

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 4, 2023
Greenville, South Carolina, USA
Bon Secours Wellness Arena

Tennessee Lady Volunteers Coach Kellie Harper Jordan Horston Rickea Jackson

Postgame Press Conference

Tennessee 69, LSU 67

THE MODERATOR: We're here with Coach Harper, Rickea Jackson, and Jordan Horston.

We will start off with a quick opening statement from Coach.

COACH HARPER: Obviously we're really excited. So proud of our team.

And it's a big win, because that's a very good basketball team, obviously with a lot of weapons and physicalness. But I'm just proud of our team for not giving up, continuing to fight, battle, chip away at a big lead, and obviously take the lead and kept it.

So just really proud of this group.

Q. For either of y'all, you guys really went through a slog in your nonconference schedule and you finally get the ranked win today. What does that feel like today? Does it mean more to have it be over LSU who you have had a rivalry with this year?

RICKEA JACKSON: It felt good getting a ranked win. Of course any team would want to get a ranked win, but overcoming adversity early on in the season, our strength of schedule.

That's been our motto all year, overcoming adversity, and I'm just so proud of our team. We was bending but we didn't break. That's what matters.



Q. It seemed like there were moments when you went into a new gear, were able to pump up the energy. Talk about those moments and your mindset throughout this game to be able to get this win.

JORDAN HORSTON: It's tournament time so you gotta turn it into another gear. We didn't want to go home. I knew everyone on that bench and in the game was locked in. This is a different type of discipline that we had to have going toward the end of the game and just fight and toughness, like just figuring out how to get a stop, figuring out how to get an O board, even when they box you out.

It's about the little things and mastering the little things, and I felt like we did that well. Jillian came in and she played great minutes for us, and I'm just proud of everybody.

Q. Can you talk about Jillian? She had a great night tonight, such incredible footwork in the paint. What has she meant tonight and this whole season?

RICKEA JACKSON: Big shout out to Jillian. Man, I'm so proud of her. She is so young but she works so hard. She come in every day and does what is asked of her with a great attitude.

We just knew this was in her. She was definitely our X-factor tonight. She is versatile, can do a little bit of everything, so proud of her. Her toughness, she is so young, playing at such a high level against a ranked team, that's nothing that you just come across, so big shout out to her.

JORDAN HORSTON: I called it, though. I called it at the beginning of the season. I said, y'all need to watch out for Jillian. She is a dog. She had to settle in and get her feet wet, and that's exactly what she's done.

Q. Jordan, I imagine there is so much of a legacy to live up to for Tennessee women's basketball. What does it mean to be back in the SEC Tournament finals?

JORDAN HORSTON: It feels so good, but the job is not done yet. We still got one more game. So thankful we made it. It's my first year making it past this day. Every



year this is when I went home, so I'm glad we made it to see another day, but the job is not done. We will talk about that tomorrow.

Q. Obviously we saw after the game kind of the emotions you had on the court, celebrating the win. Of course you guys haven't looked at South Carolina yet, but with the I guess the emotions and momentum, how do you find a way to carry that into tomorrow and for that championship game?

JORDAN HORSTON: Just coming out hot. We know that we can't get down. We know how South Carolina plays. We just played them pretty recent, so that's an advantage for us.

We know that we can't get down on ourselves and can't get in our heads. We have to be next-play mentality and then we have to crash, rebound, do the all the little things to give us a fight.

Q. Jordan, it was kind of a tale of two halves for you tonight. What did you feel like flipped the switch to make your numbers go up so much?

JORDAN HORSTON: Rickea staying on me, saying, I need you, Jordy. I don't like letting people down. I'm always like, okay, let me not be selfish. Let me figure out how I can provide and do something productive for this team, because I really want to win. Everybody knows that I want to win, but I gotta give a shout out to my teammates because they pulled me out for real.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies.

Q. How did you keep them focused and on this possibility when things were just not going well for them in the first two quarters?

COACH HARPER: Yeah, you know, that's the question I get when you have those big changes, those shifts. The second timeout I had to call in the first half was basically -- I didn't yell. It was, let's talk about where we are at right now.

I really asked them to dig deep and think about what they wanted. Halftime was not a rah-rah. It was not a yell-at-you speech. It was basically, okay, here is what we're going to have to do to get back in. We have to be tough.

I did not think we were as tough as we needed to be in the first half. Obviously the turnovers were really hurting us. We had 13 in the first half. We talked about -- we reviewed again why we were making those turnovers and how we

could not make those turnovers.

We just had better focus. Obviously we were able to score with Rickea, Jordan, and then Jillian, pretty consistently there. You just get a little momentum. The other thing that I thought our team did -- I didn't think we got too high when we were making a run. We took the lead and we stayed pretty even the whole game, and I think that was good.

When you are playing off your emotions, that's high and low and high and low and we were pretty consistent. That's really been the team this year, to be honest with you. They have not been too high or too low. They just come back and, what's next? Obviously extremely proud of them.

Q. Kellie, I know the girls talked about Jillian, but for a player who is young and inexperienced as she is, what does it say about her to show up the way she did tonight?

COACH HARPER: She is really talented and I thought the second half -- we kept her in there and we were able to get her in longer, and she was able to stay in because defensively I thought she was better in the second half.

She is a go-to player, she really is. We can get the ball to her and she can make shots, and she got some rebounds. She has lots of moves and she was a big part of that second half run.

Q. After such a tough nonconference schedule, how has that prepared you for a fourth quarter like this, but just a game like that in general?

COACH HARPER: Yeah, we played so many tough games this year. We've been in a lot of close games, down the stretch had to fight. Our players were -- like I said, I think they were confident. I think that was what was impressive. Down the stretch, you know, they were confident in the plays they were going to make.

They were really determined to figure out a way to get the win. I don't know -- I don't know where completely that came from. Did it come from our experience? I think that has to be part of it. You know? It's just part of our journey this year.

What I said early on, I wanted this team to be the best possible basketball team that we could be. That's why we scheduled the way we did. We thought it would help us, you know, and I don't know that we will be able to evaluate it until the season is over. Glad we're still evaluating.

Q. Kellie, what do you think when the whistle blew on

Angel's drive to the basket?

COACH HARPER: Well, I saw the call at the same time, so obviously my first thought was we were advancing and I had to get my shooters in. That was my thought. I know she's really physical and she is really aggressive when she gets the ball. Obviously we got that call.

Q. Hey, Coach, can you speak a little bit to Rickea's mid-range shot creation, how she can get to spots in this game in the tournament, and the season in general?

COACH HARPER: Well, Rickea is smooth and she plays that mid-game as well as anyone. She can extend you behind the 3-point line, she can post you up but, boy, that mid-range is her sweet spot.

She can work there from inside out or outside in and it's pretty -- it's really pretty when she is shooting those jumpers.

Q. You've lost in the semifinal round a couple of times now. What does it feel like for you personally to get this team over that hump as a head coach?

COACH HARPER: Yeah, it's good to be back there. I think they told me it's since 2015. We're excited to be back in the championship, and the fans were great. I'm so happy for them!

If they're going to be here, they might as well have a team to cheer for on Sunday, so really happy for them. Obviously happy for our team and our staff. It's a lot of work. It is a lot of work to get to a championship game. I don't know how many hours of sleep we're getting a day. Ain't a whole lot right now, but I'm just -- it's a big deal. It's the SEC.

I mean, to be in the SEC championship game you're one of the best teams in the country.

Q. Rickea's not only a good scorer, but a consistent one. Can you speak to her consistency and what it adds to this team?

COACH HARPER: Yeah, obviously that's a big part of our success is her consistency. We know what we're getting. It doesn't look a whole lot different from game to game. You know you can get her some opportunities, she can make some things happen when there is not an opportunity, and obviously she did a good job on the boards today.

Just proud of her. It's a mindset. She is competitive. And

she is a winner.

Q. Kellie, I know you guys in projections have been hovering around that four, five line. Do you think this enhances your chances of opening the NCAA tournament at home?

COACH HARPER: Yes. Yes, I do. I think we're good enough to host.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

