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An interview with:

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

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

COACH MITCHELL: It was a great game tonight, a fantastic victory for us. We had to overcome a lot of adversity in the game. I thought our opponent, Mississippi State, was very, very tough tonight. I thought they were well-prepared. I thought they were really hustling and giving us all sorts of problems.

You saw the lead grow to 15 in the second half. But I was real proud of our team. We got back to our full-court press, really started pressuring, and it really changed the game.

Happy for our kids. We're glad to survive another day at the tournament.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Talk about toughness and how you think this victory epitomizes what you want from your kids.

COACH MITCHELL: Well, we asked them to be tough tonight. I thought you saw a lot of toughness from our team. When we really made the run, we were playing Gelleah Sidney out of position, Kyvin Goodin-Rogers out of position. People were having to dig deep in situations they weren't comfortable in. I think that's the definition of toughness, when you can find a way to produce and to succeed when you are outside of your comfort zone. I think that's a great definition of toughness.

Our team showed that tonight. We need to continue to show it. We've been asking them in the last 10 days really to get tougher. They have done a great job. We've put a lot of responsibility on them, and they've handled it well.

This has been a good stretch for our team. I think they have shown toughness.

Q. Coach, Makayla, what is with her against Mississippi State?

COACH MITCHELL: She had two good games against Mississippi State scoring. The thing I was most proud for her today, I spoke with her this morning, I really wanted her to be positive tonight no matter what happened. I wanted her to speak positive things into our team today. I wanted to her to continue to try to mature as a leader.

Our seniors have shown a great example of that. I wanted her just to come out with a great attitude and play the game tonight and don't worry about the stat sheet.

Her contribution was significant. I was most proud about the way she handled herself. If there was ever a time to get negative and down, it was with 15 minutes left in the game and we were down 15. We did not have anything going at all. We hung in there as a team. I think she was a part of that. Real proud of that.

Q. Jennifer, you picked up your fourth foul about the 10-minute mark and you were out for about eight minutes. As a senior, seeing the young girls out there, what did you think about that stretch?

JENNIFER O'NEILL: I thought it was great. It was really good to see them play with that kind of energy and being that intense on defense especially.

Makayla did a great job of getting in transition, getting to the bucket. Like Matthew said, when J.J. and Kyvin, phenomenal. The first time they play, J.J. is picking up the point guard, Kyvin is playing the three. They were out of position, but they were committed to doing their job.

Q. Coach, it seemed like Makayla was hobbled most of the game, but still gutting it

out. Talk about that aspect of her performance.

COACH MITCHELL: Yeah, I just really tried to encourage her. I think she can play through it. Obviously she did. We just keep telling her to stretch it out. It just tightens up. You'd have to ask her exactly how painful it is. It just tightens up.

I think more than anything, it gets in her mind that maybe it's limiting her mobility. You saw tonight, you know, she was very capable of playing.

We're just telling her in all those dead-ball situations to really stretch it out so she can play. It may look like she's laboring more than she actually is, but that's just an effort to keep that thing going.

I don't know how you would say it, but it's a pretty pronounced stretch. All of you see that going on, and I think she's just trying to make sure she keeps it where she can have confidence in her game.

She looked really good tonight. She had some good defensive plays. She was able to get on the board. She obviously scored a lot. She's doing a nice job. We as a team need to continue to battle in this tournament, keep working. It's the reason we worked so hard this year to be in such good shape we can play so we can be ready.

Q. What was the conversation like when you were down 15? Was there ever a moment of doubt since you couldn't get anything going?

COACH MITCHELL: Well, the only thing that you're wondering as a coach is, Will we finally start playing? I was really upset with Jennifer. I thought Jennifer had lost focus defensively. I think when a coach can really challenge one of the best players, one of the leaders on the team, and they accept that, I think it helps everybody.

I thought Jennifer really got determined. I thought her determination sparked the team. I thought Bria was really, really determined. We were able to make a run.

Just really proud of some players. Everybody is going to talk about Epps. Epps had a great game. Jelleah didn't have much on the stat sheet, but what she did tonight was incredible. Makayla could have scored 38, and if we couldn't get something going defensively, we would have lost.

So really just a good team win.

Once we were able to get the press going, started disrupting Mississippi State, you could see the momentum shift, and we were off to the races.

Q. They started out so hot, had the momentum going. Did you say anything special to the kids to try to get that defensive trigger going?

COACH MITCHELL: I said an awful lot. There's many things that I said, packaged it different ways. I was trying to get them to play.

Our post players were very, very unfocused at the beginning of the game. I thought Azia and Jelleah got off to a poor start defensively. Azia has to stop letting her offense affect her defense. She missed a couple layups there early. It deflates her. We have to work on her.

Jelleah just let Richardson drive the ball. We spent the entire day talking about what Richardson wanted to do.

They made some threes there early. They came out with a great start. Mississippi State is a very good team. I just thought we were a little unfocused defensively.

I was very proud. I thought when Vivians went out with her second foul and Williams went out with her second foul, there was a lineup on the floor for Mississippi State, I told our kids, This is where we need to make our run. We really need to make a run here. Got it back to four.

Mississippi State dominated the first half. I felt pretty good going in only down four. Then they had that huge run to start the second half.

We did at about the 15 media time-out, the kids were saying it, We got to get up in the press, start fighting. It really changed the energy for our team. A great job.

We didn't turn 'em over a bunch, but we really started affecting them.

Q. Y'all have had some heated battles with Tennessee recently. You meet them for the third time tomorrow. Can you and players both talk about what you're expecting in that matchup.

COACH MITCHELL: We expect it to be a real tough game, SEC semifinals. Wouldn't matter who you're playing. If you play on Saturday in the SEC tournament, you're playing a really good team.

We will just take care of our bodies here. We'll go back to the hotel, go through the same process we went through today and get ready to play a good game tomorrow.

We'll focus much more on Kentucky than

our opponent.

Q. Linnae Harper, what is her injury?

COACH MITCHELL: Knee-to-knee contact. I don't know which Mississippi State player, maybe it was one of our players. Hyperextension. She stayed on the bike. We're optimistic about her return tomorrow.

She got a couple of plays where she lost focus offensively and got those charges. There wasn't much there. When you extend your arm even the slightest bit, it's a pretty simple call for the official.

Really I thought the foul trouble limited her more than the injury. She's a tough kid. She'll bounce back. We expect her to be ready tomorrow.

Q. Was there any point during this game where you thought, This isn't our night?

BRIA GOSS: Really just bringing the team together, saying, It's not over, there's a lot of time left. Saying little things like that. Taking it one possession at a time. Getting to our bench saying, We need your energy, your effort off the bench.

When they came in, like they've been saying, J.J. and Kyvin, outstanding performance. The game is not over till it's over. This game is about runs. They had their run, we had ours. We ended up winning. We were happy about that.

JENNIFER O'NEILL: We were having productive talks in the huddle. It wasn't people being tired, Okay, good job. It was, We're going to go in here, who you guarding. We were communicating a lot more effectively.

COACH MITCHELL: I always thought if we could piece together any defensive stops, our advantage was in transition offense. I thought the pace was our pace, 41-37 at halftime. Mississippi State played really hard. I just felt like at the end of the day we still would be successful with the faster-paced game, kind of proved to be right.

We just needed to get our defense shored up, and we finally did. They started missing some shots. We were in transition. That's when it really got going for us.

What I just told the team, I'm really proud of our team, they worked hard in a short period of time. But we told them before, Listen, Saturday is a workday in the SEC tournament for Kentucky and you need to do your work tomorrow night 6:30 against whoever you're playing or we're going back to Lexington.

I'm just so rooted right now in helping this team be their best. Again, I wasn't really thinking about, Oh, gosh, this isn't our night. I just knew we could play better basketball than we were playing. We eventually did. I was proud of the team for doing that.

Q. Did you call the press you went to black?

COACH MITCHELL: It's our black press.

Q. They went 10 minutes without a field goal, only 12 turnovers. How disruptive you were trying to be on defense, is that what you wanted?

COACH MITCHELL: I thought they stopped taking the shots they wanted to take and they started taking the shots we dictated to them. They did that for a large majority of the game.

There was a time in the 13-2 run we weren't being very tough. They had a really good stretch. I thought they started taking some shots. Then again I thought they missed some shots close in. Maybe the pace affected them. When the momentum shifts, it's tough, too.

Combination of all those things, I guess.

Q. Can you talk about playing Tennessee for a third time this season, being back in the semifinal.

BRIA GOSS: It's our next game, so it's the most important game on our schedule. Like coach said, we're going to go in tomorrow with a focused mindset, just really wanting to go out there and start the game off well, do the little things right, encourage each other, staying positive, having a positive attitude, all those good things we're used to.

It's a big game, but it's another game. Tennessee is a great team, but so are we. It's going to be a great competition.

JENNIFER O'NEILL: I'm excited. I think it's a great rivalry we have with them. I'm a competitor. I like to compete. I know the whole team is like that. So we're looking forward to seeing Tennessee in the next round.

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

COACH MITCHELL: Thank you.

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