job. We've had good games where we have been low turnovers and we had games where it led to a lot of points for our opponent. We've still got to continue to work in that area. And it's mental, you know. It's having the focus when you need to have the focus.

Q. Coach, what are you expecting to see from LSU tomorrow and how are you planning to combat that?

COACH HARPER: Yeah, I don't think their game plan is going to change. I think they obviously shot the heck out of the ball today from the three. They've got players obviously that can do that. They have an inside presence. They are really good on the offensive boards and you've got, you know, a dynamic superstar, probably a couple of them, really, that are just play making right now.

They're going to get after you defensively. They're going to be physical and do a great job on the boards, and I doubt they will change up anything offensively.

Q. I was hoping you could speak to your transfers, what they have added to the team. Rickea had an incredible night, but Jillian and other folks?

COACH HARPER: Going down the list, Rickea, you can see what she has been able to do as she has come in and added an unbelievable offensive punch to our team.

Jasmine Powell came in and handled the ball. She had seven boards on the defensive end today, which I thought was really tough.

Jillian Hollingshead has been a go-to player for us in the paint. She will continue to get touches there and be able to score.

And then Jasmine Franklin, although low minutes, you know what you're getting from her. She's tough and she's aggressive. She's been a good, consistent player for our team.

Q. Coach, there was a moment early in the third quarter where Jordan got a high ball screen, they hedged the ball screen, and she is able to split the defender, get downhill, and get into the floater. Can you talk about how many things she can do. And when you watch a player like Jordan, they're making so many different decisions in a split amount of time. Can you just talk about that?

COACH HARPER: As coaches we try to practice and prep our players for the actions that they're going to see in the game. She has seen a lot of different defenses with ball screens, whether it's hedge, switch, ice, over, under. I mean she's seen a lot of things.

I think the reps have helped her, but she has such natural ability to react in those moments. She does -- she mentioned it, she does like to play a little slower and be able to anticipate and read what the defense is doing.

Obviously she can -- she can jump it, get all the way to the basket, and she can find the man.

Q. You mentioned in your game plan with LSU, they're not going to change it, they have the 3-point presence. Tonight there wasn't much of a 3-point perimeter presence for y'all outside of Tess Darby. Is that a problem for you? How do you change that?

COACH HARPER: We are who we are. We are not one of the most prolific 3-point shooting teams this year, so we want to do what we do well. Obviously if we're going to take 3's, we want to shoot a good percentage of them.

We're going to have to work to get open. I think that's one of the things that LSU's defense does. They don't give you easy looks. You're really going to have to work, and I think maybe today we didn't work as hard as we need to offensively for some easy opportunities.

Q. I know that throughout the season it's been not a joke, but you have joked about Project Free Throws from time to time, and tonight you only missed two, which I looked back and I believe is the most accurate that you've been all season. Rickea Jackson was 100% as well. Seeing that, that could have been the difference maker in the game. How proud of that are you?

COACH HARPER: Other than that, other than the final score, I did tell them the free throw stat. I complimented them and said, thank goodness for "Project Free Throws." A bunch of them were tallying free throws before we got on the bus to head over here the other day. You've got to step up and make 'em when you need 'em.

Q. I was wanting to hear more about that fourth quarter improvement and being able to finish strong. I know I asked your players, but where do you think the progression over the season has gotten?

COACH HARPER: I think we've been -- over the course of the season I think some inconsistencies were there, but I

think we've also had some really good moments where we finished strong. I think that lends itself to sharing the ball, knowing where you need to go with the ball, finishing layups, getting stops, and then making your free throws down the stretch.

Proud of our team for doing that. Obviously Kentucky made some tough shots. We didn't do a great job defensively in the fourth quarter; we gave up 23 points, but we were able to outscore them and that was important.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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