

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

Friday, March 20, 2026

Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

Crisler Center

Tennessee Lady Volunteers

Coach Kim Caldwell

Talaysia Cooper

Nya Robertson

Media Conference

NC State 76, Tennessee 61

THE MODERATOR: We'll get things started with a brief opening statement from Coach and then we'll open up to questions for the student-athletes before we take questions for Coach.

Whenever you're ready, we can again, Coach.

KIM CALDWELL: Not the game we wanted, really not the season we wanted but doesn't really help us to get into that right now. Trying to enjoy our seniors for the last little bit that we have them and nothing we can really say to help this loss.

Q. Can you both just share what your emotions are like now that the season is over with a losing streak?

TALAYSIA COOPER: I feel like we played hard this game. There's ups and downs to it. You win some, you lose some, so I feel like it happens.

Q. Nya, you transferred in for your last season. Can you describe what the season was like for you?

NYA ROBERTSON: I had fun, you know, coming into Tennessee. I didn't think I would have much... hhm. I didn't think I could be where I'm at now. I feel like I definitely improved. Just being around good people, having coaches that actually pour into me and try to make me better.

I'm very sad this is my last college game, but I know I put all I could on the floor.



Q. Talaysia, being one of the returners, how would you sum up this season and why maybe things didn't come together quite how you guys wanted it to?

TALAYSIA COOPER: We had a pretty much new team this year. I feel like we tried our best to put everything together. We played hard. We learned each other. We loved on each other. I feel like we did everything possible we could do to be as a whole and we did that. It just didn't plan out how we wanted to plan out.

Q. Talaysia, I know it might be hard in this moment to think about what's next for you but you are eligible for the draft. Given this moment, how are you feeling in the coming weeks, months?

TALAYSIA COOPER: I'm really not thinking about that right now. I'm just thinking about the game we just played and spending time with my teammates.

Q. Talaysia, just what was working so well for you offensively? And how aggravating was it that you were having a good night and you just couldn't get there and best NC State?

TALAYSIA COOPER: Just playing my game, being surrounded by great teammates that believed in me and pushed me tonight. That's all I can hope for. But just playing with effort.

Q. Talaysia, what do you feel like are the biggest changes that have to be made this off season in order to have this team find success next season?

TALAYSIA COOPER: Great question. Effort. Like Coach Kim said, this is an effort-based program. If you don't want to work hard, if you don't want to press, don't think about coming here because this is what she does and she's not changing it.

Q. After NC State had that first quarter lead, what made it challenging to complete the comeback?

TALAYSIA COOPER: We've been there before, so we



know what it takes to keep playing through runs and play hard, so just locked in and kept going through it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you both for your time. We greatly appreciate it.

We'll move forward with questions for Coach.

Q. Kim, what's your takeaway from this season. How it went, what are you taking into next year that you want to adjust, I guess?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, it's a long list. I don't think it helps to get into that list publicly today. I think personally the most important thing is making sure that you and the people around you keep your character when your prayer doesn't really match God's plan and I think I didn't do a great job of that personally today and then Xs, Os, there's a list but today's not the day to get into that.

Q. Just kind of a similar question I asked Talaysia. What stands out to you about the season and why things never quite came together?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I tried to get at that last time I was up here but you can't play this style of play and put in a plan B and we put in a plan B. I think when you do that, you lose your identity. You lose your buy-in, you lose your staff a little bit. There's falter from the top. That's from me and I did that in the middle of the season. I know better than to do that and it was the worst year of my professional career. Our players deserved better than that from me and you learn from that going forward.

You build with that, exactly like Coop said. You build with that people around you that know what we're doing and are all in.

Q. When you say the plan B, what was the plan B?

KIM CALDWELL: The plan B was when we stopped pressing. We stopped running, jumping, we keep players on the floor for a long time. We walk the ball before we run sets and then we do that in games sometimes after the first two minutes, sometimes we do it in the third quarter. That's why our third quarters look the way -- we had it, right? We had another option. They knew we had another option. They knew if they didn't get a couple stops here and there that we would go to that. They could be on the floor longer and that's just not the way it works.

There was never any clear leadership on my part of, hey, this is exactly what we're going to do, this is why we're going to do it. We never got consistent rotations. That's the first time in my year that we've never had players that

consistently we know who is going to go in with which group. We just never got there.

Q. What challenges did not having Janiah Barker in the lineup today, how did that impact your game plan?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, that hurt in the zone. I think she's really good in the zone for us, really good at the high post. She can play multiple spots. She rebounds really well, so that was tough.

Q. I know you said you don't want to get into the nuts and bolts of what you need to change but Talaysia talking about players who aren't going to play with full effort on a press don't come here. Is that going to be your focus in terms of the players you're bringing in this off season of the effort that they're going to bring?

KIM CALDWELL: Uh-huh, yep. Absolutely.

Q. Building on that, do you feel like it was a roster construction thing why it never clicked? Or when did you realize you weren't going to get that consistency you wanted?

KIM CALDWELL: I can't put it on roster construction. I got to put it on me, right? I have always been able to recruit players and stack talent and get them to run through a wall for me and get them to play hard and I wasn't able to do that. One thing I can put my finger on is that I bailed on what we want to do first and then how can I blame anyone else from doing it? You cannot do that, and I know that.

Any time I have talk to coaches that want to play this way and want to press, that's the first thing I say. If you're going to but a plan B in, don't do it. You can't do it. I fell into my own trap. Once you're in it you can't get out of it.

Q. You had 21 offensive rebounds today which was your second most of the year but only 17 second-chance points. Where was the disconnect there?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, we didn't play very well on offense. The ball didn't go in really any type of way. I was proud of the effort. I was proud of the effort about offensive glass. I thought they were going in and crashing hard. We obviously missed a bunch that allowed opportunities for more but, again, the effort to go get them even when someone took a shot we didn't like, they were getting in there.

Q. In this era with the transfer portal and stuff, how important is retention right now and trying to keep things together going into next season?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I think that this world is kind of crazy of we'll meet when we get back and we'll forget out who wants to stay, what we're going to do and I think the portal, we have a little while before it opens to get there, but it's just going to continue to be crazier and crazier every year.

Q. Outside of the not letting yourself go to a plan B, how do you feel like you, what you learned about yourself adds a coach this season?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I think that there have been personally there have been very few times that I have hit failure and I have never hit failure to this extreme. It's a tough place to do it, publicly, and I didn't like who I was at certain times. I think that God sometimes pulls you out of the storm and sometimes he sits with you through the storm. That's what he did and that's what -- you shift your prayer.

I know you're not supposed to pray for winning and all of those things but you just pray for peace in your program and for God to be there with you and there's lessons in this and he's building. I don't think there's any way in the world I'm here without it being because of God because I don't necessarily have that journey and that path, so learn the lessons we're supposed to learn and try to build it the right way but keep your character along the way and know who you are.

Q. Players fully bought in and staff as well. Do you foresee staff changes? And how has that staff been a group you can lean on through this year?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, the staff is good. It was a rough year all around and I think that when you -- I think all of that stems from me and I've built a staff around me where a majority of them have come from me so when they have learned from you and I start to question me, then it's a little bit hard there because that's all we know.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you all for your time. Coach, thank you very much.

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