

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Saturday March 3, 2018

Dawn Staley Doniyah Cliney A'ja Wilson South Carolina Gamecocks

South Carolina - 71, Georgia - 49

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

DAWN STALEY: I thought we played a really good game against a really good team in Georgia. Coming into the game we knew it would be a very physical, fast-paced game with a lot of defense and I think it proved to be. We both stayed in character when it came to that. So really proud to be able to advance and play in the SEC tournament championship game again.

THE MODERATOR: Take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. A'ja, have you met Sheila Foster during this year or any of your career? I think you passed her for the record, the scoring record, and I just wondered if you ever talked to her about that.

A'JA WILSON: No, I have not. Wow. Hmm. No, I haven't. I would love to talk to her. But, no. No.

DONIYAH CLINEY: She's behind our bench all the time.

A'JA WILSON: Oh, okay, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, okay. I had to get my people straight. But, yes, I have talked to her.

(Laughter.)

Q. Obviously you were feeling it, especially from long range tonight. What were you feeling out there and how much confidence did that three yesterday give you coming into tonight's game?

DONIYAH CLINEY: It gave me a lot of confidence. It started in shoot around. I knew I had to come out with a better mindset. I had to let go of yesterday's game and move on. So that kind of helped me a lot.



Q. Both of you, facing Mississippi State again, the regular season game you were up five going into the fourth quarter. What happened at that first stretch and how do you plan to address that going into this game tomorrow?

A'JA WILSON: I don't really know. I think we just kind of lost kind of focus and they had a great crowd there and that game them that umph. But I think with us we're just going to continue to do us stay with within our system and stay within our roles. There's nothing much more we can do on scout. We have seen each other so many times at this point, we know each other like the back of our hands. So we just have to stay within our roles and trust our coaching staff and trust each other and have confidence.

Q. A'ja, I know right now the record probably isn't something you're dwelling on because you're in the middle of a tournament, but it does mean a lot, I think, to be the all-time leading scorer. Can you maybe sort of put in perspective when you think about it at some point what that will mean to you?

A'JA WILSON: It's a blessing, it really is, to kind of be the homegrown child who came in and just kind of -- and now she's the leading scorer. I mean it is a blessing and an honor to have that. But I give it all to my teammates. I wouldn't have been able to do what I do without them. So really I give it all to them. They help me out a ton off and on the court. So that goes to them, honestly.

Q. A'ja, obviously your game tonight with Doniyah and Mikiah tonight with the points, what was it from the supporting cast and how good was it to have them do what they did tonight?

A'JA WILSON: It's great. It's great. A lot of people going to try to put pressure on our post. And just to have other people step up in different categories in the way that they do is always a great thing. It really completes our team. So really shout out to them, keep doing it, hey, the best is yet to come.

Q. Doniyah, the team had another kind of a rough night with turnovers, I think 18. That's a lot in the last four games. Is there just, is that the defenses you've been facing the past four games, why the guards have struggled to hold onto the ball?

DONIAH CLINEY: Honestly I just think like sometimes we try to move too fast and just dribble too much and miss-handle it. It happens. We try to avoid it, to cut it down, but we're going to do better.

Q. A'ja, another big picture question. When you were a freshman it was -- you guys talked a lot about doing things for the first time. Now you guys are on the brink of maybe doing something for the first time, which is winning four SEC titles in a row. What would that mean to you? Because even Tennessee, that's something they hadn't even been able to achieve. They won three in a row twice.

A'JA WILSON: It's special. It would mean the world to me, honestly, just to put something else in the history book here. We have been breaking records for awhile now. Coach has turned this program around and that's one of the reasons why I came here, is to be in the history books. So to have that on the line for us I think is a great thing and I think we're going to take care of business in the best way that we can and stick within our system.

Q. Question for A'ja. What was the key for you offensively tonight against Georgia's defense?

A'JA WILSON: Honestly, every game I'm just going to try to take what the defense gives me. I knew they have versatile posts, so that's kind of different from the posts that I've seen this far. So I just had to take what the defense gave me and my teammates had me in the right position to get up shots.

THE MODERATOR: Take questions for coach.

Q. Same thing with the turnovers. As a former point guard, what are you seeing out there and how anxious are you that MSU will try to pressure you guys?

DAWN STALEY: It's something that we, we're discussing, but we can't coach every pass, we can't coach every turnover. I think sometimes we're playing a different lineup, we're playing some bigs in positions that they haven't played, because we just don't have enough guards. So we're putting people in positions where they're not totally familiar and sometimes that leads to some turnovers.

But I think we're playing too fast. We're playing faster than our skill set. And when that gets out of whack, it usually leads to turnovers. I like the fact that we're rebounding the ball though. So we're, our turnovers are up and our rebounding is up as well. So we just can't afford to, especially a team like Mississippi State coming up, to give them 18 and 27 extra possessions.

Q. A night where Alexis and Ty are both held in single digits. How important was it that KeKe and

Doniyah gave you the performances that they did and what was working for them?

DAWN STALEY: We're a team that anybody can really step up and perform night in and night out. A lot of our players are playing with a lot of confidence. And although Alexis and Ty didn't have it as far as getting into double figures, there are things that they're doing contributing in a way that will allow KeKe to have the type of game that she's having and A'ja to have the game that she's having and, obviously, Doniyah to have the game that she had. So if we can get everybody clicking on all cylinders, we're a hard team to guard. But, if we're not, there are other things that we're contributing to our success.

Q. You guys and Mississippi State, this is -- you played two SEC -- for two SEC titles, a national title last year, now another SEC title. Can you just talk about these two programs and how they have elevated not just in the SEC, but nationally.

DAWN STALEY: Vic and I, I think we're just coaches who probably do it the old-school way. It's not popular and it's unfamiliar to the way some of these young people are taught and coached. And for the people that do it our way, I think we, Vic and I are, have programs that win, that would sustain winning, which is really hard. But I'm glad we get a chance to try to outfox each other one more time and I'll be remiss if I didn't say I want it to end the same way it ended last year, all the way through.

Q. Teams have been leaving Doniyah kind of open and letting her shoot from the outside all season. Was there a talk that you had with her? Was there a changing point of you telling her that you got to shoot that ball for our offense to stay in rhythm?

DAWN STALEY: I told our perimeter players that just turn the page. They had one field goal out of, I don't know, 13 or 14 attempts yesterday and they're taking good shots. So as long as they're taking good shots they got to take them. I told them that to have confidence in themselves because no one on our coaching staff has ever told them not to shoot the ball. We're telling them not to shoot the ball, then they should have some confidence issues. But we haven't done that, so they shouldn't have -- they should knock down shots that are in the flow of our offense. And once they do that, it gives us a really good shot at going in as well as rebounding the ball.

Q. Two-part question. What was kind of the key tonight to holding Georgia to 29 percent from the field? And then also in your opinion after seeing Georgia twice, what are your thoughts on how -- what are your thoughts on Georgia as they head into the NCAA tournament here?

DAWN STALEY: Well, we knew coming into the game

Georgia is notorious for defending and holding teams to low percentages and low points. We wanted to just make sure we get out and take advantage of transition, so it won't put so much pressure on our half court offenses. And I thought we did that. We did that through rebounding the ball and pushing. We did that through just trying to make sure that we stayed -- we stayed in front of our player and not force, not allow them to force us to help, so we'd have some imbalance in our defense. And I thought we did that well. And then we got the ball inside, something that we really wanted to make an impact on this game, is getting the ball inside and scoring in the paint.

As far as Georgia, I think they can make a long tournament run. Because they defend. If you can defend in the tournament -- they've got to find a way to score a little bit more in order for them to continue to have the success. That's probably the only thing that holds them back from really going through our league and making a long run in the tournament. You got to be able to score because most teams that you face are going to be truly talented and hard work doesn't get you anywhere. It just gets you sent back home. So you got to be able to balance that talent and also defending.

Q. You've had a lot of issues this year with your team and yourself have had to work through this year. The situation that maybe helped you be stronger now as you're in March with games that really matter?

DAWN STALEY: Any time that we can get out there and play and play people at different positions going into the tournament, where if one of our guards gets into foul trouble, the person or anybody that we replace them with is familiar out there playing in the position that they haven't played all year long. And we're afforded that opportunity in March. So hopefully it will help us as we continue to go down this path of post-season play.

THE MODERATOR: All right, coach, thank you.

DAWN STALEY: Thank you.