

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by Mississippi State.

Coach, your opening thoughts on today's game against South Carolina.

COACH SCHAEFER: Well, I'm proud of my basketball team. We're disappointed. I don't think we probably executed defensively like we like to. I think we feel like the game got away from us about four minutes left in the first half. It kind of stayed there the rest of the way.

I got a locker room full of disappointed young ladies. We're certainly disappointed. We weren't satisfied in being in the game. We had aspirations of winning a championship today and we didn't get it done.

You have to take your hat off to South Carolina. They're very talented, well-coached. They're a tough out. Somebody is fixing to find that out in the next three weeks. There are probably three first-rounders on that team.

We played awfully hard today with whatever we had left. I'm proud of my kids. Again, I think we lost to the No. 2 team in the country.

We feel like turnovers were probably the biggest key today. We turned it over too much. The turnovers we had led to leak-outs and layups. You can't defend turnovers at the top of the key. We had a bunch of those in the first half.

Again, I think that was the biggest thing today. That's a sign probably a little bit of fatigue, when you're not tight with your handle. Also it's a sign you're going up against a really good defensive team.

South Carolina and Dawn, I'm pretty sure our workouts are pretty similar defensively. A lot of accountability. They're really good defensively. They've been that way all year. It's hard to score on them.

So that's why you go into that ballgame, if you're going to beat them, it's going to have to be a 52-50 ballgame like we had at our place, 57-51. You're going to have to guard them and make it hard on them.

A'ja goes 6-13, Tiffany went 7-13. That's two we didn't quite let do that at our place.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. You mentioned about your defense. You touched on the turnovers. Did you notice anything they were doing differently, up on Morgan tighter, reaching around in the back for the steal, compared to the first game?

COACH SCHAEFER: No. I mean, we talk about it all the time. Somebody thinks they can come up and pressure you, you got to attack pressure with pressure. Our attack today wasn't quite what it's been.

I think both these young ladies would tell you they were involved in some of those. Again, it's just a matter of having a little more focus when you're dribbling, protecting the ball, knowing that Tori is going against the former defensive Player of the Year in our league. So she's good. Obviously Sessions is a monster out there.

You've got to be paying attention and not taking anything for granted. When you do, that's when they're going to come up and bite you.

Q. For all three of you. You had three tough games this week. All three were pretty physical and close. What positives can you take into this week that's going to help you in at the next step?

COACH SCHAEFER: Number one, I think we're built for this. I told my kids that in the pregame. I think we're built for three in a row. I just know how hard our team works, how hard these kids work. They'd rather play three games than three practices, I can promise you. I just think we're built for this.

I know that these two, and Dom, played a lot of minutes throughout the course of the season. Again, I think they can handle that.

We have had some physical games, emotional games. You know, they're young. They're kids. I think the physical as well as the emotional sometimes can wear on you.

Again, today we played a really good basketball team. We're not going to use that as an excuse up here, I can promise you. We just played a really good team and got beat by the No. 2 team in the country.

I think we're built for it, to be honest with you. So moving forward in the NCAAs, I mean, I like our chances. This team will be a tough out. Whether we're a four or a five, they're a tough out.

Q. Morgan, with three emotional games and three physical games, what positives can you take that can help you when you get to the NCAAs in a couple weeks?

MORGAN WILLIAM: We'll just keep fighting, play hard, good chemistry. Know when we have these games back-to-back, we know we can actually go out there and play.

Today we did get a little fatigued, but we kept fighting with the No. 2 team in the country, so...

We competed.

VICTORIA VIVIAN: I think our team learned a lot today. We know that we have heart and that we keep playing the game. Through all the ups and downs, we kept fighting. I think we learned a lot from that, to be prepared for the next game. We know if you still keep fighting, you can possibly still win the game.

Q. Victoria, can you talk about your start. Seemed like it was a carryover from last night. Then with maybe four minutes left in the first half, things started to kind of unravel a little bit. How did you feel the team started? At the end of the first half, losing that momentum...

VICTORIA VIVIANS: We started pretty well, knocking down shots, defending. Then we started making turnovers that led to them boosting the score up.

Q. Coach, could you talk about how relentless it is trying to deal with South Carolina. They can win in so many different ways. How do you think that's going to bode well for them as they go to the NCAA tournament?

COACH SCHAEFER: Again, they're awfully talented. They can just hit you with so many different weapons. You can even go down the list. You take your eye off of Tina Roy, she's 3-3 out there. That's probably you're not concerned about when you start talking about Wilson and Coates and Sessions and Mitchell.

You can go down the list. Tina has had some big games for them. Obviously Sarah has a role for them rebounding-wise and can spell people.

They're well-balanced. You can't focus on one or two things. We did a good job of taking their bigs away at our place. We still couldn't beat them.

Today, Coates doesn't necessarily get us that bad, but Wilson. The one that hurt us the most was Sessions. Offensively she was 4-6, and that's where she ended up for the day.

Just a well-balanced team. They got all the pieces. I said it when they left our place a month ago, that may be the No. 1 team in the country. I'll say it again, I'd love to see them have that opportunity because I think they're really, really talented.

They're hard to deal with, no question about it, and well-coached, for sure.

Q. Coach, do you see South Carolina as the team that is most likely of the big four, including Notre Dame and Baylor, has a team that could knock off UConn?

COACH SCHAEFER: I haven't seen the other two you mentioned very much. Maybe just in passing on TV. I know what I saw today. Again, I think they're awfully, awfully good.

Again, that's why you play the game. I think on any night, that team right there can beat anybody in the country. I just think they pay attention to detail. I know Dawn coaches that way and has those kids coached up in that manner.

When you have kids that do that, and we talked about that with ours, when you pay attention to detail, you do the little things, you got a chance. That team does that.

Q. Morgan, 40 minutes today, obviously you handled the basketball for just about all of the game. Talk about the difference, if you saw any difference, between the first time that you played South Carolina, their pressure on you, trying to strip the ball from behind, disrupt you.

MORGAN WILLIAM: I feel like they played defense a little bit harder. At our place, our posts really

maintained, did a better job, guarding, too, attacking. They was playing to win it right when they stepped on court. They had something to play for. They didn't take us lightly.

At our place, Okay, Mississippi State. But they really came after us for the full 40 minutes.

Q. Coach, you take the next step from last year to this year to get to this point. I was surprised you mentioned the NCAA tournament. What's the next step for this program? What has to happen for you to maybe turn this in your favor?

COACH SCHAEFER: Well, I mean, the steps we've taken in such a short period of time, there's so many, and they're long. We're way ahead of the curve for most anybody that ever takes over a program like we did.

You know, we're where we are today because of our kids and I got a great staff. These kids honor and play the game the right way.

You'll see this in a month. Somebody is going to get hired. They're going to talk about five years, however long they're going to get their program going. We obviously got it going pretty quick. We got it going that way with young ladies like these.

For us, I think, you know, we need to get to the NCAA tournament, we need to play more than one weekend. That will be our goal. However the chips fall, I know this team, and this team is going to want to play more than one weekend. I think that's the next step for us.

We played two games last year. This year, you know, we're going to go into the NCAA tournament. I told them tonight when the game was over, I don't care where they send us, I don't care what seed they give us, I'll put them against anybody in the country, at home or on the road, and we'll go play. I've got a lot of confidence in this group.

They're getting better and better every day, every ballgame. I always get excited about the next game because I want to see how we respond. I wanted to see how we responded after Vanderbilt knowing that we had to play Tennessee. Then we beat Tennessee. I wanted to see how they would respond today.

For two weeks I'll be beside myself because I'm waiting to see how they'll respond for the next game, which is in the NCAA tournament.

We've taken a bunch of big steps. It's been really fast. It's been a lot of fun.

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

COACH SCHAEFER: Thank y'all. Praise the Lord and go Dogs.