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South Carolina – 58
Arkansas – 36

An interview with:

**COACH DAWN STALEY
ELEM IBIAM
ALAINA COATES**

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by South Carolina head coach and student-athletes Elem Ibiam and Alaina Coates.

Questions.

Q. School record 15 blocks for you. What was working for you on offense? Keying on Jackson or trying to pack the lane?

COACH STALEY: I thought we did a really good job. We just made some adjustments from the first time we played them. Just tried to give Jackson different looks. I thought it disrupted what they were trying to do.

But I thought it was a tremendous team effort on both sides of the ball. I like our defense. I like the fact that we only gave up 36 points. I like we only allowed them to shoot 19% from the floor. When your defense is working that way, it really puts you in a position to win basketball games no matter what you do on the offensive end.

Q. For either player, can you describe the confidence you gain from a game like this.

ELEM IBIAM: I think it's always just a good thing when we come into the SEC tournament and get our first win. It's a good feeling for the whole team to have that first win under our belt.

The coaches told us what they expected last night. It was an emphasis for us tonight. We talked about it last night. We just came here and got it done today.

Q. How confident were you after that first game in terms of what you could do with all the blocked shots today? Did you feel you could put that advantage to what you ended up doing today?

ELEM IBIAM: Well, yeah. Like I said, our coaches always tell us what they expect from us. We talked about getting back to the basics. We blocked a lot of shots at the beginning of the year. We faded away from that, being more cautious in the paint, staying out of foul trouble.

That helped us tonight, helping our guards a little bit. It worked to our advantage.

Q. So many shots were being rejected, what's it like being part of game like that?

ALAINA COATES: I personally have never been part of a game that involved so many blocks. But it really gives you a lot of energy. We're just knocking even back into the stands. It's a real energizing feeling.

Q. Dawn, do you feel this squad is at a comfort level where they can win no matter what the style of game is?

COACH STALEY: Yes, I'm comfortable with saying that depending on what style. We've seen it. We've seen it in our league. We've seen it in the non-conference schedule that we've had.

I think the biggest thing, our offense has fluctuated at different times depending on what the style of play is. I thought Arkansas tried to take the air out of the ball and run their sets a little bit longer and wait for us to be undisciplined defensively. It took a couple of possessions that we usually have away from us.

I just thought it ignited our defense. It made our defense focus in on each possession. If it took 30 seconds, it took 30 seconds. But we had very few letdowns. We were able to see different styles like this. It helps you going into games knowing that whatever it is out there on the floor, we're able to get it done.

Q. Coach, Coach Dykes made a pitch for his team to be in the NCAA tournament. Do you think they're an NCAA tournament team?

COACH STALEY: Now, that is probably out of my pay grade.

But I like to politic for anybody that's close in our league because we play against each other all the time. I know what this league is all about. Arkansas has played well enough I think to get into the tournament with the amount of wins they got just in our league. They got a few other wins outside of our league.

But I can speak highly on what we do to each other night in and night out in the SEC.

Q. Coach, what did you want to see from your team in the five days since the Kentucky loss, and how did they respond to that?

COACH STALEY: What I wanted to see was I wanted them to be mad, I wanted them to be angry like I was. That wasn't a team that I've seen in years. So when you have that kind of performance, that kind of lack of effort, you want them to feel that.

At this stage of the game, you don't really have a lot of do-overs. You have to get it done. You have to bring it every single day. We had two days off, then we practiced the last two days. We saw the energy. We saw the focus. We saw the togetherness, paying attention to details to get it done. They executed today.

Q. Dawn, that being said, it got to seven. Are you satisfied with how they answered, made it a game again, took control again?

COACH STALEY: Arkansas is a team that's not going to go away, like any other team in this league. You always going to have a fight on your hands.

But I think when teams go on runs like that, I feel real confident in our team to be able to get a good shot. Whether we make it or not, I don't know, but we can get a good shot. I know we did get some good shots, especially when they went on the run and cut the lead.

Yes, I'm really proud of how we responded. I'm proud of the players that came off the bench, opened up the game a little bit more. When you have that kind of depth to be able to change the outcome of a game, it's something that I'm glad that took place today.

Q. Elem, what was it like being around coach these past few days when she described how mad she was from what happened Sunday? How did that help you get ready?

ELEM IBIAM: I've been here so I'm kind of like used to when she gets angry. Not too many jokes, but joke just a little bit to pull her out of it.

It was something we needed. I think it got our team back on focus knowing what she expected us, how angry she expected us to be so we had to reevaluate ourselves. If we weren't angry, we had to ask ourselves why.

Made us go back to the drawing board, watch the film. We got with our buddies, we have a buddy system. We talked about what we could have done better. When we came to practice, we were more focused and ready to come to the tournament.

Q. Elem, people always say that making shots can be contagious. Is blocking like that?

ELEM IBIAM: Definitely, I think so. When we see that one of us is getting a lot of blocked shots, we're like, Okay, we can go for it. We can be a little bit more aggressive.

I definitely think it's contagious. It's fun. We want to at least go for it.

Q. Alaina, you seemed to get it back together, started putting those inside buckets when the team needed it. Is that the kind of situation where you start demanding the ball?

ALAINA COATES: One of the main things is a confidence thing. When you're missing, you can get frustrated.

At the end of the day I know my team is going to need for me to make shots. I know if I'm in a position where I need to be scoring, I'm going to do what I have to do in order to do that, just making sure I don't let my frustrations take over.

Q. Coach, Gillmore looked like she limped off. Was that an ankle?

COACH STALEY: Mitchell?

Q. Mitchell.

COACH STALEY: Mitchell is good to go. I think she took a shot on the left side of the court in the second half. I think her foot got stuck on the court. But she's fine.

Q. Coach, do you prefer entering the tournament as a top seed and being the hunted?

COACH STALEY: I prefer us being SEC regular-season champions, yes. But we played in the driver's seat all season long. It's not anything different from what we've been used to.

For us, it doesn't matter because all of that being the regular-season champions, it goes out the window. We have teams here that's trying to win an SEC tournament championship. They don't care if you're number one, number three, the top seed. They're trying to win.

We approach it the same way.

Q. Coach, is remaining angry the mentality you want your team to keep knowing you haven't won that SEC championship yet or made it to Sunday?

COACH STALEY: I don't know if it's anger. It's focus, it's expectation. My expectations are really high for our team. When they don't live up to that, yes, I think it's a cause for the alarm to go off.

We have a really good basketball team. They have to understand that. They have to live up to being a really good basketball team.

As their coach, I have to force them to, even when they want to take days off. For me, I'm just going to continue to coach. I don't coach any differently after being here for seven years, having this team for as long as we have. I don't coach any differently.

Basketball has a certain look, it has a certain sound, and it has a certain feel. When those things aren't in order, it's our jobs to make sure they get in order.

Q. Do you remember playing in a game with your teammates where you had 15 blocks?

COACH STALEY: I don't remember being a part of a team that recorded 15 blocks. I looked at the stat sheet, I think we had eight or nine in the first half. That was the first thing that jumped off the stat sheet.

I know a lot of times we get on the officials. But kudos to the officials tonight for allowing us to do such a thing.

Q. Coach, describe what the rest of the day is going to be like for you. Do you have a preference of opponent tomorrow, either A&M or LSU?

COACH STALEY: We'll watch the game, then we'll go back and we'll prep for the winner. At this stage it doesn't matter what our opponents look like. It's about our approach. It's about playing South Carolina basketball. Whatever team shows up at 4:00 tomorrow, we'll be prepped to play.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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