

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 6, 2026

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

Vanderbilt Commodores

Coach Shea Ralph

Sacha Washington

Postgame Press Conference



Ole Miss 89, Vanderbilt 78

SHEA RALPH: Hi, everybody. Thank you for being here.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Vanderbilt head coach Shea Ralph and student-athlete Sacha Washington. We'll begin with an opening comment from Coach. We'll take questions for Sacha, dismiss her, and then take questions for Coach.

SHEA RALPH: First of all, congratulations to Ole Miss continuing their journey for a championship.

Secondly, I am really proud of the fight that my team showed today. My team and my staff were amazing. And I just told Sacha on the way over here, maybe I should have gotten kicked out sooner, in terms of the way that they played, the fight that they showed, the togetherness. That's the team that I know.

This changes nothing about our season, changes nothing about what we've done. And I think it only adds fuel to the fire for what's ahead. I cannot wait to get back home to Vanderbilt, to Nashville, to regroup and compete for a championship in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Sacha, you guys really started to turn the tide of that game after Shea got ejected. What were you thinking in that moment? How did you feel the team responded to that?

SACHA WASHINGTON: Coach Ralph comes in and fights for us every day. When she got ejected, I know personally I didn't want to do anything else but fight for her, fight for our team. We went in at halftime and said we needed to make changes and be better. Just be better.

So that's what we tried to do. I think we did a pretty good job at it the second half.

Q. Sacha, on coming out in the first half, one to forget. What was the, I guess, point that made it such a tough first half against this Ole Miss team? Because you all faced them earlier in the season, and they gave you a tough run then. What is so tough about the Rebels that sparked the whole first half?

SACHA WASHINGTON: I think they're a great defensive team. So them making catches tough for us and trying to speed us up, I think that was a big thing. We just have to know who we have in transition and box out and rebound.

Q. Sacha, just with the fight that you guys had in the fourth quarter, just how much easier and maybe does it give you guys more motivation heading into the NCAA Tournament with the way that one played out?

SACHA WASHINGTON: Yeah, we know who we are. We know when we give that type of fight, no one can beat us. We know we have to put the fight together for four quarters and be consistent. We know we'll make a deep run in the tournament.

THE MODERATOR: Sacha, thank you very much. We'll take questions for Coach.

Q. Shea, prior to leaving the game, did you feel like you needed to do that to get some fire under the team's belly a little bit? What was going through your head there?

SHEA RALPH: I wasn't trying to get kicked out. I know where I was on the court. But I also think that at that time what I said was warranted, and the action I took was warranted. And I'll stand behind that. You want to kick me out for it, they can kick me out.

What I do love is the fight my team showed. There's only so many ways you can say something over and over again. So I said it differently, and I got kicked out. Which is fine.

First time in my career.

When I went back into the locker room, I was able to turn the TV on, and I think what I saw from my team was maybe the coolest thing that's happened all year in terms of the fight that they showed, the togetherness, the huddles. Just the way that they responded was really special.

But I also know that we can't start off games like that, and we've seen this before. We've seen this before against this team. So we have some things to get back and fix.

But the way that we finished the game today -- and I'm not one for moral victories. So that's not what I'm saying. But the way we finished the game today is the Vanderbilt I know that we can be.

When I got into the locker room, we have a different resolve. From all the things that happened today, from the things that happened throughout the course of the year, all the things that are going on around our program, which are really good and we're blessed and we've earned them, we have, we've earned them, but that changes nothing. It changes nothing.

So we have to get back and get to work so that we can be who we are for the rest of March.

Q. You just said what you did was warranted. Why was it?

SHEA RALPH: No, ma'am, don't try to get me fined. Candace, I'm not going to get fined. I promise. I just felt there was, you know -- I just felt that it was, I think. As coaches, we just want consistency from our team, from our staff, from everybody that's involved in the game of basketball. Just consistency. That's it.

That's all I'm looking for. And respect.

Q. Coach, with a couple weeks until tournament time, what are some of the main things that you want to be sure and shore up before you get to that point? I know the slow starts are big. What are you really looking forward to tackling coming up here in the next week or so before the tournament gets started?

SHEA RALPH: I think the biggest thing is just continuing to work on the things that have gotten in our way to this point. I think for this team in particular, not the challenge, the beauty of coaching them is that they've never been here before. And so I've got to be able to help them understand the growth that we need to have. We need to get some rest and recovery, but we know these things about ourselves.

They've popped us and bitten us in the butt a little bit throughout the course of the season, and I think in a lot of ways we've grown. In order for us to do the things we came here to do in March, that we know we're capable of, we have got to do -- we have got to be better in practice. We have to approach practice with intentionality, effort, discipline every single day.

Whether we're tired or not, whether we're going to school or not, whether I keep them there too long or not, the things that we have to do in practice are really important so that when we come to the game, regardless of the outside noise and all the things, and that's great, but we have to make sure that we know exactly who we are, exactly what we're trying to do in the game plan, and we execute it for 40 minutes.

I think as we go into practice, I don't think it matters who we play, we know the things we've got to focus on, and we have to focus on them and get better.

Q. Mikayla had an uncharacteristic first half, 0 for 10. Just looked like some of the shots coming off didn't look as confident as they normally do. What were you seeing from her in the first half, and what does it say about her to respond the way she did in the second half and recover from that?

SHEA RALPH: I think she missed some open shots she normally makes. I'm not sure it was uncharacteristic, not only because she missed shots and didn't have a bunch of points, but she always competes.

I also thought she was fouled. She was being held. There's only so many ways you can respond to that.

So what I know about her is that she is going to fight to win the game. Never count her or us out. And that kid fought until the very end because that is who she is. And it was great to see her continue to be a vocal leader, continue to encourage her teammates, eye contact on the bench, making sure they were in the things we need to be in.

Whether we're up 30 or down 30, that's who she is. That's who she's always going to be. That's why you can't count us off.

Q. After a first half like that, I'm curious how you approach halftime, what they need to hear or don't need to hear from you. What was that like?

SHEA RALPH: Thank you for asking that. I don't approach it any differently. My job is to help them, to coach them. So if you know your team well, you know

what they need to hear. There's adjustments that they can make, but there's also continuing to remind them who they are.

And this team, for me, they need to remember that. And so I need them to fight for me, for Vanderbilt, for a championship the way that I will always fight for them. So there's tactical things that we're going to do, but there's also me reminding them who they are.

This is who you are. Don't you ever forget it. Bad quarters, bad halves are going to happen. It's the game of basketball. It's the game of life too. We have bad moments, right? But we can always respond. What's our response going to be. Who do we want to be? For me, this halftime in particular, that was really it. It was that simple.

I stand behind them ten toes, always.

Q. Coach, you kind of talked about the fact that you guys being here at this point of the tournament, it only gets harder going into the NCAA Tournament. You never want to lose a game. What do you take away from this game the most?

SHEA RALPH: Just knowing when we play the kind of basketball that we are capable of playing on both ends of the floor, when we operate like the team that we're capable of operating on both ends of the floor, for 40 minutes, it's tough to beat us.

Today, we didn't do that. So I'm not sure that we deserved to win this game. But I know that when we do do that, it's tough to beat us. And so we still have a long way to go, and we're going to continue to work on being that for 40 minutes.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time. Good luck in the postseason.

SHEA RALPH: Thank you. Thank you, guys.

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