

Holly Warlick Press Conference

Lady Vol Media Day, Oct. 30, 2013

“Just a couple of remarks, I’m excited to be here. We’re ready to play. We’ve been beating up on each other and we’re tired of seeing each other. I definitely think we’re ready to play. It’s a different team from last year and I think we learned from it. We were the underdog and now that we’ve proven that we can compete, my biggest concerns have been leadership and how we’re going to deal with our team dynamics. I’m very pleased – we’ve done a lot of work getting our kids bonding. As women, that’s important and I think this team is a special team as far as them all getting along and understanding the importance of leadership. We’ve had several people step up: Ariel Massengale, Andraya Carter, it’s good to have her back and Jordan Reynolds as a freshman. We’re very pleased with that. A lot of people are asking who we’re going to start and I think there will be multiple lineups. We are extremely athletic and very versatile. We have a lot of people playing in different positions and as a coach, that’s great. Our practices have been very intense, very competitive. We haven’t had to motivate anyone to practice and that’s a great thing as a coach when you can just go out there and coach.

I want to talk about our freshmen: Jordan Reynolds has progressed very well. I knew Jordan was going to be a good player for us, but I just didn’t know how competitive she is, how versatile she is and I love her demeanor and her game right now. She is very vocal and as a freshman, that’s very difficult, but she’s stepped into that role and we’re very pleased with her.

Everybody is asking about Mercedes Russell. She hasn’t disappointed any of us. She’s a freshman, but everyone looks at her and how tall she is and they think her game is where it needs to be, but she works on it every day and was very well-coached in high school. I also didn’t realize how versatile she is, she’s a great passer and she’s probably stronger than I had anticipated coming out of high school. I think her high school coach prepared her very well.

As you know, Jannah Tucker is back as part of our team and we’re excited about her being a part of our team. She will be back in December. Her plans are to practice with us, but I think for her and her family and myself, the most important thing to know is that basketball is secondary and we’re going to try to get her back on the right track for her. She is so special and I just can’t even begin on her goals and where she wants to go. Those are the three new players. We have 10, so everybody will get the chance to play.

Our schedule opens up with MTSU and then we go to North Carolina, so those are two of our biggest, toughest games as the first two games of the season.

(On leadership)

“I think it’s been an ongoing thing for us. We’ve had good leadership, we haven’t had great leadership and I think that Ariel Massengale playing this summer, she didn’t start and I don’t think she played like she was expecting to play, but I think she got an opportunity to sit on the bench and observe and come off the bench to be the spark. I think that was tremendous for her. They needed her to be a little more vocal and really have an impact. This summer helped her out tremendously. Having Draya Carter back is great just because of her demeanor. Both of those two have given Jordan Reynolds the opportunity to stand up and lead. It’s been a concern of mine. And then, will our players follow? It goes back to a lot of team building and team bonding and through that, I can see a difference in our team.”

(On the importance of the point guard)

"It's huge. I talked about the guards, but I think Izzy Harrison has been a great leader for the post on the inside. Izzy went through the same things and Vicki Baugh helped her out when she was a freshman, so I think Izzy feels a responsibility of taking people under her wing, especially Mercedes. The others have led by example. It's just a different feel to this team. Right now it's a good feeling, but we haven't played a game yet. It's a group of individuals that we don't talk a lot about player of the year, but a lot about our team and what we need to do and where we need to go. I think our talk has been surrounding what this group as a whole can do."

(On the officiating ruling changes)

"My explanation of the change in the white paper is that I understand the offense is down, but I do think that players are more athletic, more physical, smarter, so don't take away from what the defense can do and how they can affect the game. I understand them cleaning up the game. It is going to make for a longer game. I don't know if the 10-second rule is going to be as effective if they're calling a lot of hand-checking. It may nullify that 10-second rule. Our emphasis all summer has been that we need to get better defensively. We've worked on it and at the beginning of the year, maybe our offense is going to struggle a little bit, but we'll see that we've gotten better on defense. It could change, though, because I don't know how the game is going to be called. To us as coaches, we have to adjust to how the officials are going to call the game. A lot of hand-checking calls and as coaches think, picky calls, but the officials are doing what they're told to do, which is to clean up the game."

(On Mercedes Russell)

"She has a little bit of Candace Parker to her because she can handle the ball away from the basket. We haven't had someone around as big as she is with as big of an impact that she has inside. I think she has a little bit of Candace because she can handle the ball full-court, is a great passer, can step away and face up. On the block, she's not a power post and she's got a little bit of Izzy Harrison in her because of her mobility."

(On the 'Grind for Nine')

"I can promise you that it is a slogan for us, but we visit it every day. It is a grind and our practices have been a lot more up-tempo. We understand what we need to do. It's a competition and as players, they want to play a lot and want to start, so we're trying to compete with each other. We've gotten up early for practice, we've practiced for three and a half hours. It has been a grind for them and they're tired. We're trying to put them in a situation where they know to not get comfortable. Nothing that we go against is going to be comfortable. I think they understand the value of it. It's a great slogan and we visit it on a daily basis."

(On the slogan beginning at noticing the dates for the MTSU and North Carolina games and remembering last year's games against them)

"It was a weak moment when Michael Beaumont, who does the schedule, said this was the only time they could play. That is my own fault. I used to blame Pat (Summitt) and now I can't even blame Pat anymore. On the road MTSU took us into overtime with them last year. They are just a well coached team. They play hard. Then North Carolina we probably played one of our best games here. I am sure that is in the back of their minds and they are both on the road. Our backs will be against the wall early. The first two games I think will be tough for us."

(On getting better as a head coach heading into the second season)

"I think like players you get better with experience. There is a lot to be said about game experience. You can practice, instruct and do some things, but until you are in a game situation day in and day out you understand the pressures and what you need to get done. The time commitment, I knew the time commitment but being out there and making sure you make the right call. Making sure you have the opportunity to include your staff. I will tell you what I do understand is that you can't see everything and the importance of using your staff. That is one thing that Coach Summitt taught me that I carried over. It is a difficult game to make sure you see everything."

(On pushing past the Elite Eight on the player's minds)

"If it doesn't bother any players on this team then they don't need to have a Tennessee uniform on because we have gotten to the finals of the Elite Eight and our standards are more than that. I mean it is a great accomplishment. We talk about this we want to win the SEC regular season, we want to win the championship. That is a goal of ours that will always be there and we will always strive to do that. But our history is competing for national championships and we haven't had that opportunity in awhile. That is our goal."

(On Meighan Simmons)

"I think Meighan has worked real hard on the defensive end and credit to Meighan we put her in situations last year where she had to make plays on the offensive end and be held accountable on the defensive end. I think she has really worked hard making defense a priority for her but that is all we have been working on. She has stepped up. She leads by example. She never truly takes a possession off of practice. She is trying to make sure she understands the complete game. There are shooters and there are scorers and Meighan is a scorer. We are trying to make sure that her offense doesn't effect her defense. That is difficult. I think last year she made great strides but we are going to keep moving in that direction."

(On new players with new positions on the court we will see)

"It depends on what the other team is going to do offensively. We have experimented with it and have played with three bigs and two guards. We have played with 5 perimeter players in at one time. You are going to see a lot of different groups playing together. We you have two or three big kids who can score, play and defend I would be crazy not to play them. Go the opposite way and I think our team is a lot more overall athletic. We can do a little more things defensively. It is going to be interesting to see when I am going to use them and what line ups I will be able to do. It is a good problem to have."

(On zone defense)

"Actually we have not. I think we will do some this week. I am trying to get us more aggressive and play defense within the rules. If we are going to play zone it is a lot easier to pull back and get us in passing lanes. Play a little of a pack zone defense. I think it was important to us to lay down a foundation of our defense philosophy. That is getting after people, being aggressive, being physical within the rules of the game and effecting people by your defense. The opportunity for us to pull back is a lot easier. You have to go all out first then pull them back if need be."

(On Andraya Carter being back)

"I think if one person could take advantage of being out that is Andraya. She got a little taste for it and as she sat over there and rehabbed her shoulder, watched the game and hear the coaches. She is athletic but she leads so much by example because she plays so hard. She has been a great example for Jordan Reynolds. I think those three can interchange at the point position and we are have. Having Andraya out there is just another body who has been there. She has been there and played in big games for us last year. I love her energy and love what she does for this team."

(On Jasmine Jones)

"I think she is going to be huge. She is the most athletic player we have. I think she has refined her game offensively. If we needed a defensive stopper then Jasmine Jones would be on someone who is killing us on the offensive end. I think she has a better understanding of the game. She has worked on her offense this summer. It wasn't bad but I think she understands better now what a good shot is and what isn't. We are going to have to have her on the floor with her defensive presence and how hard she plays. She goes one speed and that is fast and hard."

(On Ariel's leadership)

"As I said earlier, I think she's had to step up her game. She's got experience now, she's a junior, and she's not only got to lead vocally but she's got to lead by example. I think, as I said, this summer has been good for her, and now she has people to push her. Her freshmen year she was named starting point guard and hadn't even stepped foot on campus. So I think she's got some competition and I think it's healthy. I think it's helped her and everyone surrounding her."

(On players being ready for games)

"They're ready. It's just tough, we go against a group of guys and they're the most athletic and quickest group of guys we've had since I've been here. It's tough and I think they want to see success going against other college players. We've been going, and everything has been a competition. It's been short, but it gets heated and it's a battle. I think they're ready to see what they can do against somebody besides themselves and these guys. These guys are competitive too and we haven't pulled them back. It gets real interesting at times."

(On Bashaara Graves)

"Let me say this, Bashaara's coming off a great summer. You know it's funny I've talked about everyone else getting better, but Bashaara she's just a workhorse. I keep saying she's old-school and just goes about her business every day and just keeps getting better and better. So we are very fortunate to have her."

(On Harrison)

"Isabelle Harrison, having her healthy has done wonders for this team especially in the post. I think she's made Nia Moore better, made Mercedes better, and made Bashaara better as well. It's a good group and they are fun to coach right now, but we haven't played a game yet. I will say this they play hard, and if they don't, then that's where we'll be upset. Thus far they have been very competitive and they've put it all out there, and that's all I ask of them."

(On Cierra Burdick)

“Well I think just what she’s been doing. I think that’s what we talked about earlier being multi-talented; I think Cierra fits that spot. I think she can play the three and she can step in and play the four. One thing about Cierra is, Cierra is the type of kid that wherever the ball is that’s where she is. We need a rebound seems like she always gets a rebound, we need a bucket she gets a bucket for us, so Cierra has those intangibles that just happen. She is in the gym all the time, and I think Cierra’s going to play the role she played last year. She’s going to go in a spot where we need her, and she’s going to do it. She just wants on the floor, as most competitors do, she wants on the floor.”

(On landscape of the conference this year)

“Well I think it’s again, I keep saying it’s athletic. Kentucky is still athletic, South Carolina is getting more athletic, LSU is low in number but I think Nikki has some kids in place that will help her athletically. Then there’s the new people coming in the conference like Texas A&M. I keep saying athletic, physical, run the floor, multidimensional players and I think that’s what this conference is all about. It’s a tough place to play on the road. I don’t care where you’re going, where they’re ranked in the conference, it’s a hard thing to win on the road. Not that playing here is easy, but you have a lot better comfort level here than when it’s on the road.”