

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday March 2, 2018

Vic Schaefer Blair Schaefer Roshunda Johnson Miss. St. Lady Bulldogs

Mississippi State - 81, Kentucky - 58

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from coach.

VIC SCHAEFER: Well just first off, just really proud of our team and our kids. Giving God the glory for No. 31. Kids just continue to play extremely well. Hats off to Kentucky. It's hard to do the back-to-back and they had a big win yesterday, those kids played so hard. Maci Morris and those kids, Alyssa Rice. You see it after the ball game and knowing that that's her last game her senior year. But this one right here did a heck of a job on Maci, just really shadowed her, made it hard on her, and did a really good job. We did not do a good job on Murray and she's a competitor and she really hurt us a little bit along with Paschal. So the kids played extremely hard and I knew they would, that's Matthew's team. And but I'm really proud of our kids.

I thought our first three quarters offensively were really good. Sharing the ball, obviously Blair and Ro knocking down shots, 10-21 from three. Just seemed like they always had a dagger. But we do such a good job, our chemistry is so good making the extra pass, that it's just sometimes you lose them and when you do, typically we can make shots and that's been this team all year.

So Victoria played extremely well, helped us rebounding with seven and T, she's got her double, double, that's her normal. So I was able to rest some kids today and we'll get ready to, for another knock down drag out tomorrow against a top-25.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes, please.

Q. Ro, you looked like you were very aggressive this morning, this afternoon in attacking the basket and looking for your shot. How did you feel today

and how aggressive did you want to attack Kentucky?

ROSHUNDA JOHNSON: I felt good. At first I wanted to start off not settling for three. I wanted to focus more on attacking and I drove it and if somebody was open, I was going to kick it to them. But I felt good.

Q. What did y'all talk about after the first quarter when they hit a three-pointer right before the end of the first quarter and took the lead? What was the conversation like on the bench with Coach Schaefer?

ROSHUNDA JOHNSON: He said we weren't playing hard enough and that's not how we wanted to come out and I just felt like we had to come harder. And he said it, we, some people weren't playing hard, so we had to keep going and get ourself together.

Q. Blair, why do you think that was the case in the first quarter? Did you guys need to play harder?

BLAIR SCHAEFER: We weren't doing what we should be doing and how we do things at Mississippi State. We weren't denying passes, we weren't causing them to be uncomfortable with the ball, we were allowing them to see the floor and run their plays and usually we don't let other teams do that. And so I don't know why we came out like that, but we're a team that's really good at adjusting and fixing problems. Since we have a senior team, we learned how to adjust during games and we feel like we did that and we figured out how to play harder.

Q. When Ro is playing as aggressively as she was playing this afternoon and looking for her shot, what kind of a dimension does that add to the team?

BLAIR SCHAEFER: It adds a lot to our team. People have to figure out how to guard her if they're going to give her the drive, she's going to drive it. If they give her space, she's going to knock down a shot. So I feel like it opens up a lot on the floor. Either they're going to sag off of somebody and try and help the person we beat or she's just going to beat you and get a layup. So I feel like when she's playing that aggressive it gives our team energy and then it gets other people going offensively and it's just a positive effect.

Q. You mentioned you wanted to start out the game attacking the basket and not settling for threes, but



then you ended up taking threes and they were good shots of course, but what made you want to switch to taking those threes? What did you see in the defense or anything like that?

ROSHUNDA JOHNSON: I think that it was just our chemistry and our offense. I feel like when I was open I had to knock the shot down. I mean I can shoot threes and go off the bounce, so I feel like when they left me open I had the opportunity and I had to take it.

Q. For both players: You only had five turnovers total as a team. How impressive is that against any team? And then what did you do so well to take care of the ball today?

BLAIR SCHAEFER: I think we just understand who needs the ball, where they need the ball and if they're not in that place on the floor then we pass the ball and we get movement on the floor, make people shift on defense and then you're going to eventually get someone wide open. There's no reason to force balls in certain areas when it's just not there. So I feel like we have good decision making skills and today we just did that.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll dismiss the student-athletes and take questions for coach.

Q. Ro looked like she was playing really aggressive, attacking the basket, looking for her shot and no hesitation. When she plays like that, what kind of a dimension does she add to the team?

VIC SCHAEFER: Well, she's been playing like that for awhile now. She's as hot as anybody on our team, especially in the last six now. Ro's a heck of a player, that's all I can tell you. I kind of hope she keeps flying under the radar, personally. I hope nobody pays any attention to her because she's going to keep lighting people up. She's averaging 16 a game, I think in her last five and shooting like 58 percent, both three and two. So today she adds to that number. Just playing really well and she, again, she did a great job on Maci defensively. Kid had a heck of a game. If you had a player of the game, it would probably be her.

Q. Down the stretch when T went out with those two fouls early and it looked like a team could maybe capitalize at that point, I think that's when you guys went on the 19-2 run. Can you talk about that moment in the game and just sort of what changed for you guys.

VIC SCHAEFER: Well, I think we got some stops and we got going in transition, and they lost our shooters and they made shots. I mean Blair and Ro both had shots that they made in transition. And I think we made that little -- and I think we turned them over in the press maybe two or three times. So it was just a

combination of things, but that's kind of how we are, we're going to get you once or twice a game with some runs and I think that's kind of been our MO all year long. So a combination of the press, getting some stops. They shot the ball extremely well, but we did force 11 turnovers in the first half and I think we got out in transition. And when you got Ro and Blair out there making threes, you better find them and the thing that Ro can do so well is she will just take you off the bounce if you go get her. She's really good outside and in.

Q. You mentioned that Ro you kind of hope she keeps flying under the radar. Do you think that she takes that personally, that she wasn't on the first or second team? And isn't it also like Blair, that she's a girl that takes charges, is a defensive player, but she does other things as well? Do you think maybe both of them take a little pride in that?

VIC SCHAEFER: I definitely think those are prideful kids. I don't think they do anything other than they did. If you think back last year, both those kids at South Carolina didn't make first or second team and they were both two first round draft picks in the league and one of them ended up being Rookie of the Year in the league. So whether you make all-conference or not, it doesn't define you, doesn't define your career. So I think for someone like Ro, she's playing really well. Ro's a pro, I mean I can't say it enough, I would tell anybody that was in here. Somebody's going to get a good player with Roshunda Johnson. She defends, she can beat you off the bounce, she obviously can stretch you.

So I think for those two right now they're having fun playing together, they're having fun playing the game, they enjoy the chemistry that they share with each other and they feed off of it. Victoria's become a tremendous assist player. She had four more today and no turnovers. 17 points, 6-6 from the free-throw line. That's a heck of a stat line. 5-12 from the field. That's what an All-American does. She shares it with her teammates. And when you got Ro and Blair out there, they're making shots, it's just, it's just hard to defend us. So I think again Ro and Blair, they just want to win. They're just competitors.

Q. Morgan had two turnovers in the first quarter. I think they were pretty early in the quarter too. And then you put her back in the game and she was pretty much dialed in the rest of the way. What changed for her?

VIC SCHAEFER: You know, I don't know. She did have two turnovers early and I think I got her out and we sat her and, again, Jazz comes in and does what she does and played extremely well and we got Mo back in. Both of those kids struggled with Taylor

Murray a little bit. And again that kid played extremely well. That was not one that we wanted to let go get 7-13. We just happened to do a good job on everybody else. But you're guarding somebody like that maybe sometimes they can get you on your heels and I thought Mo was on her heels a little bit -- and the turnovers. There's no need to turn the ball over against a 2-3 zone. That's ridiculous. She knows it, I know it. So we got a little higher expectation with our point guards when it comes to handling the basketball. Especially a senior.