

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Texas vs Illinois

Monday, March 24, 2025

Austin, Texas, USA

Moody Center

**Texas Longhorns**

**Coach Vic Schaefer**

**Madison Booker**

**Shay Holle**

**Rori Harmon**

**Ndjakalenga Mwenentanda**

Media Conference

Texas 65, Illinois 48

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by University of Texas student-athletes and Head Coach Vic Schaefer. Rori Harmon will be joining us. We have Coach Schaefer with Madison Booker, Shay Holle, and Ndjakalenga Mwenentanda. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach, please.

VIC SCHAEFER: Giving God the glory for No. 33. I serve an incredible Lord. He has blessed me with an incredible team. That team was really focused today.

I was really proud of their prep to have to play a really good Illinois team on one-day prep after we knew we didn't have our best night the other night. Again, a lot of that had to do with being off two weeks, but we don't ever try to sugar-coat things or make excuse around here. We're pretty accountable.

Just really proud of our team. I thought they came out the first half and really established themselves and did what we wanted to do. We only had three turnovers. The reason I want Rori in here is because she runs our team, but she really set the tone today defensively on 1.

We have so much respect for those guards at Illinois as well as Bostic inside, but we knew that we had to really get on 1 a little bit and try to establish ourselves defensively because we didn't do a very good job of that the other



night. Rori has done that her whole career.

Again, I say it, I'll challenge anybody that wants to challenge me. You do what she does, picking up 94 feed in the press, running our the offense, if ain't the best Defensive Player of the Year, I don't know who is.

She's somebody that we lean on for so much, and she wants to do so well. So she's like me. She wears her feelings on her shoulders and just takes so much responsibility. There's no one like her. Again, it's why we've won like we've won here at Texas because it is started with her.

Again, you're welcome to show me anybody else because I don't think there is that person. She creates so many issues. Had seven assists today, two turnovers, four steals, and runs our team.

Jak having a career day. If she'll stay within herself and just do things that we know she's capable of doing, she can do that. Again, when I can play her, it opens up the playbook for me for some other players. Mainly this one.

The four-guard line-up has helped us some, but tonight I thought when Jak came in, really changed for us. Booker went on a little run. We got her some really good looks. I thought she was really good today. Obviously 9 for 18 with six rebounds. She, too, had two steals. Had a break-away layup off of a steal out top.

Again, I thought our team was locked in. They were focused. A little bittersweet today. Shay, it's her last game in Austin. Been here five years. She and I have won a lot of games together. We've had a lot of good times.

She doesn't have a bad day. Coach Conrad is in the back there, and I know she appreciates like I do those kids that couple into the gym every day with a smile on their face. They're low-maintenance. They go to class. They just take care of their business. Yet, they bring something to the table, and they work. That's Shay Holle.

All she's done is helped us win, and it doesn't matter in what capacity. She's just a winner. She's a great

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teammate. She's a great Longhorn. She's just somebody that you don't run into very often in your career as far as when I say the attitude, the work ethic every day, no bad days, no frowns. Just everything about her, you'll miss that when you're a coach.

You miss those kids that come in every day and are like that. I appreciate her. I know our team appreciates her. She's really impacted the University of Texas women's basketball program. Again, you have to give her credit. She's made herself into a Big 12 All-Defensive Team player and now an SEC player and a difference player.

Again, proud of our team. Onto the next one. I'm excited to take this group to Birmingham. This is one of my better teams, y'all. That's why I want it so bad for them. We've got enough. I'm excited to have a chance to go play them.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Rori, I'm wondering, did you enter this postseason at all with a chip on your shoulder since you weren't a finalist for Defensive Player of the Year, only honorable mention on the All-American Team? Do you have anything to prove this postseason?**

RORI HARMON: Yeah, I'm completely honored to be on that list with the players that are on there as well because there are some great players and great defensive players, and it's great to see that people can see my effort on the defensive end.

But I take pride in defense. That's just my thing. It's been like that forever. Coming to play for Coach Schaefer, who takes that same amount of pride, it means a lot to me, but I'm going to keep playing. It's not just me. It's also my teammates. We've joined together, and we've been working a lot on our defense. It was really great today.

Of course, it seems like I want to just play so hard just knowing that I wasn't playing that tournament last year. It just means a lot to be playing again, so yeah.

**Q. Hi, Jak, as Coach said, a career day for you. How does it feel for you to see a standing ovation as you checked out of the court and the success and recognition you're getting today?**

NDJAKALENGA MWENENTANDA: I mentioned this the other day. Moody is an awesome environment. You all saw it today, but they've always been here. It's awesome to always be around them and to play and have that home court advantage.

Also, to know that my family is there supporting me in the

crowd as well. So I'm just out there having fun (laughing).

**Q. Maddie, you had four turnovers in the last game, and you only had two tonight. What did you do over the last day and a half to really lock in and make sure you're focused for today?**

MADISON BOOKER: I don't know. Same thing. I just had to be smarter. I'm kind of mad I did get those two turnovers in the fourth quarter. In the locker room I was fake-crying to Coach Schaefer about it.

Yeah, I mean, I just think that today I made better decisions with the ball, just passed the ball to my teammates, being more aware. I think I just in the fourth quarter got a little lazy with the passes and stuff like that.

Hey, it's better than four turnovers. It's two right now. We're going to keep getting it down.

**Q. Jak, it seemed like your break-out moment. Do you feel that way? Are you scared now that your expectations that Coach Schaefer and your teammates have for you have really gone through the roof?**

NDJAKALENGA MWENENTANDA: No, never been scared. I've been prepared for this moment since day one freshman year, preseason training. It's really just my teammates having the trust in me and having the trust in myself. Y'all just saw the most confident version of myself, and it's only up from here.

This isn't the only game we have. We have Tennessee coming up. I'm glad to make contributions, but I know every game is a different line-up. Every game is a different scout. Just ready for the next one.

No, I'm not scared. I'm quite excited actually (smiling).

**Q. Your coach got you ready in less than 24 hours to get prepared. Talk about what it means to have somebody that gets you prepared for the environment like this and you still come out and play a top defensive game?**

SHAY HOLLE: Yeah, I think we've all talked about it at some point. Our staff is unreal. The amount of time and energy and effort they put into our scouts and not just our couches, but our practice players as well.

We have an 8:00 a.m. shoot-around today, and they're in our practice gym early going through Illinois sets and preparing for shoot-around so they can help prepare us, which I don't think you get that everywhere. We appreciate that so much because they do get us so ready.



We feel so confident going into a game because we guarded every set against our guys, and if we're able to do it against and guard them, we feel really good going into the game. It's really special the staff we have and the practice guys. They put a lot of time in, and we appreciate it a lot.

**Q. For Rori and for Shay. Rori, what was your plan on 1? She had a really good game the other night, and you kept her under wraps. How exciting is it to be going to Birmingham where there's going to be some of the best guards, including yourselves, in the country in the same gym?**

RORI HARMON: The plan on No. 1 was just suppress them. They had six or seven players in the rotations they normally go through. We were thinking, okay, if we can wear them down a little bit, they might start making some mental lapses and turning the ball over quite a bit.

She was able to do that, and you know, when you pressure the ball on the point guard, they're the ones that are kind of starting the offense. If they can't get into that offense, it kind of just messes up their offensive flow.

I think as a team I was under pressure on the ball and there were denials everywhere. We have our post players 100% perfectly hedging the ball screens, and three people in help. It was just beautiful defense today, so I'm just glad that it works out, and we should translate that to the next game. Yeah.

SHAY HOLLE: It's really exciting going to Birmingham. I think all of us were watching the Tennessee-Ohio State game last night. Obviously Tennessee is very talented. They have a lot of people that they play different from this team. You know, be a different scout, but we'll be prepared for them too.

Yeah, really exciting. It's going to be a lot of good basketball and will be fun.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us. We'll now take questions for Coach Schaefer.

**Q. Coach, looking ahead to this Tennessee matchup, just having already played them this year inform your preparation for such a big game?**

VIC SCHAEFER: Well, I mean, they're obviously playing very well at a high level. They're a unique team with a unique strategy. You know, I feel like I've got the best point guard in the country, and I feel like Madison Booker is the second. She's 1 and 1A when it comes to point

guards. I think you can throw Bry in there.

Those three are the best in my mind, and you are going to have to handle the ball. You know, you're going to have to handle the ball against them. They're going to try to do their thing.

I think we handled it pretty well here. I think we have a pretty good understanding of what they want to do and how they want to do it. They're a really good team, but you better have some guards when you go play against them. Man, I love my guards. Like, I'm not trading them for anybody.

Again, with Rori and Madison, you've got 1A and 1AA at point. You know, they just make really good decision. I think we had a great plan here. We had a knock-down/drag-out with them.

I know our team will be confident and so will I. Again, a lot of respect for them. They've had a heck of a year and are playing really well. You go into Ohio State and beat them on their home floor, you got to respect that. It's hard to do. It's hard to go on somebody's home floor and win at this level.

So we'll have to be ready to go.

**Q. Vic, you spoke with a lot of conviction that you believe that this team has enough. Not that you didn't have enough with previous teams, but what is it about this team that you really feel this way going into Birmingham?**

VIC SCHAEFER: Well, I like the depth of my guards, and I love the size that I have inside. You know, if we can get half of what we got from Ndjakalenga today at the four, we're just a different team.

The playbook gets way bigger when I can play her justice at the four for everybody else. When I go to the four-guard line-up, the playbook gets a little bit smaller. You might think, Okay, well, what's that mean? I've seen your playbook. You know, it's a pretty big playbook. So it's not that small, but it does hinder me some.

When Aaliyah went down, we have just been ham-and-egging it, so to speak, there. We found a way to win some games. I like this team because, first, it starts with your point guard. We obviously have an unbelievable All American in Madison Booker. You saw it today. She is special.

Then when you can go down there and have Taylor and Ky, not many people have that. This is a team that I have

a ton of confidence in, and I just want it so bad for them. I have to catch myself sometimes because I just want them to be perfect, and it ain't going to happen.

**Q. Vic, what do you think went into turning them over 20 times today? I think they averaged 12. I know you've been talking a lot about Rori. Just team-wide, what went into that number?**

VIC SCHAEFER: They are really good at pick-and-roll. I watched a lot of film on them and people that defended them. We spent a ton of time yesterday defending their bread and butter, and I think we gave up one pick-and-roll, but it wasn't to a five player. That's it. One time today. That's their bread and butter.

So we felt like if we could take that away, we would have a really good chance. So I'm going to tell you. Taylor Jones and Kyla were so good today, y'all, in pick-and-roll defense. Way different than they've been maybe all year, but we really talked about it, and we really worked on it and made a point of emphasis for them.

See, the key is not necessarily -- you got two people in that action, but you got three people in help, and you got to get those three in the right place. We had the three in the right place all day.

So I think when you took away their bread and butter and then, again, Rori is out there bugging the crap out of 1 and then our other guards are out there doing a nice job with ball pressure, it was just really hard for them to run their stuff.

Shauna is a great coach. They do a nice job. They run a lot of really good stuff. I thought we did a really good job of taking them out today.

**Q. Vic, what does it say about your team that you're this successful and you're not getting much at all from the 3-point line?**

VIC SCHAEFER: Well, again, I think we can make those. We only took five today. You know, they didn't really give us that many. Again, it's a lot bigger deal to y'all than it is to me. You know, we're a really good basketball team. I take offense to the narrative -- not in this room, but to the narrative that's out there, you know, we play a third game in 15 hours at South Carolina, score 45 points, and all of a sudden the narrative is everybody is worried about my offense. I don't think anybody was talking about somebody's offense yesterday when they only scored X amount of points. It's such an unfair narrative to my kids.

Again, we don't make excuse, but this team is always

going to have a chance because they're going to guard. They're always going to guard. I like my offense. I think we got -- we shot the ball well today. We got some great looks. We missed a lot. We missed a ton of good shots. We missed some layups.

So I think our kids are doing a really good job. You want to complain today about my offense, you can blame the fourth quarter on me. I was pulling them back a little bit because I wanted them to work the clock. When you are up 22 or 23, I've always been that way. You can blame the fourth quarter on me, but you know, it is what it is. I'm not too worried about it.

I think we've won 33 games, and it's worked pretty good.

**Q. Vic, when you said Ndjakalenga needs to play within herself, what exactly does that mean?**

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, just not trying to -- she can get in trouble trying to do too much sometimes. You know, just today she other than the three ball, she took great shots. They were within the offense. They drove the ball, finished at the rim something does. She made her free-throws. She had one turnover. I've seen her come in and touch it three times and have three turnovers. That's growth.

So, again, the kid is confident now. You can sit here and look at her. The kid, confidence is not her problem. I love that about her. You want kids that are fearless. She qualifies.

I just have to get her to pay attention sometimes to understand we have really good players on our team and some of those players can get a better shot sometimes than the one she might take, or she's trying to do too much, and that's not a bad thing sometimes when you are trying to please or help somebody, but when she just lets the game come to her -- I can't tell you how many times I heard Coach Blair say that... let the game come to you. If you just let the game come to you, sometimes this is what happens. You're 7 for 10. You are 19 points. You are 5 out of 6 at the line and had one turnovers. Didn't hurt me on defense. Did not hurt us.

The other night she came in, and she struggled defensively. So it's hard. You're throwing a three player into a new position, and that's what we've had to do with her. That's part of the ham-and-egging that I'm talking about.

She has really handled it fantastic in my opinion. She's really been great. So I'm proud of her. Happy for her that she's able to play as well as she did tonight. Obviously our crowd loves her and loved to see her play well.

You know what, that's what being young and being a student-athlete is all about, man. If you can have that happen one time in your life where you come off the floor and people acknowledge your greatness, man, that's special. I really appreciate our fans today doing that for her as well as our whole team.

Those four seniors, they have done a lot here. Shay, I'm as happy about the win for her as anything because it's good to see her be able to go out like that. God is good.

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