

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 7, 2024

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

Vanderbilt Commodores
Coach Shea Ralph
Iyana Moore

Jordyn Cambridge
Postgame Press Conference



IYANA MOORE: We have a complete team from top to bottom. We have a bench. We have defensive presence, offensive presence. We have shooters, scorers when we need it. Our team is really a complete team, so...

JORDYN CAMBRIDGE: I mean, she said it best. I also think we mesh well really together. I think we really complement each other. We know what each other is good at and we try to go out every day and make sure we're putting each other in position to be successful.

That starts with how we are with each other off the court. I think the way we are able to be off the court, love on each other, that kind of thing, just makes it easy when we come out in games.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, you can be dismissed. We'll take questions for head coach.

Q. While awaiting to see what kind of schedule they give you in March, what kind of message are you going to be giving your team?

SHEA RALPH: Well, I think we've fought really hard to be where we are right now, this year. Now we're 22-9. We are picked to finish dead last in the SEC, and we are top six.

We earned every single win. We learned from every single loss. I think what I've talked to them about is we're competing. This program has learned how to compete. We can compete to win, compete with just about any team that we face.

We're still trying to figure out right now what it looks like to win in March. I think a lot of that is preparation. So what I'm challenging my team to do now is to take what we did today, that we viewed as a failure, and there's a lot to learn from today.

We have to apply that to how we practice. I think our preparation is everything in March. To me, that was the biggest thing that was disappointing today, was that we prepared differently than we started this game. The start of this game didn't look like the team that I coach. We started

Florida 62, Vanderbilt 59

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the press conference for Vanderbilt.

We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach.

SHEA RALPH: Hi, everybody. Obviously not happy. Maybe more disappointed with the result today. I don't think that's indicative of the season that we've had. I think we fought more like ourselves towards the end of the game, but we just ran out of time.

Really proud of my team and the players up on the dais here for the season we had. We're looking forward to playing more basketball in March.

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

Q. Iyana, awaiting Selection Sunday, what about your team makes it special, and why you should get an NCAA tournament bid?

IYANA MOORE: The simple fact that we finished top six in the SEC. Like Coach said, this isn't the type of game -- this isn't the game that says our season, how our season went. We played hard. We fought throughout the whole season. We finished top six.

Q. I know this is not the game y'all wanted, but what about this season and this team is different from last year?

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

to feel more confident. We calmed down a little bit. We played with a little bit more poise.

I think we had 14 turnovers in the first half. We missed a ton of layups. We missed seven free throws. We looked at times not defeated but we looked a little bit tired.

I think the way they played defense, even though we knew it, I think in the beginning of the game they did a really good job putting pressure on us, speeding us up a little bit. Took us way too long to rebound from that.

We have to take that. A loss is what it is. That's not going away. We're leaving here with a loss. We're not competing tomorrow. But we are going to be competing the rest of March.

We now have some time to look at where did we go wrong in that game, where do we need to get better as a group and individually so when we do have Selection Sunday, we know who we're playing, we're a much, much better team.

I think that's what today is going to give us.

Q. I just asked your players, but you were bottom four in the SEC last year, now you're top six. What has changed?

SHEA RALPH: They did a good job, actually. The number one thing that's changed is we have players on our team that have invested in our culture and building a foundation to be a championship team, right? We have that. That's taken some time to build. That's not an easy thing to do.

When we came here a couple years ago, the team that we took over didn't know or understand what it looked like, to feel like, to win, to just win off the court, to win in practice, in the community. They needed to be healed. There was COVID, a lot that happened, right, for a lot of teams.

As we moved through establishing our standards and expectations, we were able to meet some kids where they were and bring them along with us. We were able to find some new homes for other players that didn't really want what we had to offer.

Then we were able to go out and recruit because we're at Vanderbilt University, one of the most prestigious schools in the world. We have an amazing administration. We play in the SEC Conference. We were able to go find some more weapons.

I think that's what you're seeing that's different this year, we have more versatility, size. We have a little bit more experience with some of the transfers that we brought in,

and we have some freshmen that have a very, very bright future.

There's still some building and molding that needs to happen. If you look at where we were this time last year, the growth is unbelievable. I don't want that to be a loss for my team. I'm disappointed, and they know, they know, but I don't want them to feel like they failed.

Because they have not. We're going somewhere special. We're still going somewhere special this year.

Q. They talked about how it's a complete team this year. Iyana and Jordyn were both out last season. What is it that they've brought back, mindset, just to the court?

SHEA RALPH: That's a really great question.

The mindset part is, Jordyn had gone through it before. She had had a catastrophic injury, so she understood what it felt like for the game to be taken away. Iyana had not.

That first time, I've been through it enough myself, it's hard. It challenges your love and passion for the game to rehab that long, to not play for that long. It can go a few different ways for players. Some decide, I can't do this. They don't approach it the right way and come back the same.

Iyana decided she wanted to be great. I think a part of that is because she got to rehab with Jordyn. Jordyn was able to guide her a little bit. But along the way, while Jordyn was teaching her what was on the other side of this really hard thing she was going through, they developed a really strong bond.

You see that on the court. I think it has penetrated into our team, understanding the gratitude that we have to play the game that we love. We get to play that every day when we walk out on the floor. It's very serious. We're competing in the SEC Conference. We want to win championships. It's hard to do. So does everybody else playing in tournaments right now.

But when you compete with a love and compassion for the game, you have fun, even though some of the things you go through are hard, there's lots of highs and lots of lows, then you understand what it means to enjoy the journey.

That's what those two have brought back. It's teaching our team it's hard, but you guys have to enjoy the journey because this is all part of where we're going.

Q. After the scoring drought in the first half, what was the changes you made into the locker room?

SHEA RALPH: I don't know that I can say exactly what I said in the locker room at halftime (smiling). I think the biggest thing that I challenged them to do in the locker room was to play more like our team defensively.

They challenged us defensively. It's hard to win a game in March when you give up 35 to one kid. We needed to lock up defensively. Offensively I thought we needed to share the ball a little bit more, calm down, play with more poise, not panic when we saw a couple hands in the passing lanes, just get into our offense.

But a lot of what we do offensively is generated by our defense. I think you saw that in the second half. We get some rebounds, we can get out in transition. If they score on us, we have to set up against our press. If we get some steals, we get this transition, get a bucket and a foul. That's more like Vanderbilt basketball.

That was the message, was more challenging them with intangibles. This isn't who we are. Sometimes it's not about X's and O's. I needed our players to be different. I needed them to be my team, and they came out and did that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

SHEA RALPH: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports