

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

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Reynolds Coliseum

NC State Wolfpack

Coach Wes Moore

Aziaha James

River Baldwin

Media Conference

NC State - 64, Chattanooga 45

THE MODERATOR: Coach, start with an opening statement, please.

WES MOORE: Yeah, I'm proud of our effort, especially on the defensive end. They have a lot of kids that shoot the three extremely well and can get to the rim.

And so to hold them to single digits the first three quarters was a great accomplishment.

On the other hand, like to see us play a little better offensively, and hopefully we'll get that going.

But, again, obviously I have a great love for Chattanooga and UTC. It was not -- I was afraid the NCAA committee was going to do this. But, again, proud of them too. They've had an awesome year, and it's a great place.

So congrats to them on their season. And, again, we're -- I'm proud of these young ladies and what they were able to do.

THE MODERATOR: Now we'll open the floor up for questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Aziaha, you shot just one make for the three-point line from the first three quarters, but then you rocketed it off for four in that fourth quarter. What electrified going Holt in that last period?

AZIAHA JAMES: Just allowing the game to come to me. Not forcing up the shots because I wasn't hitting the first



half. So not letting that get to me, just keeping my head up high and just keep going. And, yeah, it did well for me in the second half.

Q. Ladies, first nine shots you guys were 1-9 to start early, five minutes. What were you saying to each other there? You had them contained too, but what were your thoughts the first five minutes there?

RIVER BALDWIN: Yeah, I think we had to let the game come to us. When we're not hitting early, we just stay together and let our defense lead to offense. When we get the momentum going, we're usually good.

WES MOORE: I let the assistant coaches coach that segment --

(Laughter)

Q. River, it seemed like it was a pretty big battle early on on the boards. You ended up with 11 rebounds, 6 of them on the offensive end. What was the key to adjusting to these guys are really getting after us, trying to win that battle on the glass?

RIVER BALDWIN: Yeah, just we knew we had a size advantage and sending three to boards like we usually try to do. As long as we crashed, we knew we had a size advantage so that would benefit us.

Q. Looking forward, what do you guys think about what Tennessee? Any different preparation? Aziaha, if you can answer that. What's the thoughts here from the locker room?

AZIAHA JAMES: You know, just taking this game, watching the film and see what we did wrong to execute it better in the next game. Just taking our time and just going to the next step.

Q. What does it mean when you hold a team under 50 points?

AZIAHA JAMES: It feels good that we did good on offense as well. We could have done better. But I feel like our



defense is getting better as well. So, yeah, that's mostly where it comes from.

Q. A junior, a senior, every year that you've played with NC State you've made the NCAA Tournament. What has changed about your game from your freshman year to now, your senior and junior year, both mentally and physically?

RIVER BALDWIN: Yeah, I think I've grown up a lot. And I would say my two years at NC State I've been in the best shape that I've been the whole time I've played basketball.

So credit to our staff for putting us through the summer workouts, even though they were horrible, and just getting us ready and prepped for the season.

AZIAHA JAMES: I've definitely grown a lot from my freshman year, just soaking up all the information starting my freshman year. And for where it has got me now, just being a leader on this team, so, yeah, it's a major difference.

Q. You're going up against an SEC squad tomorrow. You're no stranger to playing SEC teams. When you think of the SEC, what comes to mind and particularly on the defensive end?

AZIAHA JAMES: Like us on defense?

Q. The SEC defense.

AZIAHA JAMES: Just doing whatever Coach Moore says and making sure we are not rushing ourselves and we are staying patient and letting the game come to us.

RIVER BALDWIN: I think a big piece of playing in the SEC teams is the physicality that they bring and matching that physicality and playing our game.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, you're excused. Thank you very much and congratulations.

And we'll now open up the floor for questions for Coach Moore.

Q. Could you speak on the slow start a little bit to the game?

WES MOORE: Well, we hadn't played in a couple of weeks. So let's blame it on that. You know, I don't know.

Again, like I said, you hadn't played in a while, and you're excited, adrenaline, all that. We just -- I thought we had some good looks. We just didn't knock shots down. And,

again, fortunately we kind of got in the flow a little bit later.

But we're going to need to try to get off to a better start. Hopefully getting this first game out of the way will help that come Monday.

Q. Could you speak to River's performance tonight, and are you hoping to get her more touches out there?

WES MOORE: Yeah, again, let's face it. Chattanooga is smart. They kind of packed it in on her and made it hard for her to get it. And if she did get it, they doubled her. We anticipated that happening. But it's still tough when you got somebody in your face as soon as you catch it.

So I think there's no secret, we've got to shoot better from the perimeter. If they're going to double, we've got to be able to kick it out and keep the defense honest.

River, the thing jumps off the page here to me is six offensive rebounds, and nobody else on our team had more than one. So that's why sometimes -- and then she ended up with a total of 11. That's why sometimes it's hard for me to take her out because I think she's so -- has such a presence on the boards on both ends.

Q. The team held you two seeds under 10 points throughout the first three quarters. How does that speak to the conditioning of the team and how they're able to play throughout multiple minutes and tough plays?

WES MOORE: Yeah, like I said, I spent 15 years coaching at Chattanooga. I think the tough part when you come into a game like this is the defense is now a little longer and maybe a little more athletic, and you tend to rush your shot.

And I thought we did a pretty good job. There were certain things we wanted to do to take away right hand. They got some great shooters. The two freshmen they bring in off the bench in conference play are shooting 65 percent from three and 42 percent from three.

So we just really stressed, you know, you can't overhelp, you can't get tied up in a pick. You've got to get out to them.

And so I thought our players did a pretty good job. Again, I thought we slipped a little bit in the third, late in the third and the fourth of taking away people's strengths.

But for the most part, I thought we did a pretty good job of that. But that's probably the toughest part. When I was at Chat, we played Tennessee every year, and it's hard to shoot your normal percentages and all when the defense is

a little longer and a little more athletic.

Q. Looking ahead to Monday's matchup --

WES MOORE: Do we have to?

(Laughter.)

Q. Only two coaches have succeeded Kay Yow's long tenure at NC State, Coach Harper and you. Speaking from a historical standpoint, what is the significance of Monday's matchup just from that sort of standpoint?

WES MOORE: Well, to be honest with you, I hadn't thought too much of that aspect of it. Kellie and John, for that matter, are two of my dearest friends in the coaching profession. We worked together at Chattanooga for four years, I believe. John, I was trying to hire Kellie away from Auburn, didn't have the money to match it up, so then I said what if I hired John as the third assistant?

Okay? So that's how I pulled that off, man. It was -- and John didn't make much money, but he had two responsibilities: Go to lunch with me every day and play golf anytime I wanted to. So it was a pretty good job. I can't believe he left me and went with Kellie, to be honest.

Again, that's the tough part. Madison Hayes being from Chattanooga, when the first bracket came up, she looked at me. Oh, wow, Chattanooga. I said, I knew that was coming, and now get ready, Tennessee is going to the next one. Boom. I knew the committee was going to do this.

So Kellie and I, we've avoided playing each other in the regular season game. We scrimmage each other often in the fall. But we -- again, close friends. And I hate it but, you know, same time, I get it. We've been fortunate to dodge it as long as we have. The part of that, it's going to be a great challenge because they're very, very talented.

But as far as -- you think about Kellie, she followed Kay Yow and then, not directly, but kind of followed Pat Summitt. So she's been in some pretty good company. And two of those people -- both those people had a great impact on my career.

I started out coaching at Maryville College in Tennessee, or as we say Maryville, and Pat Summitt was really good to me during those times.

So a lot of history. I've got two degrees from Tennessee. So which if you saw my high school diploma, you would say, Wow, that's pretty amazing. But -- or high school transcript.

But anyway, both of us, I was obviously an assistant with Kay Yow and spent a couple of years here with her. And then like I said, Kellie directly followed her. So we both have had a lot of -- I look at Coach Yow, what a person she was and what she's still doing with the Kay Yow foundation is amazing.

So, yeah, it is -- it's not lost, though. I realize it.

Q. Speaking of Madison Hayes, she had that early in the game, that kind of a wild pass, went into the back court, and she won the foot race, got down the court and got an and-one. How big was that in setting the tone and, okay, let's get ready to play?

WES MOORE: Yeah, Madison, she's -- you got to love her. She's going to give you everything she's got. I consider her kind of a glue player for us. She'll defend the best perimeter player, she'll rebound, she'll nail threes.

So, again, obviously I knew about Madison a long time ago from my time at Chattanooga, knew a lot of her family and friends. She turned me down the first time. But luckily got her back on the rebound, and, yeah, she's a big part of what we do.

I agree, I think that was a big play. Her outrunning that and then being able to get to the rim kind of set the tone a little bit.

Q. You touched on this a little bit with Tennessee already, but do you pay any attention to nonconference opponents besides SEC schools, or have you been watching the tournament at all?

WES MOORE: I definitely follow Tennessee, you know, again, because of the connection and ties there. But I'd say probably if I'm just watching, I'm probably going to be more likely to watch an ACC team or game or whatever.

But, yeah, definitely, again, Power Five, we definitely follow all of them, and got great respect for Tennessee and for that league.

Q. Going back to your relationship with the Harpers, you know, as a human being, how do you put away the friendship side and just go out there and compete? And then also have you spoke with Kellie or John since the brackets came out?

WES MOORE: Oh, yeah, I picked up John the night they got here, and we went to Yard House and watched basketball on TV. He ate, and I cheered for the Wolfpack men. So it was a great night.

Yeah, you know, again, we go way back. I tried to recruit Kellie out of high school when I was here at NC State, and so have that little connection. But just the years we had together at Chattanooga were some of my favorite years.

And John and I still go to Vegas with a bunch of guys for a week every August, and he probably wins and loses a whole lot more than I even take out there with me. They've got an agreement they don't talk about his gambling unless he either wins or loses a million dollars. So so far he hadn't had to tell Kellie much.

No, they're just great people. And, you know, done a heck of a job. I mean, there's only one Pat Summitt. And I know, heck, our fans have gotten a little spoiled now, and Tennessee fans obviously have high expectations.

But it's tough out here. That's why Coach Keatts and I have a special relationship on the men's side. We know how hard it is. This stuff is tough. There's 15 teams in the ACC. You finish in the top of that, it's not easy. And same way SEC, you know.

So, again, they're great people, great coaches, and I love them.

Q. As the journey continues here, what's been the most gratifying thing as a coach watching this particular squad this year, a win like Connecticut and making this journey with them? And you notice things. What's the most significant and gratifying so far?

WES MOORE: Yeah, that's tough because when you're in the middle of it, you don't really take the time. I had somebody text me the other day when the game sold out like that, and somebody texted me, What do you think of this? Think about where you came from, where you are now.

But, you know, the bad part is I think about the Connecticut game and how well we played and how do we get that again? Because we've had some great wins.

But I am, I'm proud of them. We were picked 8th in the ACC. We were unranked. But this is not the time to reflect or any of that. You're grinding and, heck, we've got a quick turnaround here. When it's all over, maybe we'll sit back and look at it a little bit. But I think here at NC State too we've got -- as coaches, players, we've got high expectations. And we haven't really done, you know, anything yet that we really -- but, again, proud of what they've done. They've come a long way. And they've done their best to carry out what we want to do.

And so it's been an enjoyable journey from that standpoint. I think we've got a pretty good chemistry, and they like each other. And that's a good start.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Again, congratulations.

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