

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Ole Miss vs Notre Dame

Monday, March 25, 2024

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Purcell Pavilion

Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Yolett

McPhee-McCuin

Kennedy Todd-Williams

Madison Scott

Media Conference

Notre Dame 71, Ole Miss 56

YOLETT MCPHEE-MCCUIN: I'd just like to thank the Notre Dame staff for just hosting us and just doing an incredible job. It was smooth sailing, and that hadn't been our experience every time. I thought they really stepped up and made us feel at home. Everything was really well-organized.

Just want to congratulate Notre Dame. I thought that they controlled the game from start to finish. You never want these moments to be in the way they are, especially when you're on the losing end, especially when you don't think your team displayed what they needed to display for 40 minutes, but nevertheless, super proud of our group, and grateful for this opportunity and this experience.

Again, just recently, three years ago -- four years ago, we were 0-16, and now we've put ourselves in a situation to expect to go to at least a Sweet 16 every year. Really disappointed as far as that's concerned. But not disappointed with the team and what we've accomplished this season.

Q. I'm sure when you build your scout you have a vision for how the game is going to go if you're going to win the game. Where or how did that go haywire, and how did Notre Dame contribute to that?

KENNEDY TODD-WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think it was just about executing on both ends, getting stops. I don't think we did a good job at getting stops to help with our offense.



It's just something that we have to be better at.

MADISON SCOTT: I would say they were the aggressors on both ends, on defense, and they were the more connected team. They were talking. They acted like they'd been there before. We have and we didn't act like it tonight, and they took advantage of it.

Q. What kind of change in the second half? It felt like you kind of figured things out. What was different about the last 20 minutes?

KENNEDY TODD-WILLIAMS: It was just about being urgent to get back into the game. That was really the main talk. Just getting back to our principles.

But it was too late in the game to even do that.

Q. When you think about what needs to happen in the next few months to get back to where you would want to be - your coach just talked about the Sweet 16 - what comes to mind? What's next for y'all?

MADISON SCOTT: We want to use the summer to get better. We just want to get better and work. This is hard. It hurts. It's going to be on our minds for a while. But we've got to get back in the lab. We've got to get going. We've got to continue to build, because like Coach said, we're a program now that we're expected to go to the tournament every year. We're expected to go to the Sweet 16 every year. We fell short, but me and Toddy are both returning. We'll plan to use it as motivation, come back and be better, and yeah, just continue to get better and grow.

Q. I think at one point you only hit four of your first 17 shots. Can you talk about what Notre Dame's defense did to affect that?

MADISON SCOTT: Notre Dame is a great team. They're big. They're experienced. Great players. Their zone was very good. It challenged us in many ways. But a lot of it was us. I'm not even just saying that. We went against the zone all year. We played against the zone. We knew spots we needed to get into. It was us executing, which we



didn't do. We have a game plan, and when you don't execute the game plan, it makes it 10 times harder. Credit to Notre Dame, of course, great team, but a lot of that was on us, us not doing our jobs, us not doing what we were supposed to do.

Q. Toddy, is your intent to return next season?

KENNEDY TODD-WILLIAMS: Yes, it is.

Q. Can you talk about Notre Dame's start and what they did to establish that tempo they wanted.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I just thought that they were the aggressive team, like I said, from start to finish. You never know what to expect with 17- to 24-year-olds. If you had told me we would come out in the manner that we came out, I would have called you a liar.

I thought that they came prepared for a fight, and I don't think we fought. When someone is prepared for a fight and then you don't fight, someone is going to get beat up.

I was expecting a game where both teams would get beat up. I expected it to be low scoring. I expected it to be a grind-out type of game. Two teams that take pride in their defense, they're more zone, us more man, and they just got the better of us today.

Q. You mentioned the disappointment there of getting back to the Sweet 16. I guess when you're evaluating your own program and where it's at, how do you kind of weigh the progress and the good things that you did in the regular season with kind of the one-game sample that the NCAA Tournament is and not getting as far as you'd like to have gone?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I didn't say I was disappointed with our performance this season. I said I was disappointed that we didn't get back to the Sweet 16 so that we could try to get another step ahead. If you've seen in the manner the program is built, we've gotten better every single year.

Obviously there are things that we can celebrate from making history with 12 wins, finishing third place, so on and so forth, with no point guard. There are things that I want to celebrate for sure. I thought we did a good job because I know I'm disappointed and everybody else is because we didn't come out and play in the manner we've been playing all season since we went on that seven-game winning streak.

You know, it's funny because you have -- there's this narrative, oh, Notre Dame has six, but if you have the right

six, it doesn't really matter. And they have the right six. Westbeld is an absolute stud. She did -- I felt like she didn't even miss. She carried them from inside, and everybody just did their job.

I know about having small rosters because we had a small roster last year. When it came to how many people we played, we played about six, seven.

When you have a small roster, you are way more connected because there's nobody that can sub in. There's nobody that can help. When you have big rosters, sometimes 17 to 24 year olds feel like I can just take a day off because someone else will come in and help. But that Notre Dame team has been playing in the manner they've been playing in for a while now.

I didn't think that that would be an advantage for us at all because they just -- they're ACC champs. I have a lot of respect for them, and I thought they did a great job.

I was just disappointed because, like I said, had we played in the manner that everybody knows that we're capable of playing, I thought the game would have been in the 50s and then whatever happens happens. We just had to dig so hard after halftime. I just told them I don't even know who you guys are right now. It was just not our team and who we were.

But I'm not going to let that rain on our parade. We'll live to see another day.

Q. Their big three combined for 56 points. Was there a plan to eliminate one of that combination?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, the plan sure as hell didn't work, so I don't even want to say we had a plan because I'm going to look like I'm crazy. So I'm going to stick with, no, we didn't have a plan. (Laughter).

They just really showed up. I thought what Westbeld said yesterday in her press conference was phenomenal. She said, when you have a big three, someone has to set the tone in that group, and we had a big three, as well. Someone needed to set the tone in our group.

I just felt like all three of them said, you know what, we're all going to set the tone. I didn't think all three of our big three set the tone early. When that happens, anything can happen.

Q. You referred to the other day when you beat Marquette kind of a formula. It was a close game the whole way but you wore them down. I'm sure you would have liked to see today a little closer. Did their

staying power -- I know their cohesiveness didn't, but did their staying power durability-wise surprise you or was that not necessarily tested today?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Guys, they're the 2 seed. They're the ACC champs. Am I not correct? Did they not just win an Atlantic Coast Conference championship with the same people? They're legit. We expected a fight.

The disappointing part was someone got beat up, and it wasn't them. They beat us up. That's what's disappointing when your character and your reputation is to dictate and disrupt.

It's just an uncharacteristic night for us, and guess what, you don't get to see -- see, when we would have these games during the season, we could talk about it and fix it. You don't get to fix it. So we get to go home, and I get to get in the portal and recruit. That's how it works.

Q. I'm curious once you got to see Hannah in person maybe what's different than film. Can you explain her effect on a team like this and a game like this?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: She's as advertised. I think one of the things that I appreciate with her is just her competitive spirit, and that's not something that you can teach. That's something that was born inside of her. She was completely relentless the whole time.

Yeah, she can pass and she can score, but you can't teach what's inside of you. I think that's her greatest strength.

Q. I know last year you really looked at some scoring in the off-season. Do you have a feel yet for what this team needs to get back here next season?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: I mean, we've been talking all year about what we need. I would have loved tonight, if we're going to reflect and talk about it, I would have loved to have KK, but I'm sure they would have loved to have Olivia.

But we're talking about what my team needs. We're just going to continue to try to get people that fit our defensive system and that can free us up a little bit more offensively.

Q. Taking a step back from the loss, how are you feeling? Are you very proud?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I'm super proud of our group. I'm not an advocate for home-court games. I'm an advocate for neutral-site games. There is an advantage when you play at home. One of two things got to happen. We've got to figure out how to be a top 4 seed, top 16, so

we can have the home-court advantage, or if you're going to go in someone's place and knock them off like we did last year, you need to have all cylinders clicking. We didn't get to have that.

But yes, very proud of our team. Like I said, we have some historic things that we have done, and we've got a lot of people returning. Just going to look forward to the future.

I remember watching the Stanford game last night. They said that they had this game -- their game last night circled for the whole year, and they gutted it out and ended up beating Iowa State. Hopefully our team will do the same and make a run next season.

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