

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Mississippi State vs USC

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Galen Center

## Mississippi State Bulldogs Coach Sam Purcell

### Media Conference

SAM PURCELL: First and foremost, it feels great to be here in Los Angeles another day. The team is excited, but obviously very tired, because as much as I bragged about last round's preparation and opportunity with multiple days, you turn around and now are handed the No. 1 team in the country in our bracket, who I believe could be the No. 1 team in the country.

You try to jam in as much film as possible and not overwhelm them, and then making sure at the same time we recover from last night's war. We've have a lot of rest, rehab, and treatment, so we feel like we've got a good game plan.

But it's going to take an unbelievable effort again, like I said, on the defensive end, and then this challenge, too, is we got to have our best offensive execution. We can't turn the ball over. We got to have people when we have open shots knock it down in order to try to beat a team that nobody believes the Bulldogs are going to beat in every single bracket, all right?

Like I said I turned on the news today, First Take with my guy Stephen A. Smith and, already talking about USC versus UConn. We're a speed bump that happens to be here, all right, and we're going to find a way to make it as tough a competition as we can tomorrow.

#### Q. Juju gets a lot of headlines on this team.

SAM PURCELL: Which she deserves.

#### Q. What stands out to you about their interior defense in particular since you guys do so well in the paint?

SAM PURCELL: Yeah, their length. I was almost a fan yesterday instead of a scout watching them. They remind me of Kentucky in our league who leads the SEC in blocks



where their guards are able to put great pressure on the ball, especially Samuels.

I think she doesn't get enough credit on this team. She doesn't start and is not the first guard to come off the bench, but boy does she change the energy of the game.

When you have a water bug like that that speeds you up, you think you get past the first line and then uh-oh, here comes the second line.

Obviously we're going to actually do a drill today. We haven't practiced, all right? Then I'm going to line everybody up and we're seriously going to do this. Put the ball out and I'm going to block it out of bounds. That's how we're going to start practice.

If we can have the mindset that we're going to get our shot blocked, as simple as that sounds in the women's game and understand that I need to bounce back and still come at them, then we'll have a fighter's chance.

If we allow those blocked shots to break our spirit then we need to hurry and warm up the bus, or more importantly, they'll tell the bus driver to turn off the bus and we better get right back on if we want a chance.

So to your question, it's just they're unbelievable with how well they can get after it and they can make you look really ugly.

#### Q. Little off question from the game.

SAM PURCELL: Yeah.

#### Q. With the men's tournament there is a lot of talk about next expansion of the field. I'm wondering on the women's side what your thoughts are on the pros and cons of making this a bigger event?

SAM PURCELL: Yeah, definitely expansion. I think there is lots of good teams that you see that didn't get in. Obviously I'm one of those teams that is always on the back end because of how tough my conference is, especially as we continue to add more powerful members.



So I'm going to speak highly for it. Just like I thought last year, and I'm speaking from my heart, I thought I had an NCAA tournament team that deserved to be in the NCAA tournament.

That was hard for me to have some transfer kids who came for one year and have to tell them, you know what, we didn't finish our goals. But we had a good enough season where I always say the eye test, and Kim Mulke always talks about that in the SEC that we need some common sense.

By expanding it it allows common sense behavior to come in and say this team deserved it instead of getting so caught up in NET rankings or how you finished the last seven games. A body of work should ultimately determine who plays manage the Big Dance.

So that's why I'm a big favor of expanding it. Obviously on the women's side I'm going to take the next question even further. I'm looking for the growth of getting to neutral sites in the first and second round, all right? Because as much as this game has grown, it's time for that move.

It's time that, especially when -- I don't want to go negative with the hotels and things we've heard because the women's game is in a good spot -- but we have to get into more set sites where we have better accommodations for student-athletes at this time of the year.

Those are the experiences they should experience come March, so that's where I stand. Hopefully that answered that.

I like the good questions. That was a good one. No pressure my guy. You got the two ladies here that came with the smoke, okay?

**Q. Can you talk about just as you mentioned just being the underdog? You turned our your TV this morning and you see they're already talking about USC-UConn. Does that make your team fired up? Do they get motivated by that?**

SAM PURCELL: Oh, yeah, we fired up. The best part about it is this ain't the first time we been underdogs. We are from the SEC where it's South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, Oklahoma. Nobody talks about us. But yet away we play in a conference and we compete and fight for that top spot.

And then obviously our kids know about us in Mississippi. Not just Mississippi State. We get slept on as a state. We have a lot of power things and people that come out of

there. We have a platform and responsibility when given a national stage to make a statement.

That's the energy and most importantly the DNA that is special about the people from Starkville and that's what I try to have in my young women. Again, at the end of the day are we playing basketball? You better believe it. I want their education and their growth and who they were as people to always have an underdog mentality, because those are the people that eat in the real world, and that's what I want from my young women.

**Q. One follow up. How often you talk about -- obviously you got Juju as well. You say you put emphasis on the others, like Malia Samuels.**

SAM PURCELL: Avery Howell.

**Q. Right, Avery Howell. Can you just talk about what the preparation is like?**

SAM PURCELL: Yeah, man, it's a lot, right? It's a storm to be honest with you. It's kind of like when we do South Carolina. Most the time you do about six kids on a scouting report. You got to talk about everybody. The hardest thing for Southern Cal is they got the starting five, but their identity changes as they make rotations, and what each kid brings to the table comes to life.

So you really got to win segment basketball. I've told them this is like a final that you studied for the last moment that you got to make sure even when the third string point guard comes in, you understand what they're going to bring to the table. We have to win those situations in order to beat a Southern Cal. Again, that's where I keep saying you got to have the perfect game. We got to have it on the perfect night.

That's why I love March Madness. I don't have to beat them seven times. I just got beat them one, and we got to be the best team tomorrow.

**Q. Coach, throughout the season you always remained super confident in your request team. What have you seen from this team all year to kind of give you that confidence?**

SAM PURCELL: Yeah, it's this life. I'm actually looking at this quote on the back wall, Fight on. That's Southern Cal's saying for their school. That's what we've done.

When we got punched in the face we fought on. Again, you can look at our record. Won one, lost one, won one, lost one in over time, won one, and I think if you look at the entire work and the body of everybody in the NCAA



tournament, most kids fold two or three games, and my kids didn't do that.

They fought on. So when you go to war with my young women you come to practice and they don't let losses turn into a second loss. They want to bounce back. It only inspires you. When you're inspired that's where you get the ultimate confidence and that's why I believe in them like no other.

Just because of who they are as people, and they're winners. It's not just basketball. They're winners on and off the court, and I couldn't be more a proud coach with a proud group.

**Q. Coach, yesterday you decided to started Eniya over Chandler, who has been starting for a about a month now. What went into that decision? Obviously worked out well. What went into start decision?**

SAM PURCELL: Yeah, just to mix up some things. If you look at our last nine games we haven't got off to -- we've lost the first quarter. So Chandler is the ultimate warrior she's somebody that is ultimately a different story because we talked about her. When I took her in the portal she was coming off an Achilles injury. I told her give herself until Christmas to get her mind right because that's a serious injury. Then just allow minutes to come.

She did exactly what I thought she would and then she played herself into a starting role. I went with her because she was playing well. Then we weren't playing well as a team and I thought Eniya a gives us an energy and lift out the gate.

I simply told Chandler, Chandler, you know, we're in a special part of the season where I need to steal six to seven points. I think a Eniya starts there is a different bounce about our team. No offense to you. Do you mind? She was like, no. Coach, I just want to play at the end of the game. I don't care about the beginning.

Let me tell you, as a coach that's the best thing a player can ever say to you. That's the ultimate reason why we're having success. It takes people that are willing to be about the team over me.

And we made that move and we won first quarter I think 12 to 5 I believe, right? And then Chandler was an unbelievable performance, again, whether she starts or comes off the bench. She just was limited a little bit in her minutes because of foul trouble.

That was the reason it came to life. Shout out to Chandler for being the ultimate teammate and upperclassman.

**Q. You have a history with Beth Burns from Louisville, right?**

SAM PURCELL: Yes.

**Q. Wondering what of her fingerprints you see on this USC defense?**

SAM PURCELL: Oh, how much time do we have, right? First of all, they're back to their winning ways. Obviously Lindsay is a phenomenal coach, too. There is a DNA about the way they play on defense that I know that's Beth, especially how they pick up the ball.

My years with Louisville, that was -- we would stop practices if we didn't pick up the ball. I just visualize myself back with her. I see the postgame comments and I read them now that I study them and some of the language they say and the things they take pride in, I can tell that's Beth Burns.

She's just always been a defensive coach where she gets after it, and when you watch the game film, you can't hide the people that are invested. I mean, you know, I love -- us coaches, head coaches, have a responsibility to work the sidelines and stand up and go at the referees.

The ones who pay attention on the scout, those are the coaches that get the maddest, or I told you not to do that, right? You see that in Beth Burns. You can see the pride that she gets mad when you give up two points, right? We're talking about two points.

Again, that's why they're the team they are and that's why they can you look ugly. She's a fighter, like I said, especially with cancer research and her whole life and story. That's what I said in my last press conference. I hope she gets the flowers she deserves as an assistant now, that if they take in coaches outside of the norms of former head coaches, that she gets an opportunity for the Hall of Fame for what she's done for women's basketball, and most importantly for Kay Yow Research.

There is a lot of people who get on this board but don't stay on it. She's been on it for as long as I've known her, for 15 to 20 years. She sacrifices her time and she has a heart for people. Really proud and happy for her. If she could just take one game off tomorrow for me, all right, that's the least she could do for me since I'm trying to get her in the Hall of Fame. Fair, right? Don't you think? Southern hospitality here on the west coast.

**Q. Wondering if you've tried the jerk sauce --**

SAM PURCELL: Yes.

**Q. -- on sale at your place?**

SAM PURCELL: It is, it's phenomenal. Jimmy who's in here with me, they sold it. First time after Christmas they had it in our stands with some nachos. I said, listen, I'm not doing press until I get some jerk sauce. I got to taste this. It was phenomenal. It sold out.

We got a hot market just like LA is a hot market. We got a hot market down in Starkville. Things are popping off the shelf down there. Credit to her, because NIL is a really cool space right now and a lot of times it's corporate-ran where you just put a face on the brand.

What was cool about what our Mississippi people did is they brought her to the plant and made her taste the different sauces so she chose what her name and face was going to be on.

Like how cool and dope is that, right? Not only does she approve it, but it actually tastes good. I am proud of her and just proud of people in Mississippi invested in women's basketball, just like they are here at USC on the women's side.

Again, the women's game, man, what a great product we got going on right now. Also want to give one more last shoutout. If I could get some Hollywood stars to DM or tweet me, right? I need my people. I know Snoop dog is probably coming here for USC. John Legend. I see all these people. I'm trying Jimmy Kimmel. Jimmy Kimmel is from LA, right?

**Q. Vegas?**

SAM PURCELL: But he's here in LA. Jimmy Fallon didn't pick the Bulldogs, so maybe Jimmy Kimmel might want to come and hit me up on DM. Jimmy, is it too late for the ticket list? I need a star behind my bench. This is my last request. We're going to play the land of the stars. We got our back against wall. Let's have a little fun with and this and let's make a great game for women's basketball tomorrow. How does that sound?

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