

March 7, 2010



Tennessee – 70
Kentucky – 62

An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: Joining us from Tennessee Coach Pat Summitt and student-athletes. We'll take an opening comment from Coach Summitt.

COACH SUMMITT: What a game. Obviously it was hard-fought by both teams. I've known Matthew for a long time. He worked my camp. He was a GI in our program. I just kind of watched him grow as a coach. He has done an incredible job at Kentucky.

They have a toughness and are very relentless on the defensive end and on the boards. So we knew we were going to have a real battle.

Pleased with how our team never gave up. I thought we kept our composure for the most part. We had some obviously players step up and make big plays. Shekinna Stricklen was obviously the best player on the court, in my opinion. It's just great to see her progress as a freshman, and now as a sophomore to have the maturity and provide leadership. I thought she was a big difference-maker.

Obviously a lot of people stepped up. I thought Glory really stepped up for us, as well. Kelley gave us some good minutes. All in all,

Angie, it didn't matter whether her shot fell in or not, she still stayed in the game and I thought did a lot of good things for us.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

Q. Shekinna, I thought the team, especially yourself, played with so much emotion, playing off the crowd, helping the crowd get fired up. Can you talk about your emotions tonight and exactly this was a big game for you guys.

SHEKINNA STRICKLEN: I think everyone was excited about this game. We all worked so hard to get here. We felt like we were -- let's don't go home without winning. We all just played through fatigue. We just encouraged each other.

We knew the only way we were going to win this game, we had to stick together, and that's what we did.

Q. Can you talk about this is a very different Kentucky team than when you saw them down in Knoxville. Is this what you expected, or did they catch you off guard?

ANGIE BJORKLUND: I thought Kentucky did an excellent job of just putting the pressure on us. You know, they really came out trapping and just very aggressive. You know, I give them a lot of credit, because they didn't give up the whole game. They fought all the way till the end. That's the sign of a great team.

I thought that's what our team did also. But, like I said, I thought they really fought till the end and did a great job.

SHEKINNA STRICKLEN: Going into the game, I didn't think it was going to be an easy game. I knew they was going to go all the way to the end of a 40-minute game. Kentucky is a great team. They play great defense. Sometimes they kind of made us rush.

But they're really great. But I'm very happy

for me and my teammates. We stuck together and we came out on top.

ALYSSIA BREWER: Our assistant coacher, Dean Lockwood, he informed us before the game they were going to be a completely different team, like the games they had played before us. That's what they showed us tonight.

Like they said, I'm just proud of our team for hanging with them like that and being the ones on top in the end.

Q. Angie, I was going to give you an opportunity to critique your coach. I was wondering your review of her postgame song.

ANGIE BJORKLUND: I've her Rocky Top from her once or twice, and it's great every time. I didn't expect her to go -- I thought she was just going to say, Thank you, fans, for coming out. Like she said, we have the best fans in the country, hands down. They were awesome tonight.

When she started singing, I just looked at our team and I started laughing. It's great.

Q. Talk about tournament MVP. Seems like the last month or so you've come a long way.

ALYSSIA BREWER: I was definitely shocked to be given this award, because I feel as if there are other players on the team that deserve it more than I do.

But, I mean, I wouldn't even have it without my teammates. Team MVP, they should have that. I'm just going to stick it on the locker room and stay it's the whole team. Because like I say, without them I wouldn't have got it.

Q. Angie, as the junior, as the leader of this team, it's been documented Kamiko has had a tough time this year. You see what she does tonight. What does that mean to you?

ANGIE BJORKLUND: I was so proud of Kamiko, how she responded. Coach got on her a little bit last night.

COACH SUMMITT: Most every day.

ANGIE BJORKLUND: Most every day (laughter).

Just how she responded, especially such a quick turnaround. She came in ready to go. She attacked. She was being the scorer and doing what she does best, and that's scoring.

At the same time, she was playing great defense. You know, we all kind of gave her a little talk after last night's game. I think that helped her. But it was really just her coming in focused and

having a whole different mindset, which she plays like that, you know, it will help Strick out, the guards, our whole team. So I was proud of her.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, players.

We'll now take questions for Coach Summitt.

COACH SUMMITT: Before we do, there's one thing that I'll tell you about Kamiko. My son, Tyler, is obviously one of our practice guys. He came to me last night, he said, You don't have to worry about Kamiko not playing hard tomorrow and not being ready.

I said, Really? He said, I spent an hour and a half with her. So I give Tyler the credit. Coach Tyler Summit. So I'm not even gonna coach Kamiko anymore. I'm gonna let my son do all the talking.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Pat, how would you compare this team in terms of balance to other teams you've had?

COACH SUMMITT: Well, obviously we've had a lot of great teams. I think this team, they rely on each other, not one or two go-to players. How about Candace Parker on our team. We've got a really good inside game.

If you look across the country, I don't know of anyone that's got bigger or better size in the postgame. So with that said, we're just trying to get our guard play as efficient as we can.

I thought when the game opened up, we were on our heels, on our toes. A little slowing down in transition. But once we got to halftime, I thought the adjustments were really good and that they committed to our defense. We ran some switching defenses, which I thought helped us keep people in front of us.

But this group, they got a pretty good basketball IQ. I like that about them. They're also invested. We can go back to the Ball State loss, which haunts me daily, but it's also been a tremendous motivation for our entire team and program.

Q. Seemed like your offense really got going. You were down by two. You came out of a timeout and got committed to getting it into Cain. She got a couple of baskets. Was that something that you kind of tell them, We need to get into the post?

COACH SUMMITT: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. We are constantly trying to get the ball inside to Kelley. Typically, she'll bring two defenders with her. I think that she's done a good job. Look, she understands paint points. You know, she's not going and posting up outside the lane. If she can establish and get the ball at the rim, she is really, really very efficient.

You know, tonight they bumped us some, kept her out from time to time, but she just kept working. With her touches, she got some good things going.

Q. I think it was after the South Carolina game you almost laughed at the notion that your squad could get to San Antonio. What about now?

COACH SUMMITT: Well, it's a go. We got to get better all the time. Hope they're not satisfied because they've had success in the regular season. You know, only had two losses. But right now I think they're very committed and very excited.

The thing about it, they play well together. There's no dissension in our team. There's no one jealous of anybody else. They're all committed to playing well together. They're coaching themselves. I mean, on the floor it's amazing to listen to their communication. It's not just Stricklen. It's Angie, it's Kelley, it's Glory. It's across the board.

I think that has been something that has allowed them to really get on each other and also to motivate each other throughout a game.

Q. How different was this Kentucky team than the one you saw in Knoxville?

COACH SUMMITT: Oh, a different level, a real different level. I was like, this is not the Kentucky team that I expected to see. That's what we told them today. Guess what, get ready to have the best shot ever coming at you this season. I said, I know Matthew; I know his staff. They have a toughness. They didn't give up on anything.

And I said, We're going to have to -- ball security was one of my biggest concerns, because they really do get up in your grille and can turn you over.

So with that said, you know, I was very pleased that we managed to get out of it with a win.

Q. Was this week all about the SEC and the goal of sweeping both titles, or did you tell



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your team they needed to win this week to have a No. 1 seed in the NCAAs?

COACH SUMMITT: I told them we needed this tonight to make sure we got a No. 1 seed. We talked about that even during the game. We're not losing the No. 1 seed. If we do, I can tell you, it's not going to be good for us.

But, you know, with that said, our focus was obviously on execution.

Q. Free throws were big. You didn't shoot them well yesterday. May have been the one thing that really didn't go your way. Today, 15 of the first 16 in a tight game. Did you talk to them about that in between the two games or is that a rollercoaster?

COACH SUMMITT: No, but when we came in to practice, we just walked through some sets. They spent the rest of the time shooting free throws, getting focused. That's what it's all about.

Q. I noticed in the start of the second half, you seemed to put a player in each corner. Was that something conscious to break their pressure on your players?

COACH SUMMITT: Yes. We do that a lot because then they got to decide, are they going to send players back or are they going to try to press us and take a risk. So that's something we've been doing for a number of years.

I think it's really forced teams to figure out what they want to do, make them have to bring their defense back as well. That opens up the floor.

Q. Just the idea that to Kamiko played a prominent role today, and two other players, Brewer and Manning, who weren't starters to start the season, made the all-tournament team. What does that say about this team?

COACH SUMMITT: Well, I think it says that we've obviously matured a lot on and off the court. I think they understand they got to make time to get in the gym and get in their reps.

You know, I feel like we've got more players invested. They're working on their game, and they're very serious about improving their skill set.

I think that has made a change for our team.

Q. Give you a chance to comment on

the song. Did you make a promise to your players if they won you would do that?

COACH SUMMITT: I did that for the fans. I know I don't have a great voice. But our fans love Rocky Top. The fact we had so many of them here, I just went over, got the microphone and sang Rocky Top.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

COACH SUMMITT: Thank you.

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THE MODERATOR: We now have Kentucky. We'll take an opening comment from coach.

COACH MATTHEW MITCHELL: Well, want to congratulate Tennessee. They certainly played a great game today. Made a lot of great plays. I just thought they played really tough.

We came here to win and came up a little short today. But I thought our players battled against a really fine basketball team today, and I thought we found out a lot about our team.

One thing I do know is they wanted to win today, and it certainly showed out there on the court. They played awful hard.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. They brought Williams off the bench. She had eight straight points for them. Address that.

COACH MITCHELL: Yeah, that was one of the few times in the game when we were very poor defensively. That's what happens in these kinds of games. There's two good teams going at it, and our margin for error is very slim.

We did not need to let something like that happen. I thought she was fantastic. Did not do a good job with her. She was able to get in there, get into the lane, make some shots.

But she's a good player. I thought she had some nice shot fakes and got us out of position. I think she's a good player. That was a big, big run in the game.

Q. Were you ever surprised that you got the momentum going your way? It didn't really seem to phase them. They always knew how to come back. Is that something you were expecting out of them?

COACH MITCHELL: That Tennessee was able to respond? That was not a surprise to me. They're a very good basketball team. They've lost two games all season. They have a lot of experience in this situation. So I was not surprised by that.

I was more encouraged by how we responded. We were down eight in the first half. Things were not looking good. I thought our players responded. So that's what I was really happy with.

To come out in the second half and play the way they did, made some really fine plays in the start of the second half. I was encouraged with some things that happened with our team today.

Q. I know you didn't have the showing you wanted in Knoxville. Is this more what you expected from them? I know it's a loss, but does it give you momentum going forward into the NCAA tournament?

COACH MITCHELL: I think what you need to do in these situations is you need to figure out how to build on the victories you have in this tournament, and then you need to figure out how to build on the mistakes you made. That's what we just talked about.

We played some very good basketball in this tournament. We played very tough. We had kids play a lot of minutes. I just thought they performed at a real high level for three straight days in what I think is one of the toughest

tournaments in the country.

There's no question from my perspective right now, there's plenty that we can build on. You have to understand, Tennessee did the same thing. We just got done. These two teams just got done playing nine straight weekends of SEC basketball. There's probably not two teams that are going to benefit more from the time off because we didn't have that -- our bye came on the first playing date.

I just told our team back there, I think we will benefit tremendously, and I think we'll be a very difficult team to play against in the NCAA tournament.

Q. Is it strange to have to wait a week?

COACH MITCHELL: It's good for us; great for us. We need it badly. It will be outstanding for us, help us get refreshed.

I want to make this point: I'm so proud of our players for being able to -- we finished the regular season on a real down note. We are not the healthiest basketball team right now, and they found a way to come in here and really play with tremendous energy three days in a row.

So that's what I'm more excited about than anything, that their mindset was able to come in and play at a championship level.

Q. Victoria, could you talk about how physical it was inside.

VICTORIA DUNLAP: It was pretty physical out there. That's the kind of team that's going to come in there and go hard to the boards. I think mentally we weren't ready to really box them out. They got in there, got a couple boards in the first half, and just mentally, as a team, we weren't able to box 'em out, push 'em back, so they got a lot of rebounds, a lot of put-backs, but I think we turned it around in the second half.

Q. Brittany Henderson gave you some good really minutes today. Can you discuss her play.

COACH MITCHELL: I thought she did a fantastic job. We gave up 12 offensive boards in the first half, four in the second half. So that's something that we talked about at halftime. Brittany Henderson got in there and got some tough, tough rebounds. I just am always impressed with her. She is a gritty player.

We didn't have much going on the offensive boards. She had a big offensive board and put-back that was a big play in the game.

I like our team. I'm telling you. I like the character of these young women. I like the tenacity they play with. She just embodies what we're trying to be here at Kentucky. That's honesty, hard work, discipline. I was very pleased with Brittany Henderson today.

Q. For the players, can you reflect on how far you've come from a 500 finish a year ago, and what has this week showed you about what you can expect from yourself in the NCAA tournament?

A'DIA MATHIES: Well, I wasn't here last year, so I can't really tell you how it feels to be on a 500 ballclub. But I know this team we have this year, we love each other. We're really looking forward to making a deep run into the NCAA tournament coming up.

VICTORIA DUNLAP: I think compared to last year and the year before that, the team chemistry wasn't really there. We had a lot of individuals doing their own thing.

This year people were willing to put in the time, put in the work, listen to the coaches, be willing to play defense and get all the fundamentals right and not worry about what they're doing personally. Just as a team we got together.

I'm very proud of the team, of how we played in this tournament. Like A'dia said, I think we're going to do a great job in the NCAA tournament and be ready to go.

Q. When you got down by seven or eight, it looked like it was over; you kept going at them and cut it close. Can you talk about the not-quit mindset you had.

A'DIA MATHIES: We know every team makes runs. They made a run. We tried to come back with another run. We knew we had to step it up on defense. That was the only way we would be able to come back in the game. So we just tried to make everything more aggressive, more tough, and just be ready mentally and physically.

Q. Coach, could you talk about Tennessee being the marquee program in the SEC. What do you feel like you have to do in the future to continue to take this program up?

COACH MITCHELL: We just have made tremendous progress. Tennessee has a great program. We have a lot of respect for their program.

We talked today about, you know, what's Kentucky about and what do we want to be about. You know, I think you see out there players that play very aggressively, players that are willing to make some sacrifices for each other and play hard together, and I think we just need to continue to do that.

We need to continue to find the right kind of people to come in and understand how special the opportunity is to play at Kentucky.

Really encouraged with what the team is doing right now. We have a long way to go this year. This season's not over, but the SEC portion is. It is time to look back. They performed well. So we just need to stick to our core principles: hard work, honesty. These kids hear this every day. I think if we do that, we have a great chance to be successful.

Q. Can you talk about Victoria and A'dia with big pressure coming on them and they came in and performed and responded so well.

COACH MITCHELL: It was really tremendous. First of all, when they received the awards, it could not have gone to two better players, better people. So I was not worried about those two being affected in a negative way at all, thinking this was an individual award or anything like that. They are about the right things.

What I did want to happen was us to bounce back from a very unusual week that we had had. I talked to both of them at different times about how important it is to step up at this time. This is an incredibly difficult tournament.

So you have to realize after watching them how proud I would be as a coach to have the real good fortune of coaching both of them. They're tremendous defenders. They are selfless, hard workers. You know, I don't know that there are any doubts about their selections.

But I think in front of the entire SEC and country, people can know both of those players are the real deal.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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