

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

Friday, March 28, 2025

Spokane, Washington, USA

Spokane Arena

Ole Miss Rebels

Yolett McPhee-McCuin

KK Deans

Tameiya Sadler

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

UCLA - 76, Mississippi - 62

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, first of all, I'd just like to thank the city of Spokane. It's been great to -- the hospitality that we've had and just the way we were taken care of, really, we're really grateful for that.

When I look at this season, no one wanted us here, no one thought we would be here, and we're still here, and we got this far, and unfortunately, we ran into a tough team tonight and did not prevail. But at the end of the day, we will continue to build. This is our second Sweet 16 in two years. If I'm not mistaken, this is UCLA's third in a row. Third time's a charm. We'll be back again and be able to move forward.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes, please.

Q. KK, this program just a few years ago was having a hard time just getting to the NCAA tournament, but now looking where you are now, where do you feel like this program is right now as you leave and Coach Yo is still here?

KK DEANS: Yeah, just thankful for this program, this opportunity, Coach Yo for just believing in me and everybody that she put around us as a team. As a program, we on an upward. Like she said, this is the second time in three years that they made it to the Sweet



16, so I expect nothing less. I expect Sweet 16 to be the goal, and I know she's not going to stop until she gets to the top. So they're surrounded by a great woman, a great coach, and a great coaching staff that's going to push them every day to get to that goal.

Q. KK, just particularly with Madison Scott, someone who's been here for five years, the whole ascension of this program, what has it been like being teammates with her and what are some of the things that maybe that we don't really see about her from behind the scenes?

KK DEANS: Madi is a great person on and off the court. She does a lot and not only on the court, but the impact she has on the Oxford community, her foundation, they love her. She's built a legacy that no one can take away from her at Ole Miss.

And I know she's proud to be an Ole Miss Rebel, and I love her, being a teammate with her. I mean, she can shoot, she can get downhill, like -- and she's six-three, so she's a guard and a post body. So I love her and she's going to have a great career.

Q. KK, this would be for you -- actually, for both of you. Even with a tough loss in the Sweet 16, what do you feel like the lasting legacy should be for team 50?

KK DEANS: Lasting legacy? That we fought hard. We love each other, we played for each other. No matter what was going on, we always came together and decided that we were going to fight, and we were going to be who we were, which is a defending team. And I just think we should be proud of where we came from. I mean, from the first game in Paris, we didn't run away from anybody. Whoever they said was the best, we laced our shoes just like them, and we came on the floor and we respect all and we fear none. So I think we really took that to heart this whole entire year, and I think that should be our legacy.

TAMEIYA SADLER: Yeah, to continue on what she was saying, I think this team is one that we only believed in ourselves instead of listening to the outside noise. So at the end of the day, it was really up to us. Our legacy,

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although it ended, it fell short, I feel like we accomplished a lot of what we wanted to accomplish throughout the year.

Q. Tameiya, this time last year you were entering the portal, getting ready to come to the SEC for the first time, come to Ole Miss. Can you just talk about how that process changed you as a person and how you have evolved and changed as a player from that?

TAMEIYA SADLER: Five years and three schools later, I feel like I finally found a place that I could finally call home, and I'm so thankful for the opportunity to play here at Ole Miss. Coach Yo has been tremendous throughout my journey, and she really helped me find my confidence and find myself again.

So I'm really thankful just to be able to be a part of something that's bigger than myself. It was a great journey, and I'm proud of what I was able to accomplish here and proud of this team, I'm proud of this program, and I know we'll go on and do great things in the future.

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

Q. I know you're not ready to really think about this right now, but in terms of replacing a player like Madison Scott who's been with you through this entire ascension of the program, how do you imagine trying to do that?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: You know, last summer -- I do a lot of work with Nike, and so last year, I went to speak to their leadership team. And I asked them, What will happen when Phil Knight, you know -- you know, like the inevitable? And they looked at me confused. And they said, What do you mean? We're going to thrive. The work that he has done, his legacy, his staple, he has taught us to thrive through it all.

So when I think about Madison Scott and what she has done here, her journey has done here, but what do you think we're going to do? We're going to thrive or everything that she's done has been in vein, and I won't let that happen.

Q. Lauren Betts is just a handful of a player. Can you walk us through a little bit of what your defensive plan against her was and just how you even tried to slow a player like that.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, obviously, whatever we tried didn't work. And it didn't work for 33 other teams -- or 32 other teams either, it seems like. So she is everything as advertised. Anytime they got in a bind, they just threw it

to her. That is a luxury. You don't have to run a play, you don't have to -- you can just throw it in to your dominant post player. And she is that.

We played against her two years ago at Stanford, and I was, like, really glad she didn't play a lot. I think that's how we got out alive. But she played tonight and showed her dominance. The game plan we had was really working, but starting the third quarter really took us out. You know, a 1-point game at the half. She was scoring, but she was scoring twos. They had only made one three, and then all of a sudden we let them get loose and hit two threes and get the momentum going. Now we're tight and she really got rolling.

So she is a very tough matchup. UCLA looks like a team that can win the National Championship to me because I don't -- like, who is going to stop her? Now, they're going to have their work cut out. They're going to -- there's some good teams, and I'm SEC all the way, so obviously I'm going to root for my people. But at the end of the day, they are very, very tough as long as she's playing the way she plays.

Q. We talked a lot about your seniors that are kind of moving on to new endeavors, but I guess in the perspective of the players that are returning next year, what do you want them to take from the experience like this and being able to build off of it? And even as a coach being back at this stage for the second time in three years, what do you -- I know it's really fresh, but what do you hope to take from it as you guys continue to build this program?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I think we have put ourselves in the position to be a perennial Sweet 16 team. Now it's going to be up to the support that we get to be able to move beyond that. Talent matters. A lot of people don't give any -- every time I hear about our team, I hear about how tough we are. I never hear about coaching. And I don't understand it, because I don't have All-Americans on my team, and every team we play, they have four or five All-Americans. So clearly, from a coaching perspective, something is being done right.

Now the next level for us to move forward is to be able to do what UCLA did. Okay, they have been going Sweet 16, Sweet 16. What did they do? They go get Janiah Barker and bring her off the bench. She's an All-American. They go get Lauren Betts and let her play. Timea Gardiner. Like, they went and got pieces that allowed them to move forward.

The next step for us is to be able to do the same in the portal, because freshmen ain't doing it, I'm just telling you.

So we have to be able to have the support to be able to go and get what we need so that we can move forward. But at minimum I think we should be a Sweet 16 team. Anybody that's looking at us that has interest, that is what they expect, from the conversations we've been having. But that's just not enough for me. I'm not one of those coaches that, I'm not going to sit here and say, Oh, you know, it's all about the kids, it's all about the kids. Yeah, but I have dreams, too, and I want to be a Final Four coach. And in order to do that -- and I want players that want to be a part of the Final Four, and this group did, all right? But this is -- I'm young in this, and we're just getting started. And so the next step is to get a Janiah Barker out the portal (laughing). To get a Lauren Betts out the portal. Because that's what Cori did and now they're going to the Elite 8.

Q. Talking about coaching, I want to know, I mean, one of the things you did is you got Madison Scott to come to your program the first McDonald's All-American in school history, after you had a 0-16 season in conference. That's some coaching and recruiting here. Can you just remind us again kind of what took place and how you got Madi here?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I mean, when Madi and I talked about what the dreams and aspirations would be, I told her, you know, by your senior year we'll go to at least a Sweet 16. And Madi has done way more than that. This is our second Sweet 16, four 20-win seasons, the list goes on and on, and she's been a part of that. So she just believed. And that's what I was telling her in the locker room, like, I know the game didn't go how you wanted it to go, but don't be mistaken the imprint that you have left in the Oxford community, me, and this team and this program. Now, the standard now is Sweet 16 or beyond. My whole life I've just never thought that you can just skip steps. I've always said that, you've listened to me talk a lot of times. And I look, and we just lost to a team that went to the Sweet 16 twice, and now it's their time to reap. So I'm just not going to lose hope and faith, we're just going to continue to sew, so that when it's our time to reap, we'll be ready.

Q. Your players were up here talking about how you were able to kind of bring the best out of them and, you know, believe in them and make them into the players that they wanted to be when they came to this program. How were you able to do that in so many different players?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, you see these gray hairs I got right here? And I'm 42 years young (laughing). You know, I just, the way that the sport is right now it makes you want to have a cold heart. It makes you want

to have everything transactional. And that is a challenge. Because we, as coaches, I don't know that any coaches from my era has got, or before me, got into it for it to be transactional. We all had good leaders, Pat Summitt, I mean, C. Vivian Stringer. Like, we were taught to do this because this was our ministry. And so, you know, I try to get people that fit the Ole Miss culture, and I just try to pour into 'em. And some days I wonder if I can still do that, because the way it's become a business, and it's disheartening to watch. But my dad is 78, and every Saturday at nine a.m. if you're looking for him in the Bahamas he's on an outside court working with like 20 to 25 kids developing them. It's in my DNA. So, for me I'm just going to always try to pour into people, inspire them, get them to be more than they think that they should be. Because that is what a coach is. A coach is someone that makes people believe more than they do themselves. So I'm going to stick with that and hopefully I can still have a job moving forward in this environment (laughing).

Q. I think you both you and Cori Close are glad that Lauren didn't play that much at Stanford.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: For sure. (Laughing). You're right. I never thought of it like that. (Laughing). It worked out for her in the end.

Q. You sort of alluded to this, but you know LSU very well, you've been scouting UCLA, faced them, how do you think that matchup plays out on Sunday?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: No comment. I'm rooting for the SEC though. You know, Kim Mulkey been around for a long time. You can't count her out. She's an OG. She will figure it out. I wish -- they're going to ship us out, but I wish I could be here to watch that (laughing).

Q. A lot of people outside the SEC don't realize that this is 50 years of women's basketball at Ole Miss, and we've had a lot of events at the Pavilion this year, you've had coaches come back, old players come back. Just thinking back on those times, what's one time or memory that you saw really impacted you and the kids, and the players.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: I think when we had our reunion and the players came back. We had players and coaches from Team 1 all the way up. So that was pretty cool just to be in the presence of, in our practice facility you walk in and all of the Elite 8 teams are up and I opted not to take it down, because it's inspiring to me. I don't think you erase history, right. So, one of the things that's cool about being at Ole Miss is all of those coaches, from Van, to Carol Ross, even Lin Dunn, I hear from them like all the time. Carol Ross was at Baylor. Our mentee was on this

trip, she was a part of one of those Elite 8 teams. And the support has been tremendous. So, I think that one, that moment was the best. I really enjoyed it, I really want to make them proud. They pour into me so much, I don't know how many other institutions, the coaches, like still pour in to the present coach. And I hear from every last one of 'em, so, you know, and that would be the one that I would always remember.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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