

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Tennessee vs NC State

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Crisler Center

Tennessee Lady Volunteers Kim Caldwell

Nya Robertson

Janiah Barker

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Kim talked about how you're one of the more improved players on the team since the last time you guys played NC State. What was that like watching back the film from that first game?

NYA ROBERTSON: I just feel like during that time I don't think I was being who I could be. It was the first game with a new system. So after playing in her system for a while I picked it up and, yeah.

Q. It's been awhile since November when you played NC State last. What are the biggest ways you think your team as a whole has changed and improved since then?

JANIAH BARKER: I mean, really I think that we've had a lot of time just to really play with each other. Leading into the season we had players on the team that are no longer with the team, just really trying to figure out how to play with each other and get that chemistry going. Definitely having different types of substitutions, five in and five out, having eight players that are freshmen and transfers, just trying to figure that out, especially with young people. And then also too as a transfer trying to figure out the system that's definitely, nobody really has ever seen before. So I think we've had a lot of games under our belt, a lot of time, a lot of practice, a lot of chemistry building, team bonding and things of that sort. So we're a whole different team.

Q. For the past few games you guys have been playing a lot of top-tier opponents in your conference.



How do you think that prepares you a little bit extra for the stakes of March?

JANIAH BARKER: This is definitely, we have the hardest schedule in the country. I think Coach Kim did that for a reason. Definitely to get us prepared for this time right now, which is March. It's ironic, but it's not ironic, I don't believe in that. But to be playing NC State, which it could be one of our last games and that's how we started the season, I think leading up to this is exactly what we needed, playing against those teams that are tough gets you ready for these moments and I think that's what Coach Kim was doing and here we are.

Q. Being on that UCLA team last year making that deep March run, how has that experience helped you this season?

JANIAH BARKER: Yeah, they definitely have been looking to me for leadership and advice and ways to, what it looks like to win. I just try to use my voice as much as possible. That team at UCLA was very by the book. I think just trying to come over and show those ropes to this team, younger players, players who have never even been in this position before, this is Nya's first time being in March Madness as well. Just letting them know like it's a regular game, although it's big stakes, don't try to put too much on it and go out there like it's your last game.

Q. With how the tournament's set up you had about two weeks since you last played. How have you guys been able to stick together in practice, despite the losing streak?

JANIAH BARKER: You know, we have things we need to work on, and that's evident going in this right now. But I think those two weeks that we had, was it two weeks? It was like a week and a half a little bit. I think we got some days off just to of course relax, get our own time to ourselves, have a little break before we get into March. Then we definitely did a lot of working on ourself which consistent of transition defense, transition offense, being more sharp in the press, make sure we're rotating the way we need to do. And then just giving each other confidence. I think we had, we've done a lot of things against the



practice players making sure that we're confident in ourselves. So spending time on ourselves a lot. So I think all you can do is just prepare and when you're prepared you have your confidence and I think that's where we're at right now.

Q. Can you pinpoint one specific thing as you looked at the film from that first game against NC State that you guys really focus on to do better this time around?

NYA ROBERTSON: It was a lot of things we worked on. Transition offense, transition defense, knowing personnel, guarding. Just being more specific in our transition defense.

JANIAH BARKER: Especially like in the press as well they had a lot of wide open layups on the back side. Just making sure that we rotate enough in the right way, and also putting pressure on the front so that we can close our traps and they don't feel so comfortable to throw those passes all the way to the back. Also to just defense, stay in the gap, making sure our help side, make sure we're rotating correct. Rebounding. Zoe Brooks had 11 rebounds against us and normally she has like three offensive rebounds against us, and she only like has five or something during the whole year. So making sure we just know our personnel really well.

Q. You guys have had two weeks since the SEC tournament about, what were the lessons that you learned from that game with Alabama and how are you going to bring that into today, or tomorrow?

JANIAH BARKER: I got it. I got it. I'm just thinking. (Laughing). I think that last game, well leading up to those games in particular the teams we had been playing had been playing a lot of zone against us. I think that we probably weren't prepared as we should have been going into that game with that. I think we worked a lot on our zone offense making sure that we can move the ball. A lot of teams feel comfortable putting us in that zone. So making sure we feel comfortable in it as well, rebounding well out of it, making sure we're boxing out. Doing things of that sort. So that will be my main thing. I think also recognizing what works in the zone as well is something that we got better at this week.

Q. Something that NC State mentioned from the last time you played is the unique effect of your press and how often you guys run that. How have you seen your press impact games so far this season?

JANIAH BARKER: Sometimes our press is our defense and our offense I think that it's what fuels us, what gets us going. Especially when you're having fun, getting steals

and getting layups easily, that's what really gives us energy and boosts our confidence. I think times where, if we get beat in the press, we lose our confidence. So I think making sure that we continue to stay fully committed to the press and know that that's our bread and butter, and knowing that's our identity of the team and fully, what's the word I'm looking for? Accept it. Like fully accept our roles and be all in.

Q. What does Tennessee basketball look like at its best to you guys?

NYA ROBERTSON: Moving, jumping, scoring, just excitement. I mean, you know when we are having fun, you can tell on everybody's faces. Somebody scores, the whole bench is up. Somebody gets a stop, the whole bench is up. We're celebrating each other, just trying to feed off each other. But you can tell when we are at our highest.

Q. I saw this morning Tennessee 44 NCAA tournament appearances, the most in women's basketball. I'm curious for both of you what it means to represent such a historic college basketball program.

JANIAH BARKER: I mean, Tennessee is the mecca of women's basketball. Of course with Pat Summitt being who she is and what she's done and how she's laid the platform for us. I think for me it's truly a blessing and an honor to play at this school. When I was playing at Texas A & M and I walked in on Tennessee's floor and their arena, and I looked up and I'm like, this is crazy. And I just think it's a full circle moment to be on this team, to wear Tennessee on my chest, have my last name on the back as well. But it's nothing but a blessing to wear this orange. Other than, besides the fans who are great, who are very consistent and have a lot of opinions, but they're always there for us. But it's nothing but a blessing to be on this team and to also have the alumni who always have our back or if there's any questions that need to be asked, they're always there for us in any circumstance.

NYA ROBERTSON: Yeah, I would agree. I'm blessed to be able to be a part of this journey. 44 years, I mean, it's my first time ever being in March Madness, so I'm just trying to give my all, all into it.

Q. It's pretty common to kind of take it one game at a time, like that type of mindset, especially in March. But just to the two of you, what are your goals for March and what do you want to see from yourselves and your team?

JANIAH BARKER: I just want to see fight. Just fight. I really want us to fight for each other. I think especially I

think for me I think about like Nya and like I've been here before, I've done this before I think about her knowing that she's never been here before and it's her last ride. So I want to make sure I can put whatever I have out there on the floor for her, so that she knows that I got her back through this. And then also too, just I mean it's March. You never know what can happen in March. But as long as you believe and you believe in your team and you all have the same common goal, you never know what you can do. So I just continuing to try to preach to my team like we got this. Like you said, one day at a time, it really is. So just take it one game at a time, have full confidence.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse the student-athletes and we'll be back shortly with coach.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. How does the tournament provide a fresh start for your team after having a losing streak going into it?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I think any time you get into March and in March Madness it's definitely a different buzz, a different vibe around it. There's some excitement, there's some juice. You had, we have a significant chunk of time where we can practice and kind of have a fresh start there where you have time to put things together. It's exciting.

Q. You've had some time now after the Selection Show to get the installation of the game plan and stuff. How do you feel like the team's accepted what you want to do in this game?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I think that we have watched our film from the last time we played them and know where we need to get better and know that they're a different team and we're a different team going into it. I think we have some good juice going into this game.

Q. What's your message to this freshmen class as they embark on this unknown here in the NCAA tournament?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, being we have a few that have never been here in March, and it's exciting to watch them be excited. Just little things, from signage in your hotel, signage when you walk here, things being a little bit different in tournament play. Just remembering that when you're still playing this time of year it's exciting, it means something, it matters, and to enjoy every second.

Q. I speak to Cooper in the locker room and she says she doesn't know why she was benched in the last

game. Do you want to share anything more about your decision there?

KIM CALDWELL: No, it was a coach's decision. We're going to move on and I think we'll get a really good version of her tomorrow.

Q. We talked to Janiah Barker before this, and she mentioned the threat that Zoe Brooks poses on the offensive and defense defensive glass. Can you talk a little bit about your rebounding game plan heading into this game and the role that hustle will play?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I think we have really focused on boxing out, boxing out shooters. There were some really key plays down the stretch when we first played them where we didn't box out, and they got multiple possession and it really did seal the game for them. We've been pretty inconsistent with our rebounding, but when we were playing our best basketball we were rebounding the ball pretty well on both ends. We know that if we want to play a possession-based game it's something we need to get back to. We tied on the glass the first time, so we want to be plus four or five in that area. But that's going to be hard because they do rebound the ball really well from all five positions.

Q. I know your team faced Camille Pierre obviously last year and opener this year. What's the plan to deal with her in this one and how can you kind of minimize her impact?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, she's tough. She will find ways to go get every single rebound if you let her and you don't put a body on her and she can score multiple different ways too. She's a good transition player in her size and so making sure that we're on high alert knowing where she is and trying not to let her get anything easy. What makes her so special is she makes hard look easy.

Q. We talked about it a little bit in Knoxville, but how is the prep different if at all making it a rematch with the Wolfpack and how can you see where your team has changed from the opener to today.

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I think the biggest thing is we know that it was a close game and we have something to prove of trying to get that game back. I think I like our, the way our team has handled it. We let one slip early in the year and let's see really who we are now. Because a long season has gone by in between and we have gotten better and then we've kind of hit a rough patch and trying to really identify who we are in March.

Q. There's been a lot of talk about the infamous



Tennessee press. Will you talk about the chaotic defensive scheme and the press that you run and how that might impact, actually would be crucial in impacting the outcome of tomorrow's game?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, we want it to look like it should. It hasn't looked like it should in a month, a month and a half. And I think that that's really been a big part of our problem is we kind of lost our identity and what we want to do. And we really haven't been pressing, we haven't been pressing with a purpose. And we need to get back to flying around, we need to get back to guarding. And again, a big part of our problem was we weren't guarding in a press and we weren't guarding in a half court, and we really weren't doing much of anything. We didn't have an identity.

Q. A follow-up on the press. Do you feel like there's one specific area that needs to improve or is there more of an overall improvement that needs to happen?

KIM CALDWELL: I think everyone needs to be on the same page and we have to do it. We have gotten ourselves in situations where we're just not. We maybe start the first two minutes of the game that way, and then we bail on it and we play, we don't have an identity. I think that's really been the cause of a lot of problems our last month.

Q. Can you tell me a little bit about that unique style where it came from the genesis of how you want to do that press and why you want to play that way?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, we wanted to play fast, that's something I've always believed in. Again, we haven't played fast. We're not really scoring the ball at a high clip. We're not really pressing. We are not really flying around. You want to do it in a way that wins you the possession battles and gets you about 20 more shots than your opponent. We weren't doing that either. We're getting maybe one more shot, or two more shots less. I think that when you play this way and you play a style that's different and an aggressive style, you have to be a hundred percent committed to it and you can never have a Plan B. And that's the one thing I would always tell people is don't put a Plan B in. Where we messed up is we put in a Plan B. And again we kind of lost ourselves. And we talked about that the first day back in practice, so we need to get back to what we believe in, we need to get back to what we were recruited to do, because that is when we were playing our best was in January.

Q. You've mentioned the identity of Tennessee basketball a few times. What are some key components of that that you're hoping to get back to in March?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I would love to get back to being the hardest playing team on the floor. That means 50/50 balls we're getting on them, we're taking charges, we're diving on loose balls, we have great energy, we're playing as a team. We're giving high-fives. Our bench is having fun. We're scoring a lot of points. We're playing through runs, 10 points up, down 10 points, up 10 points, doesn't feel like anything. And we're playing fast and the game looks a whole lot like this (indicating.) And again we haven't seen that version of ourselves in a while.

Q. Nya mentioned earlier that you can tell when the team is having fun. Have you seen them having fun in practice this week?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, and that says a lot about them, because it's a long stretch. And any time you practice as hard as we do, and up-and-down as we do, and we had to get our legs back and we had to get back in shape and we had to kind of again work on a press, work on playing fast on offense. That requires a lot of full court drills, and it happened without our practice team being here, so it was against each other, but they did a good job of having fun with it.

Q. What's it like to be the head coach at Tennessee, so much opportunity and yet maybe pressure, what is it like?

KIM CALDWELL: It's incredible for so many reasons. There's so much history around you and you see it every single day and you get to be thankful for it every single day. We have a great administration. Our players are very spoiled. Our coaching staff is very spoiled. The way we do things is first class, it's high class. It's really remarkable at how quickly anyone can get spoiled and used to it. Because I came from Division-II where we didn't even give our players a water bottle after a game, it was, fill up your Gatorade out of the Gatorade from the game. And now we're spoiled and we travel well and we're treated well and we eat well. And there's so much history and we're trying to build it to a place that's bigger than ourselves. And it's about Tennessee and it's about our fan base and it's about our history, and we really want to make it about that. I don't know that we've done a great job so far this season, but there's still some season left for us to do that.

Q. We talked a lot about the defensive end of the ball in this presser. How about the offensive end, what are the keys to unlocking your offensive success tomorrow against a tough NC State defense?

KIM CALDWELL: I think the most important thing is we share the ball. We don't try to force anything. We don't

shoot on three or four people. We share the ball, we space the floor. And then we go get offensive rebounds for each other, and we try to get multiple possessions. But I think again sharing the basketball, playing together, playing with a flow, playing through things, missing a couple shots in a row, not hanging our heads, continuing to get stops is really important for us.

Q. What's one message you've been preaching to your team this whole week?

KIM CALDWELL: I think there's been a lot of messages we've been preaching. I think basketball-wise it's been effort and it's been rebounding. And I think general-wise we need to be happy to be here, we need to have some excitement, we need to again appreciate the moment. There's a lot of teams all over the country that are done.

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