

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Ball State vs Ole Miss

Friday, March 21, 2025

Waco, Texas, USA

Foster Pavilion

Ole Miss Rebels

Yolett McPhee-McCuin

Starr Jacobs

Kennedy Todd-Williams

Media Conference

Ole Miss 83, Ball State 65

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Just incredibly grateful for the win. We don't take any win for granted, and we respect anybody, we just don't fear anybody. So, we came out with the intent to respect our opponent and play until the buzzer ended. I was really happy that I was able to almost play everybody on the roster. I thought that the seniors were locked in, and it showed on the court. We're one of the 32 teams that will be moving on, and that means something to me, these players and this program.

Q. Kennedy, what was working well for you out there? Actually, both of y'all, double doubles.

KENNEDY TODD-WILLIAMS: Yeah, just being active, being on the glass. Coach has told us before we can rebound on this team, so I think we really took that personal to do that and very intentional about that. Then I think just our energy, we don't want to go home, so just a level of intent to just leave it all out there on the court.

STARR JACOBS: I definitely agree. Playing every game like it's our last. They've been saying all week, one game at a time, and this is the road to Tampa.

I think taking each game, game by game, and doing everything we have, that's what lit the fire under us.

Q. How did you keep your intensity up because you were up once. You got up in the second quarter, and then you got up by double digits, but it seemed like your physicality was so dominating and you were so intense. How did you not have any kind of letdown?



STARR JACOBS: I think that's what we do. We're a defensive team. I think that's what gets us going, and we're told we have to play defense 40 minutes a game. That is what carries over and makes us come out on top like we did tonight.

KENNEDY TODD-WILLIAMS: I think the biggest thing is our bench coming in, giving us those good minutes is what's going to be needed to give us a little bit of break. But also see them get their flow. I thought it was really good to see that.

Q. Kennedy, you all both having double-doubles illustrated how you dominated the game. The rebounding numbers were decidedly in your favor. Did you anticipate that going in, or was it part of the game plan, or how did you see that unfolding?

KENNEDY TODD-WILLIAMS: Yeah, it was a part of the game plan. I know I have to get on the glass. Starr is always on the glass, so I wanted to give her some extra leave, so I think it alleviated some pressure, not just on Starr and our bigs but also from a guard standpoint, we have to be on the glass, as well. I think that was really good, and it was really good for me to see that I was able to get those rebounds, so it kind of opened it up.

Q. Starr, I know y'all wanted to be at home, probably deserved to be at home, but are you enjoying being in Texas close to home?

STARR JACOBS: I love being in Texas, but it's a great feeling being back home and having people come out and support you and being able to, but like Maddy said before, our defense travels. It was a great win for us, and no matter where we play, I think we're going to play the same.

Q. You guys had 27 in the third quarter. What did you see that the Ball State defense was doing that you could take advantage of?

KENNEDY TODD-WILLIAMS: I honestly think our defense transitioned to our offense. I think in transition, we're just out there, just running. I think we executed really well on



the offensive end, but it really started from the defensive end.

STARR JACOBS: I agree.

Q. Obviously, as you said, it's kind of the road to Tampa Bay here. With this win, obviously, a lot went well, but what's something that you need to work on to make sure that you're getting past round 2?

STARR JACOBS: I would say just keeping the same intensity, not letting up, respecting everybody we go against but fearing nobody. So just keeping that same level of energy to take us all the way, and like I say, defending. That's what gets us going, getting stops, kills, and that's what ignites us.

Q. You're happier now than you were three years ago, not in this building, but in this city. How gratifying is it to come back here with that history and have y'all play the way you played?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, I'll tell you this, once we found out -- once I realized that we wouldn't be playing in the same building, I felt like the juju was lifted. It's funny that you said that because I just told Maddy, it feels like a huge weight off our shoulders because she was here with me.

But I didn't really allow it to affect the game plan because we're just such a different team now, and that was our first time going to the tournament, and I think it was only like three of us in the whole room that had been to the tournament.

The only people that hadn't experienced NCAA Tournament on this team are the freshmen. And four of the players had experienced Sweet 16.

We feel confident and more prepared. But it was a sigh of relief. It was in the back of my mind.

Q. I looked at your quotes after that game and one of the things you said was "it gives me great joy, this program is headed in the right direction." So you used the word joy. What have you learned maybe in those ensuing three years?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, for me, I think I've learned more than anything just to stay -- to have a level of humility, to always look at things half glass full. Did we want to host? Of course. But I couldn't even bring myself to complain when the first two years, we won like four conference games. I'm just not going to ever forget that.

So for me, I count it all joy, seriously. I think the humility that it took to understand where we were and where we're trying to go, and we haven't looked back. This is our fourth consecutive year in the NCAA Tournament, and I just think I'm always going to be grateful for the opportunity to lead this team, grateful for my administration for sticking by me because people don't do that now, and it's paid off, and grateful for the players that decide to come and join us at Ole Miss.

Q. It's a one-point game fairly late first quarter, I think a 12-0 run going into the second, kind of solidified you. What do you think happened? What sort of clicked for you all?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, we had been off almost two weeks, so it's a long time. We just had to get some anxiety, some rust off. And I can tell because they were incredibly winded, and I don't know how because we've been like on vacation for two weeks. I just started really subbing and getting bodies in so that we could just -- I felt like we had more depth, and we were able to just get bodies in and keep the whole team fresh.

We just needed time to settle in. Hopefully, we don't have to settle in on Sunday. It's go time, playing Baylor at home.

Q. As Kennedy said earlier, they really had their defense turned straight into offense. You kind of nodded in agreement there. What were those defensive keys that Ball State gave to let you take over that game in a defensive way?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: You know what? I don't know how much you've looked into us, but that's what we do. We haven't been playing -- like our strength of schedule is a 3. Our last loss was against the No. 1 team in the country. So, we're no strangers to playing elite-level talent and dictating and disrupting. We weren't going to change anything for Ball State. Like I said, we respect everybody.

We just came in and instilled our defensive system, which is to dictate and disrupt, and then offensively, it's to rebound, run and share the ball.

We had a letdown, honestly, in the fourth quarter, but I played some people that usually don't get minutes, and for me, it's about creating moments for everybody. I'm not quite happy that they scored 65 points, but like I said, half glass full, right? It was more important to give some people some opportunities to create a memory for themselves and create moments for themselves.

But that's what we do. That is our identity. We just kind of

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

imposed our will on them.

Q. You talked about it, you were able to play a lot of minutes, maybe not expend as many minutes with the starters. How much does that help when you know you've got a quick turnaround like that?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, it's huge. Here's the thing, a day in between is big for us. In the SEC, it was like every day.

But again, I want to play as many people as possible, honestly. If I could play 10, I would play 10 on a consistent basis just because of how hard we defend and how hard we run on offense. We try to control the pace.

I don't think you can control the pace if you can't go into your bench.

But I was very proud that we were able to give a lot of players an opportunity today to get that experience. It would have kinda sucked if some of these kids never had the chance to get out and play and their parents watch them and stuff like that. I'm a mom of two; I know what it feels like. So if I can get them in, that's important for me, for them to be able to play in front of friends and family.

Q. You said on Sunday, our defense travels. Do you think that was the key to this game? What improvements do we and I'm going to say "we" because I'm on the team -- what improvements do we have to make in terms of making sure the defense is ready for Baylor on Sunday?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, absolutely our defense, that is our identity. If you look at our packing list when we distribute it to our players and you say like socks and stuff like that, on top, it says defense. So, we pack our defense in our suitcase and we travel with it. Like today, uncharacteristically, KK went 0 for 6, but she was guarding. She was defending and able to impact the game. We don't really allow our offense to dictate how we're going to play.

As far as Baylor is concerned, I need to watch a little bit more film on them. I don't like to get ahead. My assistants will have the scout ready. I didn't really watch them, but I do watch a lot of basketball, and I know that they're a really good team. And so schematically, we'll have to make sure we are on the same page defensively, but we're going to do what we do.

Hey, we play in the Southeastern Conference, all right. We play against Madison Bookers and Flau'jae Johnson. We play against pros, Mikayla Blakes, every single night. This

will be no different. We'll be ready.

Q. On the men's side, Ole Miss also won. Just talk about the basketball program in general and how it makes you feel to be a part of both teams being a part of this tournament and both teams winning today?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, the other day, I tweeted everything school. It would be selfish of me just to talk about men and women's basketball, but I was elated that Coach Beard and his crew pulled out -- a lot of people were talking a lot of trash, so we represented today on both ends. But our rifle team just won big. Our softball team, they may be undefeated. If not, I know they won a bunch of games, baseball, track just won a championship. We're an everything school, and that is a testament to, first of all, our chancellor, Chancellor Boyce, and then our AD and our administration. Keith, Jen, the whole crew, they support us.

We do operate like a small market NBA team, but we know how to make it work because there are a certain type of kids that fit at Ole Miss, certain type of people that fit at Ole Miss, and all of the coaches have done an excellent job going out there and identifying that.

So, I think we're an everything school. But I'm super pumped for our men's team, as well.

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