

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

Wednesday, October 16, 2024

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Auburn Tigers

Coach Johnnie Harris

Women's Media Day Press Conference



you get out there and you give me everything you have on defense. I think our players are very competitive on the defensive end. They have embraced the defensive end.

Yeah, that's what we do.

Q. Your program has taken step by step each year and improved. I asked DeYona was the next step is. She said a natty. Is that the kind of confidence you want to hear from your players?

JOHNNIE HARRIS: Absolutely. We don't talk about goals as much as we talk about standards. When that standard is to be the best that you can be every day, there's no limit to what you can do.

Yeah, they come in and they watch a lot of film. I called DeYona to check on her the other night. She was watching film. But that's the mindset of some of the players, some of the leaders that I have in here this year.

Q. Can you talk a little bit more about the relationship you have with Coach Vic Schaefer now with Texas joining the league.

JOHNNIE HARRIS: Yeah, like I said, my mentor. When I was hired at Texas A&M, honestly, it was to be a recruiter. It was Coach Blair wanted me to go out and get players, get All-Americans was his word. That's what he wanted. Absolutely was able to do that.

But Vic Schaefer took me under his wing because he knew I wanted more. I started doing mock scouting reports. He would grade 'em as if he was a teacher. It started out with a bunch of red marks on it. Then he would come back and I would watch film with him. I would be on the floor with him when he's putting in his scout. I was able to learn and pick his brain.

He didn't have to do that, but he absolutely did that, took me under his wing. Yeah, that relationship, he's like a brother to me and always will be.

Q. Taliah Scott had one of her best games against you last year. What has it been like adding you to your

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Johnnie Harris from Auburn University. Welcome to the stage. We'll go straight to questions.

Q. We were just talking to your players. Talked about the pressure, but they embrace it. How big is the pressure and how are you embracing it this season?

JOHNNIE HARRIS: There's always pressure when you want to win. I think we have a group of players that got a taste of getting to the NCAA tournament, and they want to get back.

They are embracing it. One of the biggest ways they're embracing it is I think our leadership is at the best since I've been there. I think our seniors and our juniors are coming in and they're showing the way, paving the way.

I feel like last year was the first year I was really able to put my system in because I had players that really fit what I want to do. Because we have that carryover, it's just making it better.

Those kids are showing the new ones what it looked like.

Q. Taylen and DeYona were talking about the defensive mentality, the scrappiness of this team. Where does the defensive identity come from?

JOHNNIE HARRIS: Well, it's ingrained in me. I've been with Vic Schaefer for a long time, for Gary Blair. That was the staple of what we did, even as far back as Kay Yow at NC State. Defense was always important.

Even if you can't score, you can defend. That's about heart, that's about toughness. That's something that we preach every day.

If you're not a very good scorer, you can impact our team if



team?

JOHNNIE HARRIS: It's been amazing. Everyone knows Taliah as a scorer, but she's a pretty good defender. I don't know she has had a practice where she hasn't stepped in and taken a charge. She was committed to getting better on the defensive end when she got on campus. That's been a really pleasant surprise.

Her goal is to become an overall, well-rounded player. She works really hard. She's one of the hardest workers that I have.

Q. This has been a rebuild of sorts for this program. You made a lot of progress last year with some wins, making it to the tournament. Feels like this tournament is starting to gain some respect. Do you feel that way? Overall, what have the past couple years been like getting to where you're at right now?

JOHNNIE HARRIS: I feel like we're getting there. As a coach, you always want more. But I do feel like we're getting there. We have to continue to recruit. In this day and age, it's different with the portal. You think you know what you're going to have next year, but it's always different.

I do think that retention, especially with a program like ours, that retention is very important. We've been able to do that. I think that's how you continue to build.

When we went to Mississippi State and we had to start over, didn't have as many, didn't have the portal, but not as many leaving your program. Our first recruiting class, we had four seniors. Our first recruiting class, by the time they were seniors, they played for a national championship.

Then the very next year, we played for a national championship with four more seniors that came in. Some of them started, some of them didn't. They came in, we were able to recruit 'em, retain 'em, develop 'em. It's harder to do that now.

I think it's really important. It's been important for us to get the players that fit our system. That's probably been the most difficult, knowing what you have from year in to year out. But being able to go get players that fit your system, that believe, that's bought into what you want to do has equally been as important.

Q. You put together a really challenging early-season road trip. What was the philosophy behind that?

JOHNNIE HARRIS: Just getting our team ready. I felt like we have four seniors that I feel like is really trying to lead

this team. I want to challenge them. I want to be ready when the SEC comes. I know how tough the SEC is. It's not going to help us to go out and play a cupcake schedule, then get into that. I don't have that kind of team. I have a team that need to be challenged from day one. That's what I wanted to do.

Q. You brought two young ladies here today. Talk a little bit about DeYona and Taylen.

JOHNNIE HARRIS: I'll start with DeYona.

DeYona has been a pleasant surprise. I actually recruited her out of high school. She signed with Mississippi State. When we went to Texas, she ended up coming to Texas. I was able to coach her her first year.

When I tell you she has grown up, she has been a pleasant surprise. She's a leader. She's always on the court. She's always doing extra. She's bringing other people in the gym with her.

She has a voice with our players. She's a competitor. She competes every day. Sometimes I have to pull her off the court because she'll stay on the court the whole time. She's running with the guards. She's a post player that can shoot the three, she can shoot the pullup jumper, she can get to the rim. She has back-to-the-basket moves, she can face the post.

You talk about a player I'm really excited about, I think I can create a lot of mismatches with her. I think she's going to explode and really help us a lot in areas that we have not had as far as the inside presence.

And Taylen, after the season last year, she's a great defender, one of the best defenders that I've had. After the season, she was passing up a lot of shots. I wanted to make sure she was a little bit more comfortable on the offensive end. We changed her shot a little bit. She got in the gym, she embraced that change. She got in the gym and she's been shooting the ball.

We did a stat the other day of our live practices when we're going up and down against our scout team. She is shooting the ball right at 50%. She's taking a lot of jumpers. That has added to her game. I'm really excited. She's guarding more on the perimeter. I'm able to play her more on the perimeter.

I think you'll see a different Taylen, but she's still that tough, physical defender that she was last year.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the size of the game in the women's game today. Seems like even the guards



are bigger, the wings are bigger, the centers are taller than what we used to be. How does that challenge you and where does your team fit in?

JOHNNIE HARRIS: It challenged me to go out and get bigger players. I still like smart guards, too. It did challenge me to go out and get bigger players. I do have bigger wings. I have moved Taylen to the three. She'll play a lot of three, a lot of four. Celia at 6'2" is going to play some three for me. DeYona is playing four. I'm running stuff, guard stuff, for her because she has those skill sets.

It's a challenge, but it's fun to be able to create those mismatches with taller, bigger players, more athletic players. That's just where the game has gone.

I'm embracing it. It's almost like position-less basketball. I think that's kind of the way women's basketball is going. You do have some really, really big post players now, 6'5" is probably average. If you don't have 6'5", you're probably small. We do have a couple of players at that height, as well as DeYona. We have Yakiya Milton. We've had to go out and get taller players.

Like I said, it's really important to make sure you have players that fit your system.

Q. Taylen mentioned she had been playing some more guard. Where have you seen her develop most?

JOHNNIE HARRIS: Probably her midrange pullup jumper. Just the confidence to take it. She passed up on a lot of those shots last year. Now she's still able to go to the rim, then her rebounding because now she's facing the basket a little bit more. She was already a relentless rebounder, but I think that has been enhanced with her positioning.

Just excited about her overall development. We're still working with her ball handling. She's becoming more confident with that. She's another big guard that I'll be able to create some mismatches with.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

JOHNNIE HARRIS: Thank you.

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