

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Friday March 2, 2018

Gary Blair Danni Williams Chennedy Carter

Texas A&M Aggies

Texas A&M - 75, LSU - 69

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

GARY BLAIR: The best day of basketball in any of the BCS conferences is on Friday when you have eight top-25 teams, NCAA teams going against each other. It's been this way ever since I was at Arkansas way back in '93. If I'm a fan, I would want to be up in the stands watching these ball games. It does not get any better. SEC Network and ESPN, everybody's done a great job. The media coverage has been good. And we gave the country what they wanted to see, elite women's basketball. And it's nothing better than elite women's basketball. Give LSU a lot of credit. They were doing some things that hurt us in the first half and we were very, very sluggish in that second quarter. Our body language wasn't good. We were just lucky to be only down by five. Thank heavens Howard hit that shot to cut it to five.

But we made some adjustments and the kids took some tough love and I had a couple seniors speak up in the dressing room and that's what you got to have, you got to have accountability from your seniors to everybody else on your team. And the senior that really spoke up the most is the one that played the least and that was Lulu McKinney, give her a lot of credit for getting our team together.

Now these two right here, I could have brought all five of them up here, but these two are the heart and soul of our team because they had to go against Jackson and Louis on the other team. Those two are a handful. And I don't think we play a better pair of two more athletic guards than the two from LSU right there. But I just would like to say it was great women's basketball, we played very well, and here's the other thing that is never put in the press. Who designed that zone offense to start the second half? Kelly Bond, not Gary



Blair. My associate head coach. She's the next head coach in waiting and she's going to be an outstanding one if some of these AD's get off their high horse and start hiring some of the great assistants in our league, because we have got some great ones.

But Kelly Bond has been with me 15 years, those were her tweaks at halftime on our offense, she did a great job, she's been doing it for me for 15 years, so she knows what's going on. But I'll leave it to my players now.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. You guys obviously face Mississippi State tomorrow with the great guard play. How does it help to have this game against such good guards in terms of now going against Mississippi State tomorrow?

DANNI WILLIAMS: It's just a different look. LSU's guards are very athletic and quick and so we knew that coming in. And just being able to have that preparation for Mississippi State because they're going to play 40 minutes of man-to-man in your face defense. And so it's helpful, but it's also a different style of defense.

CHENNEDY CARTER: I feel like this is a good game for us to play right before. They're a quick, athletic team, same way as Mississippi State is a little bit. We know that they play up, they're always pressing. So we faced the press a little bit tonight and we were able to execute and beat the press. And this is big game for us to play before them, so hopefully we can execute tomorrow and kind of dissect their man offense the way we did tonight against their zone.

Q. To follow up, that game wasn't that long ago, February 18th, and you guys probably feel like there's a lot you've improved on since playing them. What do you think would be the big keys on a neutral court as opposed to playing at the Mississippi State?

DANNI WILLIAMS: I think when we move the ball we're a real hard team to guard and when we get our five starters scoring easy, moving the ball, you talk with people to pick and choose what they're going to do with us, so I think that will be key for us tomorrow, coming in and being focused.

CHENNEDY CARTER: Me and Khaalia didn't start that game against Mississippi State, a few weeks ago, so I feel like that will be a game changer for us, to get out there and get with our five that just really can spread the floor. And we have people on the floor that can do everything. Danni can shoot, Khaalia can rebound, Anriel brings a double double every game. So we have players that can open the floor and I feel like that will help us a lot and we can all get on the same page and hopefully our bigs can come in and follow up when we get in the game as well.

GARY BLAIR: To answer that also, Mississippi State has traveled very well. They had three thousand people at that ball game, hopefully only three thousand. We might have 125 in person and I believe we're going to have a lot of other teams start pulling for us. And we also are going to have about 300,000 Aggies that are watching it on TV and reading and living and dying with us, because it might be the Alamo, but I guarantee you this maroon and white team is going to give us our best shot. I'm just happy with them but give Mississippi State credit for traveling up here, they should be, they're 30-0 or 31-0 and but we'll get that opportunity, that's all we can ask.

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

Q. This team it seems like, this team you have, has been at times a little up and down, but at times when it's good it's really good. Is that a fair assessment of them and how can you continue that through the post-season?

GARY BLAIR: I think we have never lost two games in a row all year. Our eight losses are good losses. We wear our big boy pants when we schedule, where a lot of other teams do not, in all conferences. So we have done our share, but when you are a former defending national champion, I think you owe that to the women's game to play the competition, if the competition will play you. It's a two-way street.

We have been up and down, but just remember, Johnny Manziel was a red shirt freshman. He didn't have to play that freshman. My freshman is having to play and go through the growing pains of everything. And when she makes mistakes, she wears it on her sleeve sometimes and on her face sometimes, but I'm able to bring her back to earth. And sometimes she's orbiting around there and I'm having to try to bring her back in, but Kelly and I do a good job with her because Kelly helps me with the offense.

Danni has been a solid rock all year. She's so stable. She's going to be guarded, Johnson's going to guard her tomorrow, as soon as she gets off the bus, Johnson will be their face guarding her the whole time,

and she was held to one point the last time we played at Mississippi State. But we have got to screen better, she's got to cut better, and Chennedy has got to find her. If not, we're going inside whether McCowan is there or not, and my kid just went 6-6 tonight, 5-5, 10 rebounds, 17. She might be one of the most underrated big girls in the country. But she's solid and she's effective.

So, but, yes, we will have our work cut out for us, I know it. But Vic Schaefer's birthday was today, it's not tomorrow. Mine might be tomorrow.

(Laughter.)

Q. Can you expand a little bit more on Chennedy and just, because she is so outstandingly talented, but just her playing within the flow of this team and how she's improved on that through the course of the season?

GARY BLAIR: She can create her shot off of anybody. That's why USA basketball played her at the two guard because they had Dangerfield and Tyasha Harris and she wasn't ready to lead a team of stars like that. But she was ready to be their leading scorer because she was instant offense at the two. In years to come, who knows, she might be my two guard or she might be Dawn Staley's two guard on the Olympic team in a few years, who knows. The sky's unlimited for her. But the kid has basketball IQ so good. She understands the game and sometimes she has to take a little tough love, I'm not the easiest person to get along with sometimes. But the love-hate relationship you have with your point guard goes on until we become one. And when we become one, we can become unstoppable. Like when I had Sidney Cozan or Aqua Franklin or Amy Wright or Christy Smith, Jordan Jones. That's why I'm in this game. I choose my own point guards. My assistants do a great job of recruiting a lot of other people, but a point guard is everything to your team. So when she's not playing bad, I'm calling bad plays. So I've got to do a better job of getting through to her on certain things, but it will come in time. I've got three more years.