

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - South Florida vs Tennessee

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Columbus, Ohio, USA

Value City Arena

## Tennessee Lady Volunteers Head Coach Kim Caldwell

Media Conference



career. Is there a common denominator among your teams, or what can you say to attest to the fact that you're so consistent from a winning perspective?

KIM CALDWELL: I think I'm really bless and lucky to coach great players and players that want to win. I think that's the most important piece of getting to this time of year and to still be playing is your team values winning, and we practice hard, we play hard, we do a whole lot, and just making sure that you want to win and getting to March is important.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Just with this game against South Florida, how much do you expect the half court offense and defense to come into play, and how much of a chance did you get to improve that over the course of the week and a half of practice?**

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, we're getting ready to go into practice again, and that's what the majority of our practice is going to be is going to be guarding in the half court. We've worked on that, again, since we knew who we were going to play. We've really worked on guarding their sets, and I'm sure they've put new stuff in. Everyone is putting new stuff in.

We just have to be disciplined enough to guard the actions and keep our pressure on.

**Q. You talked about Tess being a completely different player. Are there any other players who have stepped up over this week and a half, and just what's the urgency like from this senior class, especially from Tess and Sarah who have been here their entire career?**

KIM CALDWELL: I think Tess, Sarah. Sarah is playing different. She's having a little more fun, playing a little more free. Jewel definitely has a different level to her. I think Sam is playing better. She was battling some injuries towards the back half of our season. She was a little banged up and tired, so she looks renewed in practice. Hopefully that translates.

THE MODERATOR: Opening statement from Coach.

KIM CALDWELL: We're excited to be here. We have a tough opponent, so we're very focused. I think we had a very good week, week and a half of practice that we needed as a team. Hopefully we can carry that over in the game tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: The question was brought up in the Tess and Jewel's press conference about the wonderful tradition at the University of Tennessee regarding women's basketball. 43 consecutive NCAA tournaments. Just looking for your thoughts on that and the program that you are leading.

KIM CALDWELL: I'm thankful to be the leader of this program. It's remarkable. It's a long history that has a lot to do with the people that came before us, and we want to continue to make them proud and keep the streak alive.

THE MODERATOR: I mentioned the names Tess and Jewel, who were up here. They both seemed very loose, very comfortable. I'll say almost prepared and ready for this tournament, and I know they've got NCAA experience. Can you talk about the preparedness of your team?

KIM CALDWELL: Yeah, I think we went back to work, and we had a really tough week and a half of practice that we needed. We needed some rest, and we needed to get to work, and we needed to get some excitement and juice back. I think we're all excited to be in the tournament.

I think we really want to make a run, and we really want to kind of get back to the team we were in the middle of December and January.

THE MODERATOR: Kim, I know you've been to the postseason tournament every year of your coaching



**Q. You announced Tuesday that Destinee would be out for this tournament. How big of a blow is it for her for her career to end this way?**

KIM CALDWELL: It's tough, and it was just so -- I mean, we didn't think that her career ended. It was just kind of a freak thing in practice. She walked off, and we just thought, all right, she's just a little banged up, she's hurt. She went and got on the bike. Your heart breaks for player to have to go through injury after injury.

**Q. USF is a very well-coached team. Their coach Jose Fernandez has been around the business for a while. Have you been familiar with his teams in the past? Is there anything that kind of sticks out to you about the success he's been able to build at his program?**

KIM CALDWELL: He's a tremendous coach. They've been nationally recognized for years and years, and I think their offense is their staple, so our defense is going to be really important tomorrow.

**Q. I remember we talked in preseason about how you were taking it one day at a time. If you tried to get your arms around all these streaks and achievements at Tennessee, it would be overwhelming. That 43 streak, it was never in doubt that you would make the tournament, but is it also a sense of relief to not be the one that ends that? I mean, it goes back to Pat Summitt. It's a list of one. Just how big in the scope of basketball is that streak?**

KIM CALDWELL: It's a huge streak. I think it makes Tennessee the best job in the country. It makes us one of the best programs in the country because of the dominance that we've had, and absolutely it feels really good to not be the coach that blew it.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about Kaiya Wynn has had to sit out this whole season, but just in the locker room she was interviewing people. It was very loud and hilarious. Just kind of what has she given you guys this season? How has she carried herself through having to sit out what was supposed to be her senior season?**

KIM CALDWELL: I think any time you have a player that has an early injury, a season-ending injury, I think there's pros and cons to that. I think it's devastating at first, especially when it's your senior season, but I do think she's gained some perspective.

She's standing with the coaches in practice. She sees things through a different lens. She's probably one of the

funniest players I've ever gotten the ability to coach.

She's great for our locker room. Our players love her. Great for morale. She sees both sides of it, and she has a very good basketball IQ. I think she can take what she hears the coaches talk about, and she can communicate that to the players. I think that's important.

**Q. We've talked a lot about Jewel and how important she's been for your success. I just wanted to ask you in terms of when you met her last year and when you see her now, what sticks out to you about how she's developed her habits, especially as someone who wants to be a pro and just the way she carries herself and her mentality?**

KIM CALDWELL: She's always carried herself that way. She's always been in the gym. She's always worked hard. She sets goals for herself, and she achieves them. It says a lot about her that early on with me getting here, she said she wanted to fix her defense, and she wanted to become a better defender, and I think she's done that.

That's not a selfish thing. That's a team thing. She wants to make our team better by improving her defense. She's not saying she wants to shoot step-back threes or she wants to score more. She's saying she wants to be a better defender, and she's done it.

**Q. Coach, you've got several players that are first-timers. Your freshmen, of course, Kaniya for the NCAA Tournament. Then, of course, Ruby Whitehorn, and a couple of players who they got there once, but haven't gotten back until now. I'm not saying there's no pressure at this point because there is, but it seems like it's also a time to have fun. This is what you play for. Do you sense that your team is kind of built for postseason in terms of they do manage to stay loose so much?**

KIM CALDWELL: I think we're going to find out. I think I've had a rough time kind of putting a pulse on the team of if we wanted to be the underdog, if we want to have pressure, and really the best way to motivate. I do think having fun, that is something we've tried to do this little break is have fun competing.

I think when you're in a setting like this and it's exciting and it's fun and you're kind of the underdog, I do think our team will thrive off that.

**Q. I think we're two months in exactly of you juggling motherhood and coaching. You talked Monday about the team meeting Conor at the SEC tournament. What has that process been like to navigate for you? What**

**have you enjoyed about getting to introduce him to the team and really kind of feel that full circle moment?**

KIM CALDWELL: It's great. I think that's just what motherhood is that you get to have your family here and your family at home, and you get to blend them together. It's a blessing. It's a blessing that I coach a team that I'm excited to go to work and see them, and I'm excited to go home to see my son.

For those worlds to collide at the SEC Tournament and he's here on this trip, I think it's great. You just try. There is no balance. You just do the best you can where you can.

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