

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Southern U. vs South Carolina

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Columbia, South Carolina, USA

Colonial Life Arena

Southern U. Jaguars Coach Carlos Funchess

D'Shantae Edwards

Jocelyn Tate

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Next up are the Southern University Jaguars. They went 20-13 this season, 12-6 in the Southwestern Athletic Conference. They were the SWAC Tournament champions. They are the 16 seed in the Sacramento 4 Regional.

Joined today by head coach Carlos Funchess and student-athletes D'Shantae Edwards and Jocelyn Tate. Coach, if you would, please, make an opening statement.

CARLOS FUNCHESS: Well, we're just excited about coming out last night and getting a win and advancing in the tournament, you know, getting to stay a couple extra days right now so we're excited about it.

Q. Jocelyn, this question is for you. You're one of the first -- you guys, as a team, are the first team, HBCU team to make it to the tournament twice to get two wins. How are you feeling right now going into this? This is your second tournament. This is your fourth game in the tournament so you're probably one of the most experienced players in HBCU on the NCAA Tournament so just give us a little bit of feedback on that.

JOCELYN TATE: I'm excited to continue to show how much heart we put into the season. Me and my teammates, we worked for like. Like you said, a couple of us do have some experience with playing these games inside the tournament so we're looking forward to going out tomorrow and having fun and showing how much work we put in.

Q. For either of you, what did you like about the win



against Samford and what is something that you can take from that win and translate into tomorrow night.

D'SHANTAE EDWARDS: I would say how we played as a team. I think we started off with all the nerves. I feel like all of us were nervous playing on a bigger stage. Once we settled in, we really got to see how well we gelled together as a team on defense and on offense how we shared the ball. I think that was the most exciting part from yesterday.

JOCELYN TATE: Yeah, just to piggyback off what she said, once we got all the nerves out, it was really easy to just play together and do what we've been doing since the beginning of the season. I think we just need to continue that into the next game.

Q. Jocelyn, I mean, you guys won an NCAA Tournament game last year, you won one this year. That's got to be pretty special. There are not a lot of programs out there that say they've got back-to-back seasons with an NCAA Tournament win.

JOCELYN TATE: Yes, sir, I think it shows how great Southern is, from the coaching staff and the people they recruit, my teammates, everybody. We work hard. We worked for this. It just goes to show how much hard work we put in and that we want this bad. And like you said, it's hard to win a championship as it is so I think that go back-to-back is really special and it shows how special of a group we are.

Q. What did y'all do after the game? Talk to me about the excitement, the celebration. I heard the noise.

JOCELYN TATE: We actually stayed in the locker room for a pretty -- like a long time, just being happy. We actually got a give a Dawn, I think we -- we were just excited. A lot of smiles going on. But, yeah.

D'SHANTAE EDWARDS: Yeah, we did stay in the locker room for a long time. Personally I did not get out of my uniform until like last-minute because honestly that was my last time being in a white jersey but we were just so excited. We were doing TikToks. We got the gift from Dawn. I just know we were living in the moment, honestly.



Q. She said that you were all, as a team, impressed with how good she smelled. Can you describe how she smelled?

JOCELYN TATE: As soon as she got in the room, I want to say the whole room smelled like Dawn. All of my teammates just kind of noticed that so we told her.

D'SHANTAE EDWARDS: I don't know. I was hugging her so much. I just kept smelling it. I kept going back for more hugs, too. I was like wow, she smells really good. I at the present time telling her, so.

Q. Can you describe what it meant to you all to have Dawn Staley address you all in the hotel a document days ago?

D'SHANTAE EDWARDS: I think it shows how good of a person she is. It's not just about basketball. She knows what being in an HBCU is like. She knows where it comes from the bottom to go to the top. I feel like she knows the ground, knows the work. I feel like her coming and giving us words of encouragement meant a lot as a team and honestly meant a lot to me as a person because it's bigger than the game for her. It's about growth as a player. It's about growth as a person and you can see that when she was talking to us, so, yeah, that's how I felt.

JOCELYN TATE: I agree. I think a lot of me and my teammates, we look up to Dawn. We're definitely a fan of hers. Having her come in and be able to give us a speech and just talk to us I think it was very insightful and I'm very thankful for her. I think, like Tae said, it shows what kind of person she is. A lot of coaches wouldn't do that. So I'm very thankful and I'm just glad I got to here her in person and get some insight from her.

Q. What does it mean playing for Southern University? Jocelyn, first.

JOCELYN TATE: It means everything. I go out and I show how much I love to play for Southern, how I play on the court. I work hard, I play hard. It means everything to have it on my chest. I love this school. I love everything about it. My coaching staff to my teammates, that's why I play so hard and work so hard. I do it for my school, so, yeah.

D'SHANTAE EDWARDS: To piggyback off that, we always talk about the standard and I feel like all athletes at Southern is to just go out and play your best, good or bad, indifferent, whatever. It's just go out and play like it's your last game or whatever. I feel like having Southern cross your chest just gives you that edge to go harder. To go

grind. You have this big community behind you and what better way to show them that you care for them than by playing hard for them.

THE MODERATOR: Just to follow up on that question. You're obviously representing Southern University but you're also representing HBCU schools. I just wonder what that means to you and to get a win in the tournament like you did?

D'SHANTAE EDWARDS: For me it means a lot because any HBCU school is capable of this. I feel like showing the hard work that we put in and not just talking about it but seeing the way that we play will show other HBCUs if you put the work in and grind and trust the process, you could be on this stage too.

JOCELYN TATE: I agree. I feel like sometimes HBCUs get overlooked so I'm excited that we finally get some recognition that we deserve. Going out and playing as hard as we play and winning these type of games, I think it goes to show that we deserve to be here as much as anybody else. We put the hard work in, and, yeah, we just go out and have fun. We just show the people that we love to do this.

Q. Typically these 16-1 match-ups are a David verse Goliath type of game. I'm curious, how do you begin to prepare for a team like South Carolina and go out there where you do play to the Southern standard and try to give it your best shot?

JOCELYN TATE: I think we do understand what kind of game we are going into. We prepare for it like any other game. We scout like we usually do. Watch film. But I think the biggest thing is just to go hard. Go out there and play like it's our last game. Play as hard as we can. Most importantly, have fun. Have fun with my teammates and be coachable, continue to be coachable and just do what we do in every other game.

D'SHANTAE EDWARDS: To piggyback off of that, I agree. You're going to go into this game like any other game, learning how to scout, listen to what our coaches have to say, what their game plan is and true to execute that game plan and like Joce said, playing hard. Because this is like no other game. They tie their shoes the same way we tie our shoes. We can compete. They might be a little taller than us, might be a little bigger in some areas but if you go in there and play hard and know what you're capable of, nothing bad is really come out of that.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for the student-athletes? One last question you have is obviously you're facing the South Carolina team that has a lot of

height. I haven't studied your schedule that much this year, but I got to believe you haven't played teams that have that kind of size. What are you going to have to do to match-up and to hold your own and rebound especially?

D'SHANTAE EDWARDS: I would say just like you got to give what they give you. Just because they're long doesn't mean they take every option away for scoring away. You just have to go in there with a mindset that some things going all the way to the basket may not be as normal as other games because every team has different-sized players. Every team has things they contribute, too. You just have to understand what they're going to give you and you have to manage the best play out of that.

JOCELYN TATE: I agree. I think we should work to our strengths. Do what we do well. We're here for a reason. Yeah, continue to play how we play and I think we have some advantages, so just use them to our strengths.

THE MODERATOR: Anything else? All right, we'll let the players go back.

We'll take questions now for Coach Funchess.

Q. Hey Carlos. There are a lot of power four, power five programs that haven't won games in the NCAA Tournament two years in a row. How do you view this? Do you tell your players, hey, let's just go out there and have some fun tomorrow? Because we have done about as much as we can do.

CARLOS FUNCHESS: Well, we just formulate a game plan. We work extremely hard trying to make sure they're prepped for these games. You go out and try to execute your game plan. Regardless of who the opponent is, we prepare for each and every game whether it's an NCAA Tournament game or a regular season game, we prepare the same way each and every day.

Q. Carlos, you're sitting here on this big dais with the big backdrop and the microphones and all the tech and then the setup in the arena. Throughout your year and your journey and the growth of the women's game, just kind of what are your thoughts on the whole production and how the sports come along in the college game.

CARLOS FUNCHESS: I started out first of all, I played collegiate basketball at Northeast Louisiana which is the University of Louisiana Monroe now. Was fortunate enough to play in two NCAA Tournaments. Played against a national champion in Duke my senior year. They beat us in the first round.

But the women's game has really, really started to grow. I thought that we had a good product, if you say product. We just started getting exposure, especially with the Caitlin Clark deal, with her playing and bringing in more fans to the game and ESPN picked it up and started airing more games. They saw that there was an audience out there.

I think two years ago the women's championship game had more views than the men's championship game. They saw that that product was there and that they could make, I would say, some money on it. It continued to grow and the more they put into it, the more that this game will grow. These young ladies can play. They play an exciting brand of basketball and the public wants to see it.

Q. Coach, you just mentioned playing against Duke your senior year. Are there things you can draw from that experience in prepping your team for tomorrow's match-up?

CARLOS FUNCHESS: I can. That was the Christian Laettner team with Bobby Hurley and all those guys. Grant Hill. At that time, I thought we had an advantage from a speed standpoint and same in this game.

I think that although South Carolina is really, really athletic, that we have some extremely good athletes and that we can exploit some things that they don't do as well defensively. That's going to be the key. Of course they're a great team, don't get me wrong, but we played some really good teams this year in Iowa, UCLA, Iowa State. We're used to being on the big stage.

Q. Carlos, the girls sound like they got a lot out of talking to Dawn Staley. Did you know Dawn before? What were some of the other things? And also what have you guys talked about this week?

CARLOS FUNCHESS: Well, no, I've never met her in person, but I love the work that she does, like Jocelyn said, off the court and D' Shantae as well. She does a great job of mentoring young women and I thought it would be great for our young ladies to be able to meet her and get a chance to ask some questions and things like that. We're very appreciative of her taking out the time in her day to be able to come do that.

Q. Sorry, just a little followup to that. So, are you the person who arranged her coming? How did that work?

CARLOS FUNCHESS: Well, our assistant coach, Coach Jeremy Bonin, we were trying to schedule a game with them this year but we just couldn't work things out. But he had spoke within their assistant coach and she made the connection and made it happen for us.

Q. Coach, what's the message? What was the message after last night's victory to your girls and that's the first question. Second one is just can you just describe the experience this week just being in Columbia so far?

CARLOS FUNCHESS: Well, last night I just congratulated them. I wanted them to enjoy the moment, you know? Now this morning we flipped the page to South Carolina so we're trying to get game prepped and ready for them, but this week has been very good. Not just for Southern University but for our conference as well.

I thought that we came out and showed that we could play with anymore. Of course it goes back to early in the season, prior to our conference play. We won two big games against Arizona and the University of Houston, which gave us a lot of confidence, I thought.

I thought we flat lined a little bit at the beginning of conference, kind of picked it back up but started to play better down the stretch. Our message today is get prepared to go play South Carolina and we're going out to try to win a game.

Q. Coach, I'm curious, you don't have to reveal trade secrets or anything, but when it comes to game planning and scouting this South Carolina team, where do you start and how do you attack that?

CARLOS FUNCHESS: Well, just like any other game, just going back and looking at game film from prior to contests, especially the last two or three. And you go back and look at teams that play similar to what you do, especially offensively.

They are a great defensive team and they pretty much negate everything that you get inside, all the easy buckets, all the offensive rebounds. We're going to have to do some other things to try to get some good shots and knock them down, we have to make 'em.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for Coach Funchess? Seeing none, we'll go ahead and let you go, Coach. Good luck tomorrow.

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