

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 8, 2024

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

Texas A&M Aggies

Coach Joni Taylor

Aicha Coulibaly

Postgame Press Conference



South Carolina 79, Texas A&M 68

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the press conference for Texas A&M.

We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach.

JONI TAYLOR: Extremely proud of our team and how they fought today. Obviously the outcome was not what we wanted. But I thought we competed the entire time. We forced South Carolina to turnovers. Didn't convert those the way we needed to.

Had some good looks. Ran some really good stuff. Sometimes the shot went in, sometimes it didn't. Proud of our fight and our effort. It shows what our team is capable of with a full roster.

I think we're an NCAA team. We came here yesterday and competed well with the No. 1 team in the country. South Carolina is very good, and I thought we stayed in it and gave them a hard fight. I think that's something that speaks for itself, when we have our full roster together, having Endyia back, what we could be capable of doing. The way we're playing right now, I think that's something that we've got to -- obviously the committee needs to take a look at. I think we're an NCAA tournament team.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athlete.

Q. Big night tonight. What went well for you? Can you describe a little bit the energy of the team.

AICHA COULIBALY: I think, like the coach said, we came in and fight the whole night. We had to fight for 40 minutes. We stayed composed, took our time, do what we

do well. I think it worked out best for us.

Me and Janiah, we're for the team, not be selfless. And it worked out.

Q. A lot of energy, but also a lot of opposing energy. Got real loud in there. How do you stay centered, calm when a lot of people are going against you?

AICHA COULIBALY: I mean, we knew it was in South Carolina. They're going to have a crowd wherever they go. We just stayed composed and not let them dictate our game, be louder than them on the court, whatever we do.

I think we did a great job on that tonight.

Q. What did you do to be able to frustrate South Carolina at times like you did? That hasn't happened very much.

AICHA COULIBALY: I think that's what we do. Like Coach said, our full roster is back. We know what we're capable of. Tonight we didn't come to lose. We came to fight, win the ballgame.

Every night we have to be ready. I think we're going to just carry that into the NCAA tournament. We're a pretty good team to make it, as well.

Q. Janiah said yesterday how this team is really good at bringing the energy in March, a new level of energy. She said she wishes you could do it through the whole season. Do you agree with that?

AICHA COULIBALY: I do agree with it. We have a lot of talent. I feel like right now, as you see today, we're able to put it together. It's coming in.

I just feel like our chemistry is really good right now and we just got to build off of that.

THE MODERATOR: You can be dismissed back to the locker room. We'll continue with questions for head coach.

Q. What did you see there in that first quarter where

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you were able to frustrate them a little bit, then they played through it, pushed the lead out?

JONI TAYLOR: So, obviously you're talking about the first quarter. They had 10 turnovers in the first quarter. Listen, South Carolina is really, really good. If you let them pass and catch, get shots, do what they want, it's just going to be a long night for you. So we needed to dictate and disrupt. That's who we are, who we try to be defensively.

We were on high alert in that area and needed to be able to dictate tempo. I think it rushed them a little bit and forced them into some turnovers. Obviously they settled in the second quarter, went on an 11-2 run. Our offense got stagnant. We got some shots, some good looks, and it just didn't go in. We were able to regroup at halftime a little bit.

Q. Janiah talking about this team brings a new level in March. Do you agree with that? How do you bring that consistency throughout the whole year?

JONI TAYLOR: I think part of it is staying healthy. Even before Endyia got hurt, Janiah misses three games with a concussion. We have two other people, M.J. and Solè missed games with concussions.

Here is the thing. We're still a young team. We have doubled our win total from last year. Last year we learned how to play. This year it's learning how to win.

When you're learning how to win, you haven't been in those situations, you're going to have some ups and downs. Our goal was always to peak at the right time. I think that's our goal every single year. We did that last year. We're doing it again this year.

We're taking the steps we want to take as a program and moving in the right direction in year two.

Q. What are you telling your team now, knowing there may be a tournament run? You're up against Vanderbilt potentially.

JONI TAYLOR: So obviously we only can control what we can control. That was to come here and win a game and show well. We've done that. That's the conversation we've had.

Now it's for us to go back and get off our feet, stay sharp, be smart about the decisions we make, sit down Sunday night and see what happens.

Q. I wanted to ask an off-topic question. We're seeing a lot of freshmen in this game play really well this

season. Kind of amazing. Do you see it that way as well, that this is unusual? Why do you think there are so many skilled freshmen coming into the game?

JONI TAYLOR: It's women's basketball. In my opinion, Breanna Stewart was a skill freshman. So was Diana Taurasi and Tamika Catchings. Now there's more eyes on our game than ever before. Milaysia, JuJu, whoever we're talking about, they are outstanding freshmen, but so were those players.

I think now the difference is our game has grown. There's more eyes on it. More people recognize it as what it is.

Q. The transfer portal. You work so hard just to recruit. Where do you see the blend, or is there an end to the blend?

JONI TAYLOR: Good to see you. I miss you.

I don't see an end to the blend. I think the transfer portal is here to stay. I think everyone attacks the transfer portal differently. You have to do what's best for your program.

We obviously have gone into the portal, and the portal has been very good to us. There's rules and different things that we look at when we're talking about taking a player out of the portal. For us it has to be someone committed to doing and upholding the standards that is Texas A&M women's basketball. That's got to be most important, not themselves or not other things that are out there.

So the portal is here to stay. The portal has been really good to us. We also have been very selective who we recruit out of the portal. What's important for us is we still have been able to recruit really good high school players. So we want a mix of both.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

JONI TAYLOR: Thank you.

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