

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Saint Louis vs Tennessee

Saturday, March 18, 2023

Knoxville, Tennessee, USA

Thompson-Boling Arena

**Saint Louis Billikens**

**Coach Rebecca Tillett**

**Kyla McMakin**

**Brooke Flowers**

Media Conference

Tennessee 95, Saint Louis 50

REBECCA TILLETT: Thank you. First, obviously not the outcome that you hope for when you earn those opportunities.

Credit to Tennessee. I thought they were really dominant defensively throughout and disrupted some of the things we wanted to do consistently.

In terms of us, I thought we had moments of really, really playing the way that we play, and that was in the first and the third. Even in the third quarter they came out on that 6-0 run, and most teams would just say oh, my goodness, it's just not our day.

Our team responded to that, which is what this team is really going to go down -- besides being champions -- as the first champions to advance to the NCAA tournament in Saint Louis women's basketball history. They're going go down about for them.

Through the leadership of these guys and the women on leadership council with them, they just continued to fight the entire season. Those two quarters specifically were what's been so representative of this group, which has been really special.

And how fortunate am I to get to lead them?

**Q. This is your last season, Brooke. Can you put into words what it's meant to you to have that experience of winning that championship and making it to the NCAA tournament?**



BROOKE FLOWERS: I think that I couldn't be more thankful just for my teammates and this group, for all of us working together and believing that we could do this and that a championship was a possibility.

And then going out and achieving that. So that's something that I'll always be able to remember, look back on, and that's kind of like forever. We'll forever be the first champions so a wonderful experience.

**Q. So Brooke, this is for you. Obviously being a senior, as you look to the younger players on this team, how hopeful are you for the future after you're gone? Do you see a lot of great inspiration with this team after the incredible season you've had?**

BROOKE FLOWERS: Yeah, I think they'll continue to be amazing, continue to reach new heights and do things that nobody expects them to do just because of who they are and where our culture is as a program.

So I'm going to -- I'm looking forward to just watching all the things that they accomplish. So much of the team is returning, so I think they'll accomplish great things in the future and I'll always be a Billiken, always be watching, so I'm excited to see.

**Q. For Brooke, you all were getting some offensive boards but weren't converting them into second-chance points. How often was Tennessee's length and height maybe affecting that, and how much of that was not executing as well as you all usually do?**

BROOKE FLOWERS: I think that both things might have had something to do with it. You know, we've played a hard nonconference season so we've played Power 5 schools. I think it had been a little bit since we had seen so much height.

Also at the same time playing Rhode Island in the semifinal game. They're kind of a bigger team in the A10. So we got offensive rebounds, which is what we want to do.

Didn't necessary execute as much off them as we would



like to, but, you know.

**Q. With your blocks today you passed Rebecca Lobo to hold sole possession of 18th place in NCAA blocks all-time. What does that mean to you and can you reflect over your defensive prowess in your time at Saint Louis?**

BROOKE FLOWERS: First of all, wow. That's kind of cool. You know, I don't know. I just think that I've always been a defensive player first; offensive game hasn't really always been the best.

Even now it's okay. Not like Kyla. She can create her own shot at any time. Defense has been my thing. Coming into the game, and into any game really, I just want to bring any defensive presence as much as I can.

I was actually getting myself on halfway through the game. Like you haven't really got any blocks, so kind of challenged myself in the second half to get some more.

I did, so that was nice. I have a defensive mindset and I wanted to just block as many shots as I could get my hands on. Feel like I could have got a few more, but that's cool though. (Smiling.)

**Q. Kyla, you guys were able to keep that game pretty close through the beginning of the second quarter; cut the lead to three. What was working well for you guys and then why do you feel like it fell apart in the second quarter?**

KYLA McMAKIN: I think we were doing a good job with scoring the ball on offense, getting to the rim, hitting shots.

Then on defense we were kind of -- there were still times they were scoring but we were stopping them more than the second half. Second half they kind of went on a run and our answer back wasn't always there.

It's harder to chip away when they get so far. I think we did have the right mindset, trying to keep going, keep going, but some of the shots didn't fall, and that can be very discouraging.

I think they're a good team. They came out and we just had to answer back a little bit faster. (Smiling.)

**Q. For both student-athletes, can you reflect on this season? And for Brooke, you're entire career at Saint Louis and what all of your accomplishments this is season have meant to you?**

KYLA McMAKIN: You know, I'm new obviously being a

transfer, so it's just crazy to see the development, how fast everything ended up clicking. There was never a period of time coming in where there was a disconnect. No cliques or anything like that.

It was so quick that we all embraced one another and just we're so -- like everyone easily went into what the core values were. We were able to, you know, take everything -- coming from so many different places and different backgrounds and people try to take those backgrounds and help make connections. I don't think a lot of teams could have connected as fast or have been able to do the season that we did in the first year.

BROOKE FLOWERS: I would definitely agree with everything that Ky has said about the past season, just how we've embraced each other, new coaching staff, new way of playing basketball. Just everybody investing into it and investing into one another is truly a beautiful thing.

I think that's why we went on to win a championship this season.

In response to reflecting over the past five years, very proud of myself and just seeing all the growth of so many people, like Julia and Peyton from when they came in to where they are now. So just the growth that has occurred in the program, in the city of Saint Louis. So just to be able to say I was a part of that means a lot.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for coach.

**Q. Coach, when Kyla banked in that three at the end of the first and you get close and you -- there were moments. How much does that maybe give you hope as you take this program forward into your second season?**

REBECCA TILLET: Yeah, I think there was some good moments, some characteristic fight of this group. I wish I had helped them a little bit more in some of those moments. We had some of the quick turnovers, and in a game like this, when you have those in a row and they convert so quickly, it can get away really quickly.

But when she hit that bank I just smiled because this is this team, right? This is the team that when things go a certain way, they assert their will to make them go another way.

Again, I think we did that in the first and the third, but that second, when they made that run, that's a critical run that really good teams are able to make at that exact moment that can send you into halftime kind of regrouping. You want to be still in the fighting phase there.

**Q. At halftime obviously a big lead, but crazier things have happened. Tennessee opened the third quarter on a 6-0 run. You call a timeout. What was the message to that team in that moment after not coming out how you wanted to?**

REBECCA TILLET: Yeah, I think we just said exactly that: steady ourselves. That's not what we wanted to happen, talked about happening. Let's respond to it. As a group, let's respond.

And I think that is the story of this team. I think it started with Julia Martinez's leadership early in the nonconference, just having that will to make things happen on the court. It goes all the way back to Brooke Flowers planting the seed of what we could do this season.

Again, even as a coach, I've been doing this a long time at different levels. To have a student-athlete so confidently say, this is what I stayed to do, and I remember even as a coach thinking, wow, that's a powerful statement, right?

And then our nonconference was rocky. So to then have leaders continue to lead, those two did that. Kyla did that. Ken and Camree are both a part of the leadership council. We had a meeting just two nights ago on the bus on the way to get some of the ice cream we owed them for road wins along the way we haven't been able to fully repay.

To see them continue to lead, those were the same moments in the first and the third. I just wished I helped them have a few more of those moments today.

**Q. Can you talk about Brooke Flowers and what she's been able to do all season defensively? But also in this game similar to what I asked her, those three blocks that put her ahead of Rebecca Lobo, a name that comes up every year in college basketball.**

REBECCA TILLET: Yeah, I love that she's won, two Rebecca Lobo graduated when I was -- graduated college when I was finishing high school, so just the markers in time, to think about how dominant of a performance Brooke had over and over and over again to achieve that record, you know, it started all the way back Florida Gulf Coast. She broke a record there. She is just consistently breaking records.

We will just need to make a really good extensive list of what she did this season for our program. Just to hear her say she's proud of herself, isn't that what we want for student-athletes? To invest fully in the culture. She had to do it more than once as a coaching change occurred and just stay so committed to her hometown, Saint Louis University.

To breaking all those individual records and win an A10 championship for the first time in program history? We go around at the end, a tradition we took from my dad as a coach, and talked to each senior. Just each person, say something in that emotion you're in after the last game of the season.

To Brooke, like what did Saint Louis University need? Brooke Flowers. They needed her to stay and needed her to commit and do all the things she did to break those records and lead us here.

**Q. Again, I asked you this I think back in Wilmington, can you reflect on this season and what you're most proud of your team this season?**

REBECCA TILLET: Yeah, I mean, what a season. I mean, feels like we've been going full speed, right, since the press conference. Really does feel that way when you take over a program. I think just for this group, the staff, the student-athletes, our leadership, our support staff, what we accomplished is not easy. Anybody that's been around the game a long time knows that.

You know, when I talk to other championship coaches, including ones at Saint Louis University we'll say to each other, winning a hard. Like it's a lot of work. It's a lot of investment, a lot of sacrifice.

And so just to see this group -- I remember initial conversations with Chris Mayer, athletic director talking about what we're trying to do here. Both of us believe so deeply in culture. How can you speed it up? Both of us are having these conversations while knowing that it's not necessarily realistic to speed it up as fast as we did.

I think that's just a testament to every single woman in that locker room and everyone that touched our program for staying the course during the more difficult moments and then learning so quickly.

Even today, even in the moments that were not successful, the things that we were able to attempt to execute, you know, we had no chance doing that 20 games ago because we hadn't been together long enough, learned enough together.

So just to continue to build on that foundation over and over again is why this team will go down in history.

**Q. Obviously Rickea Jackson and Jordan Horston are at the top of the scouting report, but Jordan Walker definitely made a significant impact today with her defense, work in transition. What were you guys**



**expecting from her coming into this game and how do you feel she swung the game a little bit today?**

REBECCA TILLET: Yeah, I think I'm sure for them to make the type of run that they want to make, you've got to have some balance, right? Obviously we spend so much time prepping for Jackson, Horston. I do think Walker made a difference today in what she was doing and she'll need to keep doing that to take her team where at the want to go.

Balance is so critically important, something we had to work hard to find, and they were very balanced today. Four in double figures, almost five. Just dominant performance for them really on both sides of the ball.

But I thought she played well and I thought she was critical to them making some of the run that they did that put us on our heels a bit.

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