

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Tennessee vs NC State

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Raleigh, North Carolina, USA
Reynolds Coliseum

NC State Wolfpack

Mimi Collins

Zoe Brooks

Wes Moore

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to Reynolds Coliseum. Today we have the student-athletes from North Carolina State.

Q. Mimi, obviously you started your college career at Tennessee. Is it a little bit full circle to be playing them now with the Sweet 16 appearance on the line?

MIMI COLLINS: I think it's kind of -- I wasn't expecting it. You never expect, when you leave a school, to come back, but I'm just very blessed and very grateful. I think this goes to show the growth that I have become as a woman, just being an adult and seeing the adversity that I went through.

So just seeing this growth full circle and being able to play my old team, I think it's just a blessing. I'm very excited to play them.

Q. Zoe, I think you're four games now into your postseason career. What have you learned about yourself as a player, about postseason basketball over the past couple weeks here?

ZOE BROOKS: I'm very competitive. I love to win. Obviously these last four games have been very big and important, and I think just moving forward I've just got to remember that it's win or go home.

Q. Mimi, how do you look at the season so far for you personally? What would be the cherry on the cake? Your senior year, this is your last go around. What would make this year and this second half of this third season, what would be enjoyable for you? Going to a Final Four or getting to a Sweet 16, what would that



mean to you this year?

MIMI COLLINS: I think it would mean everything, but I think for me -- I know that's every athlete's dream. Every athlete's dream is to win a National Championship, make it to the Final Four. That is my dream as well.

Right now I'm just -- this is my last rodeo. So I just want to soak in everything. I think I'm cherishing more my teammates as my sisters more than anything. As an adult, you know you don't get that back. You get to come to alumni and see your old college teammates, but I just want to cherish this as much as I can.

Of course we're going to compete as hard as we can, and we're going to try our hardest to win the Final Four and win the National Championship.

Q. This would be your last game in Reynolds Coliseum. How do you manage the emotions going into that game? Sweet 16 appearance on the line, so a lot to play for. But at the same time, kind of take it all in one last time, one last time on the court?

MIMI COLLINS: Like you said, this is my last rodeo here at Reynolds Coliseum. I think that Wolfpack Nation has done a great job with the post you saw today that we're soldout. Just understanding that Wolfpack Nation is showing out for us seniors and for the team.

I just think, like questions before, it has come full circle for me. This is my college game here at Reynolds Coliseum, but also I'm playing my freshman year team. So it's literally coming full circle for me. Just I'm very grateful and very blessed to be in this position.

Q. Just talking about the game itself for either player. Tennessee has big, physical players in the post. They've got guards that can shoot, the team that's probably closest to ending South Carolina's win streak. When you look at them, is there a team this season you could maybe compare the Lady Vols too?

ZOE BROOKS: Dang, I don't know.



MIMI COLLINS: Do you want me to help her out?

THE MODERATOR: You could help her out. That would be perfectly fine.

MIMI COLLINS: I would say --

ZOE BROOKS: Wow, size-wise.

MIMI COLLINS: Are we going size-wise or skill set? Okay, skill set-wise, I would say UConn because that was our biggest test. But for size, I would say Miami helped us out a lot because both of their bigs were in the 6'4" range. Not no 6'6" range, how we're going to deal with T.K. and the rest of them, but I just think that UConn was our best like overall game skill set comparison to the Lady Vols.

But understanding that not only that they're versatile, we're versatile too, and we also have size as well. So I think this is a great game of matchup, where from the 1 all the way to the 5, we match up perfectly. So I think this is going to be a great game to compete and see who is going to be the best at defending and rebounding.

Q. Zoe, you've got -- you're surrounded by a team of a lot of veterans. What does it mean to get to play alongside people like Mimi, people like River on their last trip in Reynolds?

ZOE BROOKS: It's a great feeling. Obviously the most important thing is to have leaders around you that hold you accountable and help you keep your head up when things aren't going your way. That's definitely something I'm going to miss next year is their leadership and just the love that they have.

Q. Mimi, you've been here for two years now, two very different seasons. What would it mean to you to win this game and get the program back to the stage that it's accustomed to?

MIMI COLLINS: I think it would be huge because like my other schools, I have been in the Sweet 16, I have made it to that far. So understanding what it takes. I've been on that younger stick where I have made it that far and understanding what it takes.

But now being a vet, the mind has shifted. It's just I think it would be a great honor to bring it back -- to be the team that brung it back for us. I think we're more than capable of doing it as a team, so I don't see why not.

Q. Zoe, last year you were in high school, and you decided to come to NC State. Did you ever think that you would find yourself in this situation about to

possibly go to a Sweet 16 in the NCAA Tournament and be an integral part of that run?

ZOE BROOKS: Yes, that's a big reason why I chose NC State because they always play at a high level, they always go far in tournaments, they win.

Like I said, I'm very competitive, and that's very important to me. So I could definitely see myself in this position when I was in high school.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thank you very much. We appreciate your time. Good luck tomorrow.

Welcome back. It's time for Coach Wes Moore's portion of the press conference.

Q. I know you've talked a lot about the Harpers already, but just Kellie started on your staff when she was only a couple years out of college, starting her coaching career. What has it been like for you to go on to see her have the career she's had and how she's grown as a coach just from when you had her on your staff?

WES MOORE: Yeah, it's pretty neat. I guess, when I hired her the first summer, she was 24 years old. A lot of car rental places require you to be 25. So there was a lot of times where I drove and she navigated, and she said we were great. This is before the phone GPS stuff, y'all, and you're flying from gym to gym to see AAU games.

We would just about have passed the road, and she'd go, Oh, we're supposed to turn right there! I would just whip it and turn right, and she said, We're made for each other in this deal.

No, it's awesome to see. It's worked out great. She's back where she belongs, so to speak, had a great career, three National Championships, as a player. So it's neat that she's back home. Again, doing so well. Yeah, it's pretty fun to watch.

Q. Coach, at the half yesterday there was a change of one of the officials. When were you notified of that, and were you given any reasoning why and why they didn't use a stand by?

WES MOORE: Yeah, and I feel bad. I've known the official. I recruited her. That's the toughest thing about being old. Tommi is someone from -- she's from Chattanooga. I recruited her. Devil led her away, she went to Furman, I don't know.

On the sideline sometime, I did say something about how



in the world are you doing this game? I hope that had nothing to do with it because, again, I was just bantering back and forth.

Yeah, again, I would never doubt her integrity and those sort of things, but I guess, when they found out she had a degree from Chattanooga, I guess that maybe made it a little bit stickier.

I'll be honest, I didn't know they were doing anything until I see Angelica suffering over there stretching, and someone told me.

Again, I kind of hate that it happened because, again, I would never question Tommi's -- Tommi Paris' integrity or whatever.

Q. Coach, you've been in the game for 34 years --

WES MOORE: Longer than that.

Q. Maybe longer than that.

WES MOORE: Let's keep it at that. We'll go with it.

Q. Head coaching for 34 years.

WES MOORE: 35, but we'll go with it.

Q. I'll go with it. A lot of experience, you've seen it all in this game, recruiting, everything. What has eluded you was the Final Four. Is that something that you aspire to get to as a coach? I know it sounds like a stupid question. I know you're trying to get this next game.

WES MOORE: I'm still haunted. How many, two, three years ago, we're playing Connecticut in Connecticut to go to the Final Four, and we lose in double overtime. That will forever haunt me. I look back on what I could have done at the end of regulation differently and things like that.

So, sure, I think that's everyone's goal. If you ever lose sight of that and it's not a motivating factor, then it's probably time to play golf full-time.

Q. You knew Tamari Key, I assume, while she was in high school. What's your relationship with her? Did you recruit her? How did that all shake out?

WES MOORE: We obviously tried to recruit her. I don't know how deep we got into it with her. Yeah, she's an unbelievable presence on both ends of the floor and a big challenge when you're trying to have an interior scoring game, things like that. She definitely, like I said, impacts

the game on both ends.

Yeah, we recruited her, but I don't think we ever had -- I don't think she ever came on an official visit, I don't believe.

Q. Coach, I know we talked a lot about Tennessee and the Harpers, but on the court, what are you feeling towards Tennessee? Like you said, you scrimmaged them this year. What are the things you're telling your team that they need to really think about for the matchup tomorrow?

WES MOORE: Yeah, it's going to take -- we're going to have to play with a lot of urgency, a lot of energy. They've got talent, great talent. Obviously they're well coached, well prepared.

I think the biggest thing, when I think of Tennessee, is transition. You'd better do a good job in transition D, not only take away the block and the paint, but then they've got some great shooters spotting up when they run as well.

And then offensive rebounding. Again, I was around Pat Summitt a lot, and I've heard her say it a million times -- and I've probably said it at least a million myself -- offense sells tickets, defense wins games, rebounding wins championships. I haven't necessarily got that message through to my team as well as I would like.

I do think this time of year rebounding is going to determine a lot of these games. If you give people second looks and you yourself are one-and-done, it's going to be tough to overcome.

Q. I apologize if you've been asked this already, but Mimi Collins said it's kind of a full circle moment for her playing Tennessee given the fact that she started her career there. She talked a little bit about some of the adversity she kind of went through for her career, it's kind of bringing some of that up. Have you talked to her at all about maybe compartmentalizing the emotional side and just focusing on the game?

WES MOORE: Not a whole lot. Again, nowadays it's very common for players to face their former schools. You know, not really.

Again, obviously Mimi is an important part of what we do, and there was a coaching change at Tennessee, and that influenced her decision some. She went back home to Maryland at the time. So I don't think it was any like conflict or anything like that. It was just they made a coaching change, and so she decided to go home to Maryland.

Knowing me, if I do say anything, it will be joking, sarcasm, something to that effect.

Q. This might be a silly question --

WES MOORE: Well, I've already had a couple of those, so go ahead.

(Laughter).

Q. Madison and Rickea obviously were teammates earlier in their college career. When you have players that have played together and played against each other extensively at former schools, are you asking Madison, like, hey, what would you do against Rickea?

WES MOORE: No, but maybe I should. That's probably a good idea. There again, you watch all this film, so you kind of get a good feel.

I think it's pretty obvious. I think she's projected to be top two or three in the WNBA draft, so you kind of know what you're getting there.

Q. Kind of going to go on that same trend. How tough is it to game plan for a player like Rickea Jackson, especially the way she's playing right now kind of caught fire at the end of the season?

WES MOORE: Yeah, she's playing extremely well right now. Tough matchup. Do you put size? Do you put length on her? Do you put quickness on her?

Of course, Kellie, she's a great coach. If you put quickness on her, she's going to take them inside and post them up. If you go with length, she's going to step out and shoot the three or take them off the bounce.

In a perfect world, you'd be able to really help off people and get in the gaps and things like that, but, oh, they got three or four people out there shooting the three extremely well. So pick your poison. If you help on her, then you're giving something else up.

Definitely, it's a tough matchup. Again, they've got a lot of All-Americans over there. But, again, this time of year you're going to play somebody really good. It's gotten to a point now, when you get into this second tier, there's no easy ones. Tennessee is definitely well stocked.

Q. Mimi and River both talked about kind of the emotion of tomorrow's game, it being their final game here at Reynolds Coliseum, no matter what. Can you just talk about the pair of them and really what they have meant to this program?

WES MOORE: Again, trying to figure out how we can get another year out of them. I don't know, I think River would look good with blond hair. We can maybe disguise them a little.

Yeah, they're both invaluable. Mimi's shooting the three a lot better. She's worked extremely hard in that regard and made herself a threat at several levels, and that's good. Mimi, again, someone you can play at the 4, you can play her at the 5 some, so great versatility.

River Baldwin, I think when we just this year said, hey, you're it, we're going to play through you, I think that gave her great confidence, and she was able to step up and do some amazing things.

I'm sitting here one eye on this game and then another eye what are we going to do about filling those spots? Yeah, both of them have been a joy to be around. I love cutting up with both of them. Again, they're going to be missed on the court and off.

Q. Coach, when you play against SEC teams like you're going to tomorrow, what are the immediate characteristics you think of in the SEC, and what's distinctive about SEC defense?

WES MOORE: I don't know that I single out SEC. I mean, I look at it as Power 5s. Again, a lot of them are probably like Tennessee. They're going to play great defense. They're going to run in transition. They're going to be big time on the offensive boards.

Again, I've said this a million times too. It's a butt game. You'd better get your butt back. You'd better get your butt between them and the rim. You'd better get your butt on them and box them out, so yeah.

Q. What did you love most about this group of -- this team that you're coaching this year?

WES MOORE: I think more than anything else they get along, and they enjoy being around each other. I don't think there's a whole lot of jealousy. I think they're happy, genuinely happy for someone else when they do well. They celebrate other people's success instead of just their own.

Again, that just makes it more pleasant for everybody when a team is close and have great chemistry and those sort of things.

Yeah, it's been a fun ride. I'd love to keep it going.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.

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