

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 3 Semifinal - Tennessee vs Texas

Friday, March 28, 2025

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena

Tennessee Volunteers

Kim Caldwell

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



to be the head coach at Tennessee and that our team is playing, we're still playing in March.

Q. With Talaysia Cooper, take me through when you first got to Tennessee, what do you know about her? How did the process go of getting her to stick around? What has to meant to you this year?

KIM CALDWELL: She's an incredibly important part of our team. When we first got here, she was just a little bit nervous. She hadn't played for a year, and she was nervous about getting back on the floor, and she put a lot of pressure on herself. To see what she has done this year and how she's really helped our team in every aspect of rebounding, getting steals, helping spark our defense, she is sharing the ball really well now. Just to see her evolution from how nervous she was when we first got here, it's been something that's been really special.

Q. You weren't on the sideline the last time, obviously, the last time you guys played Texas, but how involved were you in prep for that game? What do you think it will be like for you now to be on the sideline against them in the tournament?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I was not very involved in the prep on that one. A little bit busy. But, you know, it was interesting to sit at home and watch it and to yell at your team through the TV like a fan as opposed to a coach. We did go back and watch the film and just treated it like a normal game prep since.

Q. You talked a little bit about Jillian Hollingshead last weekend and how she's looked so good and pretty consistently confident for you guys on the court. Can you just talk about her kind of evolution in that aspect this year, because her first two years here weren't probably what she envisioned and just what it was like to help her kind of find her confidence again this season.

KIM CALDWELL: I'm really proud of her, and I think the last two games she was incredibly aggressive going to the rim, rebounding, and we're going to need that out of her as we go forward.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Caldwell, please.

Q. Which of the three Gs are you guys focusing on this week?

KIM CALDWELL: Well, we are focusing on giving God glory. That's a lot of Gs for us. I think that's really important, but for us on our Texas prep it's been rebound. Make sure that we are physical without fouling and try to make that improvement.

Q. Whenever you look back at the Texas game from earlier this year, it's right in the middle of a three-game losing streak. How much thought do you put in that whenever you are preparing for the rematch here? I notice kind of the biggest differential was on the boards. How important has that been in preparing your team?

KIM CALDWELL: We've done what we can to prepare for that. We don't really look back. We are hopeful that we're a new team and it's a different game. They're playing really well right now too, and anything can happen in March. We just need to make sure we are playing like we have our last two games.

Q. It's been almost a year since you took this job and a lot has happened to you in that year. How would you describe the year that has been, and was this your expectation to be here in this moment when you took this job?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I'm thankful that we are here in the Sweet 16. It has been a whirlwind of a year, but it's been a blessing. I'm grateful and thankful to be here and



Rebounding, again, is going to be important. Texas is a big team. She's going to have to be physical and strong on the inside, but her journey and her growth has been great. She's a wonderful person. She's a wonderful person to coach. She's fun. She's consistent. She's the same every day. She's a caring, thoughtful human being, and her teammates are happy for her. Her teammates see how much better she's gotten, and they cheer her on in practice, and that's really nice to see.

Q. Obviously we mentioned that you weren't on the court last game the Vols played Texas. How has your squad helped you prepare for this as a coach?

KIM CALDWELL: They talk about what they saw. They talk about what needs to change, and any time you're coaching young people, you want to be a teacher first and just to listen to them and get their feedback and their thoughts about what needs to go differently this time around.

It's something we ask.

Q. Dawn was saying yesterday how the SEC has prepared you guys well for March Madness and for such. Obviously, tomorrow you have two SEC teams. That probably doesn't help you as much since they're in the same boat. How good has this conference been to get everybody ready and keep playing? There are so many teams still going in the Sweet 16.

KIM CALDWELL: The SEC is a powerhouse of a conference, and every night you have to show up and play. When you talk about what it takes to win in March, you have to rebound, be physical, strong on the glass. I think all of those things will be important for us, and the SEC has definitely prepared us for that.

Q. With the challenge of how good Texas is inside, how are you expecting to handle that from a defensive standpoint, and who is going to have to step up in that situation?

KIM CALDWELL: Everyone is going to have to step up. Our bigs are going to have to be big, but our guards are going to have to get in there, and it's going to have to be a focused effort. We're not going to get every rebound. They average 17 offensive rebounds a game. They had 25 second-chance points the last time we played them.

I don't know how capable we are, but we're going to have to try harder and have a more focused effort on the glass if we want the results to be different.

Q. Kind of sticking to that, how different is it or what's the approach to preparing for a team that does not rely or shoot the three-pointer much, but so good in so many other categories?

KIM CALDWELL: It's very different for us because we guard each other every day in practice, and we obviously shoot a lot of threes, so we're spaced out a little bit more. You come into games like this, where you protect the rim more than the 3-point line. It's a little bit of an adjustment for us on the defensive end. You have to make sure you know your personnel and know who you are closing out to.

Q. You talked about body language being a huge thing the other day at the press conference. Did you see good body language the first two rounds with your team?

KIM CALDWELL: I did. I saw great body language, and we showed that on film. Hopefully we can continue to build on that.

Q. I'm not sure if you saw yesterday Vic Schaefer was talking about the matchup and what he called the story line of your hockey substitutions is how he worded it. He said that if he was yanking his kids, they would be pissed at him. They like to play. I'm curious what your response is to that and just maybe what you have heard about maybe people who question the way you do things or the way you sub and it's landed you in the Sweet 16.

KIM CALDWELL: I kind of agree to him on that. Sometimes you get asked the question about with your subs, the subs, the subs, and it's not the story line. Your kids are just out there playing basketball. We play different philosophies and different paces, but there's not really much of a story there.

Q. Coach, I want to follow up on the shoes just because of Ruby Whitehorn? She put up a video that she may go with two different color shoes, like bright green or something. I expected her to wear the purple ones that she begged to wear earlier in the season. I know you said you don't remember saying it, but the team remembered it. Just how is this team motivate bid quirky things like that, particularly Ruby?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, Ruby I think just likes to do anything that's going to bother me, so that's why she's doing the two different shoes. Good for her, right? They earned that. If that's what they want, that's what they can do. I don't think it affects how they play on the floor. If that's something you have to do to motivate them, fine by me.

Q. How has the season for you coaching at Tennessee played out compared to the way you thought it might when you took the job?

KIM CALDWELL: When I got the job, I think my goal was to make it to the Sweet 16. I thought after seeing what we had on the roster and I didn't know comparatively, right? You can see on film, but you don't really know until you get in the thick of it.

When we watched some practices and we were putting our roster together, I thought, okay, maybe we can be a top-15 team in the country, and that's honestly what I thought. Then early on our games, the way we were playing, okay, we probably can be a top-15 team in the country.

Something we've wanted all year was to be a top-10 team in the country. We got to 11, and then we kind of fell apart a little bit. So we've had multiple opportunities to be in the top 10. We beat Connecticut. We could have gone to LSU, beat LSU, and then probably been in the top 10. We could have done it the slow way and just finished out our season the way we should have, hoped a couple of other people came down and been in the top 10 there. It never quite happened for us. It would be a nice story line that, hey, we did it at the right time. I don't know if we can do it or not, but to be in the top 8 would be great. We have an opportunity to play for that. I think we were playing better than we have been in the past.

Q. You talk about you saw what their potential was, and I know Wednesday you were talking about last year has been major. You know your ceiling, right? Do you feel like this team has raised its ceiling from maybe earlier in the season of what you saw on them, or what do you think they're capable of?

KIM CALDWELL: Called I would like to think we're peaking at the right time. I think that's the beautiful thing about March Madness. You have to play great for six games, and that is what it is. I do think our last two games are the best basketball we have played. It's looked the way I want to it look.

Again, you can't take a breath. You have to continue to go forward, and you never know what you are going to get. So you have to just hope that that momentum continues.

Q. Have you picked the brains of either other people with the program or other mentors or coaches you look up to just about how to plan out a routine or schedule, you know, in the lead-up between the second round and the Sweet 16 or just, what is different in terms of prep to get to this point or look

forward?

KIM CALDWELL: No, I think I've just done what I've done in the past. At Division II, I know it's different, but the calendar is still kind of the same. You still have these breaks going in between, and we think the most important thing is that you have that high energy in March and you are having fun.

Q. Are you focused at on the portal at this point with it being open Tuesday, and do you think still being in the tournament puts you at a disadvantage as far as the portal goes?

KIM CALDWELL: I think being in the tournament gives you a great advantage. I mean, you are a team still playing. If you have players that want to transfer to a winning program, then you want to kind of wait for the teams that are still playing.

We have a staff that can handle that. I'm focused on Texas.

Q. You started SEC play here in Birmingham on October 16th. You started SEC tipoff here in 2025 back in October. How does it feel to be back in Birmingham for business?

KIM CALDWELL: Oh, I love Birmingham. I don't know that we've been here, but I as a coach and two of my assistant coaches have won a Division II National Championship here. It's nice to be back in the city of Birmingham.

Q. Any time you change jobs, it's a whirlwind, but I can't think of a year that a head coach at a new school has had the year you have had from the surprise of getting contacted by Tennessee to getting hired by Tennessee, to becoming pregnant, to having a child. When this season is over, how much are you just going to take the time to try to get your arms around everything that has happened?

KIM CALDWELL: You know, I've been asked this question all year, and I'm finally to the point towards the end of the season that I can have an answer. My answer is, I'm just thankful and grateful to be the head coach of this program. It was something I could not wrap my head around until about right now.

To want a baby your whole life and then God gives it to you right as you're the most stressed you have ever been and you are, like, Oh, we're doing this now? Your eyes are wide open, and you're coaching pregnant, and then you're coaching in postpartum. Now that we're kind of through it and we have a routine, I think God knew exactly what he

was doing.

I'm thankful for that. I appreciate that. I'm just thankful to be the head coach at Tennessee. It's nothing other than that, and it's a great program. I'm blessed to be here. I'm blessed to coach the players that I coach. It's been an amazing ride, and I hope we can keep it going for as long as we can because I'm not quite ready to stop coaching these players yet.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

