

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 6, 2026

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

South Carolina Gamecocks

Coach Dawn Staley

Joyce Edwards

Tessa Johnson

Postgame Press Conference

South Carolina 87, Kentucky 64

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by South Carolina head coach Dawn Staley and student-athletes Joyce Edwards and Tessa Johnson.

Q. Tessa, they've given you the nickname Tournament Tessa. Had another 12 points in a game, I think you had 10 in a row. Do you like that nickname?

TESSA JOHNSON: I mean, it's all right. At first, I was a little indifferent about it because I was thinking, like, I wasn't really consistent during the regular season and then I would just play a little better in the tournament.

But now I've looked at it in a little different perspective, and I kind of like it.

Q. Joyce, you had a really strong defensive performance today. What was key for you down low?

JOYCE EDWARDS: I feel like the mentality. We know they were going to go to Strack. We know she just had 30 before that. We know they also played three games. So the legs would be a little dead. That was part of it.

But just getting in their body. We know she likes to do that turnaround fade, everybody knows it. Just making her put the ball on the floor.

Q. What is it, for either one of you, what does it mean if anything to be able to have a big win like this and not have to play in the fourth quarter and rest your bodies a little bit for the next two days?



JOYCE EDWARDS: It's great. Obviously, the SEC is hard. Every game's hard. We have hopefully two games coming up. That's the plan. So we know rest is really important in order for us to get a big lead like that it's a great opportunity to rest and recover.

TESSA JOHNSON: To add to that, it was good to get the other girls going, the bench players going. The SEC Tournament is a little different, so just getting their feet wet a little bit.

Q. What is it like, just before you are going out on the floor, to be around Dawn? What is her kind of personality? What is her message to you? Is she soft-spoken? Does she get more calm? Does she get emotional? I'm curious, what is she like -- you're in the locker room and you're ready to come out on the floor?

TESSA JOHNSON: I would say more soft-spoken and calm. I think she keeps us calm. And sometimes there's little jitters from us. And she's been there before, like, with all of it. She's experienced everything.

So just her being able to keep us calm really helps us.

JOYCE EDWARDS: Going off what Tessa said, I kind of agree. She's a little bit more calmer. We have assistant coaches who get us a little bit more riled up and a little bit more emotional, but after she stays pretty even.

TESSA JOHNSON: She's all right. She's all right.

Q. Joyce, you took it up another notch in the third quarter. What were you seeing differently on the court during that time?

JOYCE EDWARDS: My teammates just getting me the ball. A lot of my points just came off of dump passes from them driving and penetrating. I just had to finish the shot. It was nothing crazy. It was just being in the right place at the right time and executing the shot.



Q. It's been a few years of playing here in Greenville, and obviously the fans travel. What kind of advantage and motivation is that for you when you're taking the court for the first time three days into this tournament?

TESSA JOHNSON: It feels good, but we don't expect anything less because they've been loyal, they've been in and out of there, and, yeah.

JOYCE EDWARDS: We love them. It's a huge momentum shift for us. Feels like a home game. I know a lot of the coaches kind of hate it because our fans do travel a lot. But it's great. We feel the support on the court.

Q. Dawn, with Strack and Key in particular, did you switch up any of your defensive plans as opposed to the last time you played them six days ago?

DAWN STALEY: It was pretty much the same. We executed better today. I thought we wanted Strack to put the ball on the floor and then bring the help, bring the digs from the other big. We didn't have that the last time out, one, because we just were so locked into our guarding the player that we were guarding. And the only people that we wanted to guard like that were their shooters.

So I thought we did a really good job at digging in and closing out to the shooters and just giving Strack a much different look than she got on Sunday.

Q. More on the team's defense, but specifically more about Joyce Edwards, what did you see from her that impressed you? I know the last game was just a 4-point win. But this game obviously way better. What did you see from Joyce that really impressed you?

DAWN STALEY: I saw Joyce just adjust. I thought in Sunday's game she expended a lot of energy, a lot. Probably too much, and I think she wanted to be more sure than not.

And I thought we made her feel a lot more comfortable with knowing that, if you send her in a certain direction, we have your help. If you send her in another direction, we probably don't have your help. So she was really good at just locking into where she knew her help spots were going to be and funneling Strack to those help spots.

I mean, she wants to win. And she knew the best way for us to win the game is just kind of cut Strack's production in half.

Q. How much does it mean to have been able to get everyone on the floor today, get everyone some minutes, have that tournament experience going

forward?

DAWN STALEY: It's super important. One, because you don't know how much we can play everybody as we come down the stretch in the postseason. We're very honest with our players in letting them know at this point we have to win basketball games, and it's nothing against your skill set, it's everything that has to do with the unit that's out there on the floor. If they have a certain flow, we're probably going to let that unit keep flowing.

Today, Raven was out of the game, and the five players on the floor had a good flow. So I wanted to insert her back in the game. She was like, No, they have a good flow going on, right? So it's good to hear our most experienced player just wanting the five that were out there continue to flow.

And that's just messaging, right? She heard that before. I actually need to tell our team that. I do need to tell our team that she elected not to go back in the game because she thought they had a good flow.

And when your most experienced player that's played in this tournament, has been in this tournament here five times, when she says that, it means she only wants to win.

Q. You talk about the flow. You talked about how you wanted your team to continue to push the pace throughout the game. Were you pleased with that? Was there anything they could have maybe done differently?

DAWN STALEY: Very pleased. I thought Kentucky the first time we played them on Sunday did a really good job of slowing the pace down and making us play in the half court and kind of just took away some transition buckets.

Once we get transition buckets, we flow a lot differently in the half court where we don't feel as much pressure to score in the half court when we get some easy buckets. I thought we executed that. Joyce got out in front in transition.

Raven passed the ball. I thought we did a great job. Our guards were sprinting down the floor the way we like them to sprint down the floor, that they didn't do too much the first time we played Kentucky.

So that's probably a difference maker in the amount of transition points that we got.

Q. The young ladies just touched on it, but you all being here in Greenville, how much do you all enjoy coming out here and get to see some fans who may not necessarily get to see you play in Columbia? Had

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

a great turnout, people seeing (indiscernible) this morning as well.

DAWN STALEY: It's women's basketball, right? South Carolina, the state of South Carolina wraps its arms around our game. And they do it with their money. There are people paying to come fill this place up.

I would much rather -- if we were at a disadvantage, if it was in somebody else's backyard, will we complain? Yeah, probably would, in the confines of my office, with our staff, I would complain about it. But then, overall, you have to look at what we've done in this state, what we do in our home arena, what we've done when we go to Paris.

You know, our fans are traveling, whether we're playing here or -- you pick. They're going to figure out a way to get to where we're playing and support us and support the game of women's basketball. So I think it's cool that the arena is full, that you can hear the crowd appreciate our play as well as good basketball.

Q. The reason I asked Tessa and Joyce about that, I was curious. You played the game. Is there something you learned -- did you like when you played to be calm going into a game? And the reason I ask you is that your teams always seem to come out and there's no lag. They're playing hard right from the start. So what kind of message do you try to send to them?

DAWN STALEY: Well, I mean, for us it's don't get too high with the highs and too low with the lows. Just have to maintain. When people go on scoring runs, is there a high alert? Yes. But that's normal. It's not anything extraordinary. It's part of the game.

I think when you are at your calmest is when you create options. You could see options out there on the floor that you wouldn't see if your nerves are up or if you're ebbing and flowing on what's out on the floor.

We try to act like we were here before. We do. Even if it's new or unfamiliar territory, if you're calm about situations, you can see more. You can act more. You can do more.

Q. Tessa had a 10-0 run by herself in that quarter. How big was that to create some separation early in the game? And what do you think of the nickname Tournament Tessa?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, Tessa has been in somewhat of a slump, as far as shooting the ball. So it's good to see her actually see the ball go in, especially those 3s.

I thought she did a great job at mixing it up, driving it at the basket, pulling up, getting to the free-throw line because her skill set speaks to all of those things.

I know she's known as shooting 3s. But, I mean, she's really good at scoring the basketball. I mean, she scored a lot of points in the state of Minnesota. It was good to see her get back to doing a lot of things that she's capable of doing.

And I actually like the name Tournament Tessa. And it is funny to hear her say she likes something that brings attention to her, because she doesn't really like a lot of attention brought to her. So it's cool that she embraced the nickname.

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