

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 7, 2024

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach Kyra Elzy

Emma King

Saniah Tyler

Postgame Press Conference



Tennessee 76, Kentucky 62

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by the University of Kentucky. We'll start with an opening statement from the head coach.

KYRA ELZY: Yeah, once again I want to thank the SEC and this city for hosting a great tournament. I'm thankful, it was first class, and we've enjoyed our experience and opportunity.

Also obviously this is not how we wanted to end, but to my super senior to my far right, Emma King, beyond thankful and grateful for what she gave to this program. She's the epitome of what I want every Kentucky Wildcat to be: loyalty, relentless work ethic, coachable, and the love that she has for Kentucky.

I told her in the locker room, as long as I have breath in my body, I'll walk over water for her, and thankful for what she has done for this program.

Obviously it's been an up-and-down season. We go back to work. But I want to let it be known that our future is bright in Kentucky. We had 10 players who had to step up into new roles. The one to my right, 25 total minutes a year ago, and now averaging 26 and 10 points.

We'll go down to the list. Player development is really important at Kentucky. Look at what Ajae Petty has done this year. Eniya Russell, Cassidy Rowe. MeMe Jenkins. I gave her the task to step up and guard Rickea Jackson, who is a pro, and she did just that.

I can go down the list. Brooklynn Miles. We asked her to step up in a role she's never been in, averaged seven minutes for the last two years, and stepped up and fought.

Now, we are far from where I want to be, far from where we need to be. We have fight in us. We go back to work. We are built different. I told the players in the locker room, not a lot of players could withstand what we have dealt with this year. But we continue to fight.

For today, we left it on the floor. I asked them to have a blue heart. And they did just that. We came up short, but we go back to work.

Very confident in what we bring back at Kentucky.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Emma, as a Kentucky kid myself, can you sum up your time at Kentucky.

EMMA KING: Yeah, I mean, it was literally my dream. I feel like every little girl's dream in the state of Kentucky is to eventually get here. I told my dad in fifth grade this is what I wanted to do. It's been the biggest blessing.

The people I've met along the way. It's just been the coolest thing. I truly just feel so grateful to have been in this position.

Q. You experienced a ton of growth this season on and off the court. Can you speak to how this season challenged you as players and people.

EMMA KING: Yeah, this year, like Coach Elzy said, we took player development seriously. I feel like that's something we worked on a lot in the summer. We saw it develop throughout the year.

I had to play a position, like she said, that was completely new to me. It was kind of fun to embrace a new role, figure out what you can do to help your team win.

For me, it doesn't always show up in the stat sheet. I was



okay with that. Being able to do the little things that could help my team in any way was a really fun, really fun thing.

SANIAH TYLER: For me, last year I wasn't playing a lot, so I lost my confidence. I had to find myself, get in the gym. So that's where I saw a lot of my growth, and you guys can see it on the floor. I'm hitting shots, just being able to help my team. So that's amazing to me.

Q. Saniah, the last half of this season it seems like you came into your own. Can you explain what clicked for you.

SANIAH TYLER: Honestly, just the belief the coaches have in me and my teammates. They push me day in and day out. It comes from on my own self, getting in the gym, having confidence in myself, knowing that I can play at this level. I just play hard every time I get out there.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let the student-athletes go and continue with questions for head coach.

Q. Another year, another win in the SEC tournament. Can you talk about what's special for this setting and what you liked about the fight from this team.

KYRA ELZY: I don't know. Maybe I need to put SEC tournament logos up all year because when we get to the SEC tournament, it's like we're a different team, different hunger, different mentality. Obviously we had a win yesterday. Thought we had a lot of fight today. Obviously Tennessee is an unbelievable team, coached by a great coach, my former teammate.

Against that caliber team, there was some momentum plays we had to make, and that we didn't, that they were able to capitalize. If this is the standard where we want to be, we got to continue to learn and grow.

But I liked our fight. I liked our intensity. I thought our defensive tenacity is what we need. We can continue to build off this.

Q. Back-to-back difficult seasons now. You talked about how this is not where you want to be. What is your message to the UK fan base at this point about the future?

KYRA ELZY: I'll say the future is bright. Like I said in my opening statement, I took 10 players that hadn't played really any college minutes, significant minutes, besides Maddie Scherr. Ajae Petty, Brooklynn Miles, Cassidy Rowe, MeMe, Emma played limited minutes, Saniah, Eniya, Janae Walker.

That is a whole group that hadn't played any minutes, and then you're asking them to produce.

We did grow up. It didn't always show in the win and loss column, but if you go back and look at the stats, the minutes, they did grow up. They grew up on the job.

It usually takes you to about junior before it really clicks. Now you go to the transfer portal, get some more veterans. But the group that I have here returning, we'll be grown up. And that does matter. Experience, we'll get some.

Like I said, no excuses. Not where we want to be, but it does take time to build, and we'll get to where we need to be.

Q. Bearing in mind the youth of this team, do you feel you met program expectations this season?

KYRA ELZY: Well, no. The expectation of this program is to go to the NCAA tournament and compete in the SEC. We were not where we need to be, but we'll get there.

So no, not satisfied. We're still hungry. We have work to do. My staff and I will continue to do that along with the players.

Q. You have some seniors that have an extra eligibility year. How soon will you have those conversations?

KYRA ELZY: Well, we have those conversations throughout the year already. So now you give them time to go back, reflect. We'll talk. They'll talk to their parents. We'll make decisions from there.

We have several that can return. I'm sure we'll come up with a game plan how we would like to announce those in the near future.

Q. On your radio show, you talked about the struggle of recruiting not only out of the portal but making sure you are still recruiting your current roster. Can you speak a little bit more to that following a difficult season.

KYRA ELZY: Well, no matter if you have a good season or you struggled, part of the reality now with the transfer portal and NIL, you do have to recruit your own kid daily.

That's spending time, hands on, creating great relationships, rapport, having honest conversations, then making sure they have the belief in your vision and the program's vision.

That's one thing I take great pride in myself, along with my

staff, great relationships with our players, and continuing to recruit them. It's not over once they get to your campus. Not only are you recruiting your own players, we will recruit out of the transfer portal, and you're still recruiting high school. You're recruiting three sets of players.

It's a tall task, but a job that has to be done. Recruiting is your lifeline. I like where we are right now as far as talking to the recruits that we are, where we are with our current players.

Q. You said following the South Carolina game that you expected to return next season. Has anything changed since then?

KYRA ELZY: No, it hasn't. I've already addressed that.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach.

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