

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal: Georgia Tech vs South Carolina

Sunday, March 28, 2021

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome - Hemisfair

South Carolina Gamecocks

Dawn Staley

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

South Carolina 76, Georgia Tech 65

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by head coach Dawn Staley. We'll take questions.

Q. What does it say about your team that Aliyah Boston, the force that she has been, goes scoreless in the first half, yet offensively you guys looked so connected? What message and how much confidence does that give you moving forward?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, this team is resilient and determined and focused on the task at hand. We found ourselves with Aliyah Boston in a little foul trouble early on, so we had to pivot. This team pivoted extremely well today.

It's good to hit shots. I think we can afford ourselves that situation when we're hitting shots. I just thought over the course of 40 minutes I thought we did a great job of just making Georgia Tech go a little bit deeper into some of the things that they wanted. Lotta got off early. They tried to find mismatches on the floor. I just thought we did a great job at just winning the game, doing whatever we needed to do to win a game, no matter how it looked.

Fortunately for us we got some shots to fall and got some shots to fall deep.

Q. You mentioned hitting shots. How much confidence does it give you that even when Aliyah may not be hitting them, you can go to the bench and get a couple of threes?

DAWN STALEY: It's great. I mean, we're playing where I thought we could play a little bit earlier in the season, or



later in the season. I just think there's an extra effort of concentration. There's an extra effort of players knowing they're going to play.

L.A. knows she's going to play, and she's going to play some pretty significant minutes for us. Destiny Littleton knows that she's going to play. So I think they can relax. Once they get in the game, they can be who they are, the best version of who they are. It couldn't happen at a more crucial time with LeLe going out.

Q. In your postgame interview, you mentioned sort of that balance of being focused but loose and kind of striking that balance. You thought maybe they were a little too focused early on in the game. In a bubble setting, because this has taken all of you guys, coaches, players, out of the routines you're used to, how much harder is it to find that balance?

DAWN STALEY: I thought for the first two games we were pretty loose, meaning focused but loose. Today I thought we were focused and tight. I don't know if that helped the ball go in the hole a little bit better. It's just defensively in the first quarter we had some miscommunication on our ball screen defense. Second quarter we just had to scrap it because they weren't doing what we game planned for.

The coaches, we got together and just said, We're going to actually do what they're doing. We're just going to go under it. We were getting hung up on it. We were supposed to switch in different instances. We just found the path of least resistance in doing the things they were doing out there, making adjustments around just what they were doing naturally.

If they were a little tight, we got to go with the flow. We just can't put a square peg in a round hole and try to get them to do it the way we felt gives us a better opportunity to win.

Q. What does it mean to get the team to the Elite 8 again, to get back to that spot? What did it mean to have your sister here today watching you guys live?

DAWN STALEY: To get back here, not many teams have gotten here, not many South Carolina teams. I think one



other than what we've been through. So, I mean, it's the hard work and the legacy of some of our leaders who played here at South Carolina left with us.

Ty and Kiki, they've been here before. They got robbed of an opportunity to come back here last year. So it's great to see them leaving this type of legacy with some of these younger players. They've gotten us back to this point.

So it wasn't just about this year. Our players played extremely hard this year, they put themselves in this position. If we didn't have the type of season we had last year, the interactions we had within our team, I don't think you can just come here. There are too many great teams and great programs here to think you can just flip a switch and be here. There are people that put us in this position that allowed us to familiarize ourselves to playing at a high level. When it was time to do that, we were able to do that. So it's great.

My sister being here is an awesome thing. I look forward to hearing her call my name out. I don't know where she is all the time, but once I hear it, I give her a little nod, a little Philly nod to say, I hear you, but I can't see you, especially if I don't have my glasses on.

It's great. She made the trip out here last night. Got in late. Got up early, got some breakfast. She got into our game day routine. It was good to share this moment with her and hopefully we can continue so that her stay can be extended.

Q. You've talked a lot about your defense having turned a corner, having bailed out some of your less impressive offense performances. How is it good to see the complementary two-way type of game moving through this tournament?

DAWN STALEY: It was awesome. I was almost feeling bad for our players because we haven't hit very many three-point baskets. We've taken good shots, but they just didn't fall. When did they play? We played on Monday.

Q. Tuesday.

DAWN STALEY: We played on Tuesday. We had a day off on Wednesday, but we asked the players if they wanted to shoot. They all wanted to shoot. So we took them over, shot for an hour. A lot of stuff that we did was just three-point shooting. We did that on Thursday and Friday and Saturday. So we got a lot of three-point shooting in.

I think that helped a great deal. It was great to see Zia get them to go down, because she's a pretty good catch-and-shoot three-point shooter. But everybody. We

had eight of 'em. Destiny Littleton, it was great to see that ball go in. I do believe somebody else? Henderson, Destanni Henderson got one to go in. So it's great.

If we can get that going, it gives us an extra layer of confidence and an extra layer of something that our opponent versus to guard.

Q. Is that about as good a game as you've seen from L.A.? She thought maybe it was her best all-around game during her time at South Carolina?

DAWN STALEY: I didn't hear the last part of it. I'll answer the first part that I heard.

L.A. I mean, super proud of her. Super proud. Like L.A. is probably the most confident, the most focused. She's got a little stubbornness in her. You don't overcome two ACLs in, like, a year, year and a half span and not have some stubbornness to her.

But her stubbornness also allow her to stay focused and to stay confident. We didn't know what this year was going to end up being. I do believe that L.A. is a player that needs to be needed. She needs to be needed. Like she needs to know a consistent game plan knowing that she's going to get in the game. That helps.

I think as a coach, as I reflect on how she's played this year, and I look at how she's playing now, I probably should have did something a little bit different. And granted we're in a pandemic. We had a shortened season. So we didn't have any fluff into your schedule to kind of experiment. We did experiment very early on in the year with actually playing her at the three and playing her on the perimeter. I just thought that took away from her focus. She was focusing on a lot of different things, playing the post, the three, the perimeter.

I just chose to play her at the post because we're thin in the post. But having her play both on the perimeter and in the post has really helped her confidence. It's given her the room she needs for us to see all that talent, all that skill set.

I'm super happy for her because she stayed there with us. A lot of people would have been disgruntled. A lot of people probably would have been thinking about transferring, probably would have got leaked out.

But, no, this team has been pretty special and pretty professional about things. That's one of the things that I love about them, is they only want to play, and they want the best for each other. Even if it's at their expense. Not a lot of young people are able to balance that, but still stay confident. When their number is called say, Hey, she stuck

it to me. This is what you could have been getting all year long if you believed in me, if you gave me that opportunity. I'm certainly a believer.

Q. I wanted to does you about Brea Beal. She turned it on late. Did you notice in the past couple months she lost a little bit of confidence in her shot, she's passed up some open looks because they hadn't been going in for her as much?

DAWN STALEY: Yeah, I mean, it goes back to what I just talked about with L.A. Your confidence can wane a bit when you're not doing it consistently. So, yes, I do think she went through a period where she had two pretty good games offensively. Then after those two games, you want to play at that level, you want to continue to give that contribution. Sometimes just things happen. You're less focused or you get to a point where you press a little bit, and it becomes a head game, becomes totally in your head, nothing to do with you can't shoot. I've never told a player not to shoot, ever. I won't ever tell a player not to shoot. I will explain to them what are good shots and what are bad shots.

I think sometimes if I tell Bre that was a bad shot because if you're opening 25 seconds on the shot clock, you're open at 22 seconds on the shot clock, you're probably going to be open at 10. So let's go through our offensive sets and see if we can create other opportunities for other people, then you get yourself ready to take that shot when it gets back around to you.

Sometimes that plays with younger players, like we don't have confidence. You're open for a reason. They're taking their chances with you rather than the other players who are used to doing that.

She's at a good place. She's very, very focused. She's making her shots. She's got a great balance of what she's doing.

Q. We've talked so much about missed layups this year, how that's been a bugaboo. You are 19 of 25 today. How pleased were you to see that?

DAWN STALEY: Super pleased. I think our offense -- our defense wasn't bad, it wasn't superb, but our offense actually carried us today with our ability to hit layups and our ability to stretch the floor and hit some threes.

It's a work in progress. I hope it continues to get better and we're able to just continue to showcase that in this tournament. You got some great programs here that can put a lot of points on the scoreboard.

For us, we're going to have to have a tremendous balance between the two, just defending and being able to efficiently score.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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