

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

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena

## Texas Longhorns

## Vic Schaefer

### Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



State last week. You don't do that by accident.

She obviously has brought a lot of attention to the game, not only with their success, but how they've done it. Thief done it really, really well. It's a credit to her and her staff and her players because they play extremely hard. They're tough. So we're going to have to play really well tomorrow.

Proud of my team. It's not easy to be 33-3 coming out of the Southeastern Conference to have played I guess the second best schedule in the country behind South Carolina as far as the NET goes. I'm awfully proud of my group, but we're going to have to, obviously, be ready to go tomorrow and take care of the ball. It will be a guard-oriented game on one end, and then when you get on the other, you've got to have all five involved and playing really well. You've got to take care of the ball.

You've got to realize they basically have five players that average in double figures. So we'll have to be real attentive to that and really focused. We obviously had a knockdown, drag-out at our place earlier in the year. We were kind of running on fumes that week. We had already played Maryland on that Monday, on Martin Luther King Day. We had to come home and play them on Thursday. We were in the midst of, let's see if I can remember it, Sunday, Thursday, Monday, Thursday, Sunday stretch. Really had a tough game with them. Could have gone either way.

I'm sure they're confident going into the game. Rightfully so. I think our kids are ready to go. Again, for somebody that's been around and seen a lot in the game, Coach Caldwell has done an incredible job getting that thick turned around really quick. You have to give her and her kids a lot of credit for that.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Does it help you guys having played them already since their style is different and with the subbing and the frenetic pace of the pressing that you have seen it once so your kids are accustomed to it, and they've seen it? Watching film is, okay, this is what we did the first time?**

THE MODERATOR: At this time Coach Schaefer will give an opening statement.

VIC SCHAEFER: Good morning. Before I start, I just want to acknowledge someone who has given so much to the game, and it's my understanding they stepped down today. Doug Bruno. He's a dear friend and colleague. He's seen everything probably that's happened in this sport and then some. We obviously played them earlier in the year, and I had reached out to him several times with no response.

Then finally on game day I was able to talk to him on the phone. His voice sounded so good. It sounded like Doug, but he told me he wasn't going to be able to coach in the game that night.

Anyway, I just felt compelled to mention him thank him. Again, when you've been in the game as long as I have, it's people like him you just really come to appreciate because you've seen so much growth in the sport. He's had a big part in that, and I want to wish him the very best.

So just going into this game, again, really honored to be a part of the NCAA Tournament, but even added to that is the opportunity to be in a game with another program like the University of Texas and Tennessee that's so rich in tradition. The history of the game happened so much in Knoxville and Austin alike. I'm just honored to, again, have the opportunity to not only be in the NCAA Tournament, but to be involved in a game with them.

Coach Caldwell has done an incredible job with that team this year. They're really good. They could have easily have won 12 or 13 in our league. Were in just about every game all year long. They've had two great -- two of their better wins obviously are against Connecticut and Ohio



VIC SCHAEFER: For sure. It just seems so long ago. It's over a month and a half ago, I think. So it's been a while. It looks like it was on January 23rd or something like that, 21st. That's a long time ago. Two months ago.

I do think when you get in the NCAA Tournament, you think, okay, thank goodness you get out of the SEC and you don't have to go against those people because you have so much respect and admiration for everybody in our league. Then these things happen. I mean, they go into Ohio State, and they thumped them. They played really good. Those kids play so hard.

This is what happens, and so I'm sure they'll have a great crowd. They're a little bit closer than Knoxville here than we are at Austin. But I do think there's some familiarity on their part, and there certainly is a little bit on our part too.

**Q. Vic, the Tennessee game would have been the last time Aaliyah played. I'm wondering in the six weeks since, how has she and Laila too kind of stepped up and helped in other aspects of this team?**

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, you know, they still are involved every day. They're around. They're obviously doing their rehab and involved in themselves. They're off the floor, in the locker room. They're obviously involved with our players and still are a big part of what we do off the floor.

I know on the bench they're a lot of energy over there, which is important for our kids to have your friends and your teammates pulling for you. Sarah kind of runs that crew over there, but those two have really done a good job.

They're great teammates, you know. They love their teammates, and their energy is infectious over there.

**Q. Vic, I look up those names. It said Rori Harmon, Shay Holle, Taylor Jones. That's a lot of institutional knowledge in a tournament. How great is it to be old at this time of the year when some of these teams are doing this for the first time?**

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, those kids, you're right, they've got a lot of mileage, a lot of wins. Again, it's one of the things that for me I just want it so bad for those kids. You want it so bad for them this time of year.

It's nice to have a veteran group like that on the floor. They've been there. I think they're unfazed. They're unflappable. Again, tomorrow is going to be really important that we take care of the ball. I think the first time we had 12 turnovers, and I think only two of them were directly a result of the press.

We're going to have to take care of them and take care of the ball and two of those names you just mentioned are veteran guards.

**Q. You've bragged incessantly about Rori since she got here, and I think you started recruiting her when you were at Mississippi State, right?**

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah.

**Q. I was curious, your first impressions of her, and why did you want to get her on board so quickly?**

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, you know, I'll have to say it and my man here is from Mississippi State. I bet I was on the school plane a bunch flying to Houston to see her play when I was coaching there and recruiting her. She's somebody, obviously, that there were three really good guards that came out that year, and all of them -- Raven at South Carolina and Rori. We were in dire need of a great -- we knew who we were graduating and all that, and obviously when I got to Austin, Rori being two and a half hours from campus, she was our top priority. We had to try to hold on to Aaliyah Moore, who had already committed, and then we really had to go get Rori.

When you are building a program, it starts with your point guard. That was the one I felt like being two and a half hours from home, we had a great opportunity to get and needed to get. As you know, when you are at the University of Texas, you try to close the borders and close the walls and keep the good ones in the state. In my mind she was one of the best in the country, if not the best.

I knew Raven was closer to South Carolina, and I knew they were recruiting her. I had been to her games as well, but Rori was the one in my mind once we got to Austin, we had to really focus on. Boy, she's not disappointed a lick. You are talking about a kid that has scored almost 1,300 points, over 700 assists. The only player in the history of our university, in our storied history, to do that, and could potentially have another year to really separate herself to be at a point where no one will ever catch her again.

So, again, if she was sitting here, she would give her teammates credit because they've been able to finish a lot of those passes that she's made, but she's just an incredible young lady. I'm a better coach, better father, better husband because I've been around her every day. I'm really thankful that I've been able to -- there's some comfort when you are a head coach knowing that that's the engine, that's who is running your group, your team. Then we've obviously been able to add Madison Booker, who has been able to do the same thing once we lost Rori a year ago. Book stepped up and was just incredible.

So now that's kind of where you start. When you think about it, when you're going into the game, that's two good ones that you start with. Then you've got Shay Holle that's been here five years. There's a lot of comfort in that.

**Q. You mentioned earlier that you have been in the game a long time. You know the history between these two programs. It goes way, way back, even when they weren't in the same conference, they played each other. I wonder if you could talk about the fact that these are two institutions that bought into women's basketball a lot earlier. I know it doesn't necessarily have to do with the game itself, but the bigger picture of it and what that means meeting in an NCAA Tournament.**

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, you have to -- everything you just said, for me obviously I've coached against Pat Summitt, and you have Holly Warlick, Kellie Jolly Harper. Tennessee women's basketball, University of Texas women's basketball, those two institutions, along with just a handful of others, their administrations understood the value that women's basketball had and could bring to an institution. They invested in it. They invested in it with, obviously, two unbelievable coaches.

Again, I stand here today so humbled and honored to have that opportunity to now be in an NCAA Tournament having to play against them. Obviously, I had to play against Tennessee when I was at Mississippi State. They had never beaten Tennessee when I took that job at State. And then go to Texas where those two had really a history of playing each other nonconference every year since the beginning of time.

For me and I know Coach Caldwell embraces where she is, and she understands the history as well. I'm sure she feels like I do. It's just an honor to represent two entities, two huge women's basketball corporations, if you will, that have been around for so long, and now we're entrusted.

I mean, it can be a heavy burden if you let it, to be quite honest with you. I cherish my visits and my time with Coach Conradt so much. I love and respect and have admiration for her. It's always good just to be around her and be with her, but I also have a Coach Harston, who has actually been on both staffs, who is one of our sport admins and then Chris Plonsky, who has seen it all. You are talking about three women on just my campus that have invested so much in women's basketball, their entire life. For me that's what I've been entrusted with, and I don't take it lightly.

I know Coach Caldwell doesn't take her opportunity lightly

either at a place like the University of Tennessee where, you're right, they have been there from day one just like Texas, and have seen the value of what happens when you invest in a program, invest in coaches, invest in facilities, locker rooms, all those things. It's a real honor for me, I can tell you.

**Q. When you were talking about Rori, you mentioned her injury that she had that knocked her out for quite a bit. How did you see her grow as a person, rehabbing that injury and working her way back to the court?**

VIC SCHAEFER: I can tell you, I've seen one other kid in my career work as hard as she did. You know, this year's schedule, I put it off a week. We didn't open the first week. We opened the second week because I was trying to give Rori an extra week to get ready. She scrimmaged USC in October in a closed-door scrimmage. She was ready to go. She probably could have gone at five months, but we don't play anybody in July, and there's no point in rushing her.

The kid's commitment, her toughness. You know, with that injury, it's not the physical piece as much. It's the mental piece and getting over that. We were laughing the other day talking about that first outside competition experience when we went and played in October up in Dallas. We met USC up there. We talked about how she was a step slow, which was still a step faster than just about everybody else on the floor. There was a couple of guards that USC had that gave her a little problem, but we laughed about that because, you know, you look at her play now, and you are amazed.

You look at her and her movement, her explosiveness. I said this even before she got hurt, the torque and just the power that she plays with, the change of direction, I'm amazed. I was amazed out there today. I'm amazed every day. She does something every day that's just explosive, off the charts. It's what's allowed her to be so good on both ends of the floor.

So to answer your question, while she's hurt, I got to move Booker into the point guard spot. She's helping bring Madison along and telling her, Hey, Coach is calling that play for this reason. He ain't just calling it for grins. You got to understand, he's calling it because he wants this person to get the ball, and he wants this for this. So she's coaching over there and helping her along with everybody else. Then if she was in here today and I heard her say this I think yesterday or the day before, she would look at me some days and go, I see what you were meaning by that, Coach. You were right the last, you know, two or three years.

Then last year we were standing on the side in January, and now she's -- you know, the best press attack, y'all, is a great point guard. It isn't how many press plays you run. It's just having a good point guard.

We were standing there one day. I was putting in three press attacks. We were fixing to go play West Virginia, who pressed 40 minutes. So Booker is my point guard. We're having to run through all these. She looked at me and said, Coach, I don't ever remember all these press attacks. I said, No kidding, we ain't never done these before, but I got to put them in for this team because you're over here with me standing here talking to me about this.

So, you know, it's just she brought so much to the table on the floor. Then she's off of it, but yet, she's over there coaching, mentoring our players. It's why I tell her all the time, whenever she's done playing, I'll have a spot for her on my staff because she and I are on the same page so many times. She calls plays that I'm thinking about. Before I can get them out of my mouth, she's calling them out and looking at mismatches and things like that.

So it's fun to coach a team like this, and it's really fun to coach a team that's got a point guard like her.

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