

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - William & Mary vs Texas

Friday, March 21, 2025

Austin, Texas, USA

Moody Center

Texas Longhorns

Vic Schaefer

Taylor Jones

Rori Harmon

Madison Booker

Media Conference

Q. Rori, I know the injury is kind of an old story now, but you being back in the tournament this year, how does it feel to be back and knowing that you've got a chance to lead this team into this postseason tournament after missing out last year?

RORI HARMON: Yeah, definitely kind of is an old story, but it's not, at the same time, because I get déjà-vu coming to certain events now. I get certain memories from last year.

I was so excited that my team was able to do what they were doing.

But I was upset at the same time because I wished I was playing. But I'm just grateful to be playing with my teammates again. It's just so fun. I think I definitely have that chip -- my personal chip on my shoulder coming into this tournament just being able to play again. I'm just super excited and happy.

Q. If you guys don't mind going down the board, this is nothing new for you guys, tournament play. Is it any different? Is there any more juice when the nation is looking at you guys as a team that can win this whole thing?

TAYLOR JONES: I would say we're just trying to take it one game at a time. We know the potential that we have when we play the best that we can.

We have a chip on our shoulder after our last game, but we



know what we can do, and it's really exciting having a bunch of eyes, not only on us, but also women's basketball. I think I can speak for the whole team when I say that we're just thankful to be here.

We knew coming into this year, the talent that we had and the potential that we had, so I don't think we're surprised to be where we're at, but the job is not done.

MADISON BOOKER: I mean, I think I would lie if I say our team don't think we could win a National Championship. I think that would be a lie. I think it's always been a thought here. It's been a goal since the beginning of the season. We knew if we put in the work and stay consistent and do our job in games, we could potentially be a 1 seed, too. Now we're here as a 1 seed, and also, it's being talked about winning the last game of the season, too.

But it's like what Taylor says, one game at a time and one possession at a time. You can't take a possession for granted. You now see where a possession is coming down to the last rebound, last shot, just that one last possession that you wish you could have back.

I think we come into the tournament with our heads high, humble and hungry and just ready to play ball.

Q. All three of you have been through this situation before where you have the ability to be home for the first two rounds. How much of an advantage is it to your home, your arena, your practice facility, sleeping in your own beds, stuff like that?

TAYLOR JONES: It's really exciting to be able to play in front of the fans in Moody again. I think everyone can say how electric this environment is, and just being able to potentially have two more home games is really nice and being able to play in front of our crowd. It also is nice being in your same city. We've traveled a lot this year, and so being able to stay home is really nice and refreshing.

RORI HARMON: I love our fans so much, so playing here is just awesome. I've done it all since I've gotten here as a freshman. To be in the position that we are, to be on a familiar court with familiar people -- Jeremy said there's



about 300 tickets left from being sold out, so we'd better start getting those numbers up because I like that sold-out number, the 10.5K number. We love playing with passion, and our fans definitely help with that.

MADISON BOOKER: We love our fans, like Rori said. I think just us being able to get the home-court advantage just means so much for us, not only to us, but to our fans, showing how much we love our fans and how much we play the season -- we always keep our fans in our head, too, and just knowing that we play hard, we keep winning games, we go out and do our job and be able to host and give back to our fans and let them come back out for another two games to see us play.

Q. It's your first season in the SEC. You came this close to winning the championship game. Can you talk a little bit about how that feels and motivates you for this tournament?

TAYLOR JONES: Like I said earlier, the last game sort of leaves a chip on your shoulder. I know I got a bad taste left from that game. But I also know that our team is a lot better than what we showed in that last game. Still being able to accomplish winning the regular season, it being the first year that we were here was a great accomplishment.

I'm just really happy for us and just proud that we were able to make history. Of course, I know Texas is going to continue to go on and, hopefully, win a lot more SEC Championships, but we do have a chip on our shoulder coming into this tournament.

RORI HARMON: Yeah, to be in this conference, SEC conference that we're in, is very challenging. It was a lot different for a lot of us, but to also be named the champions of the conference is a pretty big deal. I'm so proud of my team to be able to do that in the first year. Like Taylor's saying, just going down in history, our names are going to be on that team when you see SEC champs of Texas.

Yeah, I think what she said about the chip, of course, but we're on to the next game, and this is a new set of games and a new tournament that we can earn more championships.

Q. Rori and Taylor, first-team All-American this week, why do you think Madison was named one of the best five players in the country?

RORI HARMON: It's kind of obvious. Okay, I'll make it a longer answer.

No, I mean, I think one of the things that we talk about is

having an impact on the team no matter what the numbers look like, even though her numbers are incredible, but just being able to have an impact. When you're playing against teams and you're like the No. 1 thing on their scout, that should tell you a lot. That should tell you that she probably deserves to be on that first team.

I think we're all just super proud. But she would say herself, when you play for the name in front of your jersey, the name on the back, it comes with and it's handled. So I think she has that type of mentality, and us as teammates, appreciate that because she's just a team player, and that has a lot of impact on our team and makes our team go.

TAYLOR JONES: Yeah, I don't think anyone was really surprised by her being first-team All-American. I might be a little biased, but I do think that she is the best player in the country.

I think the impact that she has on our team, even if she isn't scoring the ball, is tremendous. I have to remind myself that she is only a sophomore, and just really excited to see what she does with her career.

It didn't happen by accident. Her work ethic is very rare. You don't see it hardly ever at all, and that's why she's gotten to where she's at. She's extremely talented, but she's worked hard for it, and I think that she's a great leader, and I think the accolades will continue to go on for the rest of her career.

Q. You three have played in the tournament before, but some of the freshmen on your team haven't. What are you guys telling them to keep them grounded?

RORI HARMON: I just tell them that everything, almost like the intensity and the urgency, almost picks up. It's not that it's -- it is on purpose, obviously, but these are the games where you can't get back. You lose one, that's it. That's your season. You go home.

During the conference you can't just, all right, let's just fix this mistake and go into the next game. These are the games you can't get back; it's one-and-done, which they completely understand and they're going to figure it out, obviously.

Throughout our practices, they understand our preparation is a little bit more intense because you can just be able to lose one game and be done.

I think we're just harping on that and remaining leaders and making sure they're an important part of this next game that we have. But they're really coachable, and they're starting to understand what's at stake.



Q. For Madison, Rori made the SEC all-defensive team. Describe for me her impact on the game defensively.

MADISON BOOKER: I mean, you see it. We all see it. She's definitely pressing off her feet. That's what gets our defense started. I think we're a great defensive team, honestly, and you talk about who's the impact, is Rori. Just the pressure she puts on the ball handler, just the passes she deflecting, just being in the help side, the steals she gets. I mean, so much to say. But wow.

Just her energy on that end, like, you don't see anybody exerting all that energy, and she wants to play defense.

A funny thing happened today in film. We were talking about who we might guard for tomorrow's game, and Rori wants the best player. Like, you don't see that a lot. She wants the best player. When she's not on the best player, she gets mad. You don't see that a lot. She wants to guard the best player. She wants the challenge.

Just that energy and just that mentality she has, it really just keeps this team going on defense because you don't want to see -- a lot of players don't want to play defense, and I was one of those players before.

But when I got here, seeing that she wants to play defense, man, I want to play defense now. So just that mentality she has, it really impacts the whole team wanting to get better at that end and be a great defensive team.

Q. Rori, Vic was talking about you guys could easily be the hunted in this thing as a 1 seed, but you need to be the hunter. You're a leader, you're the point. What does that mean to you, and do you look in the locker room and see a bunch of hunters?

RORI HARMON: Yeah, I like that he said that. Like yeah, we can easily be the hunted, which makes sense. Everyone wants to beat Texas or even that 1 seed. But we can't be victims. We have to go out and put our foot down and punch first, and that's when we start turning into hunters.

Yeah, we can't wait on anybody. We can't just be passive-aggressive. I think that's one of the things that we kind of harped on these last couple weeks of not playing a game. We just talked about, basically, just being aggressive, and I think that's kind of what we're trying to say as being hunters. But yes, we definitely are hunted quite a bit.

VIC SCHAEFER: First, I'm going to congratulate you and

thank you for your service to women's basketball. I know this is your final year.

THE MODERATOR: Of full-time employment.

VIC SCHAEFER: Thank you for all you've done for our great game, and hope you have a great -- if this is the last go-around for the NCAA Tournament, I hope you have a great experience here in Austin.

Just to start, I'd like to congratulate Coach Dickerson Davis and her team, as well as High Point. What a great game that was last night. Two teams that really competed at a very high level.

Again, I think y'all have heard me say this, my local media has heard me say this, the thing about this time of year is, you've got to get hot, and you've got to have a little luck. Well, man, William & Mary is really hot. They are playing so well. Coach has done a great job with them, her and her staff. They're playing at a very high level.

They have our attention.

I guess today we finally know who we're going to play, so we'll have a much more specific defensive practice today than we have had. We've had to kind of cover two different teams. I'll even go back to High Point, boy, they are way different than the team we saw last year in the Virgin Islands. Their coach and their staff have done a great job, I think, with their team and their program, as well.

For our kids, this is what we work for. What a great opportunity. So proud of them to be able to host, to play in front of our fans. I think I've been told we have 300 tickets left for tomorrow night, which is outstanding. Just want to praise our community and our people here at the University for their efforts in promoting and supporting our kids.

As I've said all along, if I can get you to come one time, I think you'll be back, and I think that's what's happened, especially with this team. They're such great kids. They have great personalities. They play the game the right way. They honor the game. They respect the game.

Again, the gauntlet that they've gone through, to be 31-3, I don't have time to pay attention to what everybody thinks. I get phone calls or texts all the time from friends going, well, so-and-so said this and so-and-so said that. I don't really have a lot of energy, time or effort to put any credence in that.

All I'm going to tell you is, I live in the Southeastern Conference. That is a really, really tough -- in my opinion, it's the biggest, baddest conference in the country. We

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

have to play the best of the best every night, and for us to survive that gauntlet and have gone through it the way that we've done it against some of the best players in all of college basketball, to be where we are, we've lost two games in the state of South Carolina and one game in overtime at Notre Dame, and I say that to say this: My kids are tough. I'm proud of them. I'm excited about the opportunity that we have.

They've worked really, really hard to get to this moment.

So, as I've tried to encourage them, you don't want to take things for granted. We've worked really hard to be in the position we're in. But now is the time to not lose focus.

I'm sure they'll be focused again today and very intentional with how we work out.

Q. You talked about you're going to have a defensive-specific practice today. Want to talk about Rori as a defender a little bit --

VIC SCHAEFER: Not bad, is she?

Q. Describe her for me as a defender and what she gives you game in and game out.

VIC SCHAEFER: I'm so glad you asked me that. She's up for the National Defensive Player of the Year. Again, not taking anything from anybody else in the country, but nobody -- I'm telling you, I look at this kid every day. I've coached some great, great players in my time, some great defenders. Rori Harmon is the best I've ever coached. She's not only great on the ball, she's a great help defender, and she's a great sealer. She takes away driving lanes while still being able to cover out on her own player.

I look at her every day, and again, I've had some really, really good defenders in my day, but she does so many things well.

Again, what she does on that end and the impact that she has on our team, she'll take a charge, she'll get run over by a freight train, but then she does what I want her to do on the other end, which is go run my team, make a big shot, make a great decision.

Again, I'm just telling you, she's really, really special. And she's really good. On the ball, off the ball, she's just got it all.

I know there's some really good defenders across the country, but man, I look at it every day. I'm telling you, she impacts our team on that end of the floor so well. And you know what? She does it because she plays her guts out.

Again, you show me somebody else that picks up 94 feet every night, does what she does, and then goes and runs their team on the other end and is accountable on that end for her coach and her team, and we can talk.

Q. You talked earlier on Selection Sunday about, we need to be the hunter in this thing because you're definitely going to be the hunted. Rori is a perfect example, her mentality, but when you're looking in your locker room, are you seeing a bunch of hunters when you start this thing?

VIC SCHAEFER: It's funny you asked that because my thought for the day today -- I pulled up a thing, and I closed it out with, we've got to get our edge back. I thought we lost our edge in the second quarter in the championship game, and we've got to have that hunter's mentality.

Again, I try to help them keep that. It's kind of what I feel like our job is as coaches, to keep that hunter's mentality. We know everybody is coming for us, but I think -- that's when I say you've got to keep an edge. That's the edge. The edge is, I'm coming for you. I am hunting you. I'm not on the defensive because you're coming after me.

I thought we got on our heels a little bit in that second quarter. Again, you have to give South Carolina credit because they can make you feel that way a little bit, and then have 14,000 people screaming at you, that'll get you even more on your heels.

But I think we've got to have that because, again, I don't have time to pay attention to all the pundits, but there's people that don't give us a snowball's chance in hell, and that's okay. I'm fine with that. I've kind of lived with that a lot.

But I want my kids to embrace that. I want them to have an edge and take it a little bit personal because it is for me.

Again, I know 31-3 in the Southeastern Conference with the schedule that we played in non-conference, you've got to give me a break.

Q. You only have three losses on the season. You can write the rest of the year off and have a bunch of success. How do you keep your players motivated to keep winning, keep pushing forward and drive through the tournament?

VIC SCHAEFER: Well, again, I think our kids see the bigger picture. I think they know we're after a really big fish right now, so to speak. We're not satisfied. My job is to help them not be satisfied if they're feeling that way.



Again, it is such a long, hard grind living in the league we live in, to go through the schedule we've gone through. It's easy right now to -- again, your friends are on spring break, they're skiing, they're at the beach. What are you doing? You're sitting here in Austin, Texas. You're practicing a couple hours a day. And then what? So it's easy to get in that -- for some of them. I'm not telling you all my kids are like that.

But I think for us, I think the overall mentality of my team right now is -- and I've tried to remind them of this every day for the last two weeks, we are good enough. Again, all it takes is one bad game. We had a bad game last year in the Elite 8. That's the worst we had played in a long time. Give NC State credit. I'm not taking anything from them. But we picked a bad game to shoot it bad. We had some really good looks in that game in the first half that we didn't make that we'd be making all year long. This is not the time of year to be playing bad.

If you do, you're going to get beat.

But so my message to them is, hey, we're good enough. It would be a shame to not give this our full attention right now, where your feet are, live right now in this tournament because this is not guaranteed.

I know we all take it for granted; it's what we've done. It's what we've done in the past. We've been here before, yada, yada, yada. It still doesn't matter. It's not guaranteed.

I think the crazy thing or one of the things you have to commend my team on is, it's two years in a row now that we've lost a starter. This year, we've lost potentially two starters in Laila and Aaliyah Moore. Last year, we lost Rori Harmon. Yet my team, our kids have been able to gather up and figure out a way, along with my staff, to go win 30-something games. That's crazy.

I'd like to get through a year with everybody intact just once before I decide not to do this anymore.

I'd just like to have my whole team that I start with in August, everybody together in April. But sometimes in athletics, this is what happens.

But that's what's crazy about these past two years, and so I'm ultra proud of them. You can tell, I get excited about this group. Again, we've got to go do it. You've got to go live it. Talking the talk and walking the walk is two different things. But I want them to embrace where they are right now because this is not a given.

Q. There was a period of time where the NCAA took the first two rounds away from campuses, put them at neutral sites. Obviously, it's back home now. With the interest and the popularity of women's basketball now, should the NCAA consider moving the first two rounds back to neutral sites?

VIC SCHAEFER: You know, it's been a while since we did that. I think by giving teams the reward of being able to host, I think we're in a good place with that. I would like to see us go back to four sites for the regionals.

Having eight teams at one place is problematic. We experienced that last year, from practice times available to shoot-around times available. When you've got eight people trying to run through there before that first game -- I would like to see us go back to regionals. Plus, I think then you can keep teams in their region a little bit. Right now, you've got them here and there. At least this year, we do have a semi-Midwest. It's a whole lot more Midwest than up in the east where you had West Coast and East Coast.

But again, if I had a vote, which I don't, and they're not calling me to ask, but if I had one, I would like to see us go back to four Sweet 16s, where you have four teams at a place.

But again, because of our sport and because there's so much attention and so much support for it right now, I think it's an evolving thing that they have to look at each and every year. I just like -- no, I'll leave it alone.

Q. I was just talking to Kyla in the locker room and she was telling me a couple years ago, she had a pretty serious health scare that changed her perspective. What do you see from her attitude and effort every day?

VIC SCHAEFER: You know, I went up to her yesterday and said, man, I am really glad you're here at Texas. Kyla, she's just a wonderful young lady. You look at her, you don't get to see what I get to see every day. She's got a personality. She's just a special kid.

You guys, all y'all see is that look that she's got when she's playing and on the floor. I see her a lot differently. I get to see her in so many different ways.

But I've told the story, she's the only kid I've ever recruited that asked me to work her out on her visit. She's just a special kid, man. I love her. Her teammates love her. She's becoming more and more comfortable as a vocal person.

I look for her next year to be one of our vocal leaders. The



thing about it is, she can back it up physically, too.

She's going to be great. By the time she gets out of here in another year, she's going to be another one that's going to go on and have a great career.

Q. Vic, in the LSU game here, Bry and Jordan came in and kind of gave the team a spark. Can you talk about the chemistry of those two and the fact that they're, like, best friends?

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, you know, those two are -- they're our energizer bunnies. If you pay attention over on the bench, they're living and dying over everything that happens on the floor with their teammates. They celebrate everything good over there. They are animated. They're such good teammates. They're the energizer bunnies.

They come in the game and usually change it. They make plays -- and the plays they make, y'all, Bryanna Preston, she's Rori on steroids when it comes to speed and quickness thing. I mean, Rori is really fast. Like, Preston is electric. That's how I describe those two.

You know, I just think that both of them have meant so much to the success of our program this year. They've provided depth that I haven't had my whole time here at guard. I've heard Coach Harston mention to me early on, back in the summer about, man, talking about Preston, man, that's your kind of guard, Vic.

Then, of course, Jordan Lee, when we were recruiting her, I knew she was way ahead of the curve defensively. She was a great help defender. She was really good on ball. She communicates. She talks.

So she provides that, that most freshmen don't do. They just don't -- they're not either confident in doing that or it's not something that they have a habit of doing. But Jordan did that in high school, and she brought that with her. She is a confident kid. She doesn't worry about whether that's cool or not. Kids hear me tell them all the time, hey, this ain't about being cool or playing cool. Cool don't win.

Man, both those kids have been so special and have added a really dynamic and necessary dimension to our team.

Again, to me that's our future. You start thinking about those two and Book, our guards for the future are really, really -- I think we're in a great place right now.

Again, those two kids are -- I don't want to say they're the class clowns, but they're a lot of fun to be around. They keep things loose.

I'm telling y'all, they got all the dance moves. Like, it is -- I told them this one time joking, like, if they ever take anybody with them to the club to dance, that'll be the last time anybody goes with them because those two ain't coming off the floor. By the time the 2:00 horn sounds and you've got to leave, they'll be wanting to stay, and the other person will be going, no, we have to go now, because they will absolutely wear them out.

They are just full of juice and energy. They're just a lot of fun to be around. They're great kids, and again, you have to give their parents credit. They come from wonderful families, absolutely wonderful, wonderful families, and that's why those kids are as solid as they can be.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.