

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

Wednesday, October 16, 2024

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Tennessee Volunteers

Coach Kim Caldwell

Women's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome Kim Caldwell of Tennessee to the podium.

KIM CALDWELL: Thank you very much. Thank you all for being here. I'm excited about our team. I'm excited about this season. Our team has been working incredibly hard. They still have a lot of work to do. But I appreciate them and respect them and love them for embracing the standard that we have set. Already diving right into our culture.

THE MODERATOR: We'll begin with questions.

Q. You brought in a lot of impact transfers, Ruby Whitehorn one of them. What have you seen from her over the summer? How big of a role do you anticipate her having?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I think Ruby will play a real good role. Came in as a talented player that could already score the ball, but she's getting better and better every day. She's a good leader for us. She's a great person to be around. She works hard all the time.

When you have players like that on your team, it makes everyone around them better.

Q. Samara Spencer, she came from a score-fast offense. How has she evolved into your program?

KIM CALDWELL: From the very beginning, she has been able to play at a pace that other people can't. You can tell she has a background of pushing the ball up the floor, running the ball up the floor as opposed to walking it.

She's been huge for us, and we make people keep up with her, which is big because she's going to have the ball in her hands a lot.

Q. Was it a bit of a shock to the system, the off-season conditioning program, to be able to play at the pace? Are they at the place where you want to be in terms of conditioning to play your style?

KIM CALDWELL: They are not, but I'm never really happy (smiling). We're just going to continue to run all season. They're getting better. They're getting stronger. With that, with conditioning and getting on the baseline, going to the track, you get mentally tougher as well. I think we have accomplished that in the pre-season.

Q. In your first season, you have Jewel Spear and Sara Puckett. They both are coming back and have the experience at Tennessee. Talk about what that means to you in your first year and to Tennessee.

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I think they are both incredible human beings, let alone great basketball players. Great leaders. They're two of the best leaders we have on our team. They can score the ball. They have the ability to play fast. I'm so happy that they stayed because they have set our culture instantly.

That's not easy to do when you don't know the coach, you don't know what to expect, to step up and be a leader when it's new to everyone. They've done a tremendous job at that.

Q. I was talking to Jewel about a lot of individual skill work that you like your assistants to do with the players. From your standpoint, where do you feel she's made the most strides with the skill work, her shot, shooting at pace?

KIM CALDWELL: Jewel has gotten better all the way around. Her defense has gotten better. Her driving has gotten better. Her shooting has always been good. We're asking her to shoot it quicker, deeper. She has already had that. I think that was one reason why the system was really enticing her to stay. She has that. She's taking charges, diving on the floor. She's a leader. Outspoken. I could not ask for a better leader on this team.

Q. What's the consistent theme in your winning, and



what made you embrace playing at a fast pace?

KIM CALDWELL: I think the game is definitely trending fast. I think we're going to be on the forefront of that. We're going to turn it up a notch and play faster than most.

As far as making a winning culture, you have to have great relationships with your players. I'm very fortunate we already have a great culture at Tennessee in a short amount of time. Our team is full of great kids. I love to be around them.

You just have a brand. You believe in your brand. You teach it every day. You explain the why. You pour into your kids every day.

Q. How do you feel like people are settling into roles at this point with the season a few weeks away? Are you someone who likes to be clear about that, make sure you're established?

KIM CALDWELL: That's a really good question.

It's a fine line because we don't ever put players in a box. We let players play every type of way because I want to get the most out of them. We do talk about roles. We talk about it publicly. We talk about it in a room. Everyone goes around and says their roles.

But because we practice and play so free, our first couple games, scrimmages, some people will still try to do things out of their roles. That's where film comes into play, having conversations. Having had those conversations prior is really important.

Q. You talked on September 3rd about baby Caldwell on the way. Congratulations. Something to celebrate. If y'all go deep into March, any kind of adjustments you have to make, challenges?

KIM CALDWELL: I spent a really long time, I think maybe the first three months of my pregnancy, being really worried about it. You have to give it to God. God gave us this blessing for a reason. He's got it. I don't have a lot of power over it. I have a great team around me. My husband will be there to support. My mom will come. Our staff is ready.

When we talk to our team about it, we really put it in a light of, Hey, we need all of you guys to step up and be leaders, come together now. I think at that moment it became a really positive thing.

Q. How did you balance, in terms of putting the roster together, trying to build something for the future but

not overlook this season, especially for your veterans?

KIM CALDWELL: Absolutely. When you're senior heavy, you want to go all in for your seniors. You want to make sure we establish everything the way we need to now. This team is really a big part of what we're trying to do long-term. They're team one. They have a big role to play. You bring in players that can help you do that immediately. You just try to bring complementing pieces into that.

Q. There's been a lot of change in the SEC this year. It feels like in some ways the middle of the pack is wide open. Is that something you want to put a chip on your players' shoulders?

KIM CALDWELL: No matter if we're No. 1 or No. 16, we're always going to play with a chip on our shoulder. Does not matter. That's kind of our brand. That's kind of what we want to be. We want to be blue collar, hard working, motivated all the way around. We want to be motivated together. Rankings don't really matter on that end.

Q. What is your impression of the SEC, taking over a program like Tennessee?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, it's a lot. It's so much more than I could of have dreamed of to actually be the head coach at the University of Tennessee. It's amazing. You take it day by day, stride by stride, moment by moment. You really have to focus on basketball, being around your team, or you could get consumed in all of this.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

KIM CALDWELL: Thank you, guys.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

