

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

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Columbia, South Carolina, USA  
Colonial Life Arena

## South Carolina Gamecocks Coach Dawn Staley

## Ta'Niya Latson Joyce Edwards

Media Conference

South Carolina 103, Southern 34

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by South Carolina Gamecocks Head Coach Dawn Staley and student-athletes Ta'Niya Latson and Joyce Edwards.

Coach, if you would please make an opening statement.

DAWN STALEY: It was good to get the tournament started here on our home court. I thought Southern did a really good job of defending and doing the best that they can against our team.

They are a well-coached basketball team on both sides of the basketball. I like to say when we were in their position, we used to get out-talented. I thought they got out-talented tonight. Nothing against the effort that they put out there on the floor.

So proud of them. They should be proud of the season that they had, and they should look forward to continuing to make noise when they play the power 4 teams and continued suck says in the NCAA Tournament.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open up for questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Ta'Niya, Joyce, could you talk about the overhead pass, blind flip. And Joyce, you finished it off.**

TA'NIYA LATSON: I knew she was down there somewhere. I threw it up behind my head. You know what? I'm just do it. That's what happened.



JOYCE EDWARDS: I feel like we always find each other in transition. So it was nothing unexpected.

**Q. Ta'Niya, you've played in the NCAA Tournament before, but never in front of your home crowd. Does that bring added pressure?**

TA'NIYA LATSON: No, it brings comfortability. I feel like it brings us confidence, having our fans out there and our home court advantage and being at home. We feel comfortable out there. We play here every home game and we play really good here.

**Q. Joyce, how anxious were you guys to get started and come out and have the start that you did both in the first quarter and the second half, the third?**

JOYCE EDWARDS: We've been practicing for a long time. Everybody wants to get out and play. You could tell we were a little rusty initially. As a team, we got together and started hitting shots in the second half.

**Q. Ta'Niya, I think you got popped in the mouth in the first quarter. What happened there and how long did it take to shake that off?**

TA'NIYA LATSON: I got hit in the nose, but I wanted those free throws.

DAWN STALEY: Thank you for saying it. I wasn't going to say it.

TA'NIYA LATSON: So I had to shake it off and hit my free throws. I was good, though.

**Q. Joyce, how does it feel to get the most points you've ever had in a tournament game?**

JOYCE EDWARDS: It just feels like another game. Just had to do what the defense is giving me. I found the basket today. It feels like a regular game.

**Q. Ta'Niya, how great did it feel to start off the tournament like this and kind of as you guys get ready to go as far as you can possibly go?**



TA'NIYA LATSON: It feels great. With Joyce having the game that she had, Gotty having a career high, Tessa having a double-double. Like Coach said in the locker room, we've got to keep building off of it, building our momentum throughout the tournament. Staying together as a team and getting better.

THE MODERATOR: After the playoff you've had, you've had two weeks since your last game, how it felt to get back out on the court against some competition and how did the layoff help you reset and get ready?

JOYCE EDWARDS: It was great to play. I feel like all basketball players, we don't like practices much. We want to go out there and play in a game. But like you said, us taking two weeks off had its pros and cons. I felt like we worked on ourselves, especially against pressure. I also feel like we haven't played in two weeks so we haven't really got necessarily game reps. Shots looked a little rusty, but it feels great going out there and playing.

TA'NIYA LATSON: Like she said, it feels good to finally play a game against an opponent instead of the highlighters. It gave us a good time to take care of our bodies and work on what we needed to work on.

**Q. Joyce, I saw that everybody took a turn doing your side-eye, and I was curious if you had a favorite. Personally, mine was Coach Staley.**

JOYCE EDWARDS: No, I didn't have a favorite. Nobody can do it like the original.

DAWN STALEY: Wow.

THE MODERATOR: Seeing no other questions, you can go back to the locker room. Congratulations. See you Monday.

We'll open up for questions for Coach Staley.

**Q. Dawn, the same thing with the over the head pass. As a coach, what do you think when you see a play like that?**

DAWN STALEY: Ta'Niya has done it before, and probably to Joyce. It's just players out there playing, just feeding off the moment. But I don't think they do it in a -- I don't think Ta'Niya does it in a gym that's not full of people. I think she played a little bit to the crowd, and the crowd really celebrated the move. It was just another play for me. I'm glad we didn't turn it over.

**Q. Coach Staley, I saw that you have a connection**

**with Dove and The Game is Ours movement. How do you see your own team and body, this sort of reclaiming of confidence for women athletes?**

DAWN STALEY: I'll say that I usually get behind things that I'm passionate about. I was a recipient of body shaming when I was growing up. Obviously, I'm short. I've got big shoulders. I got a big head. I got big hands. I got big feet. So when you're growing up as a girl, you're called a lot of different names and you have to be stronger in situations.

Raven doesn't like her arms. She's got great arms. Are they muscular? Yes. But in order for her to play at the level she has to play, she has to have them. And I got the most compliments when I did have arms.

So you have to combat some of the things that are being said about women athletes who have to do certain things in order for them to compete at a high level.

So, I mean, the more young girls hear the body shaming names, the more we have to combat that with the direct opposite. So being a part of Dove campaign is something that's near and dear to me because as Biggie Smalls would say -- and I'm gonna probably get this wrong -- I'm not only a player, but I'm a player's president, or something like that. Y'all understand what I'm saying when it comes to me being a recipient of the name calling.

I'm not only the player, I'm the player's president. I think that's it.

**Q. After the flip from Ta'Niya to Joyce, Ta'Niya just deeply kind of smiled the moment she heard the crowd's reaction to it. How do you see the players' joy on the floor growing throughout the games?**

DAWN STALEY: We missed being in here. We haven't been in here in a long time. To do it while playing in an NCAA Tournament game, it's always great. I want our players to play with joy. I want our players to play the game that they love with joy.

And obviously, when they are able to convert plays like that, it brings the crowd to its feet. Not only probably our fans, as well as Southern fans probably had a great appreciation for good basketball.

**Q. Seemed like in the first half, any kind of offense with the jumper was struggling. Settled down in the second half. The speed and turnovers for defense, was that a concerted effort from you, say pick up the D, or is that how it unfolded?**

DAWN STALEY: We were just knocking the rust off. Sometimes when you haven't played in a long time, you don't know how you're going -- no matter how well you practice, it's a little bit different when you're out here in front of a crowd and you've got an opponent that you're unfamiliar with. You're just trying to play the right way.

I thought our players tried to play the right way, moving the ball. Didn't hit our shots. And sometimes you have to pick up the D in order to get easy buckets to see the ball go in. Then we started knocking down some shots. That was good to see as we ramp up to the second round.

**Q. Dawn, can you share about Madina's struggles with home sickness and her return to full strength, particular going into the tournament?**

DAWN STALEY: Madina has worked harder than she's probably ever had to work. When you're in that situation, you miss the comforts your family, your friends. When you're working your hardest and feel like you can't go anymore, you need a little bit of home cooking in order for you to make it through.

Thank God for technology, but it's a thing that we've gone through with several of our players where we're hand in hand with them. They may think they're alone. They may think it's really tough, but we're right there beside their side going through it with them, but they do have to get through. We can hold their hands, but they're going to have to step through the moment.

You'll hear her say she's ready, and I do think she's ready, no matter the early foul trouble she got in today. She came back, only played 17 minutes and almost got a double-double. I think when she was going through it, maybe she doesn't come back and get close to a double-double.

But you see she's working through. She's got some defense mechanisms that she uses to continue to face those challenges that you'll face every round, every moment of basketball that is unfamiliar to her.

But the stakes are higher each and every time we step on the floor so she's equipped with handling it in the moment, in real time. If she's not, we'll give her a breather, take her out, and she'll go back in and right the wrong.

**Q. You've had, obviously, many post players that have been great, but you've also had a lot of great point guards. As a point guard yourself, what have you seen throughout your time here that in all of your great guards, what is one thing you've seen in all of them?**

DAWN STALEY: Well, I mean, one, they're super competitive. So we'll start there. Two, they're coachable. You got to be coachable. You got to understand that we're preparing them to handle the very worst in the situation.

So we're trying to familiarize them with situations that when they arise, they've already been through it. That's my job as a coach. And as someone who's played the position for a long time and at a high level, you just have to be calm. The more you see, the more you're able to operate in the space and the more options that you'll have.

That's how I've seen our point guards grow in that area, and they're strong, they're mentally tough, and they're able to handle any basketball situation that arises.

THE MODERATOR: Do you feel you're more demanding of your point guards than other positions?

DAWN STALEY: Oh, for sure. It's a position in which if everything goes right, they get all the praise. If everything goes wrong, it's their fault. And you have to condition them to believe that.

So they're always on their A-game, they're always understanding their responsibility on the floor. And sometimes they can handle it very early in their career. Sometimes they can't, and you have to wait until that process catches up with them. But you also have to, you know, hold their hands there it and then at some point you do have to let go and allow -- it's almost like parenting.

When you allow your children to grow up, it is a direct reflection of your parenting. Direct. Like if you hover over them all the time and they can't work through problems, they're going to have issues. You've got to let them work through problems because they're working through the things you've instilled in them. That's the same thing with point guard play for us.

**Q. Dawn, you said early that you guys out-talented them, which is what you're supposed to do. How do you, as a coach who has been through this a number of times, look at the first round games. It's like, okay, we got off to a good start, but we've got A, B, C, D, E to work on next. Can you look at this and say we did really well today. Let's throw that out and move on?**

DAWN STALEY: I would say this. At halftime, I give our team what it needs. This team is a little bit different than the teams that we've had because we don't really have a core group of players that have been together that really understand it.

So I did. I said, well, I'm watching the tournament. I'm

watching. We're going to have a game. Between Clemson and USC, it's going to be a real game on Monday. I'm watching Oklahoma. I'm watching Michigan State. I'm watching Iowa. All the teams that are in our bracket, we looked a little bit different in the first half, looked a little different than them.

We've got to find a way to elevate our play to play on the scale of -- because we're going to get everybody's best. No matter what, we're going to get everybody's best. We shouldn't have to get a wake-up call in the first quarter or the second quarter, third quarter, fourth quarter to say hey, you've got to really play now. We've got to play to our strengths, and we've got to play to our capabilities, and we've got to play on guard, like on guard.

I mentioned all of those programs that are part of our region so they can understand that there's a level of basketball being played out there, and if we're not playing at that level, then we're going to get sent home early.

**Q. Coach, any special shoes for the first round game? Any special kicks?**

DAWN STALEY: Do I have any special --

**Q. Are you wearing any special shoes for the first round game?**

DAWN STALEY: I don't know. Did you see any special shoes?

**Q. I couldn't get a good look from my spot. That's why I had to check.**

DAWN STALEY: The special part of these shoes is they're comfortable. So, yeah, they're special.

**Q. It was, I'm not only a client, I'm the player president.**

DAWN STALEY: There you go. Yes. Thank you for correcting me. Hey, I need y'all to edit. I'm not only a client, I'm the player's president. So cut, paste, put it in there. I don't know what I was saying earlier. I was close, though.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. See you tomorrow.

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