

March 25, 2014



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An Interview With:

**NIKKI CALDWELL
DANIELLE BALLARD
THERESA PLAISANCE
JASMINE RHODES**

NIKKI CALDWELL: This is one of those moments that as a fan and a coach, a spectator, that you honestly can say this is one of the hardest fought games between two very good teams, and a lot of credit to West Virginia for really pushing the envelope as far as pushing us to our limits, and a lot of credit to these young ladies for answering that call.

You know, we give out a game ball and I want to give one to every our of games, but the game ball obviously went to Jasmine Rhodes. I can't say enough about when you have a player step up and make huge contributions, and Jasmine did that for us tonight.

Q. Danielle, would you say you played your two best games of the season here in the NCAA Tournament? You had 46 points and 32 rebounds combined in the two games. How much did you feel like you had to carry the team with Jeanne hurt and Theresa and Shanece in foul trouble?

DANIELLE BALLARD: Well, I felt like since Jeanne was out, I felt like that we as a team had to step up, especially me being one of the scorers on the team. I felt like I needed to get to the hole or just get a wide-open shot for my teammates. There was a lot of pressure, a little bit, because I'm used to having Jeanne talking a lot on the court and just directing us in offense and

defense. It was kind of tough, but we played through it.

Q. Theresa, what was going through your head when you got the fourth foul? I mean, honestly were you at all worried or upset knowing that this was your last home game and possibly your last game ever?

THERESA PLAISANCE: What was going through my head was that if I really wanted to get a foul, I would actually make them pay for the foul and not have little ticky-tack fouls.

Going in, I haven't really been a player that fouled much and I got into foul trouble and so did Shanece, but I wasn't really worried. There was a sense of calmness going through our bench. We just had stability. We weren't the biggest lineup out there, but those are some of the girls that fight the hardest, and we had a lot of people step up. Jas did a great job the second she got in. I get a deflection, Jas grabs it and takes it the full length of the court for a bucket. That was a very quick turnaround play. We just have a lot of great team camaraderie. I wasn't worried. I was disappointed in myself for not being able to contribute more, but my teammates did a great job tonight, especially Danielle Ballard stepping up to the challenge and being Danielle Ballard, doing what she does best.

Q. Danielle, seemed like there was a little bit of frustration when West Virginia took a lead late. How did you overcome that?

DANIELLE BALLARD: Yes, we were just saying like stay together, don't get discouraged, just play hard, keep playing hard, keep trying to rebound and do all the little things. We tried to have energy, talked about energy, because at first we saw that we didn't have energy on the court because our back was against the wall. But in the huddle we were saying some positive things. That's what got us going.

Q. Jas, is this one of the situations where you're just kind of too young to really know what's at stake? You were really selling

out for almost all the balls. You were really kind of the spark plug there for a while. Is it one of those situations where the situation didn't overwhelm you?

JASMINE RHODES: No, not really. I mean, I knew what was at stake, and coach always said that it's tournament time, so someone is going to have to step up, so I just answered the call like she said and I played my best and my teammates definitely encouraged me to keep going even when I messed up. It was a team win, and I'm proud of what we did out there, so it was great.

Q. Theresa, this was a game of runs. Can you just talk specifically about the run that ended the game? What was your team doing so efficiently?

THERESA PLAISANCE: We were just doing the little things. It started really earlier in the season. We worked with the Marines and we went through their obstacle course one time and we were all dead tired after that first one and then they sprung on us that we had to go through the entire obstacle course all again. Our times the second time through were better than our first time because we dug deep and we just had that extra effort in us. Coming into this game, we just have to dig deep and find that extra effort.

The play from our guards stepped up tremendously. At one point our two biggest people on the court were Anne Pederson and Sheila Boykin, who may be 6'0" and going against 6'4", 6'5" guard lineup that's 6' even with them. Just the heart of our team was so strong tonight and we were all beating as one, and it really showed in that last run. We just didn't want to give it up, and it was on our home court, and our home crowd really pulled us through, as well.

Q. Jasmine and Danielle, when you looked over and saw Theresa and Shanece on the bench, was there a sense to keep our seniors' season alive?

DANIELLE BALLARD: Absolutely because me personally I didn't want the season to end for them because they are seniors, but I felt like we have to play hard and tougher, we have to play hard and think smart at the end of the game. I give credit to Jasmine. She did her thing. She had -- the reason why it was like help plays, she come in here rebounding and scoring, doing all the little things, so that just kind of pumped us up even more.

JASMINE RHODES: I definitely agree with her. I think that we definitely hit adversity like in the middle of the game and we kind of started losing a lot, going down a lot I mean, and I think we came together more after we hit adversity. We just wanted to play hard for them and for the fans, for the coaches, everyone.

Q. Theresa, I know you all want this season to continue, but do you see a little bit of a passing of the torch to some of the younger girls assuming those roles?

THERESA PLAISANCE: Yes, most definitely. When your upperclassmen go out, there was a sense of urgency from the underclassmen. They really stepped up to the challenge. It's nothing that was of any shock to any of us. We knew they could handle it. They handle it every single day at practice. So you know, at tournament time, like Jas said, somebody is going to have to step up and face that challenge, and we hit adversity tonight, and I was very proud of our underclassmen for really stepping in there and picking up where Shanece and I and Jeanne really left off. Credit to them, they just did an amazing job tonight, and we wouldn't be moving on if it weren't for our underclassmen.

Q. Jasmine, I hate to give away a good stat here, but you had as many points tonight as you had minutes in the last five games. How hard is it to stay ready when you're not getting as much game action, or is it easy just being able to go out there and practice every day?

JASMINE RHODES: I mean, it's neither hard nor easy. You've just got to stay ready. Coach puts you out there, you've just got to do what you're called to do. I might not have that scoring role or that fantastic role, but I go out there and I hustle and I try to do things that other people can't on the floor at the time, and I try to pump my team up. It's a win-win situation, I guess.

THERESA PLAISANCE: Can I add to that?

Q. Sure, honestly you can.

THERESA PLAISANCE: Jasmine Rhodes is one of the hardest working players I've ever seen, and her minutes haven't been as great, but she has greatness in her. Every single day of practice she comes in and works as hard as possible, and that's something that's hard to do.

I've been in Jas's shoes before. My freshman year I wasn't seeing the court, and that's where I didn't step up and I wasn't the big person that Jas is. I stopped working hard. I just thought it was a hopeless cause. I just found no hope in it, and Jas really sticks to it and does everything that's expected of her. She always does the little things for us, rebounding. I've never seen a guard, besides Danielle, that crashes the board every single time and gets and-ones like Jas does. She's an amazing player, and she has a lot of potential. She's growing every day. She did a great job today.

Q. Danielle, tell me what was maybe going through your mind when you slammed the ball off the floor at the end? Seemed like kind of a punctuation to two big performances?

DANIELLE BALLARD: What was going through my mind was we did it again. I was so excited. I was like, yes. All my frustration went out on the ball. That's the reason why I really threw it down, I was so angry at the referees (laughter).

But that was just a happy moment. I did that one time in the year. Playing in this game, we made it to the Sweet 16 again. It was just a joyful moment and it was just exciting.

Q. I suppose with five SEC teams moving on, it validates what you said about a tough schedule and maybe your record not reflecting what kind of team you were going to be in the tournament?

THERESA PLAISANCE: Right. I feel like the SEC is one of the toughest or the toughest conference in the country. By showing how many teams are moving on just is a testament to that. The SEC, really when you're going against team after team, top-25 teams, anybody can win on any given night. Even the people that are at the bottom of the SEC, they would give out tough games every single night. There wasn't a game that you would go into and you would go, this is a win like you don't have to worry about it. Every single game is a battle. Every single game is a fight. Just six teams moving on out of one conference, I think eight made it out of the SEC. That statistic is incredible. I'm proud to be a part of the SEC, and it's a tough conference to play in.

THE MODERATOR: We have a statement from Jeanne Kenney. "I'm so proud of the heart, the fight, the determination and courage shown by my teammates tonight. Forever LSU."

Q. Do you have any information on Jeanne's status? Was it a concussion? Do y'all have any idea?

NIKKI CALDWELL: Well, at this moment I don't know, but I will tell you that we will be very cautious in moving forward with Jeanne Kenney due to the fact of the history of concussions. So at this moment I don't know exactly what her status is.

Q. When you lose someone, not just a shooter like Jeanne but an emotional leader like her, how does that change up the game plan going forward?

NIKKI CALDWELL: You look at your team and you reassure them that they're still ready and they can still come away with a win. Your strategy doesn't change, how hard you want your team to play, do the little things, hustle plays, making sure that we're pushing tempo. When we have numbers, that doesn't change.

I think something that stirs up in them as players, though, when you lose a leader, and they chose to dig a little deeper and give a little more for Jeanne because she's been just that for them for a long time, and I think that's what made the difference. I think that's why you've got Danielle Ballard able to say, hey, I've got to do more, even though my partner here in JK is out I've got to do more. You had players step up, and that's a testament to the relationship and the friendship that Jeanne has developed amongst her teammates.

Q. This may be wild speculation, but from the outside it would appear that you had three known commodities in your seniors and you added some talent this year that was maybe a challenge to mesh throughout the year. It would seem that you've come together in the postseason. Could you talk about if that's true and how proud are you that these young girls were able to rise to the occasion?

NIKKI CALDWELL: Well, we have a core coming back after losing Adrienne Webb and Bianca Lutley, and we brought in a class that is by far one of the hardest working classes that I've been affiliated with in all of my coaching. They would finish one, two and three, that's Rina, Jas and Ray, in all the sprint work. Everything that you want from a student-athlete, they exemplify it, and they're so mature.

And so to bring them in with the returning veteran squad, it was just going to be a matter of time where everybody's role was going to be defined and everybody would accept that maybe a lot of the limelight will be shifted to some of these younger players. So we bought in, and we've done so, and I'm extremely proud of this team for realizing how great they can be, and they've shown time and time again, although our record did not reflect it, that they could play and potentially beat some of the best teams in the country.

This is a great victory for so many reasons, not just for our seniors, but it's an amazing feeling as a first year, and Jasmine Rhodes is never going to forget this moment, and she will carry it with her for the rest of her career. I'm extremely proud of our team for staying the course and not allowing adversity to just separate us. If anything it brought us closer together.

Q. Was there a time when you reminded the team of last year's team and how y'all were able to fight the adversity? You were down to one bench player. Did any doubt ever creep into your mind at any point?

NIKKI CALDWELL: No. You know, I didn't even talk to them about last year. I talked to them about taking in the atmosphere right now, feeling the energy that's in this building with the fans, making sure that they understand that this game is going to be won, and it's going to be won because it may not show up in the stat sheet, it's going to be won in a quiet way but in a ferocious way. We talked about that in timeouts, how we would be able to win this game.

They played like that. There were little glimpses of it, whether it was a hard cut or a hustle play back on the defensive end. It was just little things, and as a competitor, you could see that the momentum was starting to shift in our way, and the momentum started to change because they started to make it happen. They did it through their play.

But our huddles were tighter. After a free throw was made, you could see them all go up and just touch each other. Our bench energy was unbelievable, and even when there were calls made against us, our kids still stayed the course. They didn't go crazy, even though I know they felt they wanted to. They just stayed the course, so that's a sign of a team that's very mature and a team that felt as though this is still a game for us to pull out if we just do these small things.

Q. Talking about Rina, she didn't get a lot of playing time late in the SEC, 17 minutes. Is tonight one of the best games for her?

NIKKI CALDWELL: You know, Rina has been one of those players that had started for us early on. She had some great games then. She also had a tremendous game here at our home against Tennessee. I thought she played with a lot of just confidence, and as a freshman you've got to have your ups and downs, but when her number was called tonight she answered it, and she was fearless out there, and she played with a lot of courage. She did not play -- she nor Jasmine, neither one of them played like freshmen tonight, so extremely proud to have Rina a part of our family, and I know there's going to be great things in store for her.

Q. I know this game just happened, but compared to last year's, the drama of last year's win over Penn State, can you compare the two at all? This looked in some ways even more desperate considering the foul trouble and everything.

NIKKI CALDWELL: You know, the only thing that's a similarity is you have players that are in and out due to injury, and this year it's been such an interesting ride and journey because we started out very strong, we started SEC play very strong, and then we tapered.

Last year was the reverse. There was desperation and there was that sense of urgency at the end, and we kept it going. So regardless, we've got good momentum right now, and whether we have seven players, eight, nine, 10, at this time of year you just try to do your best to keep everybody healthy. But that's something that we can't control, so we try not to focus in on that and just stay positive and really focus in on what we can control, and that's the healthy bodies that we are able to put in there and making sure that they understand that they can do it and reinforcing that empowerment into our team.

But that starts also in the offseason, and we traveled to Spain and we've had that small lineup. We've had Theresa and Shanece in foul trouble before, so they've played that play. They played at Tennessee without those two and Jeanne. So we've drawn on that, and they've had success when adversity has hit, and that's what we did tonight.

Q. Can I get your response to my SEC question from before with five teams advancing?

NIKKI CALDWELL: Well, Theresa said it best, it's the toughest conference in the country, and when you have five teams advance to the Sweet 16, that's a testimony to the players that are in our conference. There's amazing talent. You can look at South Carolina with Mitchell and Coates, and Tennessee obviously with Harrison and Simmons, LSU with our players. It's a tough conference, and you don't really get a full view of it unless you play in it, and what Theresa is talking about, the bottom of our conference, Ole Miss took us to the wire, Alabama beat us. So you can't just walk into an SEC game and say that that's going to be a win. It's so competitive, and obviously it's helped us prepare for NCAA, and that's a reflection of why we have so many teams that have moved on.

Q. What are Moncrief's prospects going forward?

NIKKI CALDWELL: Right now she's out with a knee injury, so we wish that we could have her tonight, and we will not have her the rest of the season.

Q. Obviously emotions are still high from this one, but Louisville comes up on Sunday, so I guess what is the mentality knowing you have this momentum throughout this week of practice going into that contest?

NIKKI CALDWELL: Well, I think the thing that we're going to do, I want our kids to continue to enjoy tonight and enjoy tomorrow. They have a day off, and we'll get them ready. But I know they know the brackets, so we'll have some that will already want to come in and want their scouting report, but I'm not going to give it to them. I want them to understand that what they just did and what they accomplished with the challenges that we had was amazing, and I want them to enjoy the moment. Let the coaching staff get them ready for Louisville, and we'll be the ones watching the film and staying up late. This group, they deserve a day, a full day, to just enjoy beating a very good West Virginia team, beating a very good Georgia Tech team to advance to another Sweet 16.

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