

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

Thursday, October 19, 2023

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Florida Gators

Kelly Rae Finley

Women's Media Day Press Conference

KELLY RAE FINLEY: I don't have much for an opening statement, but thank you all for being here today. I think it's a really exciting time as we start thinking about tipping off college basketball. Thank you in advance.

Any questions are more than welcome.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Talk about things that you're trying to work on to improve after last year's great run.

KELLY RAE FINLEY: Yeah, I think our run in the WNIT was really helpful for our program. We needed to learn how to play long into the season. That we did. I was really pleased with our resolve and the competitiveness that we showed as a group.

In the off-season, we've worked tremendously hard at - goodness, I hesitate to say it 'cause we have a little ways to go, right? - but the rebounding and defense. If we can become a better defensive team, it's going to set the tone for our offense and allow us to play at the pace that we'd like to play. In order to do so, we need to be just a bit more physical and really be elite in our rebounding.

Q. Can you tell me about bringing on Rhyne Howard. She played for an SEC team, but not yours. How did you get her to come to Florida?

KELLY RAE FINLEY: We were looking at filling that position. It was really important as a staff to understand, we want to surround our student-athletes with somebody who has done or is doing what they dream of, right? That was a hole that we felt like was missing, not in Rhyne in particular, but something we were looking for.

I'm not sure if many of you know, but Rhyne's mom played at Florida, Miss RJ. She was a tremendous player for the



Gators.

We just reached out to her. It seemed like a perfect fit being in Atlanta. She's talked a lot about developing her leadership skills, as well. That's something that she'll bring to our team and our staff, as well as her knowledge and experience as a player.

Q. Talk a little bit about rebuilding.

KELLY RAE FINLEY: Oh, boy. I think that's kind of how it goes these days. I don't think that is unique or different to any program with the change in the transfer portal rules.

The additions that we have have been tremendous for us. Not sure how many of you remember, but Aliyah Matharu sat out for us last season. She'll be competing for us as well as Zippy Broughton who redshirted last season due to an injury.

The two of them, combined with Kenza Salgues, Eriny Kindred, Alexia Dizeko, who is the WBCA Junior College Player of the Year, and Laila Reynolds, are great additions for our team that are going to help us with that physicality like we just talked about, the rebounding, just overall pace and how we're trying to play.

Q. Building off the Rhyne Howard question, being near a WNBA team, how important was it for you to bring that exposure to the collegiate level? Why was it important to bring somebody with that experience into the program?

KELLY RAE FINLEY: I mean, she's living right now what many of our student-athletes' dreams are. When you can speak from that level of experience, whether it's USA Basketball, whether it's being a No. 1 draft pick, whether it's being the Rookie of the Year, being an All-Star, what does that sound like? What does that look like, feel like? What comes with that responsibility?

So her ability to impact us with what that is I think is tremendous, and for our team to know and understand she's doing it right now. So sometimes it can be a matter of an opinion. But the fact is this is what it takes.



Q. Obviously you don't want to have players sit out. It's unique that your backcourt had to sit out. How did you see them bond in a way and maybe grow and be prepared for this season?

KELLY RAE FINLEY: Yeah, thank you for that question. I think it's a great question.

They've both developed a knowledge of the game that potentially they didn't have before. Just understanding time, score, situation. They've really developed the mental side of play, which I'm looking forward to seeing on the court together, in addition to their skills, their passing, their scoring.

Both Zippy and Aliyah play both sides of the ball, and they do so with a competitiveness and an effort that many times goes unmatched.

I think them having each other to bounce ideas off of, to understand what each other were going through, was extremely beneficial to our team.

Q. What does a run like y'all had in the WNIT add to the confidence of the team?

KELLY RAE FINLEY: We looked at it as we want to play as long as we can. We talk a lot in our program about the process and the plan in which to take the steps necessary to get where you want to go, right?

For us, we felt like that was a huge step in understanding the duration of the season, what it takes, break the season down into five-week segments, or quarters, if you will, and how do you refocus and what is required during each stage of the season in order to find success.

I think it helped us build our confidence tremendously.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

KELLY RAE FINLEY: Thank you all. Let's have a great season.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports