

**March 5, 2015**



Kentucky – 67  
Vanderbilt – 61

An interview with:

**COACH MATTHEW MITCHELL  
JENNIFER O'NEILL  
BRIA GOSS**

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Kentucky head coach and student-athletes Jennifer O'Neill and Bria Goss.

COACH MITCHELL: Very tough game tonight. Vanderbilt was an extremely tough opponent to play against. I thought their players played with a lot of determination and made it a difficult game.

I was very, very proud of our players. Went through some adversity in the game. Sometimes when you get off to a hot start, it all kind of unravels on you, you don't get it back.

But our players steadied themselves at halftime and came back with a great second half. We're very proud to be moving forward in the tournament.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Obviously your band and cheerleaders weren't able to make it here. The Ole' Miss band filled in. How did that happen? And for the players, does that help when you have that from them?**

COACH MITCHELL: The SEC, Leslie and her staff arranged that. The people at Ole Miss were good enough to participate. We were very, very grateful and appreciative. Those young folks in the band showed up with a lot of enthusiasm for our team. That's really, really admirable, commendable. We're appreciative of the SEC even thinking about that, then the Ole Miss band participating.

We appreciate it.

BRIA GOSS: From a player standpoint, we're just so grateful they came out. One, they didn't have to. Two, they didn't have to with as much energy as they came out with.

That really helped. Going over there and touching their hand at the end of the game, I felt that wasn't enough from our part. I was really, really happy they had the opportunity to do that for us with so much enthusiasm, like coach said.

COACH MITCHELL: I'm a Mississippi State grad. It's hard for me to compliment Ole Miss. But I do tonight.

**Q. Jennifer, you had 19 points tonight. Do you have a preference coming off the bench or starting?**

JENNIFER O'NEILL: My preference is probably just to perform either way. I just want to be productive for my team and help them.

**Q. When you grabbed that 14-point lead early, you scored 16 straight, do you feel like you let off the gas or...**

BRIA GOSS: I think we lost our defensive intensity because we weren't scoring on the offensive end. We had to refocus and regroup at halftime.

Vandy stepped up and got the momentum, really got going.

**Q. Rematch with Mississippi State, double overtime game in the regular season, what do you remember from that game and what do you expect going forward tomorrow?**

COACH MITCHELL: Well, we really were clicking in the first half, built a sizable lead. I remember we lost focus there at halftime. The first five minutes of the second half was really dominated by Mississippi State. Went back to an 11-point lead, then they came back again.

We played some really good basketball against them in stretches, and they played some really good basketball against us in stretches.

I want our team to come out with a real

determined spirit and I want them to come out with a great mental focus on what Kentucky needs to do to win.

When you get to a tournament, at least the way we feel about it, you have to focus on yourself. It can't be a whole lot about your opponent. You have to do the things necessary for you to be successful.

We'll work real hard just trying to get our team mentally prepared to go out and play a great game against a very tough opponent.

**Q. Jennifer, you guys are coming off a win against South Carolina on Sunday. You win tonight. Talk about the stretch of play lately for you guys.**

JENNIFER O'NEILL: The key for us has been intensity. That's something that he's been preaching to us in practice and during shoot-arounds.

He wrote three words on the board which were focus, responsibility and execute. That's what really got us through the South Carolina game and that's something we have to carry over in this tournament.

**Q. Coach, in this kind of tournament environment where you don't have a day off, you don't necessarily know who your opponent is going to be, talk about how you get your team ready to go.**

COACH MITCHELL: Well, we benefited I think tonight from some uneven play out of our younger players, which led them to not have to play a lot of minutes. Our two mentally toughest people, who it won't matter how many minutes they'll play, they'll be ready to go, are sitting beside me here. They know what needs to happen.

So we won't have anything other than talking about what it takes for us to be successful in this tournament. We'll just mentally prepare. We'll ask for tremendous focus and we'll ask for them to understand what they need to do. That's the responsibility part of what they really need to do tomorrow night to win, then go out and execute it.

We've had some tough players through the years in this tournament and we've been able to win a bunch of games. I think these two want it really, really badly. I think they'll help us get our minds right for a good game tomorrow.

But right now I just think these tournaments are mental, mental toughness. Are you tough enough to hang in there and make no

excuses and win games or do you bail out and make an excuse and say that you're tired. That's not going to get you anywhere in this tournament.

We'll go back and make sure our players understand we'll win this one with our minds because it will be our minds that tells our bodies what to do.

**Q. Jennifer, what changed for you in the second half?**

JENNIFER O'NEILL: I was more aggressive. I told my team, I apologized, I was settling for jump shots instead of attacking the baskets or getting fouled or getting other people involved.

That was really it, just changed my mindset.

**Q. Could the players address the play and help you get from Harper off the bench.**

BRIA GOSS: She did a great job. She was hot at the beginning of the game, really got us going. Got us an early lead.

Her intensity off the bench really gave us a spark. We're going to need that from her tomorrow and every day going forward. Not just this tournament, but looking on the future, she has that capability. That's what we need next year from her, as well.

**Q. Coach, what is the game plan to slow down Victoria Vivians and Martha Alwal from Mississippi State?**

COACH MITCHELL: You just have to play really good team defense. Victoria needs to play out of her comfort zone. You can't let her get in a rhythm. I thought we let her get her feet set on a lot of threes in Lexington. We didn't play very good team defense behind our own ball defender. She's a hard cover, a great player, a tough player.

Martha is a senior and tough and long and athletic, a real presence in the lane. We'll just have to battle. Our team has to fight, claw, scratch, just really battle and have a blue-collar mentality against any of our opponents in this tournament. That's what we'll need to do against Mississippi State tomorrow. We have to play harder than they play. That's the goal.

**Q. What did you feel was the biggest difference between Jennifer between the first and second half?**

COACH MITCHELL: The first thing, the charge, Vanderbilt wanted to keep playing. I told the team that today. They've had a lot of success. They did not want their season to end tonight. They were really fighting for their tournament lives.

They had made some plays on us down the stretch. We needed one stop desperately. We needed just one stop. Whoever was guarding that player was pressuring and wasn't giving her an open spot. I think it was Dahlman. We talked about how she puts her head down and plays basketball.

Jen made a clutch play, concentrated, veteran, did her job. Huge play in the game.

Sometimes her desire to win manifests in trying really hard but maybe shot selection's not great. That's the only thing that I would ever coach her on. Just let it come to you. Let's make sure we attack first. Especially when you're in a drought, when you're not making jump shots, somebody has to get in the lane, get their feet in the paint, make a shot.

She really did a good job in the second half and I thought had a much better mindset, and it led to better shots and better play.

I tell you the biggest thing for Jennifer right now is she is affecting the game defensively. When we're good, she really, really turns up the defense and does a great job. Bria is always there, always a rock defensively. Jennifer has become that, too, for us in this time of success for our team. That's what we'll need from her more than anything tomorrow, just a real focus. These two need to play real tough defense tomorrow, and they will.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, ladies, thank you very much.

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