

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

Sunday, March 22, 2026
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA
Williams Arena

Ole Miss Rebels
Coach Yolett
McPhee-McCuin
Cotie McMahon
Christeen Iwuala
Media Conference

Minnesota 65, Ole Miss 63

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we'll start with an opening statement from you when you are ready.

YOLETT MCPHEE-MCCUIN: I just thought this was an incredible environment. Shout out to the Minnesota fans that came out to support women's basketball and I know they got a treat by watching two good teams.

Disappointed how we ended the game. I thought that there were opportunities from the beginning of the game to the end of the game where we could have taken control of our destiny. We did that coming out of halftime and if you want to know how home court advantage feels, I feel like their fans won them that game today. I'm not discrediting their play, with an awesome shot by the Battle kid at the end, but their fans won them that game. You couldn't hear. Just an incredible environment.

As I close out this year and look forward to next year, the goal will be to host at home so that we can have that same type of opportunity. That's what's next for this program.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much. We will now take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Cotie, getting into that foul trouble early and dealing with that throughout the game, did that change at all how aggressive you felt you could play on both ends of the floor?



COTIE McMAHON: I feel like if it changed how aggressive I was, then I wouldn't have fouled out. I just feel like I was put back in the game to play basketball and do what I do so I continued to do what I do. I can only control what I can control and I was dealt the cards that I was dealt. I just handled it and still tried to make the right plays for my team. And the plays that I would usually make so I wouldn't say it changed anything.

Q. I mean, 21 minutes I think is tied for the lowest you've played this season. Being on the bench that much in a game, you're not used to that. How are you trying to still put energy and lift up your teammates even though you were not able to be on the floor as much?

COTIE McMAHON: I would just say kind of talking to them on things that we see from a bench perspective versus on the court. I say that would be the biggest thing.

Q. Right now, as you're sitting in this moment, what do you feel is the most impactful feeling like maybe this was a missed opportunity or thinking about missing the opportunity to advance?

CHRISTEEN IWUALA: I feel like the game didn't end the way we wanted it to. There were a lot of things within our control that we could have done and really just honing in on that. I feel like, I don't know, it was just a tough pill to swallow just being in this position.

COTIE McMAHON: Yeah, I mean after a game like this, all you can do is think about it, but it was all in our hands. I feel like the first half, we just didn't want it. We put ourselves in the position that we got put in and it was unfortunate, but that's just what it was. So now we just have to take it on the chin and then deal with it and get ready for what's next for everybody.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thank you very much.

We will continue with questions for Coach.

Q. Coach, not being able to have Cotie out there as much with the foul trouble, I don't think that's a



situation you have dealt with much, if at all this season. How did that challenge the team trying to play so much without her and you as a coach not being able to coach with your best player on the floor?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: I got to see how to answer that without getting in any trouble. I was in the locker room thinking about other star players on teams. I've just never seen them fouled out in a March Madness game. I just haven't. Paige, Caitlin. I mean, I don't want to call current ones because then someone will say I'm tampering or something like that. I just haven't seen the best players get fouled out.

From my point of view, the last call was incorrect. We watched it 1,500 times. One of the things I do understand is that officials are human and environments create them to officiate in a particular type of way. I don't think that's why we lost the game. I just know that Cotie is leading scorer, newcomer of the year, all of the things, and she plays 20 minutes.

And it's disappointing. These fans deserved more than that. The game deserves more than that, and I just think a officiating as a whole really needs to be looked at. I really do. I'm not just talking about this game. Something has to be done. It has to be better.

Q. Even with how that transpires. Last play of the game, you still have a shot, good shot from Tianna. What was your mindset drawing that play up and just your thoughts on how it transpired?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, it was a back screen for Tash and I told Sira to just throw it at the rim because Tash is super athletic and can out-jump anybody on their team, but I said if T is open, you can pass it to her because we've also seen her bang seven threes in one game. She hasn't had a good tournament but we've seen her do it. She got the look and as a coach, that's the look you want.

As a coach, I thought the last two possessions, two for us with Tash scoring on the play I drew up and Tianna getting the shot and the young lady making that shot, it was just -- that's out of a Disney movie. You're at home court, three, two, one... and she just makes the shot. There's nothing you can do. Sira's hand was right there contesting that shot. If we could have it again, maybe I wouldn't want her to catch it.

But we had been defending so well the whole night. It was a good look for T and she's a sophomore and she won't forget that.

Q. Coach, you like to learn history about this place, so

I believe you're the first Black female to sit on the stool that Clem Haskins made famous when he coached here. I know you stand moving up and down, but then you sat down. In your last moments of leaving an impression here to fans who don't see Black coaches coach, do you hope you felt you did that with your team this year?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I mean, like I told you before, representation matters. I did not know that the seat I was sitting in, who's been in that. For me, I think it's important for us to just put a great product on the floor. I thought both teams did that. I have a lot of respect for Minnesota and Coach and what they do. At the end, you just -- I had to just give her a hug because it was like a great basketball game. Sometimes I wish that is reciprocated when it's the other way around, but I know how to win and lose games.

This is the beginning for me and I hope our fans saw how many people were out there and what that looked like, because I believe that communities, administration, they win those games. And also the teams, but it's a full effort. As far as me being a Black coach, I don't shy away from that. I'm proud of that. Hopefully I can inspire all just by getting a team to come together and play hard and being able to a gracefully take a loss. That's what I hope.

Q. You literally are one of the best basketball minds that we have right now. I'm so proud to be able to say that. I want you to think about how does today's loss either fracture the confidence of the program or fuel the momentum? What's the next step?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: That's a great question. You know, I saw -- someone wrote up that Coach Yo is losing seven seniors so they'll have to rebuild. We don't rebuild at Ole Miss. We lost six last year and had the best start that we've ever had here at Ole Miss in my tenure, so we reload.

I think what's next is I'm kind of tired of having to take down Goliath so early. What's next is to be able to host. If Sira didn't get hurt, we would be hosting this year. Those two games we lost at the end really hurt our chances.

Next year is to host, but not even be a four seed. Be a three seed. I have to figure out how to make sure our fans come out and support us. They had almost 11,000 today and I felt it. It was incredible. For someone that loves a game like I do, it doesn't distract me at all. I get fuelled by it.

So it's about reloading. The only way that happens is by the people that support the program from the chancellor to



the AD and to the community for us to be able to do what we got to do because this is a different type of environment that we're in. You got to be able to have the Jimmies and the Joes, Jessleys and the Jessicas. So hope through we can get two Coties and be able to build around that.

We've built a reputation. Doesn't fracture us at all. This is a well-oiled machine. Just try to put us in a better position to make the run that we want to make moving forward.

Q. Just wondering about your view of that possession with the shot clock violation after Gophers tied it with a three-pointer. Did you feel like the crowd noise affected that?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, of course. I just said the crowd won the game. The crowd won the game. These are young people. I felt like Sira had a really good shot. She had willed us the whole time. When she didn't take the shot I was kind of, like, stunned because I'm not a big time-out person unless I feel like we have to. Like I did the possession after that. I called it because I could tell we weren't confident, but it was in the hands that I wanted it in. Cotie was out the game. It was Sira. She had made some big shots and that's just an environment. That's something she has to learn from. She's a sophomore. She'll be better.

One of the things I did talk to the team about, because I have seven seniors and they're getting ready to go into the real world. I just talked about courage and having courage. I wouldn't have this job if I lacked courage. Ole Miss didn't come after me. I called a search firm and told them that I was the right person for the job.

If there's anything I want them to learn, sometimes you have to step out and shoot your shot. I think moving forward, that's something that Sira will never forget. Hopefully our team and the seniors that are leaving that are going out in the real world, when they have an opportunity as women, especially, that they just have the courage to go ahead and shoot their shot at whatever it is they want in life.

Q. I have asked every one of your transfer players throughout this week and all if coming here, if it was what they thought it was going to be, if they've gotten what they thought they were going to get and gotten everything that you told them in terms of learning and growth. Every single one of them has said yes. Every single one of them has gone on and on about that.

Does that help you when you now, the portal is fixing to open up and you're recruiting players, you've got evidence that they got what they were coming for.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, that's something that started way before these young ladies game from Shakira Austin, Kennedy Todd-Williams, Anger Baker, Marquesha Davis. I have tons of players that are in the league or playing professionally that were all transfers. It speaks for itself.

My friends have this little slogan, if you want to go pro, go with Coach Yo. We look at our institution and our program as a pro prep.

But when we talk about Ole Miss, I don't care what the perception is, you have to come and see for yourself. Oxford is a place that loves on their student-athletes. All their students, really. They love on them. It's a safe environment. It's an environment where you're allowed to grow and it's one where you really get to feel a home away from home.

I think these young ladies continuing -- that's what I said to them in the locker room. Just thanks for taking a chance on me. Cotie could have gone -- Cotie had so many schools that wanted her, Christeen leaving from UCLA. All these young ladies had options, okay? And they chose to come here and be part of what we're doing here.

I'm forever grateful and that's why this one stings. I really enjoy coaching this team. I wasn't ready to stop. But, you know, as a coach you don't really stop coaching them. My coaches are way older than me and I still call them coach to this day and I'm 43. Hopefully they will continue to be advocates and just by them showing up and doing what they did. They will always have a home here at Ole Miss with us.

Q. You mentioned Sira's name a couple of times. With how much you're losing from the senior class and reloading, how important is it that she is a player who can come back and kind of looking to see her take another step and become kind of a 1-A player for you all next year.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, we already had our meeting with Sira for next year. That is one of the things we talked about. She has to be -- talking about two Coties, how about two Siras? She's going to be that one. She knows that. She will be ready to step in that. She has blossomed so much in the little time. She's only a sophomore. She's way ahead of any of my sophomores that I've ever coached going into her junior campaign. This young lady was out for a month and came back and just played with so much heart and we really missed her.

Really excited about her having a great offseason and



building her. That is the goal. The gold is to build around Sira so that we can continue to move on and even be better in the future.

Thanks, everybody. Really appreciate your love.

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