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ARKANSAS: 68
TENNESSEE: 74

An Interview with:

**COACH JOHN PELPHREY
ROTNEI CLARKE
DELVON JOHNSON**

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Arkansas. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach Pelphrey, and then follow it up with questions for the student athletes.

COACH PELPHREY: I thought that Tennessee played very well, and I think the game was 25-23 there for a minute in the first half. And I think we even had a -- we may have had the ball as well, we struggled scoring the ball the rest of the way. It put them in a situation where they were able to score, get out in transition and score.

And second shots in the first half really hurt us. They had 10. We did a better job of rebounding the ball in the second half, especially down the stretch. I thought Delvon really took over the back board there that last little bit. And that was a big key for us to be able to defend them.

I didn't think our first shot defense was all that bad. But Tennessee's tremendous, and halftime, I think they had 28 points, 28 of the 37 was in transition or offensive rebounding. And so we talked

about that and came out in the second half, and I was very, very proud of those guys for the run they put together. Actually had a chance there on a couple possessions to take the lead, but we weren't able to do that.

Tennessee had some good defense and was able to outplay us there in the last minute or so to get the victory.

THE MODERATOR: Take your questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Tennessee's up by 16 with seven minutes left, you figure doesn't look too good and you guys had a 16-0 run. Talk about that run and kind of what you were feeling when that was going on. And how disappointing is it to put a run like that together and not finish that off?

ROTNEI CLARKE: It's very disappointing. We felt like we shouldn't been in that position in the first place, but that's how it was. But we didn't quit. We fought. And the coaches believed in us. We kept saying we are going to get back into the game. And it's frustrating because we got all the way back into it, and had a chance to do some things and take the lead on a couple possessions and just didn't do it. So it's frustrating.

DELVON JOHNSON: Frustrating because we knew we was going to get back in the game as long as we rebounded and get back in transition, and we actually did that. So we did that and we didn't take advantage of it and it hurt, so...

Q. For both you guys, the defense in the first half was special. Maybe the early part of the second half where they were scoring a lot of lay-ups and dunks. What was going on there and what did you do to change that momentum late in that second half?

ROTNEI CLARKE: I know just thinking of a couple that I wasn't in the right position, help side. And just a matter of fact of maybe us breaking down and allowing them to get to the hole, which probably shouldn't have happened. And it's just helping each other out, we didn't make the -- we didn't do the right things. We weren't in the right spots at the beginning of the game and throughout the First half.

And also, like coach said, 28 of their 37 or 35 or however many points they had were off transition and second-chance points. So that's tough. Our first shot defense was okay, but that's going to kill you every time if you allow that to happen.

DELVON JOHNSON: We all wasn't doing our defensive fundamentals that we always talk about. So we just decided in the second half to come out, and they were like they was killing us in transition. So once we cut that down, we got back in the game. But in the first half, we wasn't doing nothing we were supposed to do.

Q. For both players, but Delvon especially, as you came off the floor you were visibly upset. Just talk about three straight years you guys come to the SEC tournament, three years straight you leave after one game.

DELVON JOHNSON: Of course it hurts, because it is my last time. So of course it hurts me.

ROTNEI CLARKE: It's tough. It's definitely not the way we planned it. We never expected that. Especially I hate for Delvon and our seniors, Britt and Jemal. And that's the toughest thing, not being

able to get them farther by making a run. Because like D said, it's their last time and that's what really hurts us, is seeing your teammates not be able to get farther with them being senior, so it's tough.

Q. The NCAA tournament's obviously the goal, but I understand Arkansas's put in a bid for the NIT. What would be your feelings about that if that came to pass, if you guys got a NIT bid?

ROTNEI CLARKE: I don't know. We haven't really talked about that much. We're focused on this tournament and focused on the games that we had to play here, and we didn't expect to lose. We didn't want to lose.

And so that was more our main focus. We weren't really thinking about anything else. We were just thinking about getting to the NCAA tournament.

DELVON JOHNSON: I haven't heard nothing about that, but obviously if we do, I'll be happy because I get to suit up one more time at least, so that will be good. But I don't know nothing about that.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for coach.

Q. I know as coach you never give up, but you're down to a pretty good Tennessee team by 16 and then you guys score 16 in a row. Just talk about that run and kind of what you guys were doing, and then how disappointing was it that it ultimately you didn't get the result you wanted?

COACH PELPHREY: We have been playing very well our last seven games coming into this and we won four out of five. Last week, we ran into two good teams that shot the ball extremely well against us in State and Mississippi. And we played pretty well offensively ourselves in terms of scoring the ball and taking care of it ourselves. There was some things defensively we wanted to

work on, and we knew coming into this game that transition defense and rebounding, those are Tennessee's strengths. There's no question about that. Towards the end of the first half, they hurt us with those things.

But I never doubted our team. Those guys have got tremendous heart. They have allowed me to coach them all year long. They have been resilient like you want a basketball team to be, and they have stuck together.

So regardless of what the score was or how much time was left on the clock, we were still playing ball. We're one big shot away from something probably pretty special happening. And so I'm proud of those kids, the way they kept playing.

Q. Is there any shot you might be able to make a comment on, the photos that popped up today?

COACH PELPHREY: Well, outside of we're certainly very sensitive to those things and take all that stuff very, very seriously. It will be looked into with regards to our compliance people, and if there's something there, we'll certainly cooperate and be forthcoming.

Q. I know it's an emotional loss today, but looking back at the season, you had goals, how disappointing was the season as a whole when you look back or how do you assess it at this point?

COACH PELPHREY: There will be a point in time where we'll really do that. Tonight, obviously, I'm concerned about our basketball team and those young men in that locker room that fought their hearts out the second half and had a chance to win that game.

Rotnei said our focus was this tournament and doing as well as we possible can. There will be a time for

evaluation and reflecting, but it's probably not tonight.

Q. Can you talk about Marshawn Powell tonight. I didn't see a box yet, but I know at halftime he had no points, no rebounds, two turnovers. Can you talk about the way he played tonight?

COACH PELPHREY: Well, foul trouble got him there a little bit in the first half. And then I think, too, Tennessee's very good up front. We talked about their length in and around the basket coming into this game, because that was a concern for us. Our last two games, I think we had 11 shots blocked on us in last two games. So their length was something we were concerned with.

And Tennessee's good defensively up front. They got a lot of guys they can throw at you. They're very experienced up there. And in the second half I thought he got in there and made some plays, but that's a good defensive team we went against.

Q. Do you feel like your program has made enough progress to retain your job?

COACH PELPHREY: We'll talk about our team tonight and we'll talk about the SEC tournament. There will be a time for that reflection here at some point in time. I look forward to it.

Q. How do you feel about a NIT bid?

COACH PELPHREY: Obviously, we're trying to gather ourself back up here and there's a lot of emotions still running through us, but I think if we had a chance to keep playing we would be excited about that.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Thanks.

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