

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Tennessee Tech vs South Carolina

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Columbia, South Carolina, USA

Colonial Life Arena

South Carolina Gamecocks

Coach Dawn Staley

Sania Feagin

Bree Hall

Media Conference

DAWN STALEY: Super excited to get things going. Excited to welcome I think three teams that have never played here. So I hope our fans give them an opportunity to experience what they give us every game that we play in Colonial Life Arena and create an incredible environment for some great teams that are here and for everyone to have a great time as we start this tournament off.

Q. Ladies, both touch on this. First year the women's tournament will get units, financial compensation that goes toward the school. As seniors, you didn't really get to partake in it. What do you think about the women's tournament getting that money to pay for mutual future NCAA games?

DAWN STALEY: This is going to be good. Go ahead.

BREE HALL: Wait, so we get money?

DAWN STALEY: Not NIL money.

BREE HALL: I don't know. I have no clue about that. I'm sorry.

DAWN STALEY: I got you, Dave.

Q. Bree, I know there is a long way to go, but at the end of it, if you guys come away with a third national championship, that is rarified air for a lot of people. Do you think about that?

SANIA FEAGIN: Yes. Well, I do. I think we both do. We were talking about it the other day. It was like just making



history would be like wonderful. We made history before. We can continue to make history.

Q. What's that like?

BREE HALL: It's very exciting. It's something that I have thought about, but I try to just keep my feet present and stay in the moment, not try to think too far ahead.

Q. Bree, for you specifically, Coach talked about how MiLaysia has been able to grow and mature over the past season. As a veteran guard, from your perspective where have you seen her grow the past this year?

BREE HALL: Oh, I definitely say her defense. It's been incredible. Her defense was all really good. To see some of the things she had to work on just grow especially helps our defense and things of that nature.

And I feel like she's really taken responsibility and asking questions how to improve in that part of her game.

Q. Bree, where did the Seat Belt Gang come from, and who came up with the handshake for it?

BREE HALL: I don't know if you guys seen the handshakes me and Raven do. I'd say she kind of created the name honestly.

Q. Bree, offensively you guys have been seeing a lot more man to man this year; a lot less zone. As a shooter from the perimeter, what does that look like going through your progression and getting ready to take shots? Is it any different getting ready to take a shot, open look, just shooting the basketball man to man versus the zone like you saw last year?

BREE HALL: Can you ask that question again?

Q. Yeah, is it any different when you see a zone look on offense, like the other team is in zone versus man to man, does that change anything about how you're shooting the basketball?



BREE HALL: Yeah, it's a different look. You feel like you have to get your feet set faster to get the shot off.

Yeah, I don't know. I'm sorry. I don't really know how to answer that question.

DAWN STALEY: Does your mentality change when you prepare for man and zone?

BREE HALL: No. (Smiling.) No.

Q. I was just wondering, have you guys noticed a change in energy on the campus as the university has been preparing for such a big event?

BREE HALL: Yeah, I'll go first. Yes. It's so nice like how the students treat us and how other people that might just be walking on campus treat us. I was getting a tropical smoothie the other day and someone walked in and was like, good luck in the tournament. Oh, my God, like thank you.

It's so a nice. Everybody is really cheering for us and rooting for us. Having that love from not only the students but people walking on campus is incredible.

SANIA FEAGIN: I agree. I mean, yeah. (Smiling.) She said everything.

Q. I was wondering for Sania, this year how has your approach changed to the game and how has that impacted the team?

SANIA FEAGIN: I say my approach changed as in just staying help side, being coachable, and playing defense using my feet, my voice, as well, to help me teammates.

Just staying disciplined, because blocks can lead to fouls. So just being disciplined.

Q. Is there anything different about approaching this tournament as a senior, and is there anything you can take from when you were freshmen or sophomores and defending champions and try to win back to back?

BREE HALL: That's a great question. The biggest thing is people are going to come for our necks and we have to be prepared for every game. We cannot take any breaks. Everybody is coming for the same thing. We also have a bigger target on our back because we won last year, and going back to back would be a very big deal.

SANIA FEAGIN: I agree. Take one game at a time.

Q. What do you think the other teams will see here in

Columbia that he may not see from fans in their home college Towns?

SANIA FEAGIN: Great environment. I mean, the energy, the atmosphere. I mean, our fans, they love us. Great environment.

BREE HALL: She said it. (Smiling.)

Q. Dawn, just curious about the wholesome moment you had with Kim over Twitter and the name plates with Champ and everything. I know you replied to her initial tweet. Just thoughts on that? Did it take you by surprise? How did that come to be?

DAWN STALEY: It did, but it didn't. I think as dog lovers, I think their pets come first, just like Champ. Any time that you can provide a cool -- I think it was pretty cool gesture. I know Kim. I've known her for a long time. She's coached in this league.

I'm super happy for her and I'm over the top that she would extend such a nice gift to my boy. (Smiling.)

Q. Dawn, you mentioned it before, but now that's it's here, how exciting is it to know that you will be doing something to constantly give back to the school for financials?

DAWN STALEY: Yeah, it's exciting. Never in my career did I think we would get to this place. I think a lot happened to get here and got here a lot quicker than probably most people wanted, so I think it's pretty cool.

I think the numbers reflect where we are today; I hope they don't reflect where we are in five, ten years. Because we know that that part of it, that part of it allows you to be a sport and not a sport that is always in the red, pulling on the budget always.

So I think it's a great start. I think it's a great start, but it's surely not a great finish. It's a great start.

Q. Dawn, this class, the possibility of winning three titles, that's immortal type stuff. What do you think about that? Do you think that they get all the accolades that are due because of all the people who have been involved?

DAWN STALEY: I think it's super cool. I never really thought about it. I didn't until you asked the question because we stay present.

But to think about them being able to do something that no other class has ever done, it would be them. It would them

because I do believe that this class sacrificed the most of all of them.

But because of their sacrifice, they put us in the position to make history. You know, I love this class for that. They don't get the credit. They don't get the individual credit that they deserve. Don't get the national credit they deserve.

But they get the national spotlight because they win. They are winners through and through. I don't think there is another class within the past, I don't know, ten years maybe, maybe eight -- I'll go eight -- that's won two national championships, let alone three, or the possibility of winning three.

Q. Going into this game, Tennessee Tech have had their 17-game win streak. You're coming off the SEC Championship. How do you prepare, and what have you told your players about the last time South Carolina played Tennessee Tech in the tournament when they won?

DAWN STALEY: Child, I didn't talk about that. (Smiling.) Great history. I mean, we are creatures of habit in how we prepare. So whether we're preparing for Tennessee Tech or preparing for Texas in a championship game and the SEC tournament doesn't change. We go through all of the things that we feel will put us in the position to win basketball games. All the things that could put us in a position to lose basketball games we're prepared for.

So we are fortunate that we're playing at home and there will be a lot of Gamecock fans in the stands that will help us, energize us. Although you don't really need energy, but it's good to be in this position at home where we lead the nation in attendance year in and year out.

Looking forward to the challenge. Very good Tennessee Tech team that is hot. A 17-game win streak is a lot. They got some momentum coming in. We got some momentum coming in. I hope our habits are displayed and executed much longer than theirs.

Q. You mentioned being present a second ago. Can you expand on how that thinking helps you guys this time of year?

DAWN STALEY: I think we always stay present. We do. Like, I mean, we been very fortunate to have just a team full of players that they don't get too high with the highs or low with the lows. They just really stay right here.

I mean, that's what they show me. I don't know what they're doing in their private time. That doesn't seep out in how we need to perform and prepare.

We've always been that way. I think they take our lead as a staff because we're not thinking about Sunday. We're thinking about Friday and what we need to take in on Friday.

Q. Dawn, I know the last few years we've been talking a lot about how the men's tournament -- women's tournament could be more like the men's tournament. Seems like the first two rounds for the women is a really incredible perk that you can have on your campus. What do you say when people talk about, well, we should go to all neutral sites like the men do?

DAWN STALEY: I think it's up for conversation, but you also have to look at what we're doing on our campuses. If there is bad attendance on campuses in the first and second round, probably won't -- people won't want to move to neutral sites. But we were charged with bringing more people on our campus in seats, and then you're rewarded.

Something you can control. You can control for the most part putting together a schedule that will put you in a position to be a top 16 seed. I think that in itself during the season is something that you can control. And you're rewarded in that way. I think for us and women it's more about what you can control versus what you give to someone else.

Because when you give to someone else, they may have an ulterior motive that doesn't benefit the game. I'm happy about that. I'm always willing to discuss anything that will help our game grow.

Q. Dawn, you talked about MiLaysia's growth and maturation at length. Curious with the tournament specifically, maybe a difference how she's approaching this tournament compared to last year?

DAWN STALEY: I think this year she looks more seasoned. She is a much better practice player than she ever was last year. She is a lot more locked into what needs to be done, just the nuances of what needs to be done, how she needs to improve.

She's done that. Breezy just spoke on the defensive side of the ball. I think just overall preparation, overall just being more willing to listen and grow. I think that's her biggest growth, is listening, growing, trying to figure it out. And not to be perfect.

It's not to do it right once or twice. It is her wanting to do that, her thirst for wanting to do that is where her biggest growth has taken place.

Q. Coach, how impactful is it to have assistant coaches beside you on the bench when it comes to tournament time?

DAWN STALEY: Yeah, we got a lot of assistant coaches. We been afforded to have five other assistant coaches, and for me, probably, I mean, all but two of them have more experience than I do as a coach. Maybe three now. Three now.

So I think it's pretty cool to have seasoned coaches on your bench that really understand what's needed. And they all have input. We all have knock-out, drag-outs about how we need to prepare for a certain team and things we need to do it execute in order to win.

I think it's pretty cool. I think our staff has probably been the difference maker. We have great continuity. Had that for years. It helps us in these types of situations where you're going into the NCAA tournament.

Q. Just driving throughout campus and the town you can see signs everywhere in support of the Gamecocks for this weekend. How else have you seen support from the town besides just fan excitement and fan coming to cheer them on?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, to be honest, that's what it's about, is the fans feeling like there is an NCAA tournament going on. I mean, I try to walk, get my walk in, and I walk through campus and I'm amazed at how many students come up to me and tell me that their mom loves me or dad loves me. It's cool to see their parents involved in what's happening on their child's campus.

So I think it's pretty cool.

And for the fact it's women's basketball, that's a pretty cool dynamic to what was happening here on our campus, in and around the city. This is the place to be when there is a women's basketball game. This is the place to be. It's going to be the place to be on Friday night or Friday morning and afternoon. Friday afternoon.

It's going to be the place to be and people are setting their schedules up for games that are going to be played here. People are coming into Columbia, South Carolina and they're giving our city all the hotels and all the restaurants an opportunity to see how special this place is.

And make some money. (Smiling.)

Q. You have become a fashion icon on the court. You show up in Paris. Did you go to some fashion shows?

DAWN STALEY: I did, yeah.

Q. How much do you enjoy that? How much input do people give you into what to wear? Do your players have suggestions about that? How does it feel being an icon like that?

DAWN STALEY: Well, last summer was probably the first time that I was a part of like fashion shows. I would see them on social media, television, just like, okay, that's cool. But when you're there and you see the energy and you feel the energy, I mean, I enjoyed it. I really, really enjoyed it.

No one helps me get dressed. I got people that send me stuff.

BREE HALL: I styled you like two weeks ago. You forgot.

DAWN STALEY: Short memory. So I mean, I dress for comfort. Anything I wear I'm comfortable, like I could probably have on the entire day. So it's more geared to comfort. I'm so glad I don't have to wear heels anymore. I am so glad, like. So, yeah.

Q. Other players are excited for the atmosphere and environment here. Do you think Columbia is reaching -- can be compared to Storrs as the women's basketball capital of the country?

DAWN STALEY: Be careful about what I say here. I mean, we have led the nation in attendance for the past ten years. Like it's not even close. Not even close. We have had a tremendous amount of success over the past ten years.

To answer your question, I think this is a pretty cool city that people will want to come and enjoy themselves. And not just our basketball game, which they do, but when you come here and walk around our city, see the restaurants, I think it's Southern comfort. It really is Southern comfort.

I don't know who deemed who the basketball capital of the world, but if we're not in the conversation, you haven't visited.

Q. Building off the last question, there hasn't been a back-to-back win since 2016 when UConn won. How do you think a back-to-back win would secure South Carolina as a legacy team?

DAWN STALEY: I think we created a legacy already, whether we win this one or not. I think it's going to go down in history as our team, our program has done things that programs haven't done in a very long time during the

most competitive -- like this is the most competitive that women's basketball has been in a long time.

There is a lot of parity within our game.

But for us to be able to have won three in the past seven, eight years, that doesn't happen a whole lot. UConn is in a class by itself. I don't ever think that's going to be matched no matter what era we're in.

But since we're in this era, I could probably say what we've done over the past eight years won't be done again. So we're just going to compare eras, and I do think if this senior class is able to do what we all are planning to do, which is win another one, yes, it's even more of a legacy in our game.

Q. Going back to the fashion icon question, do you pick your outfits ahead if you do? Can we expect to see any of the Together merchandise? I know they previously had the South Carolina colored shirts.

DAWN STALEY: I haven't picked my outfit out for tonight. It's funny. Somebody just asked me this. I will try on an outfit. If it's really nice, I might save it for a later round. Sometimes. Sometimes I haven't been able to wear them because we don't advance.

But I have quite a few just ideas. I can't wait until the season is over because I can clean my closet. It's not in a good position right now, like really.

So, yeah, so I don't have it yet. Not yet.

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