

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

Friday, March 28, 2025
Birmingham, Alabama, USA
Legacy Arena

Texas Longhorns

Rori Harmon

Madison Booker

Shay Holle

Taylor Jones

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are ready for the Texas players. Questions, please.

Q. This is mainly for Shay and Taylor. I wanted to get your thoughts. Did you get to this point where you know you have a finite number of practices and games? Does it roll through your mind when you go to practice, we only have this many more practices, this many more games as Longhorns? a

SHAY HOLLE: Yeah, it definitely does. I'll go into a practice not necessarily thinking about it, but at some point it will just be, like, Whoa, this is probably like maybe one of my last times doing this or that. Me and Taylor are talking about it last night at dinner. She had counted it. I think we're at nine or ten days of that's our max, you know, if we go all the way, which is just crazy to think about.

You spend so much time doing one thing, and you love it. So you definitely think about it. I've said this before. Maybe it makes a drill you don't like that much not so bad anymore. You just want to soak it all in and enjoy every moment really.

TAYLOR JONES: I didn't really think about it much until our last game in Moody. Then we had our potentially last practice in Moody. I just think that that's when it started to set in.

Yesterday at dinner, like Shay said, we just started talking



about how, like, close the end is. It's crazy to think. I mean, I've been going at it for this is my sixth year now, so I've been in the game a while, in the college basketball game. So it's a new feeling.

Q. Rori, we saw JuJu Watkins go down earlier this week with an ACL tear. As somebody who has recovered from one themselves, how does the emotional and the mental recovery compare to the physical recovery?

RORI HARMON: It's like 10 and 2. The physical is honestly when I look back, it's so easy. Hmm, I wouldn't say so easy, but looking back, like, it was a lot easier because the mental comes after when you are clear. You are cleared, and you are, like, okay, I'm physically good. They wouldn't release me if I wasn't physically good, but it's not like they help you with your mental as much as your physical.

When you get to playing and it's, like, the mental now looking back, I'm still going through it. It's not something that kind of just, like, goes away just because you start playing again. It's definitely a lot harder. Obviously, I hate that for her. Absolutely don't like that.

We're not even, like, that close, but I've said before, this is a basketball player, women's basketball player. We all stick together. I just wish she has the best recovery. Just so she knows that she's going to come back better, faster, stronger. Obviously it's going to take a lot longer than any regular ankle injury, but she's going to be a better player than she was before, so...

Q. For Shay, what are the advantages? You guys are young in life, but old college basketball players. What advantages does that give you in a pressure situation like this? For Rori, Coach Schaefer has been saying all year, "I want it so bad for them, y'all." How bad do y'all want it for him because he's been at the doorstep twice in the championship?

SHAY HOLLE: I'll answer your first question. I think being older. Taylor said it's her sixth year. This is my fifth year. I think it gives you a certain level of confidence. My dad

always told me growing up, you get confidence from your preparation. You know when you don't do the preparation, and that's when you get nervous and a little stressed out. When you do the prep, you feel good in those moments. We've had a lot of prep, obviously, being older.

I think just being in those moments before and knowing how you handle it and how you can learn from maybe moments you didn't handle it the way you wanted to and just learning from that.

Yeah, it just gives you a certain level of comfort, I think, in pressure moments.

RORI HARMON: To answer your question, you said how bad we want it for him? Of course, we all want a national championship and to get to that last game, but I think us showing how much we care about not just, like, ourselves and our teammates and stuff, but the coaches are the ones that are staying up late nights, staying at the gym, trying to prepare us for these games, and to show respect to that, we're going to play our hearts out. There's not going to be a doubt in our mind, in their mind that we're not going to show respect just by playing our hearts out and trying our best to play as good as we can and follow that scout and follow the plan.

So, yeah, that's how bad we want it for him because he works so hard for us.

Q. Rori, another question for you. During your rehab from your injury, did your view or perspective on the game of basketball change at all? Like, did your love and admiration and appreciation grow for it? How did your view on the game change as you were viewing it from the sidelines?

RORI HARMON: If I'm being honest, I absolutely hated it. Right after I got injured, I didn't want to see anything. I didn't want to go to practice. Mind you, that was just a day after I tore my ACL.

Eventually you get out of your own funk and stop being so selfish and into yourself and think about -- it was 12 games in. I'm still on the team. I'm still a player on the team. I just may not be playing. They still have a whole season. I have to be there. Obviously I spent a lot of time just seeing a different perspective of the game, like you said, and understanding -- I think those moments, like, you have to look on the bright side of some things. I just thought being able to focus and learn the game of basketball from another point of view, because I'm so used to looking at it from being on the court, but sometimes, like Coach might be right about what he says when he is fussing. You don't necessarily understand it like if you are in a game, but

when you are on the sidelines, you actually are, like, okay, okay.

I think it helped a lot with just slowing the game down for me coming into this year. I think I learned a lot from Madison from that point guard position. Obviously she can say she learned a lot from me, but I learned a lot from her because at that moment I was, what -- we were just 12 games in. I'm not perfect. I can still learn something from someone, and it doesn't always have to be someone older or more experienced. So I learned from Madison still, so yeah.

Q. Another question for Rori. I wanted to ask what does Coach Vic mean to you personally? When he spoke to us a few minutes ago, he spoke so highly of the process of getting to know you over the years and the growth that he's seen from you, and what you've done for him as a coach, as a father, as a husband. I'm just curious from your vantage point, what has he meant to you?

RORI HARMON: You don't come here if you don't have a relationship with the coaches, and I built the best relationship with him and Lovato and Blair when they were recruiting me from Mississippi State.

He kind of made the comment the other day, like, saying we're not even with our parents as much at all. We see them at games every once in a while, but truly he's like our father figure, like, every day. To see how he talks about us and especially to talk about me and how he just truly cares.

I've known he's cared about me a lot, but just to see when I went down with my ACL injury and I had a good little long moment with him in his office and to see, it truly broke him. That's something that you really appreciate as a player.

He cares about you not just as a player, but as a person. I think that goes a long way because basketball is not who we are, but it's what we do. I think he truly does understand that.

As someone who is going through practice every day, like, spending 11 months out of 12 months in the year to perform well, I think he does a really good job of just showing how much he cares. That means a lot to me, so I'm going to show that way as well.

Q. Madison, Rori talked about learning from you. What have you learned from Rori the last two years, and is there anybody that hates losing more than Rori?

MADISON BOOKER: I will say I learned how to be a leader for this team. I just think watching her the first 12

games of my freshman year before she went down, just watching how she led this team, watching how she -- she was like a -- I can't even explain it, but she was like the head of this team. Whatever she did, we were right behind her with just like the energy she put on defense, just like the little things like details. She's always first in line in practice. Everything. She's always the first one up.

Just like that kind of leadership, and I think that this year I've kind of taken more of that role too. Just, you know, being I guess experienced. Just starting point guard, being like in Elite Eight. I took that with me this year, more of a leader.

I'm still probably not the leader I guess they want me to be, but I'm still learning here and there. I'm still learning here and there, but I think just that one piece that people don't see a lot, is really what I've learned. It's what I'm actually happy to learn from her.

Q. Madison, you were Player of the Year in the Big 12 as a freshman. Go to a completely new conference; you're Player of the Year. How do you feel like your game has grown? Then specifically the player you are now going against a heavy pressing team like Tennessee, how have you grown to adapt better in those situations?

MADISON BOOKER: I think last year we played West Virginia. I remember we didn't have Rori. We didn't have Rori there to break the press. She's probably like the one-man press break, whatever you want to call her. We didn't have her. I was the point guard.

I remember I had nine turnovers that game in the press. Yeah, that was a great stat line. Nine turnovers, nine assists. I think similar points. Almost had a triple-double.

But just learning from that moment, just looking at my turnovers, I think I've kind of learned patience. Don't go their speed; go my speed. For tomorrow Tennessee, I think it's going to be the same thing. Patience. They're going to try to speed you up, but I'm just going to go at my own pace.

Just coming to a new conference, being Player of the Year is a blessing, for real, but I think this year is more of a target on my back, more of a mental thing. I think also I have leaned on my teammates a lot for that. I thank them for that a lot because when I shot bad, they picked me up. You have Kyla down there, Taylor, Shay hitting clutch threes, Rori, leading our team. The freshmen, they're doing their thing. I had to find new ways to provide for this team.

But I really thank them for everything, like all my awards and stuff like that. It's really just coming from them. Thank you, all.

Q. Taylor, what do you remember from that first game against Tennessee? Then what as a team do you need to do again from that first game to win again tomorrow?

TAYLOR JONES: I remember it was a very fast-paced game. They subbed a lot. I think we got a lot of O-boards. That's what I remember.

I think just always mentally having to be engaged because how many subs that they have and just how fast the game is. You can't have any mental lapses or they'll take advantage of it.

What was the second part of the question?

Q. (Off microphone).

TAYLOR JONES: I think crashing the boards. I think we did a good job at getting rebounds and keeping them off the boards. They have height. They're really athletic, and they get to the boards quite a bit. So making sure that we block them out and doing our job, getting to the rebounds, for the posts especially, but for the guards and all of us as a whole, breaking their press, they have 40-minute in-your-face defense.

The last two practices we've done a really good job, I think, playing against our guys and learning to play at our pace and not let them speed us up. Also, transition too will be key, but I'm confident in our team, and I'm excited for the rematch.

Q. This is for any player who wants to take this. What contributions have you all gotten from Aaliyah and Laila with them unable to play, but obviously still a part of this team?

MADISON BOOKER: So much. Laila, Michigan Laila, was balling. She came here, and she don't play at all, but she still gives so much effort off the court. Just the advice she gives to everyone. I think she's always, like -- every timeout she's always saying something.

A-Mo, she's been here before. Also, she's in the forward's ear. Jak, that's why she's playing so well this year. I think her giving Jak confidence and telling Jak, patience is going to be your best friend basically. Like I credit that to her because Jak is doing well on both ends for us. We need her to keep doing well.

Yeah.

RORI HARMON: When I see Laila and Aaliyah, unfortunately, they have their own thing going on where they can't, like, play with us on the court, but just to see how engaged they are. For people who know, they're going through their own things. They're probably going through their own mental battles and physical battles. To see that they're going through that and are still positive every day and just engaged in all the practices, all the games. It just brings so much positive energy.

I really appreciate when they do that because I know and understand, like, that feeling of not being able to help and you're on the sidelines a lot. I have a lot of gratefulness to them and appreciation because we need every single player. It doesn't matter if you don't touch the floor or always touch the floor. We need everyone.

SHAY HOLLE: I think what Rori mentioned, when she was out last year, how maybe you see some things that you're, like, oh, Coach is right about that, and things that are harder to see when you are on the court. I think them being able to see those things and voice that to us really helps everyone that is on the floor because it's just like nice. You can take things from Coach Schaefer, but sometimes it's just nice to have it from a teammate as well who has a different relationship with you and can maybe word things differently and help different people understand that.

So I think that brings -- that's really beneficial for us as well.

TAYLOR JONES: I think all three of them basically summed it up, but both of them have been to the battles and played so much basketball. Even if Laila hasn't played many games here, there's a certain wiseness and level of experience that they have. Being able to hear them on the sideline and see their input, you know that whatever they say is valid.

I also think both of them do a great job at just bringing energy and encouraging. When you come out of a timeout and even if the other team goes on a run, you come out and you hear both of them and also our freshmen just keeping us up and being as positive as possible.

It's really uplifting for the team, and it's really impactful too. Neither of them have to do that. They are both going through hard times with their own things that they're dealing with, and it's tough enough not being out on the court. It also is pretty tough giving the amount of energy that they give us.

So we're really thankful for them, and they have a great

impact on our team.

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