

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Ole Miss vs Baylor

Sunday, March 23, 2025

Waco, Texas, USA

Foster Pavilion

Ole Miss Rebels
Coach Yolette
McPhee-McCuin
Madison Scott
Sira Thienou
Media Conference

Ole Miss 69, Baylor 63

YOLETTE MCPHEE-MCCUIN: First of all I thought it was just an awesome game. It felt like an SEC kind of game. You know, on the road, rowdy crowd. I love that they showed up for their team.

You know, Waco has been incredibly hospitable and we have a lot of respect for Baylor. I mean, I just felt like it was a classic game. A lot have back and forth with Sarah Andrews staring me down every time she made a shot. I told her how much I love that.

Someone had to lose and I'm just glad it's not us. I'm just incredibly grateful that we were able to come out with a victory.

Q. Sira, nose okay?

SIRA THIENOU: Yeah, I'm okay.

Q. I noticed it early in the game, but did you have it at the beginning or did something happen early that you needed to make sure it was okay?

SIRA THIENOU: Yeah, something happen in the game.

Q. I guess while I still got the mic, Madison, you appeared frustrated after a couple of foul calls early. You were looking for a foul call on one of those buckets late. What were the conversations like with Coach Yo or others about trying keep you in the



moment, and approximate how did that help you when it came time to hit that key shot late?

MADISON SCOTT: Yeah, a lot of emotions this game. I know, because of what was at stake. But thank you God for my teammates, my coaches. They settle me down and tell me, look at the game. We're in the game. Next play mentality. So thankful for them.

Q. Sira, can you talk about -- you're a true freshmen. Can you talk about being ready to step into the spotlight as a true freshmen and now heading to play a Sweet 16 game?

SIRA THIENOU: Yeah, like we talk about every day, I didn't want to stop playing with her, like my seniors. That's why I give everything I had. I don't know how many game we have left, but I will give everything every time I step on the court like I did today, because I don't want to stop playing with them.

Yeah.

Q. Madison, Coach Yo mentioned around three years ago when you all played here; you all talked a little bit about that. How much was that on your mind? How special is it to do this after what you went through three years ago in this town?

MADISON SCOTT: Yeah, it was fitting that God brought us back here in my final year after losing here, getting outed the first round last time.

So definitely was in the back of my head that I wanted to come and lead my team to victory. I wanted to come and it be a different story this time, you know. So really, really grateful that we were able to come down here and be successful and get two wins.

I am so excited for what's to come. So excited to go home, wash our clothes, pack up, and get back to Spokane.

So I'm excited.

Q. Maddy, can you talk about you made some big



shots down the stretch. Can you just talk about what your mindset is here in this hostile venue and what you were thinking?

MADISON SCOTT: Well, there was a lot of things going through my mind. (Laughter.) As you could see through my emotion and passion.

But I shoot every day. I'm a shooter. I put in the work and get up shots every day outside of what's required. I don't know if you guys noticed down the stretch I missed three shots in a row.

Of course a part of me wanted to be in my head, but I had to remember I put up shots every single day, that I shoot these shots, that I am very capable of hitting these shots.

I just had to remind myself. And again my teammates were telling me, Coach Yo was telling me, let it go. Next play. When it came to the last play I just trusted the work that I put in, trusted God, just shot it. (Smiling.)

Q. On the offensive boards you won that margin 16 to 9. Talk about what went into that.

MADISON SCOTT: We talk about our defense, right? We talk the possession ending with the rebound. It's not a stop unless we come up with a rebound.

For us, rebounding is a sign of toughness, a sign of character. So it was a point that we rebounded on both ends of floor tonight. We made sure we were very intentional about it.

Yeah, just a part of what we do. We know in order to be successful and continue to dance, we got to rebound. We have to defend. That's our emphasis every time we step on the floor.

Q. For Madison, Baylor ended the first half on a 10-0 run, but you guys came out on a 6-0 run to answer. I guess what changed at halftime?

MADISON SCOTT: First, basketball is a game runs and Baylor is a really great team. We knew that they were going to punch back.

Coming out of halftime, we just wanted to give our all. We had 20 minutes left and we weren't ready to go home. That was the message. The message was to have no regrets when the buzzer ended. And look, no regrets.

So God is good.

Q. Siri, you were the leading scorer for the Rebels.

Again, I mean, you had just some big plays there throughout the game, but especially in the second half. Can you talk about your mentality? It was crunch time in a hostile environment with a lot on the line.

SIRA THIENOU: Yeah, I think sometimes someone has to step up. That's what I've been like. I don't want to think again that I'm a freshmen or something. I have to step up. My team need me to do that every single day. If I don't do it I'm wrong. That was my mindset today.

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: She doesn't even sound like a freshmen. (Laughter.)

Q. Madison, just last Sunday you said our defense travels. How important was that, especially in this game today?

MADISON SCOTT: It was very, very important. You know, like I keep saying, Baylor was a really good team. They have great players. It was important that we came here on the road with our defense, you know, ready to -- with our defense ready.

So, again, like I said, our defense travels. In order for us to continue to dance through March we understand how important it is to play defense.

Going to be playing different courts. Shots aren't always going to fall. One thing that will always be there is our defense because that's a will thing. Coach Yo harps on us being willing to do what it takes to win. Again, defense shows we're doing what it takes to win.

Q. Congratulations. So, coming out at after time, they had come back strong, kind of on you; you're in there at halftime. Coaches have told you what it is that you have to do. What do you as a team talk about that gets your mindset where it needs to be coming in that second half to accomplish what you need to accomplish?

MADISON SCOTT: Honestly, we were calling each other soft. I'm being honest with you. We were at the point where we lose, we go home, so it's very important to be honest with each other.

You got to give the hard truth. To end that second quarter, we were being very soft. Including myself. Went up a couple times, like you said, expecting a foul call. For us, that's soft. We wanted to come out in the second half and be better. You know, not playing for the whistle. Being the aggressor. Dictating and disrupting on both ends of the floor.



So I'm really proud of us for doing that.

Q. I know you don't just -- being around you a little bit here, you don't dwell too much on history. Is there some satisfaction doing what you did last year after what you all went through three years ago?

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: You know, it's satisfaction because I really enjoyed coaching this team. This team has had a goal that they want to go to the Final Four. We don't get to stop tonight. We will be one of the remaining 16 teams that will be competing.

You don't have a chance if you're out, so as far as I'm concerned we will be one of the 16 teams that has a chance to win a national championship. So it's satisfaction in that regard.

I'm at peace with what happened in the past because for me, that's all a part of being here and that's what makes it special.

So just really -- it was really gratifying when the buzzer sounded and we had the victory.

Q. Well, your team sounds so much like you and so ya'll were underdog in this game.

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah.

Q. Do you feel like their performance kind of reflects you and your mentality and how you approach things?

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, not in the second quarter. I don't take any responsibility for that. (Laughter.)

You know, after halftime they were so riled up. I know a lot of the people think I went in there and threw around chairs.

I just kept calm and I just reminded them that first is NC State. We went down 21 and we got back in the game. Versus UConn we were down 20-something and in one quarter; got back in the game. Versus LSU we were down 16 and won the game.

I just asked them, I said, so you're telling me three-pointers is a margin we can't make up? One basket?

And then you know, because sometimes people just need -- it needs to make sense. Some type of rationale. They were just going nuts in there. I was like, I really want ya'll to think about it. It's a one-possession game.

They made their run, and now let's make our run. When know we got to the fourth quarter and it was in my opinion

0-0 because it was a tie game, we felt confident.

Q. You had 25 bench points to Baylor's 12. Talk about how important your bench is.

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I'm always going to start the group that I feel starts the best for us, and I started doing that like six games ago.

So now everyone is like really comfortable with whatever I decide. Even after halftime if I need to make a change.

And our group just understands this: Like it takes all of us. You know, we're a super team. Today Sira was the leading scorer, but the other game someone else was the leading scorer. Thank God she came to play. Where she been?

But that's our team: KK didn't score at all yesterday. Tam says, okay, I'll do you one better. I won't score so you score, and so then KK gets 12 and 2.

So we're a super team, and that's what makes us special. You can't just key in on one person. We were able to key in on a couple people on their team, and I didn't think they were able to do that. I thought that was the difference.

Q. Wondered your perspective on Madison. When she got the second foul you had to get her out of game.

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah.

Q. Looked upset. You talked to her.

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah.

Q. What was that conversation and how much of your mindset was trying to keep her locked in?

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: I just told her to relax. She was just starting to, the kids said, crash out. So she was just losing it. I'm like, Maddy, first of all, we're up. Secondly, you're fine. Just relax.

But she was passionate because she felt like she should have gotten a foul. Glad you brought that up. I said at halftime, guys, when do we get calls on the road? It's called home cooking for a reason.

I thought the officials did a great job during the game. It was a hard game. It was a physical game. I felt like it was going to be what it was. So I was just trying to get her to just calm down.

Q. I think from 29 seconds left if the fourth quarter --

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: She brought it home.

Q. -- six free throws, 6 of 6. How huge was that, and being a leader on this team and taking any role that she needs?

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, you know, don't tell KK this, but I love her to death. She is really in a lot of ways a mini me, all right? That's why she drives me nuts most times.

But, she's fearless. She's a leader. She's competitive. She's a winner. When KK came to Ole Miss, I said, you score 30 points, 25 points, 27 points but you haven't won. And until you win, then none of that matters. And she has taken that to heart.

This is a young lady that came back if two ACL injuries. Very prideful. I bring her off the bench for a freshmen and then adjust a just to that role.

Today I said, hey, you're not starting because I want to give a different look, and she is completely bought in. So really happy for her. She deserves this more -- just as much as anybody else.

Q. Congratulations, Coach.

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: Thank you, Donna.

Q. (No microphone.) (Regarding the crowd.) They showed your husband and your in-laws. He was just coaching away. (No microphone.) What all does that do for your team and taking to the next round knowing that love and support is there?

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, Coach Emp (phonetic) is from Texas. I don't know if people know that. She's from Dallas, so she had 100 people show up.

And then Christeen's parents live in Waco, so I don't know that people know that. Starr is from Texas. And so we had a really good showing. And one of the players from year one, she's from Texas. There was there, Crystal Allen. She came to the game.

And my husband is from Texas, Fort Worth, Texas. So it's a family affair. You know, I wouldn't want to go through this without my husband, two kids. My mom is here, my sister. We're a team, and so my husband -- sometimes I have to talk him down, so he is all in.

Just grateful for the fans showing up and I double dare them to come to Spokane.

Q. (No microphone.) Congratulations. Two questions for you coach (regarding being Bahamian.) (Zoom questions are not through the system.)

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: Sure, well, you know, like we say, 2-4-2 to the world, so I have a whole country that's behind me, and that's not an exaggeration. I turned my phone on and I had 150 messages, and 50 from a WhatsApp. The only people at WhatsApp me are Bahamian people. My daddy was watching. My brother, I know everybody was super excited.

It's a great deal for me to come from a little country and be able to come over here and live the American dream. A lot of people know or don't know my story, but I took the stairs. I think I've been naturalized maybe five years now. I don't remember.

But my roots are still Bahamian roots. My family is there. I get a lot of love from my people in the Bahamas. I just think that when we get an opportunity we always show out from Jonquel to Buddy. I know I'm going to hear from JJ and Buddy. To Devon, man, it's just so many of us. VJ. I do root for Baylor, but just VJ.

He's a Bahamian. So we have tons of Bahamians out here just doing well and I'm happy for them all.

Q. (No microphone.)

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, I was still emotional. I was crying the whole time just filled with gratitude and joy. You know, that's the best way I could -- that's the best way I could describe it.

I think this time is just a tad different because we expected to win. When we went to Stanford, you know, I thought we could win but we were out-manned. They had like three WNBA players and we were just there just having a good time.

This time it was all business. We didn't sightsee. We barely left the hotel. You know, this was a business trip for us.

So we expected to win. You know, we don't think we're a five seed, but that's what the committee gave us, you know, and so we played with the cards that we were dealt. And I think what you saw was -- like I was getting ready to celebrate and Maddy was like, let's go, let's get out here.

So it's just a level of maturity from this group. We expected to win.

Q. Coach Yo, kind of like what you were just talking about, but you were obviously pretty disappointed that this team wasn't able to host with the regionals this week. How much of a motivating factor was this for this team coming into these two games?

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: You know what? I've said this, and I really mean that. Had we hosted I would've been pumped, but I'm really grateful for the pressure we didn't have to go through to win at home. (Laughter.)

Just, you know, I don't know if this place is rocking like this all the time, but my mentor, Dawn Staley, always tells me if, you're not used to this type of crowd it can work against you.

I'm not sure Baylor has this type of crowd all the time. If think do, then okay. But while it's good, it's also something you have to get used to.

And for us we had no pressure. In the SEC we play in big crowds, so I think I think whole 7,000 -- our pavilion holds 9,000. We have had 8,000, 7,000, 6,000 games at home fan attendance, and on the road at LSU it's packed.

So -- and Paris it was sold out. NC State sold out. We're unfazed by this. We actually enjoyed it. The student section, man, they heckled me the whole game. They were respectful but they had a great time.

So we're just used to it and we're built to play on the road. Of our players understand that free throws and layups matter the most on the road.

So I want to say this. You didn't ask, but I was really proud of Maddy because when she smoked that layup, to come back and hit that shot, I don't know -- when we played Texas at home she didn't come back and hit that shot.

So I was proud of her for her growth in that moment.

Q. What you just said about Maddy and KK earlier; free throws at the end. What does that say for you about the mental toughness about your team, how it's evolved over the years? There were times --

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: That's right.

Q. What changed?

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: Growth, Donna. Learning through our losses. Learning through our losses. When we lost to Texas at home, Maddy had the last shot and got to the paint and kicked it to Sira.

I told her, we got to win and lose with you. So that's growth. It's no knock on Sira, but Maddy is the fifth year senior. So we learned from that. We have really learned through our losses.

And so that's what you saw, a team that has had to grow through our losses. Again, we schedule so that we can possibly host, right? But we gained so much out of that.

I don't know who can rattle us. Ya'll we played Southern California, NC State, UConn, LSU, Texas, South Carolina. Our last ten games every team except for three teams were ranked in the top 15 or below.

We are battle tested. So that is what you're seeing, a team that has had a chance to grow through and learn through our losses and then perform on the biggest stage when it matters the most.

Q. One final question: Are ya'll going to go back to Oxford?

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah. You want a ride? (Laughter.)

Q. Just wondered. Was it a few years ago did you go correctly to the west coast?

YOLETTE McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah. You know what's crazy? I'm not sure that everyone was prepared for us to beat Stanford, so they had to shift, you know.

It was like, just stay out here. So we have a chance to go back home which will be great. You know, my team, our word is joy. We don't complain a lot. I don't allow them to.

And so we would've been grateful regardless, but we'll have to go back home and change out some stuff.

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