

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Tennessee Volunteers

Coach Kim Caldwell

Women's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome from the University of Tennessee to the stage Kim Caldwell.

KIM CALDWELL: It's been quite a whirlwind since I stood up here in front of you guys a year ago. I am so thankful to last year's team. They trusted a new staff, gave everything they had to help us set a foundation. I'm even more thankful that the majority of our team that had eligibility remaining chose to stay, and they have helped us continue to try to build upon that foundation we set last year.

It's been nice to have returners. Nice to have people that can lead and help our eight newcomers figure out what our standards are. Those eight newcomers have made practices competitive and exciting.

As a coach I always want more practice time, but I know I have a group that's ready to get on the floor and play.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. If you have a question...

Q. You just mentioned the standards. Can you help paint a picture for us what those look like.

KIM CALDWELL: Anything from we don't put our hands on our knees when we're tired. We want to be the hardest-playing team. We work very hard. We want to be in the gym extra outside our practices making sure our individual game is better. We want to take notes when we watch film, take notes on scouts. We want to make sure we're sitting up straight, paying attention.

All of those little details. It's nice I don't have to be the one every single time we walk into a room to say that. I have six returners that can repeat it and get to it before I do.

Q. (No microphone.)

KIM CALDWELL: It takes time. I think success helps. Every time they see themselves or our team get better, they realize all that matters, pays off. Once you see success and you see yourself improve and play better basketball than you ever played before, you want to do more of it.

Q. You mentioned the competition that the newcomers have brought. Do you feel there's even another level they've kicked into for this team of the competition you have in practices? How would you describe that in pre-season?

KIM CALDWELL: I think our newcomers have elevated the level of our practice. Anyone can have a great practice. You can't show up and just walk in the gym. You have to show up ready or you're going to get your tail kicked.

We have five freshmen. They're doing a great job. They're tough. They are not scared of anyone. They're not scared to talk, to lead. They win our sprints. They have been great.

If you don't show up ready and in the right mindset to practice, a freshman is going to, again, make you look bad.

Q. Number eight in the pre-season AP poll. Potential Final Four team this year. At this point in the pre-season, how would you describe this team's ceiling?

KIM CALDWELL: I think we have a lot of floor. I think we can get in our way. I think we have a really high ceiling. Those two things right now are very far apart. We need to do really a better job of lowering what our floor is, staying out of our own way, staying focused and hungry.

We are in the dark days of basketball season. We've been going for a really long time. There's not an opponent really near in sight. We have to make sure we remember what the goal is. The goal is to make it to an Elite Eight or Final Four. Those are conversations we're having. That takes hard work and it takes consistency.

Q. We saw Talaysia Cooper emerge a little bit going

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into conference play. What is the ceiling for her?

KIM CALDWELL: She has the ceiling to be one of the best players in the country. She's a different player, a better player right now than she was at the end of last year. At the end of last year, she was probably playing the best basketball you have seen.

She's facilitating, making the right pass. She's showing up every single day like a professional. She's getting work in before practice starts. If she doesn't have time with her class schedule, she'll get it in afterwards. She's taking care of her body. She's holding her teammates accountable.

She's a much better teammate this year than last year by having a leadership role. Last year it was a little bit uncomfortable because she sat a year out. Now she has some momentum, she's taken that, and that's helped her just hold people around her accountable and hold herself accountable.

Q. You talked this summer about not having as many shooters as last year. How has that developed over the pre-season? How confident do you feel about the variety of shooters you're going to have?

KIM CALDWELL: I think we're going to drive it more. I think our goal now is to get to the foul line more than it was to shoot three-point shots. We have spent a lot of time in our pre-season of working on shooting. We maybe didn't get a labeled shooter, but we're going to develop you and make sure that you get better.

That's something we always try to do, is make sure other players get better, whether it's finishing with the left hand, getting to the foul line, their lateral movement. If you have a decent shot, we think we can make you a shooter. We've spent a lot of time working on that inside practice and outside of practice.

Q. How important was it for you last year in your first season to establish proof of concept, not just knocking off big names, playing the way you wanted to play, hitting threes, creating turnovers?

KIM CALDWELL: That was incredibly important. That's why I will always be thankful to last year's team because they could have looked at me and been, No, I don't want to do this. This doesn't really fit my style of play.

They didn't. They got better. They saw themselves get better. They loved it. They had fun. They had team chemistry because we went so deep in our bench.

I think to see them really fall in love with it, to see them

watch their bodies change, watch their game change, all of that, it was fun for me because it doesn't matter what level you're at. An 18-to-22-year-old is an 18-to-22-year-old. Basketball is basketball. That was really cool to see that transpire in real-time. That team helped us get the recruiting class that we did.

Q. We know there's a game inside of the game. What are those areas when you look after a victory or a loss that you want your team to focus on: We need to win rebound battle? We want to win this battle?

KIM CALDWELL: We want to win the rebounding battle. We want to win the possession battle. We want 20 more shots up than our opponent. We have to take care of the basketball, turn them over. We have to limit our fouls and get fouled. That means you have to go crash the offensive glass and box out.

I think we want to win, the major part of that, and mindset part of that, we want to beat you to every 50/50 ball. I don't know if we did a great job of that last year. This is something we have the athleticism to do. If there's a ball, we're going to beat you to it. If not, we're going to be on the floor trying.

Q. Last year when you were recruiting, you were trying to pitch and sell something that they hadn't seen yet. How has that changed with this fall recruiting? Has it been easier to sell this? Have you not noticed a difference?

KIM CALDWELL: It's been easier to sell because they've watched the game. You don't have to sit there and necessarily explain to them and break it down. You don't have to show people past clips. You can show clips of people in Tennessee uniforms, how they would fit in.

We're always going to recruit athleticism and a mindset. We're going to recruit players that want the ball in their hands, players that aren't afraid of anything, players that as a freshman want to come and be counted on right away.

Because we don't recruit backup freshmen. We recruit freshmen that we are going to count on you from day one. If you're not right, we can't find what's right, we're going to get it out of the portal. That's a dawg mentality. That's a mindset of this is something I want to do. I believe in myself enough, I believe in Tennessee and the coaching staff enough that this is what I want.

Q. I wanted to ask you specifically about two of your transfers in Jersey Wolfenbarger and Janiah Barker.

KIM CALDWELL: I think they're great for what we do



because they're big and guards bodies. They like to fly around. They're very good in pressing. They like to run the floor in transition. They would rather play outside than in. We don't have a traditional post player. We play five out.

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When we get our bigs, we put them in our system, they can play position-less. They're not going to bring the ball up the floor, but they can play two, three, four, five for us because they're all the same in what we try to do. I think they do that well. They can get up in front of press and get turns, so we don't have to hide them at the back.

Q. You have twin sisters in your freshman class. Fun sisterly moments in practice?

KIM CALDWELL: A great dynamic. I obviously coached with my dad, so I love to have siblings involved. I've had siblings involved in a team every year I've been a head coach. I love that. I think that brings a really nice just little bit of competitiveness. You can just talk smack a little bit more when it's your sister, your sibling.

They've been great. They don't like to guard against each other. They like to go against new people because they've been guarding each other their whole lives.

Q. How has it been balancing motherhood with your new son, just getting ready for the season?

KIM CALDWELL: I wouldn't say balancing is the right word. Probably like juggling. That's probably what it is for all working moms. It's been great. It's been very good for me. I've never been a coach that can ever turn it off. I think about basketball 24/7.

And now there are times in my day where I come home -- my son is at that cute age where he can love you back. So I come home, and he'll come laughing and crawling up to me. That is my favorite part of the day. I can have time with him before he goes to bed to think about him, then I go back to basketball again (smiling).

Q. Janiah Barker has a really high ceiling as a player. Feels like she hasn't gotten close to that yet. Is that a challenge that you like as a coach?

KIM CALDWELL: Absolutely. I want her to play the best basketball she's ever played in her final season. I want to help her do that.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time this morning.

KIM CALDWELL: Thank you.

