

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 1 Semifinal - Ole Miss vs UCLA

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Spokane, Washington, USA

Spokane Arena

Ole Miss Rebels

Yolett McPhee-McCuin

Madison Scott

Kennedy Todd-Williams

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, we're grateful to be here in Spokane. I had spent a year in the Pacific Northwest at Portland. I coached with the Portland Pilots. Shout out to Jim Sollars.

Yesterday, we were able to practice in an off-site at Gonzaga, and that was nostalgic because they were in the WCC at the time. So just really grateful for us to be here representing Ole Miss and still being one of the 16 teams that are vying for a National Championship.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Obviously UCLA has such a dynamic player in six-seven Lauren Betts. How do you defend her?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I mean, I think the conversation has to be about UCLA being a really good team. Unless she's getting ready to put 70 on us, I don't know that that's their game plan. So I think we should probably give more credit to their team as a whole and what they're about and what they're able to do.

So she's not the only one on our scouting report. We're kind of looking at everybody and we're from the Southeastern conference. I think we'll figure out a way to do our best.

Q. With Christeen being a former UCLA player, what made you bring her into Ole Miss? What did you like about her in the portal and what have you seen her



bring to the team this season?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: We loved Christeen out of high school, so we wanted her out of high school. So once she got into the portal, it was a no-brainer for me. Although she didn't play much at UCLA, I knew what she was capable of. So sometimes it's about opportunity and a need. And then, obviously, we had a need for her size and what she's able to do. And honestly, when I look at portal kids, I kind of see where they're coming from too, and so I have a lot of respect for Cori and how she runs her program, so I knew the type of kid I was getting, and that's important too.

Q. You've said all season in post-game press conferences that you wanted to prepare and make mistakes early and then peak in March. Do you feel like that's what happened? I mean, have the girls learned to take their mistakes and learn to fix them in-game instead of watching film?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, if you've followed my head coaching career, this is my 12th season, we've always gradually got better because for me, I kind of coach through an explorative type of style. Let's figure things out. With the transfer portal, you don't know what you know until you're in those situations. So what people were able to see is just us grow as a team. But I always said we would peak in March. So we're definitely doing that now.

Q. Two questions: Are you leaning on Christeen for the scout? Are you talking to her, picking her brain about UCLA?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: You know what? These kids don't remember anything, and so they let me know. It let's me know. Like, they don't have to worry about us gaining any advantage because Christeen, she has not been a help (laughing). You know what? We haven't asked her. Y'all, there's 16 teams left and all of us has played at least 30 games. We watch film. We know what each other does. So we actually didn't even ask her.

Q. With UCLA just being the top overall seed, how do you prepare a team so they don't put too much weight



in knowing that and still come in with confidence and belief in themselves?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I mean, our strength of schedule this year has been a 3. We opened up versus Southern California, we've played UConn, we've played NC State at their place, we've played South Carolina, Texas, LSU, Tennessee. We've played half of this Sweet 16, so we could care less what anybody is ranked. We're from the Southeastern conference. We have the best teams in that league. Six of us in this.

So as far as I'm concerned, we kind of just take it game by game, matchup by matchup. And we always go into games as underdogs. When we went to LSU and beat 'em, we were the underdogs. This will be our -- I think our fourth No. 1 seed that was ranked a No. 1 that we have had to play. So I think we have a lot of experience and the pressure's not on us.

Q. Second time in three years coming out to the state of Washington for the Sweet 16 and Elite 8. Did you learn anything from that first trip and does this feel any different this time?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: For sure. I mean, the first time we -- I mean, we just partied the whole time. We were just -- after we beat Stanford, it was like, whatever, you know? Like, we just really had a blast the first time.

Now, we go to Waco, we don't even sightsee. Like, we're not taking anything in. We are here for business. We have kind of built the team like that. My first year when we went to the Sweet 16, I think there were only four of us in the whole program that had experienced the Sweet 16, and I was one of 'em, and then my coach was another. So I think there had maybe, maybe been two others.

This time the only people -- first of all, our whole team has experienced the NCAA tournament, but only the freshmen hadn't, and then Toddy, Madi, Ayanna, Christeen, Tam have all been to the Sweet 16. So we're just a little bit more mature and understand what's at stake. The first time, we were just partying like rock stars (laughing).

Q. You mentioned this briefly in Waco last weekend. What does it mean to you that your team is actually earning units for Ole Miss for the first time?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, it means a lot. It's been a hard fight. A lot of people that were definitely wiser -- that's what I say to people that are older, they're wiser, they have fought for this opportunity to happen. I think it's going to even get better. I mean, you cannot deny the impact that women's sports has in 2025, unless you just

want to.

So we're doing our part. I definitely sent the sheet to my AD, even though I knew he knew. People could try to say, Oh, it's not enough. We don't get to decide that. I just know that it is something. And I don't think that there's value of anything if it's free. So I love the fact that now there's a value for women's basketball, and I'm 100 percent sure it will increase.

Q. With the transfer portal being open right now as you're also preparing for the Sweet 16, what are your thoughts on having to do both at the same time or what has just been the approach your team has taken on perhaps multitasking that right now?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I mean, I just think it's a part of our job, especially I'm a self-proclaimed portalista. So we kind of prepare for this moment. We have an idea of who may go in the portal because of just the rumor reel, and then we kind of just sit back and wait and see if it happens.

Coaches now are GMs. We're all figuring out who is leaving, who is staying. So we only signed one freshman because I prefer a mature team. I don't think in today's times, you can be young. By the time they get old, they're ready to get rid of you, so you kind of got to stay mature and stay old, and you can see that with my team. It's just a part of it.

Do we want it to -- I would prefer for it to be at the end of the season, but I've also been in those rebuilding stages when I needed an opportunity to be able to recruit and get in there. So I don't make the rules. I just play the game.

But it's been wild because I have been reading stuff, and I'm like, That's not right. Like, we're not recruiting that person. But you know what? They say even if it's bad news as long as they're talking about you, it's good.

Q. We often talk about the girls and their experience and working hard all year, but can you talk about your staff, because they each have such a huge role in developing these girls from summer on, and what this process has meant to them to watch them grow and get to this point.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: That's a great question. Shout out to the Mississippi media that's here, way to represent. But I'm glad you asked that because last year I was under a lot of scrutiny because I had made changes on my coaching staff. And the whole thing was, we had just went to the NCAA tournament, why would I do such a thing. But I've never really been a traditional-type coach



and I've always been pretty open and clear with my staff. The reason why I made a change is because I felt like for me, at the end of the day, I want to win a National Championship. So in order to do that, since I hadn't done it, I thought it was important to have people around that had. Like, Quentin Hillsman coached in the National Championship game. And then Coach Emp and Coach Joy played in the Elite 8. And then I was able to bring in two of my former players and put them on staff, so that they can teach everybody the Ole Miss way. There's no coach that's out here doing it by themselves. My staff is elite. They understand what's at stake. They have been great for me, and I've really been able to do my best job as a coach because of them. The things that they handle for me, the things that they take off of my plate, and I'll put my staff up against anybody.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, let's let Coach go and get the student-athletes up here.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Madison, your team has obviously faced a ton of elite teams of this caliber already this season. How do you think that's maybe prepared you coming into this game?

MADISON SCOTT: Yeah, I say it all that time, that our coaches did a great job with setting up the schedule this year, from day one opening up in Paris against USC. We have seen great players, great teams. We've been prepared for this moment. So that's what gives us the belief, the confidence, knowing that we've been battle-tested, so we're ready for whatever comes our way.

Q. For both of y'all, you're both leaders of this team. Is there anything you feel like you need to do to ensure the team's locked in and maybe don't let the moment get too big for them?

KENNEDY TODD-WILLIAMS: Yeah, we've been -- like she said, we've been in this position before, playing against great teams. Keeping our composure is the biggest thing and having that belief that we are here for a reason. I think that's the biggest thing for us. We have experienced guards and everyone that -- our seniors, we lead this team, so just ensuring them and keeping that confidence and belief, it's the biggest thing.

MADISON SCOTT: What she said.

Q. What sort of difficulties will a matchup with a

six-seven center for UCLA post for you? Let's start with Madison.

MADISON SCOTT: Please repeat the question.

Q. Defending the six-seven center for UCLA, have you seen somebody that size? Does that present a challenge?

MADISON SCOTT: Well, Lauren Betts is a great player, UCLA is a great team, so it will definitely be a challenge. But like I said, we've been battle-tested and put in positions all season long. Our last game, we played a very physical post against Baylor and also we play in the SEC, so we say big, tough posts every night. You get what I'm saying?

So it will definitely be a challenge, but God has prepared us, our coaches have prepared us. You know, we're prepared. So we're ready. So, that's it.

Q. For both of you, Coach talked about earlier the portal's already open. Madi, you've been at Ole Miss your entire career. Toddy, you transferred in. Tell people that are in the portal why they should come to the Sip.

KENNEDY TODD-WILLIAMS: Yeah, you want to come to a family atmosphere, people that welcome you with open arms. I was a transfer and it's not easy, of course, but it's made my ride smooth with coming in and being surrounded by good people and people that actually care about you. So, yeah.

MADISON SCOTT: Yes, what she said. But also, if you want to be average, this isn't the place for you. And I say that proudly. I say it each and every day, that when you come here, you're pushed outside your comfort zone, you're pushed to be great. Every goal that you set out for that you told Coach Yo you wanted, she's going to push you to that. She's going to hold you to that standard.

So some days you're not going to like it, some days going to be tough, but look at where we're sitting right now. That should be enough to tell you that this is the place to come to. You're going to be able to come here and, like Toddy said, be in a family atmosphere, be around other people that want to be great and also be at a place where everybody's pushing you, from the managers to our practice players to our staff to our coaches. You're never alone here.

So that's why you should come to the Sip, because you're coming to be a part of something that's greater than you, that will help you be successful not only on the court, but in life.



Q. Madison, Coach mentioned that two years ago this trip to the Sweet 16 felt very different in terms of the emotions of beating Stanford and everything. How does it compare for you?

MADISON SCOTT: It's definitely different. It was a lot of emotions beating Baylor, but we've been here before, if I'm being plainly honest. Like, our goals are bigger. We want to keep going. We want to keep dancing. The last time I think Ole Miss won an Elite 8 was '07, '08 with Coach Mint was here playing for Ole Miss.

So this Sweet 16 run has been amazing, just like the one was before, but we're -- the difference is, I think, we're hungry. If I'm being completely honest, back then we were just happy to do something that hadn't been done very long time. But now we've done that again, so we're not complacent, we're not satisfied. We want to keep doing, we want to keep dancing, we want to keep making our Oxford community proud, so we plan to do just that.

Q. Kennedy, Coach Yo referred to herself as portalista, which was a new term to us, you may have heard it. But what was her pitch like when she reached out to you and coming off of that run?

KENNEDY TODD-WILLIAMS: Yeah, just her believing in me was the biggest thing that really sold me, and just coming to a place where she saw me for who I was as a person. And, you know, she just opened me with open arms and was really set out for what I wanted for my future and really took that personal for her. So that's, I just think, I thank God that I'm here, because I wouldn't know what to do, so...

Q. You guys opened your season against USC, played JuJu, have experience with that. Obviously they're in the other area of the bracket, but at this regional they're playing. Just the loss of her, can you speak about what that means, not just for them as a team, but women's basketball, nobody wants to see somebody go down.

MADISON SCOTT: Yeah, no, we're definitely sending our prayers out to JuJu and the entire USC community, university. She's a great player. Playing against a player like that makes you better. So, she's a great player, great leader, and a great influence in the women's game. You never want to see anybody go down with injury, but just playing against her, her persistence, you get what I'm saying, it's loud, it screams, it speaks volumes. So, there's no doubt in my mind, in our mind that she will bounce back and continue to be the great player that she is. So we're definitely sending our prayers to her, but I'm sure she will

keep going, and I'm sure USC will keep going as well.

KENNEDY TODD-WILLIAMS: I second that. (Smiling).

Q. Madi, Coach Yo talked about how when ya'll beat Stanford that it was like y'all partied like rock stars. So how are things different this go around than they were then to you in your mind as a player?

MADISON SCOTT: Definitely, like she said, we beat Stanford and we went crazy. But this time around we beat Baylor and we celebrated, but it was short-term memory it was back to work. We traveled back to Oxford, we washed, packed and we completely changed our mindset to UCLA. And that shows where we are as a program, it shows the growth of this program because again back then we were again satisfied, but again now we're not. Now in this situation we're not satisfied, we're not okay with settling. We want so much more. Again, for us, for the Oxford community, for our university, for all the hard work that we put in since day one, we want more, and we want to give our all every time we step out on the floor, and we plan to give our all when we step out on the floor tomorrow.

Q. Kennedy, with Christeen being a former UCLA player and now she's playing her former team, what has she brought to this program or what has it been like being teammates with her this season?

KENNEDY TODD-WILLIAMS: She's a joy to play with. She's awesome, on and off the court. But I think just her, as a human being and just the way that she carries herself she carries herself like a pro, and on the court just, you know, she's what we need. Big-body post, just her effort, everything that she does, she comes in every day and works really hard. So she's been a really good addition to this program and we're really glad that she's here.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you.

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