

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Mississippi State.

Coach, your opening thoughts on tonight's win over Vanderbilt.

COACH SCHAEFER: Well, first of all, just want to give Vanderbilt a whole lot of credit. Those kids have played their guts out, won three in a row.

I knew that tonight would be one of those, like it was, especially the first half. It was ugly. We had an ugly one with them a week ago.

But I was really proud. I thought we executed some good stuff, but late, late. Again, just give Vanderbilt and Melanie, her staff, a lot of credit. They certainly played us tough.

As for my group, didn't play exceptionally well the first half. I was proud of our defense. We talked about it at halftime, we just had to stop fouling, period. Play with our feet, stop playing with our hands. I thought we did that.

I can't tell you the last time I've had a five player with five steals, and I've never had a freshman five player with five steals.

I'm really proud of T tonight getting up the line and doing things we've been asking her to do. It's hard for anybody to do, a guard. But you get a 6'7" kid like her to get up the line, she has a seven-foot wingspan, she can really wreak some havoc in there. She did that tonight. I thought she was a big difference tonight.

Dom bounced back after having a bad first half. 0-5 at half. Ends up 6-13. Made some big shots for us. Guard their best player, holds her to 2-11.

Got to rest Victoria and Morgan, which hopefully will pay off for us for tomorrow, so...

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. Coach, you talked earlier about the identity of the team. How much do you enjoy saying a game is ugly but that you guys win?

COACH SCHAEFER: I mean, if you've known me any period in my 31 years, I've won more 51-50 games, 48-46. When they write down W, they don't put if it's pretty or ugly.

For us, our identity is we try to defend and we try to get some transition off that defense. When we made a run in the second half, I thought that's what we did. We got some steals. Dom had a steal good steal off the sidelines.

My freshman point guard played really good off in transition. She really finding T a lot. But, yeah, I kind

of like it.

Q. Dominique and Vic, you're a defensive stopper, when you were able to do what you did tonight and add the offense, talk about what that means to you to be able to do that on both sides of the ball.

DOMINIQUE DILLINGHAM: It just starts on the defensive side for me. Whenever I'm getting stops, I'm at my best. Whenever I'm able to knock down shots consistently, I help my team.

It helps take some pressure off Victoria. I got to keep shooting the ball and have confidence in myself.

COACH SCHAEFER: Well, yeah, I mean, having that other wing is really important. It does take a lot of pressure off of Victoria. Victoria didn't shoot it well don't. Again Dom goes from 0-5 to 6-13. She bounced back, had a good second half, made some good passes.

She's out there 35 minutes, three assists, no turnovers, three steals, and holds their best player 2-11. She helps our team both ends of the floor.

Look, we don't practice well without her, we don't play well without her. She just has that kind of an impact of the she's a tough, hard-nosed, physical basketball player.

Q. Teaira, can you talk about how you've been trying to do what coach wants on defense and how you maybe did a little bit of that tonight.

TEAIRA McCOWAN: Well, coach has been stressing in practice every day to get up the line and, like, be (indiscernible). So that's what I did tonight.

Q. Talk about facing Tennessee. They've had two pretty good games here. You were able to turn over Vandy many times. That might be a key tomorrow. What are your thoughts?

COACH SCHAEFER: They're obviously playing awfully well. They're really playing hard.

There's two coaches in our league I think you got to give a lot of credit to. Their teams maybe hit a little spell where it was really rough. That's Matthew at Kentucky and Holly at Tennessee. Boy, they both have got their teams turned around and playing extremely well. You have to give those coaches a lot of credit. That's hard to do.

For Holly, they're playing really, really well. They're active. Again, I look out there, you know, there are seven McDonald's All-Americans, nine total over there. They'll be a handful.

But you know what, we'll be ready. We'll play hard. We'll have a good game plan. I told my team there at halfcourt, it will be like playing on the road a little bit, they'll have a few more fans than we have. But I got a bunch of fans and they're pretty loud.

We're excited about the challenge. But you're right, they're playing awfully well. Defense is always going to be a key for us. We're going to have our hands full with them. Defense and rebounding.

In the old days, a Tennessee team would guard and they would rebound. I think they're doing that right now. So we've got to really do the same thing. But, you know, I think we will. I think we're going to be excited about the challenge and up for it.

Q. Teaira, how many times have you had five steals in a game? How much do you think you're embracing the defensive mindset of your head coach?

TEAIRA McCOWAN: I don't think I've ever had five steals in a game, no. That was my first time.

And coach, like, he's a defensive coach. We work on defense every day in practice. So, like, that's kind of the main point that he stresses, like defense during the game. It comes easier because we do it so much in practice.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about how maybe tonight's game epitomizes what coach says about your defensive identity as a team?

DOMINIQUE DILLINGHAM: With us, it starts with defense. The game was going back and forth for a while. We really locked in on defense. I think that's just what got us going. The steal I got on the sideline, got two points. So I think that really started us.

Once we got defense going, it was over with. It starts with defense. We're really good when we're playing really good defense.

Q. We shouldn't be surprised that we've had upsets. It fits with how the season has gone with the SEC, right?

COACH SCHAEFER: Our league has so much parity. There's just a lot of good players spread out. But everybody, it seems like, is well-coached and does a tremendous job.

This league, this year, I say this all the time, y'all, we play 16 rival games. I mean, it's just a nightmare of a league. You get in this tournament, it's a toss-up. You've got to be ready every night. I say this every year. If you're not ready to play in this league, you're not going to get beat, you're going to get embarrassed.

The fishbowl we live in is full of piranhas. It's the way it is. But we choose to live in it. We choose to swim in that water. You got to prepare.

I think it's the one thing I'm proud of. As young as we are, I'm really proud of how we prepare. When we step in a gym, it doesn't matter where we are, when we start talking about an opponent, our kids usually get locked in. Dom really does a good job with that.

I think our kids will get locked in on film in the morning at breakfast, get locked in in the shootaround. Been a while since we played Tennessee. We'll be excited and ready to play.

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

COACH SCHAEFER: All right. Praise the Lord and go Dogs.