

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Mississippi State vs California

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Los Angeles, California, USA

Galen Center

Mississippi State Bulldogs

Sam Purcell

Jerkaila Jordan

Eniya Russell

Media Conference

Mississippi State 59, California 46

SAM PURCELL: Really proud coach. We talked about how much respect that we have for Cal and that it was going to take our best defensive effort all year to come out with this win, and what I think everyone just witnessed is that best defensive effort awe all year, again in a game I thought was great for women's basketball.

USC has a great fan base here and a cool environment. I know our girls and ladies were so fired up for us to put four quarters together and win. I wouldn't be more happy especially in a game where a lot of people haven't been betting on us.

We are going to enjoy this tonight and then we'll keep that same energy where we are trying to change the script because I know nobody, all right, voted us for this next one. So we are going to enjoy tonight, and we'll get to work.

Q. You guys disrupted them really early. Do you feel like you put them in a hole that they had to dig out of the rest of the way?

ENIYA RUSSELL: Yeah, definitely, I think physicality and rebounding and defense wins us games. I don't think they was used to that.

But Cal, like Coach says, they have a great team and great fan base. But making them off the three-point line, they are a very good three-pointers. Physicality rebounding and denying and just being strong.



So yeah, I definitely think our defense disrupted them.

Q. You mentioned keeping them off the three-point line and they really struggled offensively. Can you talk about keeping your hands busy in the paint? A lot of pick-and-rolls had no luck closer to the basket.

JERKAILA JORDAN: Just like Eniya said, our emphasis this week was defense. We knew defense was going to win us games. Jumping out the game strong, defensive being very active, we worked on that in practice, active ball hands. They are great passers and a very smart team. They can pick you apart.

Today, we came, we were locked in in the first quarter, and like you said we got a lead up on them early and made sure we stayed solid all four quarters.

SAM PURCELL: Also want to take it to another level to give a shoutout for some special people. The NCAA sometime gets a hard time but what's a really cool rule right now is we get to travel practice players.

So we have had phenomenal practices, and like I told tell them if your preparation is on point it's funny how your success comes.

And I want to give a shoutout to them, along with assistant Coach Tony Dukes and Victoria Vivians because I thought did they a great job of, and I think that's why you saw so many deflections and confidence from my young women because they understood the coverage that was going to be needed to disrupt things.

Q. How do you evaluate your team's composure because from the start to the finish? It seemed like you guys never got too high or too low.

JERKAILA JORDAN: Honestly, I would just say, before the game we knew we were the away team. We're not from California, obviously.

So the only people we had were us and our fans. We stayed together as a team. In the huddle we talked to each other and made sure we stayed poised and made sure,



five on court, make sure we were all on the same page throughout the whole game. You know, just listen to our coaches and our staff and our teammates.

SAM PURCELL: Also, shoutout to Eniya Russell for any future job people here. I don't know who runs the double-decker bus but we took our team two days ago, Eniya took over the mic, and I really believed it carried on the court because she's never talked that much on defense. Future job opportunities for Eniya Russell here in California.

Q. Do you want to talk about what comes next, facing USC on their home court, one of the biggest stars in the country?

ENIYA RUSSELL: I think USC is a great team but right now keep the focus on us. Get to work in practice and practice hard, and just stay focused on us right now. That's the main focus right now. We are just going to get after it. Like Coach said, we got practice players, Victoria, TD. Hopefully we just get it right. We going to get it right -- sorry about that. We going to get it right.

SAM PURCELL: That's right.

ENIYA RUSSELL: We going to get it right.

JERKAILA JORDAN: We going to celebrate us tonight and lock in tomorrow.

Q. What did you see from Cal coming into the game? Their three-point shooting was strong and you focused on shutting that down, but did anything surprise, and you did you ever expect them to get going in this game in a way that they never really did?

SAM PURCELL: Yeah, so we are a big scouting report defensive team. I'll put ourselves up there because again when I was at Louisville making those Final Four runs, Jeff Walz taught me to how to break down film and put game plans together. I've been able to hire three former head coaches.

So with the time, I think we probably went through 15 games, right. That's how detailed we were, all right. Only thing I think we're missing is their social security number, right. We knew tendencies, which way they wanted to go. It was really cool how my young women wore dialed in and willing to accept the information, but most importantly, apply it.

And we referred a lot back to their Duke game, right, because they held them to the lowest because we think Cal is one of the best halfcourt offensive teams in the

country. But we felt if we could disrupt them and get them out of call-in sets and make them go to other things to try to have pressure releasers; that we might have a fighting chance.

And most importantly if we wear them down, those times they messed up, maybe they would shoot with tired legs instead of with fresh legs. I think you saw a lot of that tonight, because sometimes in games like this when you play good teams, you need a little luck, and tonight, obviously, we had a little luck but we also had a lot of hard work.

Again, so much respect for Cal because that's a team that was in the Top-25 for eight weeks. Beat several teams that we played in the SEC. So they had our full respect, and again we just knew it was going to be a game that we were going to have to bring it for 40 minutes and we did.

Q. I thought your positional defense across the board was opponent rails all night. How can you speak to the preparation of this team and how they digested the information? It's a lot to overload and not over coach at the same time?

SAM PURCELL: Well said, man. One, luckily everybody always talks about my guards. They need to start stalking about my bigs.

Madina's athleticism and motor is next level. And I keep saying it: We are watching one of the best post players in the country come to life and I'm fortunate to coach her.

And then you had Nir. Thank God it wasn't worse with her knee injury. She made some huge blocks when Madina was able to muck it up, and she comes in and blocks. And I bring in Kaila, who is my enforcer and I think their physicality allowed my guards to eat, and then when they hold it down on the inside, I've got a lot of great speed and length, so they can disrupt what they are trying to do.

Q. 3-1 now in the NCAA Tournament.

SAM PURCELL: A lot better than my SEC record.

Q. What is it about your teams? This is two completely different teams but have taken it to the next level it seems like both times you've been in the tournament.

SAM PURCELL: I'm going to brag about myself and pat myself on the back. Again, if you give me time, I think that's what I've been known for my whole career is putting game plans together, and again, I'm a firm believer that proper planning prevents piss-poor performance, and you

just had a well-oiled scout that we stuck to, where in the SEC Tournament, you don't have enough time and break.

And then I think there's something to be said about the length of the season. I've said this before, and it's no knock to the SEC. But we don't have an off-day. We play on Sundays. Our off-day is a school day so we go full time.

A lot of people thought I was crazy but I gave my young women four days off after that loss and just told them to go have fun and be a college student, all right. Enjoy spring break and come back fresh. I think you see a joy and an energy about them that's next level.

And again, you know, it was just a special vibe and I think that's why you're seeing us have so much success in the NCAA Tournament compared to the SEC.

Q. You went and forth about Kaila's technical. What were your thoughts on that call?

SAM PURCELL: First of all, we're here in Hollywood, okay, where we're trying to put on a show, and I think the women's game is as good as it's ever been. And I think, you know what, I think it's a double-edged sword sometimes. I think women aren't allowed to show the same emotion that men can sometimes.

And I understand the rule when you do taunting or trying to personalize it to the opposing team. But my young woman was doing it in front of the camera, and my kids, they live for this moment. Bright lights, big stage? Let's eat. And she was trying to do it right in front of the camera on ESPN2, and that's where I was upset is like, man, let that kid have her moment because we have an audience and they want to be fed. So let's keep feeding them, and let's don't slow the game down.

Q. You mentioned Madina a little bit earlier but a heck of an NCAA Tournament debut for her. She certainly seemed to get the better of her matchup. What were the keys to her having the game she did, and how can she continue in the next round?

SAM PURCELL: I wouldn't say she got best out of her. You had two elite post players go at it. That's why I was so upset is because we had a great game for women's basketball on TV, and especially those two young ladies. Madina had 14, the other young lady had 17. Madina had 13 rebounds and the other young lady had 15. It was just a dogfight.

I just think, again, what Madina doesn't necessarily get credit for is the deflections, the altering of the pass, things

that never show up on a box score but most importantly her body language. I think, and don't fact-check me on this, but she probably started 0-for-4 in her first NCAA Tournament and she knew she wanted to do better. She work harder. When you have kids who think like that, you've got chances and again I'm the luckiest coach in the world to be coaching her.

I hope you're going to ask me about -- and LaChanna Robinson, my best friend, she's in wedding season, I hope this goes on Twitter, her wedding gift might be questionable, Hon. My wife is in here, we meeting sending her a wedding gift. She did not believe in the Bulldogs. Tim McGraw is no longer my favorite country music artist. I'm going with Garth Brooks. So we pay attention to the love and the shoutouts. Go ahead.

Q. They better talk to you nice.

SAM PURCELL: Amen.

Q. You talked coming into this that everybody is going to be talking about JuJu, and that's a huge matchup for you. What's your early thoughts on playing that team?

SAM PURCELL: I've got a lot. First of all I was just a fan today on the sideline, because again who JuJu is, again, the women's basketball is in a great game -- I like how the young lady carries herself. The way she moves in transition and just the competitiveness about her was fun to watch.

So I'm not going to have a good night tonight trying to watch it on film. But again, when you've got the No. 1 seed, it's more than one player. She's got a supporting cast that is next level. I hit my staff about five times because the way they rotate bodies and keep throwing McDonald's All-Americans in there, I think it's going to be the McDonald All-American kids against the Burger King kids -- or what's the awesome hamburger spot here, In-N-Out? Let's go. Maybe we get an NIL deal with In-N-Out.

But seriously, they are loaded with talent. Every poll, because I pay attention to what people write, the story line here in Hollywood has already been written. It's USC going to face UCONN in the Elite 8.

So like any good movie, we need a plot twist. We need to mix it up. We have our work cut out because you're playing one of the best teams in this country that's mad they are in this bracket. We have watched the news, all right. We know it is going to be an absolute war.

And I know the other coach, Beth Burns, who I mentioned last time should be in the Hall of Fame.

Beth, I'm going to need to you take it easy because as much as I think I'm a great scout, Beth burns, she's up there as well, too.

So they are going to have great plan, this place will be rocking. Our backs will be against the wall, and again, it's going to take another effort that we are going to have to play our best game.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

