

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

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Columbia, South Carolina, USA

Colonial Life Arena

Tennessee Tech Golden Eagles Coach Kim Rosamond

Anna Walker

Peyton Carter

Media Conference

Q. They went 26-5 overall during the season, 18-2 in the Ohio Valley Conference. They were the OVC regular season and tournament champions. Joined today by head coach Kim Rosamond and student-athletes Anna Walker and Peyton Carter. Coach, if you would, please make an opening statement.

COACH ROSAMOND: Yeah, I want to go ahead and get this out of the way really quick so I don't have to answer any more questions about it. Due to their high-demand media requests these days, Dolly and Dean will not be attending the press conference. They weren't able to come to Columbia. So we're going to let Champ have his day. Dean was looking forward to marking his territory, but we're going to let Champ have his day.

No, seriously -- great to be in Columbia, excited to be on this stage with our two fifth-year seniors, Anna Walker and Peyton Carter. Proud of everything that we have accomplished thus far in this season. It's been a historic season at Tennessee Tech, and there's a lot of history at Tennessee Tech in women's basketball. I'm really proud of what this team has accomplished; seventeen straight wins. And, you know, in order for us to get here, you not only have to have a great regular season, you've got to go win the tournament, and that's a hard thing to do. And what these kids have accomplished, it's hard to do. And so, very, very proud of them. We understand the challenge ahead, and understand the assignment ahead. We understand what a great opponent we're going to be facing tomorrow at 4 p.m., but we are also excited, and we embrace the opportunity.



Q. For Peyton and Anna, I mean, what is this like? And how do you keep yourselves calm and focused at this moment, knowing you're going up against the defending national champions?

ANNA WALKER: First off, like you said, we're really excited, and this is a huge stage for us, and we're just pumped for the opportunity that we have at hand. And I think just looking around the room and just going back and just knowing that we're playing for each other is what keeps us calm.

PEYTON CARTER: Yeah, I think too, we have great leaders on this team -- myself, Anna, Reghan Grimes, Reagan Hurst. We've kind of been here before -- different team, different time a couple of years ago -- but we've been here before, and we're excited. Our team has worked really hard to get to this point. So, we are making sure everyone -- we're all excited, but, you know, stay calm, do our thing, and just have fun and embrace the moment.

Q. What does it mean to this team that the Cookeville community has bought into you guys? Like, 20 wins, 17 wins straight, and it seems like they're coming out to support. What does that mean to this team?

PEYTON CARTER: When we get recruited to come to Tennessee Tech, they tell us that the community is like no other. And you hear about it, but once you get there -- and I mean, I've been there for Cookeville for five years -- you really feel it. It's just a staple for Tennessee Tech, the community, everybody around it, alums. It's just such a family. And we always -- we travel big, we travel loud -- and it's just awesome to have that support.

ANNA WALKER: Yeah, our community is everything, we have a Hall of Famer sitting here with us right now, but I think just the support that we have and just seeing this past week how many people have showed up for us, supported us -- just through the Selection Show, winning the championship last week -- it's been really awesome. It just makes you feel a lot of gratitude for where you're at.

Q. For both -- you mentioned how you guys have been



here before. You were in the tournament a couple of years ago. How do you kind of take positives from that experience and try to apply them to this game tomorrow?

ANNA WALKER: Yeah, I think that, like Peyton said, four of us, including the coaching staff, we've been here before, so we know how loud it's going to be. We know the excitement of how we're going to feel whenever we step on that court. But like we said in a past question, just staying calm -- that's going to be something really huge for us tomorrow.

PEYTON CARTER: Yeah, a couple of us have experienced this before, so we understand. And even, you know, before conference gets going, we play bigger schools, I would say, and we've played against that pace. The difference between mid-major and Power Four. But yeah, we -- you know, the pace is different, but we're just going to play our game. We just keep reminding each other what makes us go, what makes us good, what has been our -- what's gotten us to 17-0 right now. So we just got to stick to that, and we'll be fine.

Q. For both of y'all -- obviously, you're aware of the attendance records that South Carolina brings in, in the environment. But what advantages does it have being the team that isn't playing in front of a home court, obviously, in the NCAA opener?

PEYTON CARTER: Well, I mean, I guess we're the 16-seed coming in and playing the 1, so we understand what that is just in itself, but it's pretty cool. The Hooper Eblen Center holds a lot of people too, and we've packed that place pretty good. But yeah, this is going to be awesome. We've practiced all week with crowd noises in practice, so we try to prepare for that. But yeah, this is going to be a great test for us. You know how we are -- we are such a connected team on the court anyway. So this will be awesome for us to just, stick together, and huddle, and eye contact, and everything, will be big, but we're excited for it.

ANNA WALKER: Yeah, I think the opportunity is really awesome. Like, we're getting to play against the defending national champions, so that's not something a lot of people get to say. So I think that we understand that moment, and we understand and kind of know what to expect going in tomorrow, but, yeah, the attendance record -- there's really nothing else you can say about it. But it's going to be really awesome, and we're excited.

Q. This team -- obviously something changed when 2024 turned into 2025. Seventeen straight wins, zero losses at home. What can you say about that change?

What led to this successful season?

ANNA WALKER: Yeah, I think that we kind of had a come-to-Jesus moment on January 9, and we all kind of realized, okay, we all need to get on the same page. We all knew we were bought in, but we knew that it was going to take another step for us to get to what we wanted in the end, and ultimately, that was a championship.

But I think our practices changed, our focus on the mission changed, and I think that's what ultimately led us to where we are now.

PEYTON CARTER: Yeah, I think too, we had a lot of new faces on our team, and it takes a while to get the camaraderie right within the team. And, we had a couple of really good games in the beginning, then we would have, you know, the heartbreaker -- just a gut-wrenching loss. And then we'd have a few good wins. And then we had that last one against EIU, yeah. And like Anna said, we sat together -- yes, as a team, but just as us players -- and we looked at each other in the eyes, and we know in that locker room how much talent we have. But we knew that we needed to hold ourselves and each other accountable because we had such great potential, as you can see, where we are now. So we just had to be able to look at each other in the eye and be like, I'm going to give it all for you. I know what I need to do, what my role is on the team, and we all just completely bought into each other. And, like you say -- when teams go far, it's because they don't want to quit playing with each other. And that's really what this team stands for right now.

Q. For both the players -- you guys talked about your success, 17 wins to close out the season. Describe the mindset it takes going against a team like South Carolina to channel that success and bring it into the NCAA Tournament and play free and loose. What type of mindset does that take?

PEYTON CARTER: It's important to know that we know what leads us to success. Our formula for success is what we call it. So we knew coming into this tournament that we're playing with the best of the best here. This is what this tournament is about. So we knew we were going to get matched up with a good team, and to be able to say we're playing against South Carolina -- this is an amazing opportunity. But, we want to stick to our formula and do what we do -- and what we do, we do at an elite level. And when we come out with that, just stick together, do our formula, play with each other, and play for each other. And that's what we can control.

ANNA WALKER: I think our biggest thing is just staying true to who we are. And I think that's what has brought us



to this moment -- so why would we shy away from it now? And I think that coming in tomorrow, we don't need to come in with our heads down. We need to play with confidence still, no matter who we're playing. And I think that, like Peyton said, just stick to our formula. Obviously, it's got us to where we are.

Q. Obviously, it's been a little while since Tennessee Tech played South Carolina. 1989, I believe. Have you guys talked at all as a team, just out of curiosity, about what went right that game, or things to do, or anything like that?

ANNA WALKER: No we haven't. We just try to focus on the moment now and just kind of what we've done this season. I think last time they played them, it was a whole lot different, so there's not much that's the same anymore. So no, we haven't.

PEYTON CARTER: Yeah, as said, we have not talked about it.

We saw it, but we have not talked about it.

Q. You're both fifth-year student-athletes. Talk about the decision you guys had, especially the era of the transfer portal, to come back and represent the university another year.

PEYTON CARTER: Like I said in the earlier question, Tennessee Tech, the community, the coaching staff, the team, Mark Wilson -- everybody affiliated with Tennessee Tech -- it's just, it's a family. And I think the COVID year is amazing -- how awesome we got another opportunity to play the sports we love with the people we love. But yeah, we won our conference, and we had an extra year. Last year, it didn't end the way we wanted it to end. We were kind of unsatisfied, and Anna and I were kind of like, we gotta run it back, we gotta come back and do it again. And so it's just been -- it's been awesome. No regrets. We've had an amazing year with an amazing team, and I'm just very grateful to be here.

ANNA WALKER: Yeah, this program has absolutely changed my life. I mean, you look around at the people that are in this room, the girls that are in that locker room -- I would not trade this year for anything in the world. So just being able to, again, like Peyton said, have that extra year to come back and play -- we weren't satisfied with how it ended last year, and we didn't want to end our basketball career on that. So why would we not come back to this awesome program with these awesome coaches and great people in the locker room?

Q. This team's scoring is all very balanced. How does

that make this team difficult to beat in the tournament, and also different from previous teams from Tennessee Tech?

ANNA WALKER: Yeah, I think that it can be someone different any given night, and I think that we have proved that all year long. But that's something different -- I haven't really been a part of a team like that before. So it's been really cool to see just the selflessness that has come from that. I don't care if I have 20 points or zero, just as long as the team wins. And I think that just goes back to the buy-in of what we want to accomplish. And I mean, it proves it.

PEYTON CARTER: I think too, a lot of the tougher teams -- the scout as a defensive end -- are teams that are, you know, kind of evenly distributed, about 6, 7 players. And so that's us. I think literally what Anna said, any given night, any given quarter, it could be anybody's quarter, and that's how we stand out. And like Anna said, we're a very selfless team. We fuel off the defensive end. We always count stops and not scores, and that leads to a fast-paced offense. And it's fun to play fast-paced when, you know, it could be anybody's night, and we always find the hot hand. It's fun to hype up a teammate who's hot that night. And even if I'm hot one night on a Thursday, Saturday could be Anna's night. And it's the most fun thing -- everybody's bought in, our bench, coaches -- everybody. It's just so fun to have a team of such selflessness.

Q. Kim, for you -- earlier today, Dawn was kind of talking about how she's known you for a while. I know that you spent some time at Vanderbilt and that you played at Ole Miss. I'm just curious about your relationship and kind of how it led to, you know, sending the nameplate.

COACH ROSAMOND: Yeah, well, 19 years in the SEC. Obviously five of those were as a player at Ole Miss. And, Dawn and I are close to the same age. Dawn was leaving Virginia when I was coming into Ole Miss, so I never got to play against her. But she was someone -- I sure won't sit up here and say I modeled my game after her, because I was nowhere near the player that she was. But what I loved about Dawn was her toughness, the way she led her teams. And she was always -- you know, we didn't have the media coverage back then that we do now. So you might get one or two games a year where you get to watch, but I can remember watching Dawn coming out of high school, and the admiration that I always had for her.

And then, obviously, she went on to a long career as a pro, and then went to Temple. And then when she came here to South Carolina, I was an assistant at Vanderbilt at the time with Melanie Balcomb, who came and worked with Dawn during her national championship -- I think the first national

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championship in 2017. And from the first year, obviously, she had to revamp that roster. And back in those days, it took you three and four years to do that. There was no such thing as a transfer portal. But what struck me that first year that she came and took over -- they were riddled with injuries. I think she only had five or six kids down the stretch that were even able to play. But just how tough they were -- even though, maybe the talent was nowhere near what it is right now -- the toughness and the discipline were already there from the get-go, and you knew it was going to be special.

And what I love so much about what they've done now is -- I think they've done it, as well or better than anybody right now. Taking modern-day basketball, the speed, the size, the skill, the transfer portal. And NIL -- I mean, that's something you have to manage every single day -- but still blending it with the honor of the old-school toughness and discipline.

I love the way their teams play. I love the way they honor the game. I love the way they respect the game. I love the way they respect the opponent. So, I've known Lisa for a long, long time. You know, if we have a common opponent, Lisa is always someone that I'll call and get advice from. When you're in the hiring process, who better to call than those guys? So just tremendous respect on my end for what Dawn and her staff have built here.

Q. Yeah, yeah. First of all, welcome to Columbia. I just kind of wanted to ask you -- what have Anna and Peyton kind of meant to your program, not just this year, but collectively as a whole during their time?

COACH ROSAMOND: Well, I think there was a question earlier I wanted to jump in on, but I didn't. You know, they asked about the difference this year. And these two sitting right here by me -- these are two of the reasons why. There were about three or four more in that locker room that I would have loved to bring up here with me. And I also want to mention Reghan Grimes and her leadership. But the leadership that Anna Walker and Peyton Carter have given this team -- you know, as a coach, you can only lead when people want to follow and when people buy in. And it started with these two guys. And it started when they were on the bus home last year -- I think it was, I've kind of forgotten the date now, but I think it was somewhere around March 8th or 9th. And we had just lost in the quarterfinals of the OVC tournament. Like they said, it was a disappointing year, and it was disappointing for me anytime you feel like your team underachieves, that's your responsibility as a coach. But we had won it the year before, had a lot of talent back, and I just wasn't able to press the right buttons. But when these guys committed to coming back, I knew -- we would have a chance. And then,

with Reghan Grimes and Reagan Hurst -- you know, we lost a big piece of our team with Reagan Hurst when she went down in October, but her leadership has still really been solid. But the leadership within our locker room has been special.

And I've coached for 25 years now, and been part of an SEC championship, two Sweet Sixteens, a lot of NCAA Tournaments. But I don't know that I've ever had two better leaders than what I have sitting up here with me right now. And you guys just heard them, you know. And I know you understand why. So the leadership, number one. The unselfishness of this basketball team has been really, really special. Like Peyton said, we've got six players that average in double figures, and nobody cares who gets theirs on any given night. This team in an era where, with social media, it's all about them, but to get a group of young women to prioritize winning above everything else -- you know how rare that is. And this team has done it as well as any team that I've ever been part of.

Q. Kim, you've mentioned South Carolina's toughness, their discipline, their skill. I'm sure at this point, you've watched reams of film to prepare for this game. How do you start to break them down?

COACH ROSAMOND:

Well, I think, you just said it -- that's how you have to approach it.

We're reading a book together, *The Obstacle Is the Way*. It's a great book, and there are a lot of life lessons in it. And one of the things it talks about is an algebra equation. And I don't know about you guys, but I hate math, and it is overwhelming to me. And so when I look at an algebra equation, it's like, Oh, my goodness. But you learn to break it down, right? You learn to break it down in parts, and that's what we've got to do. We can't look at it as a 40-minute assignment. We understand that it is, but we've got to break it down into eight five-minute segments and focus on those first five minutes. And it's like our head football coach, Bobby Wilder. He was the head coach at Old Dominion, who upset Virginia Tech. Think back in the 2016-17 season, and Virginia Tech was, I think, in the top 10. It was a huge upset, you know. And Bobby said, You got to treat it like a heavyweight match and just break it up. And that's what we're going to do, you know. You hang in, and in those first couple of rounds, you don't get knocked out. You've got to avoid getting knocked out in those first couple of rounds. I have full confidence that our kids are going to come in, and they've not backed down from a challenge all year. And we understand who they are, but we also understand who we are. And we can't forget that -- we talked about that this morning. We can't walk in here

and let the crowd make us forget who we are. You know, let South Carolina and their talent and how good they are make us forget who we are. And we've got to take it and break it down in those eight five-minute segments and be us as much as we can be tomorrow.

Q. You just talked about *The Obstacle Is the Way*. Is that something that the whole team is reading? Was that kind of a team event thing, or was that something that you personally just pushed?

COACH ROSAMOND: No, it's the whole team. In fact, managers, everybody's reading it. That is part of who our program is, part of who we are. Obviously, we get to teach basketball, but most of all, we get to teach life lessons through basketball. And so, teaching our young women -- you know, this is just a preface to their life, you know? I mean, that's the great thing about sports -- you learn how to handle adversity. You learn how to overcome challenges. You learn how to buy into something that is bigger than yourself. And I actually started reading that book right around the time of our last loss at Eastern Illinois. And just, there were some things that we needed to overcome, some obstacles in our way that we had to overcome to become champions. It's my job to guide the ship. I don't -- I hadn't made a bucket all year. I hadn't made a steal all year. I hadn't made a rebound all year.

It's these young women that have gotten us to where we are, but it is also my job to help guide them when those moments get tough and to prepare them. And that's what I've got to do for tomorrow. Yeah, look -- basketball, we make it hard, but it's really simple, you know? We've got to defend, we've got to rebound, and we've got to take care of the basketball. Now, that's going to be much harder tomorrow than, probably, than it's been all season, you know. But we've got to just make sure mentally that they understand and they're ready to embrace that moment. So when we do get in that -- basketball is a game of runs. South Carolina is going to have runs. We plan to have runs tomorrow as well. But when those runs do come, you can't let your emotions get the best of you. Your feelings will lie to you. And so, we've got to make sure that we have prepared them for when those moments come and that they're ready to meet the moment.

Q. Hey, so, obviously, you talked about -- you've known Coach Staley for a while, her dogs, everything like that. Here in Columbia now, in the place that Coach Staley has coached all her games for the past 15 years, have you seen Columbia become a mecca of women's basketball, similar to how Storrs has been seen the past decade or two?

COACH ROSAMOND: No question. No question. And

look, I've been -- I've been really fortunate to be in this game, you know? I don't think I'm old enough yet to call myself a lifer, but I'm getting there. But I've been in this game at this level since I was 18 years old. And I grew up in the 80s. I played college basketball in the 90s.

And when you talk about the 90s -- and I was in the SEC for a real long time -- you talk about Tennessee and Pat Summitt and what they did. And then, you go to the 2000s and UConn, and what they did and obviously, what they're continuing to do. But, what Dawn has done over the last six to ten years is absolutely incredible. And, you know -- I'm not real sure when this building opened. I was trying to think when we pulled up here today. I believe that -- what was it, 2000? Yeah, 2000, yes. So I've obviously played here. But, to pull into this building and walk in and to see, and I know tomorrow it's going to be electrifying.

I know Terry and Indiana are here with us. And two years ago, we were at Assembly Hall, and I remember -- I've had a lot of moments in this game as a player and assistant coach, obviously playing at Tennessee, we played at UConn in the NCAA Tournament when Breanna Stewart was a freshman, and they were undefeated. And what an incredible environment that was. Indiana was an incredible environment. I haven't been back to this environment since it has become what it has become over the course of the last six to seven years. But I watch it on TV, and I have enough friends in the SEC that are still coaching that, you know, all tell me what an electrifying atmosphere this is and how exciting it's going to be to be part of that tomorrow. Yeah. But I was also struck -- you mentioned Columbia. Columbia has grown a lot since I was here nine or ten years ago.

But that is also what sports and a university can do for a community. And that is what Dawn and women's basketball has done for Columbia, has done for South Carolina, but has also done for the game of women's basketball. Dawn has now become the torchbearer, so to speak, for the college game. It's been really cool to watch her grow and embrace that over the years as well as we've lost some legends in our game -- obviously losing Pat and then Tara retiring, and several more that have stepped away from the game. Dawn's doing it as well as anybody in the game today.

Q. Sort of going exactly off of that -- you've talked about -- and there's obviously a lot more expansion of women's basketball. Now there's more eyes, you know, the units coming into play this year. How have you just sort of managed conversations -- whether that's with your team or just with peers -- when conversations about women's basketball in 2025 are brought up but sort of ignoring the history? You talk about basketball

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in the 80s and 90s -- sort of the foundational pieces that a lot of people who are just tuning in don't really know but are essential when looking at the present and the future.

COACH ROSAMOND: Well, we don't ignore the history. We talk about the history of our game weekly within our program, because it is so special to me. I wouldn't be sitting here today if there were not people that blazed a trail before us. One of those is in the room right now. Dr. Dianne Murphy, who was a longtime athletic director in Division I athletic director at Denver, at Columbia. We were just sitting at dinner talking last night. And look at the Ivy League getting three teams in. And Dr. Murphy played a huge part in that. And so we got to sit and talk for 45 minutes, you know. And she was telling me about, when the athletic directors of the Ivy League got together and made a commitment and decided that they were going to make a change and move the needle forward. So it's women like that that love this game. And again, they're lifers, and they've given so much to this game that young women like Anna and Peyton, and older women like myself, get to sit up here and now enjoy the platform that we're playing on. So I think it is so important. I talked about my job as a coach, guiding the ship, but it's also my job as a coach and a woman and a professional that loves women's basketball to keep paying it forward and passing down those history lessons to make sure those that came before us are never forgotten.