

**March 13, 2015**



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AN INTERVIEW WITH:

## TENNESSEE

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

COACH TYNDALL: Well, I said all year this, and this is third time we played Arkansas, that I think that is a really, really good basketball team. A team that in my opinion could go deep in the NCAA tournament.

We talked a ton the last 24 hours as a team, the biggest key would be to take care of the basketball and not turn it over against their pressure. We started the game on our heels.

To their credit, they were very aggressive and forced some turnovers. We dug the hole for ourselves, and like my team, like our team has done the entire season, there was no quit. They continued to fight and scrap. I think we got it to six and had two open looks from three that just did not go in.

But I'm proud of my guys. They competed like they have all year long for 40 minutes. If we could have just started the game a little bit better, maybe it's a different story. But give Arkansas credit for that.

THE MODERATOR: Take questions for the student-athletes, please.

**Q. I think that at one point you had eight, nine consecutive points there. A lot of the time it hasn't been you scoring as much this season. What did you see in Arkansas's defense that allowed you to do what you did there, especially in the second half?**

KEVIN PUNTER: Just open areas. Rich did a good job of just attacking the hole and

drawing defenders and I had a little bit of room and just let it fly.

**Q. Can you talk about the mentality of this team and what coach was talking about not fighting or not giving up and fighting for 40 minutes?**

JOSH RICHARDSON: You mean the mentality that we played with or the mentality now?

**Q. Mentality that you played with.**

COACH TYNDALL: I just think that we went in the game and were confident. I think we kind of got off to a slow start and let them get up by like 12 points off the bat. So it's just tough to dig yourself out of a hole against a team like Arkansas.

But I think that rest of the game was a testament to our season, to how we persevered through problems and everything. And we never stopped fighting. So I'm proud of our effort.

**Q. For both players, when you did get it close there late, was there a feel that if just one more basket went down, that you would be doing exactly what you did last night?**

JOSH RICHARDSON: Don't want to dwell on the past or anything like that in the game. We were just trying to keep attacking them when we got rebounds. Coach kept telling us throughout the game, if you get an open look, let it fly. So that's what we were doing. So I think we got good looks all game, they just didn't fall.

KEVIN PUNTER: Same question? I just want to piggyback off what Josh said. We got pretty good looks and a lot of time it rimmed in and out. We got a few offensive rebounds and the same thing again. I know Hubbs had one in the corner that he missed that that he normally makes. But it happens.

**Q. Talk about the play where they called a foul on you and on that inbounds play, the TV didn't show all that much.**

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JOSH RICHARDSON: Michael Qualls was kind of trying to post me up to get an inbound pass and it was a slow pass thrown. I hit the ball and they called a foul. So, I mean, you know refs aren't perfect, we're not perfect, so tough calls happen sometimes.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse you to the locker room and take questions for coach.

**Q. Guys talked about it in the locker room, Robert Hubbs said you've been down quite a bit this year, but your guys keep fighting, keep fighting, keep clawing to the end. What did it say about your kids that down 20 at the half, to claw back and get that within a four point game and make Arkansas sweat it out?**

COACH TYNDALL: Well, that's been our deal all year. You've seen us play about every game. We ended up playing 32 games and I think we played as hard as you can probably play for 31 and a half. The only game I keep going back to is the first half at home against LSU.

Other than that, these kids gave me everything they had. You think about we got two skinny freshmen up front, a 6'7" post player, who is really a 3-4 and a 6'4" post player who is really a wing player. We get 20 offensive rebounds against that team. That's grit and that's effort. And that's competing for 40 minutes.

As I've said all season, I love my team, we certainly need to grow our program and add depth and size and all those things that come through recruiting, but these are good kids that competed every day and I'm really, really proud of them.

**Q. As tip off approaches, does a coach ever have a real feel for what the mentality of his team is or the mental state or the preparation, or is it just constantly a surprise when the ball goes in the air?**

COACH TYNDALL: That's a great question. I think that I usually feel, if our team's not right, which was very seldom the case, you can feel that. A lot of times you think your team's ready and they prove that they are. Other times you think they're ready and for whatever reason, you start out a little sluggish.

But I thought our team was really, really focused in the film room last night and today. The key as we knew would be taking care of the basketball and for whatever reason, we started a little bit on our heels, which was surprising,

because I thought we were ready to go. But we did bounce back the second half.

**Q. Portis killed you guys in the first half. What adjustments did you make at halftime to counter him?**

COACH TYNDALL: Well, the biggest thing is he's just so, so strong and so athletic. A lot of times they just play over the top of us. We were in decent position, but they throw it a little bit higher than we could go get it and he makes plays on balls.

He's got great hands. His second jump is incredible. Probably four or five, six of his points came on offensive rebounds where we didn't block him out.

I thought the second half we did a better job of getting a body on him and limiting his offensive rebounds. We were quicker to the double team when he did catch it off the post a little bit. We were double-teaming him the first half. We weren't getting to the double team and he was splitting it or getting a bucket. I thought we did a better job of that in the second half.

**Q. As far as any potential post-season play, how do you weigh whatever invitations may come your way and whether to play in them or not and things below the NIT, obviously?**

COACH TYNDALL: Well, that would be something I would discuss with my athletic director, Coach Hart and Jon Gilbert. It would probably be no post-season unless it happened to be the NIT and if we're still in the mix there or not.

If we were to get an invitation there, I believe we certainly would do that. And the other two would be up for discussion, although I would lean towards saying we probably would not play in either of those two.

**Q. What was going through your mind in that first half when you guys went 4-25? Have you ever seen a half like that, worst nightmare?**

COACH TYNDALL: Well, I tell you, we have had a few halves like that this year, believe it or not. We really struggled at the offensive end of the floor where we just don't have that true post player to throw it to and alleviate some pressure from our perimeter.

But the biggest thing were the turnovers.

That's what bothered me the most. We weren't aggressive probably the first 10 minutes of the half. We settled for some jump shots. And so I just thought at halftime we collected our thoughts a little bit and played with a lot more confidence.

But that first half was rough, no question about it.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you very much.

COACH TYNDALL: Thank you.

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