

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday March 2, 2018

Dawn Staley Alexis Jennings A'ja Wilson

South Carolina Gamecocks

South Carolina - 73, Tennessee - 62

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

DAWN STALEY: I thought it was a hard fought game like we anticipated. I thought that a team that was able to make the most plays during the stretch of the 40 minutes was a team that was going to win the game. Fortunately it was us.

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

Q. A'ja, first of all, most importantly, how are you feeling? And second of all just what with coming in and out of the game like that, how did you manage to stay in rhythm?

A'JA WILSON: Well I feel great. I feel a hundred percent me. Pretty normal. But going in and out of the game, it was okay. That's something that I wasn't used to but at the same time we talked about it, so I kind of knew it was coming. I knew I was going to be playing the minutes that I normally play but at the same time I knew that I had to be efficient and I had to contribute at the same time. So my biggest thing was how can I still be me without lot of minutes and I think I did a pretty good job of that. Shout out to coach for subbing me in right away.

Q. A'ja, you didn't start. Were you just trying to fool Tennessee to maybe you weren't going to play?

A'JA WILSON: No, it wasn't really a joke honestly. That was just the way the lineup was at that time. So hopefully I can get back in that starting lineup.

Q. A'ja, you probably said this on TV but I didn't hear. When you left and went out, were you feeling dizzy or whatever? Can you kind of tell us what, when you left, how you were feeling and how you



felt when you came back?

A'JA WILSON: I was good. I was all right. But at the same time when I came back I just felt a lot better. I just had to get a breather, gather myself.

Q. Alexis, you guys just played Tennessee Sunday and in Knoxville. Looked like a completely different game. How does it make -- it seems to just make everybody better when A'ja's in the lineup. Could you speak to that, please?

ALEXIS JENNINGS: Well I think that she does a very good job leading us on and off the court and I think we were just kind of missing her presence. But when she came back she kind of got us going again and we were just fired up to play for her.

Q. Alexis, 26 of the team's 33 points the first half was in the paint. How did you feel inside and what was working down low, especially in the first half?

ALEXIS JENNINGS: I felt great. Coach's emphasis all week was just get to the rim, get to the rim, and I trusted her, so I got to the front of the rim tonight and I just glad I was able to finish.

Q. A'ja, were you able to -- how much were you able to do this week leading up to the game? Were you able to practice at full speed? Could you shoot or what?

A'JA WILSON: No, not really, I couldn't really do any contact. I just kind of got shots up here and there. Shot free throws a lot. And just got my rest. That was my biggest thing is I just had to get back and just get back to me. So I really got a lot of rest and I got some shots up here and there and I kind of felt my teammates and my coach so, that was it.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Take questions for coach, please.

Q. Can you talk about how important the post play was tonight? Obviously you guys struggled a little bit to score from the perimeter, but all three of your post players really came through.

DAWN STALEY: That was the emphasis is try to put Tennessee back on their heels and pound the ball in the paint. I thought Alexis did a great job. I thought she played like a grown woman in the first half. We just fed off what she was giving us on both sides of the ball. And she was rebounding the ball, she was scoring.

And then we insert A'ja into the game and she's a difference maker. And I can't take KeKe, KeKe's performance either. They all made a concerted effort to live up to the challenge of having a double double. I challenged our post players that at the end of the day we needed two double doubles and they got them.

Q. When did you know for sure that A'ja was going to play?

DAWN STALEY: For sure? Probably right before the game. She had to do some things in order for our medical staff to clear her to play. Obviously she went through a little bit of a shoot around today and we just wanted to know how she was feeling at every step of the way, just to make sure that she is okay. Because when you -- that was the first thing that she's done in over a week, just kind of got her heart rate up and got her sweating a little bit. Just because we wanted to make sure that she was completely feeling like A'ja.

Q. To piggyback off that, how did the game plan, game planning work just knowing if she would play or if she wouldn't play? And how was the conversations about limiting her minutes and all that?

DAWN STALEY: Well when we had the notion of she may be able to play, we knew it would be minimum minutes and I just consulted with our medical staff to see what she looks like, what she feels like, and as the game progressed she looked good. I thought we did a great job of just keeping her at bay and not -- even though we needed to win the game, not putting her health at risk. So any time you get a chance to play an A'ja Wilson you got a shot at winning the basketball game, even if it's just under 20 minutes.

Q. You talk about limiting her minutes, you look at the numbers, how productive could she have been any more productive than she was tonight?

DAWN STALEY: I saw a couple of more rebounds she could have gotten. I think just probably having her out there for maybe another 10 minutes could have reduced our turnovers, because she is an experienced player, she's been in this situation before. So a lot of times the ball was in the hands of people who haven't really experienced that kind of pressure. So we got by. So hopefully we can play her a little bit more tomorrow and if not, then we'll just continue to forge on and try to win the game.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.