

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 7, 2024

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

Mississippi State Bulldogs

Coach Sam Purcell

Lauren Park-Lane

Postgame Press Conference



tonight. Shout-out to them. They wanted it, and congratulations to them.

Q. Obviously you guys have been kind of a bubble team going into this. You had a chance to strengthen your résumé. How frustrating was it to have that chance not go your way? What case would you make for the committee to put you in the tournament?

LAUREN PARK-LANE: Of course we wanted to play longer in this SEC tournament. This is my first time being here. This is so exciting. I've never seen anything like this as far as like a women's college experience.

It was a good experience. I wish it lasted a bit longer. Things happen. Like Coach Sam said, we have to take our days off and come back and practice.

In my opinion, we're an NCAA team. I've seen the highs of my team all season. In the beginning of the season, we had such a strong start. We just ran into a wall. Sometimes that happens.

There's no doubt we're an NCAA team, and we're going to see what happens.

Q. What is the mindset of y'all's team preparing for Selection Sunday?

LAUREN PARK-LANE: Really just to focus on what we saw in this game. I feel like we have some stuff to work on. If we're not scoring, just getting stops. You know what I'm saying? I feel like that's where we struggled today when we weren't making shots. We got frustrated, and it affected us on the defensive end.

And I think that's one of the biggest things that we have to work on once we have our little break and come back.

I know I'm going to be emphasizing it. I know he's going to be emphasizing it. We're going to get better at it.

Q. You talk about the lows, now being the low. But the highs of this team, how happy are you that you made this decision to come to Starkville for your fifth

Texas A&M 72, Mississippi State 56

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the press conference for the Mississippi State Bulldogs.

We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach Purcell, then take questions for Lauren, then take questions for Coach.

SAM PURCELL: First and foremost, congrats to Joni and Texas A&M. I thought they came out of the gate and played really well. They really got after us on the defensive end. I thought it set the tone for the game.

I also want to give a shout-out to the SEC and the SEC people running this tournament and the people of Greenville. This is my second year experiencing this. It's hands-down a tournament that is one of the best in the country.

Obviously we came here to have plans to play more than one day, but it is what it is. Now we'll head back home and get a couple days off, get back to practice, get ready for Selection Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Lauren.

Q. Lauren, they had a 16-3 run out of halftime. What were you seeing there?

LAUREN PARK-LANE: I think their and-ones really affected us. Those are big momentum swings. They're kind of back-breakers for us. I think those played a big part in that.

We couldn't make any shots today. It wasn't our night



year?

LAUREN-PARK-LANE: Yeah, it was nothing like I ever imagined, but in a positive way. I had a lot of fun. Living in Starkville, this is the first time ever being in Mississippi ever in my life. Being here with my group of teammates who love on me, a coaching staff that loves on me, it was a really good experience. I'm glad I stayed my nine months here.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Lauren. We'll continue with questions for Coach Purcell.

Q. Sam, you've made your case for this team being an NCAA team many times now. How frustrating was it today?

SAM PURCELL: A little frustrating. At the same time I have to refer back to last year. It's the same situation where I brought every suit for every single day because that's just who I am, but more important my team is, too.

I know this, we're definitely deserving. SEC is a beast. Then you got to look at our body of work and the eye test.

Last year, we were first team, the play-in game, and we made history. You look at what we did in the SEC. We beat two of the top three teams in this conference, the top two of the three. Then we've had huge games at Belmont, Colorado State, then went on a week like no other where we beat LSU, Kentucky and Texas A&M in one week.

I think the committee will do their job. They'll look at how good we are. That's why we're going to rest up, have faith, and be ready when our name is hopefully called here on Sunday.

Q. What are the qualities of your team members that make you feel confident that they are poised for the NCAA tournament?

SAM PURCELL: Yeah, I just think it's ironic how this is playing out because we've been here already, right? We have a bad taste in our mouth. You have to remember, we played Miami at home and UTC with seven players. That was hard. Like today, it's hard. I saw a team that bounced back.

We started conference play 0-2. They didn't fold. They fought back. For SEC to schedule us three games in one week with a momentum we'll never forget, beating LSU, then play two road games. Gives me hope for who they are and why this is a special team that deserves a dance in March.

Q. You were down four at the half, but they go on that run. What did you see from your team in that 16-3 run?

SAM PURCELL: I saw a team that got off to a good start. Wanted to mix up defenses. When the ball doesn't score, man, we just wanted to press. We talked about it in the timeouts, to what LP said, it was the and-ones where we're guarding for 20 seconds, then it's a dagger.

We go zone defense, we're guarding multiple passes, and at five seconds a kid flashes behind the back line and gets a layup. Dagger. You could see it on our kids' faces that they were right there, but we couldn't come up with enough plays.

On the offensive end, I thought we had some great possessions. Anytime you tell me D gets 13 shots, Lauren gets 10, Jerk gets 13. Obviously they were doubling and doing everything they could to Jessika and giving her multiple looks. Our best players got the best shot. It just wasn't a night we made enough shots.

Q. No matter what happens on Sunday, what do you think of when you think of your seniors, the impact they've had here?

SAM PURCELL: Again, I'm proud of 'em because, again, for a season that's been thrown so much adversity. I've been sick. Players have been sick. Ramani Parker tears an ACL on the first game.

I've never experienced this in my 20 years, but these kids have never quit. They came up here with a great week of practice to perform. Unfortunately the scoreboard didn't reflect the hard work behind the scenes.

Most important, I couldn't be more proud of who they are as people. They're crushing it outside of the court. We had another top-20 attendance in Starkville. It's a special place. But it starts with special people. These players have been awesome.

Q. Should the committee not select you for the tournament, would you accept a WNIT bid?

SAM PURCELL: Right now our whole focus, why I came here, is to play in the NCAA tournament. Right now it's getting ready for the NCAA tournament.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

SAM PURCELL: Thanks, everybody. Appreciate you.

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