

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

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Galen Center

USC Trojans

Rayah Marshall

Avery Howell

Media Conference

Q. Lindsay was talking yesterday about how you really have taken pride in being at the head of the press when you guys initiate that. Was that just an instinctual thing for you, kind of came to you naturally, or is that something that's developed over time?

RAYAH MARSHALL: I would definitely say that's something that I can say I developed here in the program, something Coach B has brought to my game that over time has just strengthened; and also just the confidence that my coaches and teammates instilled in me.

And then another thing is also part of the game plan. That's something that I'm prepared for prior to games.

Q. How have you seen this defense get better and better with that press? It seemed like in this past game that was really when things changed.

RAYAH MARSHALL: For sure. So a lot of time watching if I may, and also just certain players, we know who to take advantage of, who to be aggressive, who to fall back, have an awareness of shot clock.

I would say the more we go deeper into the season, the more we are comfortable with trapping with each other. The more I know which teammate I can strongly trap, which teammate we can force a ten-second backcourt. With time, learning my teammates and also looking in on the scout so I know which players I can be more aggressive with.

Q. How did you see the freshmen overall, just looking back at Game 1, not just the game itself but mentally how they handled themselves? Being the first game of the tournament, it can be overwhelming.



RAYAH MARSHALL: I feel like one thing I like to pride Coach G. on a lot is she recruit really, really good people. So not just players but people off the court.

Avery right here, actually, I'm going to talking about her. When we have team structure studies, she is always -- can get out of there early and fast because she has no work because she's crushing her work on her own time.

And another thing, also, with these freshman, what a lot of times people don't see how competitive they are. They don't take a backseat to anything. They are talking and they are vocal.

Also I felt like Lindsay giving their prep prepared them for games like this because they get to play. And it's not like we are in a tournament now and throw them in a game.

They have reps in preseason and in-season. Now when we are in NCAA Tournament, they can hit big shots because they had the experience versus UCLA. We played Notre Dame. We played top teams, and they are thriving.

Q. You mentioned the press and how much you take pride in it. But you guys were hitting that thing up 30 to the point that it wasn't like it was necessary in that game, but what are you working on at that stage of the game in terms of how you are communicating defensively for the next opponent when you are going to install that again?

RAYAH MARSHALL: A lot of that goes with the coaches and the preparation and scout.

Also, I feel like when it's March, it's all about wins. So whatever I need, whether we are pressing or picking up full-court man, I feel like being aggressive to get the W, forcing turnovers. Being vocal with my teammates. When we are all locked in and on the same court, I feel like we are a contender to win a National Championship.

Q. Can you talk about what the Mississippi State coach talked about you, you and Malia and other



players, as well, how you're prepared to play big and prepared for these moments throughout the season?

EVERY HOWELL: Yeah, kind of like what Rayah said, all of us have been working the whole season just in practice and games to be ready for any moment we are given.

Especially coming off a bench I try to be a spark for our team and try to fill in gaps where it's needed, and try to read the game from the sideline. And when I get in, try to make the best impact when I can. I think a lot of us do that.

I think we're focusing on like what's front of us. So we are ready for this next game and preparing for that one. For the main part, it's like every moment is super important at this time.

Q. I was just wondering, what's it been like playing with Kiki this year and what's your relationship like with her?

RAYAH MARSHALL: Okay, so I've been on Kiki since like early high school. We always played against each other.

But every day, I've never experienced Kiki every day. Like, we've never been on the same team. So we actually are locker partners. Every day she's coming in; consistently bringing in great energy. She's coming in, saying good morning.

In her head, she really a princess. She walks around like, "Good morning, everyone." She's really sweet.

But also, playing with Kiki is like having a cheat code. Like, she can do it all. Her tempo is always great. We'll have practices the day after a game, and Coach Lindsay is like -- we're like walking through, but Kiki is going a hundred every day.

She's fun. She's competitive. She's also just one to really just uplift your spirit with her presence. She's generally sweet. I've actually been honored to play alongside her this year.

Q. I know I asked Rayah this, but in terms of this press defense, when you guys are running that, what is it that makes it so suffocating about the way you guys run it? And how difficult, as a freshman, how hard was it to get in the rhythm of the way you guys do it?

EVERY HOWELL: Yeah, I think we work on it a lot in practice. So the more we practice it, the better it feels in a game. And I also think for the personnel that we have on this team that can be a really energizing thing for us and

can kind of get everyone going.

I think it's a good thing to fall back on if we need a little pick up. So just being able to fall into that press. I think that it's been a really good thing for our team this year, and we rep it a lot. Coach B is honest about wherever we go and everything, and I think that whoever the dog is in the front, most of the time it's Rayah, just brings it. Kind of starts it all for us, being loud, being big. That scare factor at the front, it's just really energizing for our team.

Q. Obviously you guys have your opponents in front of you that you watch film on but just as a team, do you get to watch games together? Do you still get to be any sort of basketball fans even though you're locked in on your own schedules with all the other games happening in the tournaments around the country?

EVERY HOWELL: I mean, yeah, I watch a lot of basketball. Have all my life. I think that especially during March Madness, it's super fun to watch games, kind of to see what's going on on the other sides of things, especially early on.

But I think that our main focus is still on us and our opponent, so that's definitely what we keep our eyes on. But it is fun to see what's going on.

But yeah for the main part it's just focus on us.

RAYAH MARSHALL: I also watch, I have friends at other schools, other teams. So it's fun. It's March basketball. So I'm watching.

THE MODERATOR: Can you talk about your opponent for tomorrow and what you see and the expectations?

RAYAH MARSHALL: Who won the game?

THE MODERATOR: For Mississippi State.

EVERY HOWELL: Yeah, we're excited to play. We are excited to be in this next round game. We are excited to face them. We know it's going to be a tough game just like a lot of teams are facing right now in March Madness.

But I think that we have a good game plan and we are ready to hit it face-on tomorrow.

RAYAH MARSHALL: Our last game in Galen Center for the season, we are looking to go out with a bang. And we have a great competitor front of us.

So just starting there. Sticking to our game plan and

looking to compete, you know, and hopefully go out with a win in front of our home crowd.

THE MODERATOR: Rayah, let me ask you about Coach Purcell from Mississippi State, coached with Beth Burns and had a lot of very nice things to say about her in here previously, and I know she's had an impact defensively for all you guys and you. Can you talk about Coach Burns and what she's meant?

RAYAH MARSHALL: Yeah, for sure. I would probably say Coach Burns changed came my sophomore; my senior year now. I feel like that's what I really started playing elite-level defense.

I never experienced a defensive scout like that until she came. And same thing every game. She's handling the defensive side of our scouts. It really shows because every game plan, every defensive game plan, looks different. With her knowledge, I feel like that's a lot of the reason we have a lot of the wins.

Then also one thing, about Coach Burns is, not just -- we have principles. So it's not just this game we're going to do this, this game we're going to do that. But like in practice she's really pushing us to battle one-on-one defensively or making sure the bigs are -- just picking her mind defensively has helped my game a lot.

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