

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 4, 2023

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

South Carolina Gamecocks

Coach Dawn Staley

Laeticia Amihere

Postgame Press Conference



South Carolina 80, Ole Miss 51

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the press conference for South Carolina we are joined by head coach Dawn Staley and student athlete, Laeticia Amihere.

Q. Laeticia, obviously Ole Miss was able to take you guys to overtime last time you played. Was there an extra layer of motivation to leave no doubt about this match-up?

LAETICIA AMIHERE: Yes and no. I feel like every game is the mentality you want to have, and we wanted to make sure we took care of business today.

Q. Laeticia, I guess it doesn't surprise you much anymore, but the versatility in your lineup where you can have -- Victaria can have 19 points one night, you can have 17, everybody is able to score and make things happen. How easy is that to get used to?

LAETICIA AMIHERE: It's great. I think our bench is great asset to our team, and just being able to rely on anybody and call on anybody at any given moment is a great asset to have.

Q. When Kierra went down the first quarter, I think you guys had a minute to collect and regroup. What were you saying in that moment?

LAETICIA AMIHERE: First it was prayers making sure she was okay, but I think the thing that you heard the most is, we got you. You could see that she was nodding. She knew we had her back.

Raven stepped up and everybody stepped up to fill in her

shoes, and just praise up to her. She'll get the best care.

Q. Today was Brea Beal's fifth game in double figures since the beginning of February. How have you seen her confidence grow on the offensive end, and her consistency as well?

LAETICIA AMIHERE: One thing about her is her poise has always been something we look at. She's able to control the pace of the game. She's able to hit open shots easily, and we know that when she is shooting it confidently it's going to go in.

So I think that's one point of her game that's excelled, and I love seeing her excel right now.

Q. Laeticia, you were 7 for 10 today. Can you talk about when you got in rhythm?

LAETICIA AMIHERE: I think being able to run the floor, getting easy baskets is always a good thing. When you are able to do that, then it gives you confidence seeing the ball go in. I think that continues on throughout the game.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Laeticia. Questions for coach.

Q. Dawn, not to sound too much like David, but how is Kierra? And it looked like Victaria had a hard fall; is she doing okay?

COACH STALEY: V, no ill-affect from the fall.

Kierra is going to continue to be evaluated. Could we have pushed her to go today? Yes. Did she want to go? Yes.

The bigger picture is can we get her treatment tonight, see how she feels tomorrow. If not, you know, we got the best bench in the country. They have to activate if she is unable to play.

Q. Coach, congratulations again. Feels like today's game was more like home away from home with all the fans that traveled, the ones that are in Greenville, the ones that came from Columbia. Talk about how this



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atmosphere made you guys stepping foot into the arena today.

COACH STALEY: Yeah, our fans, they do a great job of traveling and they didn't have to travel far to come to Greenville.

It is advantageous for us, obviously, but if we didn't have what we have, I don't know how many miles is it? 70? Is it 70 miles from Columbia?

THE MODERATOR: Maybe 100 or so.

COACH STALEY: 100? Oh. 100 miles from Columbia, and Colonial Life Arena. We pack that arena, so I don't think it's a far reach to say 100 miles from where we create a home court advantage in our arena, obviously it's in driving distance and our fans travel and they show up and they create an environment that is not only great for our team, but great for women's basketball.

They are here to see us and they are here to see the SEC. And they are super bias, obviously, but they appreciate great basketball and all the players that are contributing in a way that, you know, the SEC has.

Q. Dawn, Brea Beal has become consistent on offense for you guys. What have you seen, especially in the last stretch since February?

COACH STALEY: Every player that has been in a situation for, you know, for four years you develop, you grow, you figure out who you are, you find ways to impact the game, and Brea Beal never stops thinking about or put herself in a box.

Obviously she has been a great defender for us, but, you know, throughout the years she is figuring out where she can make an impact passing the ball, where she can make an impact shooting the basketball and scoring the basketball and rebounding the basketball.

That's the development of her and her mentality and us pushing her towards getting herself ready for the next level.

Q. Hey, Coach, can you talk about LA's defensive versatility, being able to defend at the point of attack, just be all over the court on defense?

COACH STALEY: I mean, she is the most versatile player I have ever had. She can play 1-5. She welcomes all the roles she is given.

We knew coming into the game -- she didn't play much the first time we played Ole Miss this year and it was a coach's

decision. But her response was, I'm going to make you play me. I'm going to make you play me for a long time because I'm going to be all over the place.

I can guard Angel -- she didn't say this per se, she just said it with her actions out there on the floor. LA's played point guard for us, so she was point forward for us today.

I think we utilized all of her skill set, and she definitely was a difference maker and the separator from when we played them the first time.

Q. Dawn, I know Raven has lots of playing experience, but I guess sometimes when a teammate goes down it can be jarring. What did you like most out of what you saw out of Raven for her to exit the game for a bit?

COACH STALEY: Raven is unafraid. She is unafraid of the moment. I think it's a gift and a curse. She treats every moment the same way, whether it's a 30-point game or a 10-point game or 2-point game.

Sometimes that's scary as a coach, but we learned to live with it, because when you look at her, more times than not she is going to make something good happen. And if she doesn't, she can make up for it on the defensive side of the ball.

She is a freshman. She is a freshman. Never played in an SEC Tournament. Never played in the postseason. Everything you're seeing is just from a freshman's eyes. But she's got poise. She has incredible court vision. That is her gift.

I was proud. I think sometimes it does shake you up a little bit when you are not going in at the time that you usually go in. So she got jolted into getting out there, playing sooner than normal.

Q. Dawn, speaking about your team's versatility with so many people able, you know, to put up big performances, how critical is that to manage? And speak to the selflessness of your best players.

COACH STALEY: It is difficult, but when you have a team full of players that they just want to win, I don't think any decisions I make to play them or not to play them hurts their confidence, and that's because we communicate. We communicate extremely well.

Like I think sometimes it's just a coach's preference in that moment, and sometimes they're the preference and sometimes they're not the preference.

Because we've had those conversations they know it's not

just because they're not good. It's just that it's a preference.

Q. With Fletcher out the second half there were times when neither her or Raven were out there. What did you see from the lineup then?

COACH STALEY: I thought the last unit that was out there, never seen 'em play as good as they played. They didn't turn the ball over. They created opportunities for other players. They made the right basketball decisions.

Sometimes that comes into question throughout the long season, but super proud of them. Super, super proud of their growth being in that situation and thriving in it.

Q. Dawn, update on Fletcher if you have one?

COACH STALEY: Pete got you covered, you know? I mean, no, Craig is going to evaluate her. Obviously we don't think it's -- we don't think it will put her out for very long.

I shut her down. Like she wanted to play in the second half but I just think it's -- I think we could handle the game today, so we wanted to put her in a position where she could possibly play tomorrow.

Q. And also the transition game worked well in the second half. Was that the focus of it? Or is that how it worked out with be rebounds?

COACH STALEY: It was scary, some of those passes were scary, but it's Raven. They run for Raven. They get down the floor because they know they have opportunities to get some quick buckets.

But the strength of Raven's game is in transition, pushing the ball, and getting her teammates open looks.

Q. There's a finite number of games left in the season, and for you guys to get where you want to go and where you have been headed since the beginning of the season, have you noticed any edginess out of your players, nervousness as the undefeated season continues?

COACH STALEY: No, no. This is an experienced group. So, I mean, last year maybe because, you know, there was a big target on our back -- and that target is still here -- but we've won one, you know, so that monkey is off our back.

Now I think we can just embrace who we are and play as calm and poised as we need to play, because they've been there. This is part of their routine, and once you have

created habits going into the postseason, you find a way to adjust and navigate in a place where -- I mean, if you can just be who you were all season long, you can find comfort in that.

Q. You're big on everything Carolina sports. With the recent news of Ja Morant, what do you tell your players about maintaining a positive image on and off the court?

COACH STALEY: I mean, here is the thing, I don't know much about Ja Morant because I'm worried about what I'm doing. But we have players who have -- and this is nothing against Ma Morant because they have great parents. They're respectful. They understand what it takes to go where they want to go to be successful.

Image is important for them. Name, image, and likeness is a business for them. So they take it very, very seriously because they want to make as much money as they can.

So that helps us when it comes to just living your life, you know, as an example for younger people.

Q. Couple players in the locker room saying that they think LA has been more locked in in the last couple of weeks. Have you noticed that? What does that mean to you?

COACH STALEY: LA has been locked in. I think she sees the end of it. You can go two directions. You can go, hey, let me just finish this year out, whatever it is, and then you have some that say, let me finish the year out the way I want to do it, performing the way I want to perform, and doing the things that honestly increase my stock in getting into the WNBA.

I don't know -- LA doesn't give you much. She just comes to practice every day and gives her all, whether that's more locked in or not, that's who she is. She's got a lot of other things she has going on as well. She does stuff in the community. So she is pretty grounded when it comes to being able to compartmentalize.

Now is the postseason, now is the bigger piece of the life pie right now, next couple of weeks something else will be that, which is probably to get drafted into the WNBA

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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