

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Texas A&M Aggies

Coach Joni Taylor

Women's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome Joni Taylor from Texas A&M.

Welcome to the stage, Joni Taylor. We'll go straight to questions.

Q. What did that mean for you to win the Olympic gold, be part of that process? Also your top scorer, she's pretty dynamic.

JONI TAYLOR: She is.

You know what, I have gotten that question a lot, rightfully so. I'm honestly not sure if I've processed still. When you're in it, you're in the grind of it. Obviously this year the competition was very, very competitive. The last game went down to the final shot.

The first feeling you have is, like, relief, right? Relief that you got the job done and you completed the mission. You never want to disappoint. You don't want to be someone who went there and didn't finish the job.

I don't really know if I've processed that experience. It's something that I think about. I'm obviously very grateful for it, to be around those 12 elite young women and the coaching staff that we assembled. We had great chemistry. It's just impressive to what they do every day.

In terms of AC, she is our leading scorer, our toughest player, brings a level of competitiveness and drive and hunger for the game that has leaked over into the rest of our team.

Year two for her here with us in our program and our culture. I'm excited to see how she continues to grow. She leads us every day with our competitiveness and her drive to win.

Q. It's so common, you've had quite a bit of turnover, moving parts in the roster. How do you feel the team is coming together, meshing? Going into year three at Texas A&M, do you have a feel of where the program is right now? Do you feel like you're on schedule?

JONI TAYLOR: I think this team, we had a chance to go on a foreign tour this summer. When you do that, you're across the water for 10 days, but also you get practice days. You get to practice in the summer, 20 hours of practice. That gave us a chance to get a sneak peek of who this team is. There's a lot of similar faces, different faces. We had time to gel as a team.

I'm excited about who we are. We are versatile, big, long, we've got the pieces. We have to stay healthy. We only have 11 on our roster. Honestly, I like having a smaller roster. 15 is a hard load to carry for us, how we play. I'm excited about the people that we have.

Going into year three, I think we are moving in the right direction. Are we where we want to be? No, because we're not winning championships yet. We took a huge step last year. Our goal is to continue to move that program in the right direction, and we're doing that. I'm excited about our staff. I'm excited about our players and the potential that we have.

Q. You're bringing Taliyah Parker this year. What have you seen from her? Why was it important for you to keep her in state?

JONI TAYLOR: Taliyah might be one of the funniest people I have been around. She has me laughing in practice. That is not something that normally happens for me. She is just hilariously funny and doesn't know she's funny.

In terms of who she is as a person, which is one of the most important things for us, she is someone that has high goals for herself. She comes from a great family. She is someone who fits perfectly into what it means to be an Aggie. She came from the state of Texas, Dallas, Grand Prairie.

She's a long guard. She's really good defensively. She's a scorer. You put the ball in her hands, she figures out how to score. We have somebody on the wings, go get a bucket, she can do that. As a freshman, she has to learn our style, our pace. A lot coming at her right now. Really excited about what she brings to our team on the court and all the intangibles she brings off the court, as well.

Q. What experiences did you take from the Olympic gold medal experience that you're able to translate to your team this year?

JONI TAYLOR: This is my second time being with the national team. First time was in 2022 when we went to Australia and won the World Cup.

Every day we tell our players elite is not a word you just throw around. Anytime I leave that environment, I am reminded and I'm grateful to be around greatness and to be around the 12 best players in the world at that time.

We bring back to our team those habits, whether it's their nutrition habits, their prehab habits, the way they take care of their body, show up to the practice floor, their workouts. We have players who have played for their national teams. AC played for her national team this summer. We have players who want to be Olympians, who want to represent USA Basketball, or who just want to be professionals. That's something I bring back for our players.

The other thing is just because our players want to play professionally, our game, the way we play offensively, really mimics the professional game. We try to use the same terminology. We run some of the same actions so that the transition for them is as seamless as possible.

If we have players who that's their ambition and their goal, it's our job as coaches to put them in the best position possible to do that. Obviously that's how they work, that's their game, that's their talent. It's also making sure that the transition, which is normally the hardest, is the terminology, the actions. That's what we try to make sure we assimilate into our program.

Q. What is it about AC that allows her to be at her best when the lights are brightest, like the South Carolina game in the SEC tournament?

JONI TAYLOR: I think for her, again, she shows up like that every single day. She understands what it is we need. She's arguably our best defender, arguably our best rebounder. The stats say she's our best player, our best scorer. She can bring all those things. I think that's what she does best.

She looks around and recognizes where does the team need me today. She is happy to fulfill whatever role that is. Sometimes it's all of it. Most times it is all of those things.

Innately as a person, she just has that competitive drive. Before she came to the United States, she fell in love with the game of basketball in Mali. She realized that was her ticket. Her why is a lot bigger than for most people. She's proud of where she comes from, her family, her mom. She has sacrificed a lot to be here, time away from her family, time away from her siblings, to be here and play the sport that she loves. She wants to have a future in basketball.

When you combine all of those things together, it is the product you see on the floor.

Q. The NIL landscape at Texas A&M for women's basketball?

JONI TAYLOR: Yep. Is that the question in general?

Q. Yes.

JONI TAYLOR: I think in year three, we are moving into the direction it needs to be.

One thing I will say, for us, NIL is a great opportunity for players to benefit off their name, image and likeness, but we don't want it to be transactional. We don't want a transactional relationship.

For us, NIL comes after you were there because you chose to come, help our program, help our program on and off the floor, in all those areas. I think we are at an institution that obviously has a lot of resources, so that puts us in a position to be successful in that area.

Q. Last year y'all made a big move from year one to year two, got into the NCAA tournament. As you look at your team, what do you think y'all have to do to continue getting back to the NCAA tournament, making improvement?

JONI TAYLOR: We got to stay healthy, number one. I really think we could have had five more wins last year if we don't lose Endyia Rogers and Lauren Ware. We played that game in the tournament against Nebraska without Lauren, and Endyia was coming back off of a knee surgery that allowed her to come back for the SEC tournament. We were fortunate to still make the tournament. So we've got to stay healthy.

Where we are right now is I would still love to see a little bit more consistency in who we are in practice every single day. We have three great days, then we have just an okay

day. I want a great day every day. Really good teams, they show up every single day, they do what they have to do at a high level. They don't get bored with the mundane, with excellence. We have to continue to create those types of habits.

When you have teams that can walk in every single day in a practice, attack it, get it done at a high level, that's when you know that you are on your way to building something at a championship level.

We've still got some work to do there. Are we better than we were in year one and year two? Absolutely. Are we where we need to be? No.

Q. Your transfers, specifically Janae and Amirah, where do you envision them helping out this season?

JONI TAYLOR: Janae is someone who we have history with and have known for a really long time. She's a long guard. She's big. I think she can impact the game on both sides of it. She's a two-way player. She gets out in transition in the open court, she's really dynamic there. Defensively she can guard positions one through four.

I think we can move her around a lot. She brings a championship mentality with her to our program, which is something that we need to add, as well. I'm excited about just her maturity, who she is, how she works, just the consistency she shows us every single day.

Amirah, we've known her since the seventh grade from our time in Georgia. Versatility at the forward position. She can post up, shoot it, she can drive it. Again, someone who understands who we are as a staff that can echo that in the locker room.

Again, defensively is a rim protector, a great rebounder. She brings us some versatility and athleticism at the forward spot.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

JONI TAYLOR: Thanks. Good to see you.

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