

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

Tuesday, October 18, 2022

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Tennessee Volunteers

Kellie Harper

Women's Media Day Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are ready to start. Coach is going to give us a few opening comments and then we'll take your questions.

KELLIE HARPER: We're excited to be here, and it really gives us a strong indication that basketball is just around the corner.

We're thrilled about the upcoming season. I do realize there's still more football to be played, and we over in Rocky Top are going to enjoy every minute of it. Loving life right now in Knoxville.

As we start getting closer to our first game, I'll tell you, we are super excited about this upcoming season and what this team can do. They're a lot of fun to watch, and they're a lot of fun to coach.

Q. What excites you the most about your team from what you've seen here so far in preseason practice?

KELLIE HARPER: I think for us right now our depth is one of our more impressive attributes. We have a lot of different players that can step out on the court and make plays.

Our athleticism and length is also a strength of ours. We're pretty aggressive on both ends of the court. So I hope that rebounding will continue to be a strength of our program as well.

Q. You've brought in quite an impressive transfer class. Can you talk a little bit about the process of recruiting them and what they're bringing to this program and this team?

KELLIE HARPER: Yeah. Every player's recruitment looked a little different. We had a couple that finished their seasons halfway through last year, so they entered the



portal very early. We were able to recruit them earlier than most, and that was Rickea Jackson and Jasmine Powell. Jasmine and Jillian Hollingshead were actually late entering into the portal, and we were really excited to add all four of those young ladies. I think they bring something special, each one of them. They bring something different.

But they're all very explosive, and they're veteran. They're very experienced and seasoned, and when we get them out in practice, you can tell. They caught on very quickly. I think their college basketball experience allowed them to do so.

Q. Kind of going off that question, obviously when you're recruiting a newcomer out of high school, somebody that hasn't -- you're selling something they haven't experienced before, but when it is a player, especially a couple that have played in this league before, what's the challenges in kind of getting them to come here?

KELLIE HARPER: Well, I think there are two -- high school players and college players are in a different space, mentally, physically. They know more what they're looking for because they know their needs better as a college player.

During the recruiting process with all four of those young ladies, what was not very superficial. It was getting to the heart and the meat of the recruitment and relationships very quickly.

I think they all understood why we recruited them. We understand why they chose University of Tennessee.

But that process happened -- and it happened so quickly, recruiting in the transfer portal is like light speed, and you've got to get down to the business very quickly. Unlike high school recruiting where you're recruiting people for years.

Q. Just keeping it on the theme of the transfer portal, what specifically stands out about Rickea's game?

KELLIE HARPER: Rickea Jackson is super talented. She has great athleticism, great size, ability to handle the basketball, shoot the basketball, get to the rim, defend,



rebound. She's very skilled in that athletic package.

She's also very competitive, and she has been very coachable. Been really excited about who she's been on the court, and her teammates have complimented her numerous times that she has been a great teammate, a very positive encourager for her teammates.

I think having someone of her caliber step out on the court with you, I think it just gives you confidence. I think that's what we're seeing from her teammates.

Q. Do you ever take a moment to think what might have been if everyone had been able to stay healthy last year, or do you not have that luxury as you head into this season?

KELLIE HARPER: I will say last year there were a few moments that I let myself daydream about what might have been had we not had the injuries that we had.

But I do believe the adversity that we faced challenged us as a team and as a program, individually, to be better.

I hope that our players are even more equipped now to handle anything that's thrown at us.

Q. Being part of that and having this team, not only the fan base, potentially pressure, but also the notoriety and how you all interact with that at all times.

KELLIE HARPER: You know, as a coaching staff and as the head coach and our players, we all come to the University of Tennessee to win. You have to have winning championships as part of your goal, or you can't come.

The expectations are extremely high each and every year. You have to have confidence that you're going out and you're being the best you that you can be. You have to be competitive. You have to want the challenge.

I don't think you can look at it as pressure. It's easy to if you're looking at it the wrong way. But when you're just wanting to be your best and you're wanting to go out every day and do all you can do that one day, it really takes that pressure off of you.

If you start thinking about April when it's October, if we start worrying about April right now, that is pressure. But if we're just trying to be the best we can be today and then tomorrow and understand that it's a process, I think that helps.

And I'll tell you what, speaking from experience, you can't skip steps. You can't. You just have to enjoy each and

every day. You have to enjoy the journey together, the ups and downs, because that's what builds championship teams. It's the journey.

I hope our team can appreciate each and every day because this is a special group.

Q. Last year Rick Barnes kind of mentioned that he thought Zakai Zeigler's development was really accelerated because he went one-on-one with Kennedy Chandler in practice. I'm curious if you've seen that with your newcomers going up against your four returning starters in practice.

KELLIE HARPER: I'll tell you, the first one that comes to hand, when Rickea Jackson and Jordan Horston are going one-on-one and they're guarding each other every day, it's exciting. They're making each other better. They're pushing each other.

I think they're both elite-level defenders. And the challenge of going up against that every day has to be pushing them and getting them better.

I'm excited for both of them, and I love the way they have embraced that competition. They are teammates, and they know it. They're pulling for each other.

But I'm telling you, as soon as I put them on opposite teams, they're going to be the first to step up and guard each other, as well. It's fun as a coach.

Q. Where have the two Jordans and Tamari grown as leaders in the past year here?

KELLIE HARPER: You know, I think experience is a great teacher to help leaders, and they are by default going to be leaders because of their experience. But they have grown with understanding what their voice is, their understanding how important their voice is.

I think they're open to the fact that people look to them as leaders.

They step on the court more confident, not only as leaders but as basketball players, as well.

They've grown a lot. Their communication has been outstanding among their teammates and with the staff, which I think leaders on a team, I think they all have to have great communication.

Q. Can you just speak a little bit about NIL and what that has changed for the game in the past couple of years and what you've seen with that? And then also

the opportunities that some of your players have gotten and how that affects women's basketball generally?

KELLIE HARPER: I think we're at a great advantage being at the University of Tennessee and having the Tennessee Lady Vol brand associated with our players. I believe our players have done really well in this past year of NIL. They have embraced the opportunities that they have had. I think they are selective, but they also are becoming savvy businesswomen, as well.

As we continue to help support them, as they build their brand, they know that partnering with the Lady Vol brand is going to elevate them and give them opportunities to open doors for them in this NIL space.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports