

2023 Women's College World Series

Monday, June 5, 2023

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Tennessee Lady Volunteers

Coach Karen Weekly

Ashley Rogers

Kiki Milloy

Postgame Press Conference



Florida State 5, Tennessee 1

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Tennessee.

We'll start with a statement from Tennessee head coach Karen Weekly.

KAREN WEEKLY: I am just so grateful for this team. They're the kind of team that you live to coach, and you just hope that you have a team like this.

They have made this such a joyful, joyful year for me, for our entire staff, for each other. All I feel tonight is gratitude, just gratitude, that I got to spend the entire season with them.

It's going to be really, really hard to let 'em go.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for players.

Q. Bringing this team to a semifinal for the first time in a long time, what has it meant to be part of this run?

ASHLEY ROGERS: I'm just so proud of this team. I'm just so grateful that I got to spend this opportunity with them. I don't know. The love of the game, I get to play with these girls every single day, is the highlight of it all. I'm so proud.

I think that love and dedication and passion and fire that we all have is what got us here. This is the greatest thing of it all, being together and playing with each other, being on that field together. I think the results are the result of that.

KIKI MILLOY: It would have sucked to end the season not here with this group of girls. I love every single one of them. Playing for all the ones that came before us. We

have such great alumni and the Lady Vol community, just being able to do something like this for them, made me really proud.

Q. Ashley, that hug with Karen after the game, what did that mean to you?

ASHLEY ROGERS: It meant so much to me. We've been through so much over the years. Even a lot of head-butting and whatnot. She's just pushing me to be better, just made me a better person and a better player.

I'm just so thankful that she believed in me, took a chance on me when I was a sophomore in high school. I was a little girl from Athens, Tennessee. She took a chance on me. I'm so grateful for this opportunity that I have to wear the orange and white, represent my home state.

The way she's pushed me to be a better player, everything that she's done for me, I cannot thank her enough. I'm just so grateful that I got to play for her for the past five years. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

Q. Karen Weekly all season long has said you are the leadership on the team. To have had her look at you the way she has this season, what has the season meant to you?

ASHLEY ROGERS: It's just, like I said, the way that she's continued to push me not only as a player but as a leader as well. I don't know how to say it, but just kind of really helping me be a better leader, just strengthen my weaknesses, but also valuing the type of person and the way that I play, the way I am as a leader.

I'm just so thankful that she gave me the opportunity, just the way she continued to pour into us, all of us as leaders, not just as players, but people as well on and off the field.

KIKI MILLOY: You don't come into this program as just a softball player. Karen cares about you, like, as a person, what you're going to do off the field. Obviously softball isn't going to last forever. So just coming and making sure, she builds leaders that are not only going to be on the field, but you can lead with whatever you do in the rest of your life.



All the lessons she's given us, we're going to take on for the rest of our lives in whatever we do.

Just kind of taking that, yeah.

Q. Kiki, you saw what Ashley has done. What does Ashley mean to you?

KIKI MILLOY: (Tearing up) Sorry.

It's been a long four years. It's been such a joy, like, playing with her, getting to know her not just like as an athlete. I know all you guys have seen her on the field. Getting to know her as a person, how much she cares and loves life, just loves the people around her.

She just carries herself with so much poise and so much confidence that it just rubs off on all of us. It's going to be a big hole when she leaves this team. Yeah, I'm so grateful. COVID sucked, but it gave us another year together. I'm so grateful to have that.

Q. Ashley, this is your last season, so many times with Kiki. What has it meant to play with her?

ASHLEY ROGERS: I mean, she's obviously an amazing athlete, she's an amazing person, too. The way that she pushes us all, she's so inspiring. It's so cool to see how she's grown over the years just as a person and as a leader. The impact she's had on me, she will never know the depths of that.

It's so cool to get to spend the last four years with her. I think our relationship has grown day by day and just continues to grow. I'm so thankful I got to spend the past four years with her. I wish I could be on the same team with her forever and ever. I love playing with her on the field, the fire she brings to the game, how she makes each of us better, not only as ball players but as people.

That is the biggest impact she has had on me, and I cannot wait to see how she's going to continue to grow, get better and better. You haven't seen the best of her yet. She's so amazing all around. I just love her so much.

Q. For every college athlete this day comes. Karen wrapped you up in a hug. I believe Danny White stopped by to speak to you. What did they say to you? What is going through your mind stepping out of that dugout?

ASHLEY ROGERS: They just said they were so proud of me and they just thanked me for choosing Tennessee and coming back.

As I step off the field for the last time, I'm feeling a lot of emotions obviously. The ones I feel the most are a lot of gratitude and a lot of love and a lot of pride for being able to wear 'Tennessee' across my chest. I don't know if you guys knew, I'm a Tennessee native, grew up an hour from Knoxville.

Being able to represent my team and my home state that I grew up cheering for has been an absolute dream come true. Like I said, I'm happy Karen took a chance on me as a sophomore kind of nobody in high school, and just being able to represent Tennessee, the people that I love, the impact every person that I've come into contact with at Tennessee has just had a forever impact on my life, just pushed me as a person and as a player, just all around, as a student.

What wearing the orange has meant to me and my family is unspeakable. Like I said, I just grew up a Tennessee fan. Just having the opportunity and that chance to come out here and just wear 'Tennessee' across my chest, I hope I did it with a lot of integrity. It's been an absolute dream come true. Like I said, it just meant so much to me.

My father, who passed away when I was 16, was the biggest Tennessee fan. He was laid to rest in a Tennessee orange shirt and has the Power T on his headstone. I think that says the most about what Tennessee has meant to me.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions for Coach Weekly.

Q. Were you expecting this to kind of get into the bullpen battle that it did, and did you feel you were equipped for that?

KAREN WEEKLY: Yeah, I have a lot of faith in our pitching staff. All three of them have done just amazing things this year. Tonight was just a night that didn't go our way. That's a very, very good team. I mean, obviously you're here at the World Series competing to get into the championship series. They were just the better team tonight.

Q. Seven runners left on base today. How frustrating and pivotal was it to not be able to take advantage of those opportunities?

KAREN WEEKLY: I think especially early, we came out and I think every at-bat in that first inning was a good one. We put some good swings on pitches. Then I think we just gave away a few at-bats in the second and third innings.

Like you said, we had some opportunities. You kind of

knew if they got to a point where they had a lead, you were going to see Sandercock's. She's very good. She's one of the best pitchers. You saw why tonight.

I think we needed to do more damage early on in those first four innings. We just didn't.

Q. How much has Ashley impacted this program because of her, not only on the field, but her research? How has that changed the way you coach?

KAREN WEEKLY: Ashley is brilliant. Ashley is going to be a doctor. You're talking 4.0 through undergrad, kinesiology, 4.0 through a master's in biomechanics.

I think it's cool when you see somebody -- number one, at Tennessee we let them study whatever they want. There's no major that's off limits. I'm a big believer this isn't about four years, this is about 40 years.

When I went to college, I went to college to be a lawyer. I practiced law for five years and taught business law at the college level for six years. I had coaches and professors who made sure that they helped me so that I could do that, so I could play sports and do well in school.

I think that's what makes me most proud, is you see somebody that has a passion for her studies like Ashley does. Did all that research about pitching, the motion, the stress on your body. You just want to do whatever you can to give opportunities to them, to allow them to pursue so many things beyond softball.

I think so many softball players, they grow up and all they see is softball. I'm blessed because this is my third career, and I loved the first two careers I had.

I want them to look at the world like that. There's so many things you can do. Go do everything, try everything, and we're going to make that happen at Tennessee.

Q. Having broken through and getting to this semifinal, how does that position you for success in the future?

KAREN WEEKLY: Yeah, we do return a lot. For them to have this kind of post-season experience and to feel every step of the way, every step, to feel competing for that SEC regular season championship, and getting that deal done. Going to the tournament, competing and winning a tournament championship.

Just being put in those situations where you have to win, and learning how to play in those situations but play free and play with joy.

I think that's the biggest thing that I want this team to remember as we go into next year. No two teams are ever alike. You can look at our roster and say you lose Ashley and Shak. You're going to be great. I've coached too long to know that's no guarantee.

Next year's team is going to have its own personality, but there will be a lot of people that will have learned a lot of these valuable lessons.

I think you play on this stage differently once you've been there, and you know exactly what to expect.

Q. What were you saying to Ashley after the game? You've mentioned all season these two players are the closest you've ever been to players. What have they meant to you and that program?

KAREN WEEKLY: Just thanking Ashley for believing in Tennessee and believing that we could do this. It was a tough decision for her to come back this year because she's had so many injuries in the last two years. She's had so much pain and had to shut down a lot. It's just been very frustrating for her because she's such a competitor.

The thing that to me is most powerful about Ashley, Ashley spent the first four years of her career being a perfectionist, really not finding the joy because she was always trying so hard to be perfect.

What I'm so proud of both of them, these are two young ladies who didn't used to let anyone see them cry. They're very strong. It was almost like they felt like, I can't be vulnerable, that's everybody else's job.

This year they both learned to be vulnerable. They were vulnerable with their teammates. They were vulnerable with each other. And because of that they were able to really just let their light shine and play free and give everything they possibly had.

More importantly because of that they have the kind of relationship you just saw. They have that kind of relationship with their teammates.

Again, this is about 40 years of your life, it's not about four. That 40, yes, it's your professional career, but it's also those relationships and those girls that are going to be in your wedding, you're going to be in theirs, you're going to share all of life's joys and sorrows together.

Q. You may need a few days to have an adequate answer, but what are you going to remember the most about this team and this season?



KAREN WEEKLY: I don't need any time at all (tearing up).

Just how much we love each other. They just make it fun. They celebrate. They care about not just each other, they care about the coaches. The coaches love them.

We've had a lot of great teams at Tennessee. I'm not saying I was never joyful. I guess for doing this without Ralph by my side, just in my second year, to have a group like this that just embraced each other and embraced the coaches.

Every day it was lifting each other up. I just love 'em. I mean, that's the thing I'll remember, is how much love we have for one another and how much we love being together.

That's why they're crying. They're not crying because we lost. Wins and losses come and go. They're crying because we don't get to be here tomorrow planning for the next day. When we go home, we know that we'll go our separate ways. We just want to be together longer.

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