

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 6, 2025

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

Vanderbilt Commodores

Coach Shea Ralph

Iyana Moore

Mikayla Blakes

Postgame Press Conference

Vanderbilt 84, Tennessee 76

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Vanderbilt. We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach, then questions.

SHEA RALPH: Hi, everyone. First of all, just want to say how excited we are to be moving on. We wouldn't be doing that without the two sitting up here.

Really proud of our team for our resilient effort today. Thought we had contributions from multiple people. You can't say enough about what Iyana Moore did for us today. I talked about it on TV. She's gone through it here, but we've been together since we arrived. This is her fourth year with us. She's gone through an ACL. I was really hard on her this year. She's playing the best basketball of her career right now. Proud and excited for her. This is the first time in our program's history we've beaten Tennessee twice in one year. We're not done yet. This is just the beginning of March. We expected to win today and we're excited to move on tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Iyana, can you give me an example of coach being hard on you that was tough at the moment but pushed you through?

IYANA MOORE: I mean, just in practice, like, when I think I'm doing something right, Coach is like, You're doing it wrong. I'm like, Okay, fine. Just moments like that. Like her just constantly staying on top of me, not letting me slack, take a breath. That's all you can ask for in a coach.



As you get better, you want a coach that continuously pushes you. At the end you're just looking like, Okay, she loves me and she's doing it for a reason.

Q. Iyana, took you a bit to pick up wins on Tennessee. Two this year. What does it mean to you?

IYANA MOORE: It means a lot doing it with this group of girls. It's special. I think we all have a great time with each other. It carries us a long way.

You have ups and downs through a season. Through it all, at the end, right now, we're doing it at our best time. That's all you can ask for.

Q. Iyana, what were the emotions like going into today? You had 17 points last time you played Tennessee. Any extra edge?

IYANA MOORE: I don't think there's any extra edge. Coach say our next game is our most important game. We go into every game just wanting to kill the punch person standing across from us. This one here pushes me every day to be the best version of myself. When you have people like that around you who continuously push you, have great people around you, you want to go out there and do it for them and yourself because they're going to continue to push you, so why not.

Q. Mikayla, Jordyn Oliver, how important is she to your team?

MIKAYLA BLAKES: I mean, she's the glue to our team. Without her, I don't know where we would be. She does everything we need her to do, like play point guard. Normally that's not her role, but today because we were being pressured, she was able to bring the ball up the court and flow into our offense. We're grateful for her and everything she can do.

Q. Comparing this game to back when you played Tennessee in Nashville, any more fatigue at this time?

IYANA MOORE: I mean, it was a little cold in that stadium.

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I don't know if it's a hockey stadium or what. My lungs are a little bit tired. We played them last time, knew exactly how it was going to be. We stayed poised, stayed together, we knew what type of game it was going to be.

Q. Mikayla, the pressure, you had three people around you many times today. Can you take me back to childhood or early life dribbling drills, beating pressure.

MIKAYLA BLAKES: Oh, I don't know if I had like an early childhood moment of that. I started a little bit later, like in middle school. I think being around these group of girls, knowing I had two defenders on me opened up the floor for them. It's wasn't just like I had to handle the pressure with the ball, but I think just drawing in, taking up space, so that Nwaba was able to get open threes, the paint was open for Mitch on the roll. You were able to get kick-outs as well.

SHEA RALPH: If you're going to take the ball from either of these two, you're going to have to take some vital organ with it. They understand how important possessions are, especially playing Tennessee.

You'll see that. A lot of times with Mikayla, she'll learn how to get stronger. She draws a lot of fouls. She has to learn to withstand people being physical with her and I thought she did a good job of that today.

Q. It's a quick turnaround with a game tomorrow. You faced South Carolina less than a month ago. What are you looking to improve upon?

MIKAYLA BLAKES: Everything.

IYANA MOORE: Literally from top to bottom. Taking care of the ball. Being very crisp in what we do. Being really attentive to all the details. Not taking a play off. It's a quick turnaround, so just getting our bodies right, minds right, spirits right. We have to go in there and handle what we have to do tomorrow.

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

Q. Mikayla used the word 'glue'. How important is Jordyn Oliver?

SHEA RALPH: J.O. has the highest IQ on our team. She can play position one through five. She has done that since she's been here, depending on who is in foul trouble, what we've needed as it relates to the scout.

I told her this morning, Just sit down, don't stand up for any part of what we're walking through because you're not

going to be able to come out of the game today.

We knew she was going to have to bring the ball up and start the offense. What's most impressive about her, she wants to win, she wants to be part of winning, she wants to enjoy the winning. So she'll do whatever we need her to do. It doesn't require her to have shine or shoot or do anything else other than be on the court and help her teammates win. That's very rare to find at this level in basketball. She's just a joy to coach.

She's also the glue in our locker room. She's somebody that you hear all the way down the stairs. You know she's in the office because she's in everybody's office having a great time, in the locker room having a great time.

I'm excited for her that we're able to continue to play right now because I know how important it is.

Q. On the offensive boards, felt like you were everywhere today. What was working?

SHEA RALPH: Offensive boards (smiling)?

Q. What was working so well?

SHEA RALPH: We've been working on that since I've been here (laughter).

Q. What was working so well?

SHEA RALPH: I think the team, I know they chuckle at me, they laugh because I always talk about energy and effort, right? Energy and effort, being resilient, winning each possession with your competitive fire.

I understand and they understand there is a tactical part, a strategy part of basketball. If you can play with relentless effort, relentless competitiveness, relentless confidence. If you can play that way and you have the pieces that we have, then there's no reason we shouldn't like we're all over the offensive glass, we shouldn't look like we have eight defenders on the court.

Sometimes the ball is going to go in, sometimes it's not. But rebounding and defense, playing a certain way, require no talent. If we can be great and consistently great at the things that require no talent, then we're always going to be in position to win the game. I think they're starting to understand that.

Q. We've talked a little bit about this in the stats. Could you talk about how instrumental Iyana was to the win?

SHEA RALPH: I think it was her experience, her ability to slow the game down a little bit. That really is the calling card for Tennessee, right? They want you to speed up. They want to create chaos offensively so you take quick, bad shots.

We knew we were going to have the opportunity to attack, but we had to do so with intelligence. I thought Iyana did that really well so it calmed Mikayla down a little bit because she can get sped up at times as well.

It took the ball off Jada and allowed her to take a breather a little bit so she was able to stay in the game and do things on the defensive end.

She just managed the game for us. She was our veteran leader on the floor. She was talking in every huddle. She was connected to the bench. She was exactly what you need to be when you're her age in March. She is the reason we won the game today.

I would also like to add I thought Khamil Pierre, after sitting for most of the third quarter, really helped us on the offensive glass. Did a lot of things in the fourth quarter that we needed her to do to win the game. That shows how much she's growing as a basketball player after sitting for so long.

Q. What is Mikayla's competitive makeup? What have you learned about her competitive makeup?

SHEA RALPH: Her competitive makeup is like I'm not sure anyone in the program would want to play a game of Uno with her. She is the kind of kid, she just looks angry all the time because all she cares about is winning. She takes it personally when things don't go right on the court.

I think that's a level of pride, but it's also something that you can't coach somebody to have. Like when things don't go right, whether she's involved or not, it's personal to her. She'll come back and she'll work obsessively to be better at whatever it is that happened that she didn't like, whether it was her or our team. She loves to be pushed in practice.

She has a competitive nature, a makeup of championship mentality that you don't see very much. But she's also really young, so that's why it's so important to have veterans around her, J.O., Jordyn Oliver, Iyana Moore. Even Khamil is on the same path with her. Having all those pieces around her that can teach her things she needs to learn, while she has that makeup that God gave her, is only going to make her better fast.

Having her on the team obviously makes us really good because she is super special. That's not coaching. That's

her parents, how she was brought up, but also what God gave her.

Q. What has been the key for your team in beating Tennessee twice this season?

SHEA RALPH: I think I would answer that with two reasons:

The first is resilience. I think what we're learning, this team is learning how to be genuinely resilient. Through the flow of the game, but also through the day-to-day of the season, the weeks of the season, the highs and lows. They've become really resilient.

And I think preparation. I think we've done a really good job. We understand what our team needs to do to be prepared for games. We've gotten that down to a T. When they feel prepared, they are really confident. Now they have that resilience, we'll be tough to beat.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

SHEA RALPH: Thank you, guys.

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