

# Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 8, 2024

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

## Tennessee Lady Volunteers Coach Kellie Harper

## Jewel Spear

## Rickea Jackson

### Postgame Press Conference

Tennessee 83, Alabama 61

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by University of Tennessee.

We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah, we're excited to be advancing. Proud of our team. I thought we had great focus. Really good energy. I thought it was great team win. We had some really nice performances individually by some players that I thought overall everybody that was out there contributed on both ends of the court.

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

**Q. Felt like from the start you were on a mission to win this game after losing to Alabama in the regular season. How much motivation did you have from that?**

JEWEL SPEAR: Yeah, we take any SEC game, like, the same way. We don't overlook anybody. But we did know that Alabama beat us in the regular season. We knew we had to beat them to advance.

I think our focus was really good today, like Coach said, on both sides of the court.

RICKEA JACKSON: Yeah, I agree.

**Q. Offensively everything felt like it was clicking, especially for you, Jewel. To hit six threes in a row,**



**how confident were you feeling going into this game, and what was working for you?**

JEWEL SPEAR: I felt confident and comfortable. Like I said, just getting used to the system, but also just playing confident and aggressive on the court, whether that's getting downhill, seeing the ball going in, then also getting open looks for threes, as well.

**Q. Can you talk about playing with Jewel, who she is on the court, off the court, then as a good offensive duo?**

RICKEA JACKSON: She's just a great person, a great teammate, goofy personality. She's easy to get along with, very easy to play with. Just being on the floor with her just opens up so much because you have to respect her drive, her three-pointer. I feel like it just opens up a lot for everybody.

She comes in practice, works hard each and every day. She's going to continue to get better. Yeah, I'm super proud of her.

**Q. Where do you feel like you've grown this season? There's been some rocky parts, but now a win like this, what does that mean?**

JEWEL SPEAR: I'd say definitely and also staying poised, like when other teams go on runs, knowing what we're capable of, not getting panicked on the offensive end. Whether Coach calls a play, who it's going for. If they have the hot hand, stay with it. Just defensively playing team defense.

RICKEA JACKSON: Yeah, I agree. I feel like we definitely have improved on our defense a lot, having confidence on the defensive end and letting that fuel our offense.

**Q. I believe you had 18 assists today. A lot of sharing the ball. What did you see out there from the whole offensive standpoint today from the team?**

RICKEA JACKSON: I just felt like we executed. We were aggressive. We noticed last time we played Alabama we



were probably playing a little too finesse, not trying to get to the basket as much. I feel like this game we did a little bit of both, knocking down our shots, getting to the rim. It was fun, easy to kind of execute our plays when we did that and move the ball.

**Q. Jewel, how much joy has playing at Tennessee brought you this season?**

JEWEL SPEAR: I'd say a lot. Going through the transfer process can be stressful. But coming here to Tennessee, them welcoming me with open arms, playing with Key this summer, seeing how good of a player she is, being able to play with her at Tennessee, see how she's helped my game grow, as well as Coach Kellie and the other coaches, has been very good.

**Q. Coach has said leading up to this, you were playing your best basketball. This felt like a statement of that. Where do you feel like this team is right now, especially going into tomorrow facing South Carolina for a third time?**

JEWEL SPEAR: Yeah, I don't know exactly where we are, but I know we're at a good point. Coach keeps saying that we're growing in the right way. I definitely see that.

Our defense has gotten really good. We're helping each other, playing team defense. Then offensively, like yesterday you saw Sara Puckett go off, today Key and I and other people stepping up. The depth we have on offense, it makes teams harder to guard us.

RICKEA JACKSON: I feel like we're definitely turning in the right direction, playing really good basketball on both ends of the floor. I feel like when we are all making shots like that, we're just a dangerous team. We just keep doing that and focusing on our defense, we're going to be a dangerous team.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let the student-athletes return to the locker room. Continue with questions for head coach.

**Q. Can you talk about Jewel's development over the season.**

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah, I think her level of comfort and her confidence has grown. She's always been talented, but I think she's a rhythm player and needs to find that rhythm. It's not just in a game, it's within what we're doing.

I think she has broadened her game. I don't think she got as many today, she rebounds better. I think she's improved her defense. She has improved her confidence in putting the ball on the floor and getting to the basket,

which opens up a lot of things for her.

**Q. On Jewel, her teammates have told me she likes to do dances, TikTok. Can you tell me about who she is off the court. Do you ever see the TikToks?**

KELLIE HARPER: No, I'm sorry. I'm not as hip as they are (smiling).

Jewel is a really, really good person. I think if you start there, I mean, she's just high-quality individual. She does really well in the classroom. She works hard. She's thoughtful. She's genuine. I think she communicates well.

She's the type of person that can bridge gaps. She can connect with every single person on the team and every staff member that we have. She has a unique ability to do that.

She had that the moment she stepped on this campus.

**Q. What about Tennessee, even when you have rocky seasons, you come to the SEC tournament and take off?**

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah, I think historically for our teams, you see us getting better throughout the year. I think that's a big piece of who we are. We're trying to play our best basketball when it matters the most.

I think we talk about it a lot. We had a really tough schedule this year, had some growing pains. It did allow us to keep getting better.

You don't do that unless you have players that are willing to be coached through hard times. If your players lose confidence in what you're doing, you're not going to be playing well in a tournament.

I think our players have always had great belief in our system and great belief in what we do. When we come to the tournament, they feel really good. I think that's important.

**Q. I'm curious about this day two and three of the SEC tournament where some teams are playing for the first time and some the second. Can you give me your philosophy on what is the better outlook to have on day two or three?**

KELLIE HARPER: I think every team is different. I think each game plays a little differently. I thought yesterday we were playing our first game, Kentucky was playing their second game. They probably looked a little bit more comfortable at least early on. We were able to figure it out

and play well in the second half. We didn't shoot the ball particularly well in the first half. I think sometimes that is the tournament vibe you get in your first game.

I think the teams that have played sometimes come out a little bit more comfortable in that next game.

**Q. South Carolina, what's the game plan going into it? How do you have short-term memory knowing losses and how good they always are?**

KELLIE HARPER: I probably do not even have to write up a scouting report. They know. We've played them twice in the last, I don't know, two and a half weeks. I'm not sure what it is. You can look and see. We played them twice recently. We'll go with that.

The scouting report is fresh on our minds. We understand what we're up against. We get it. We know how talented they are.

But I think the way we've played, hopefully we have some confidence going in and we can tweak some things and give our players a game plan that they're going to be excited about.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

KELLIE HARPER: Thank you, guys.

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