

QUESTIONS FOR COACH SHERRI COALE AND PLAYERS VIONISE PIERRE-LOUIS AND
MADDIE MANNING

Q. I guess we'll start with Maddie. Could you talk about your thoughts when you guys were selected. I read a little bit about you're on the bubble, so to speak. That's kind of unusual for Oklahoma.

Do you now sense that you have to step up and prove it, or do you feel you've already proven it, or just does it just not matter? Tell us your thoughts.

MADDIE MANNING: When we saw our name up there it was an incredible feeling. We knew we left it in the hands of the committee. We didn't take care of our business late or that last game, and we left it in the hands of them.

But as far as proving ourselves to anybody, no, I don't think that's our attitude at all. We definitely want to prove it maybe to ourselves more than anything. We believe in our team and the product we have and what we've been working for. And that's what it's about; it's not about proving it to anybody else.

Q. Vionise or Maddie, how have you guys been preparing the freshmen, especially the ones who have a huge impact for you guys?

VIONISE PIERRE-LOUIS: I guess we have to step up as seniors first and lead the way, lead by example. We could walk through with them, we can talk to them in practice, but it's really by leading by example. And how we're going to come in every day and are they going match our energy and make sure they're prepared in that way.

Q. Maddie, can you talk about the pace of a game like this? Because you guys have played them before. You see a little bit of everything in the Big 12, but they're going to play up-tempo and you guys probably like to do that, right?

MADDIE MANNING: Absolutely. I remember that first game. We were talking about it on the bus coming out here, how fun of a game that was. It's a great product for women's basketball. It's great that we've been on the court before, we've ran with them before, so we're looking forward to that. It's something we've been working on too.

Q. Vionise, could you talk about that game as well. I saw monster numbers. What do you expect them to do to try to limit you this time and what might you do differently to make sure you still have that kind of ballgame?

VIONISE PIERRE-LOUIS: Well, I expect the double-team. I really do. So, personally, I've just got to be patient, make sure I'm patient and make sure I'm open enough so my guards can give me the ball when I do. And when I get it, what am I going to do with it? And I going to be a threat and be dominant in the post?

But if I'm dominant and I set the stage in the paint, then that opens up for my guards and they can do whatever they want at that point.

Q. Sherri, what about in rematch? Do you feel like the underdog has -- won and lost -- has the advantage? Or do you feel, since you guys have played them a couple times before in your history, no one has the advantage?

COACH COALE: Oh, I don't know about advantage, disadvantage. I have such great respect for Doug Bruno, the way he coaches, the ambassador that he is for the sport of women's basketball, the fundamental way in which his teams play.

They play a style of basketball that's different. There's nobody else in the country who's quite like them. And so I suppose being on the floor with that maybe exposes you a little bit to it. I don't know if it can totally prepare you for it. We saw it in November. And we have nine guys, so it's really hard to replicate that in practice.

They do what they do extraordinarily well. Twelve made 3s a game leads the country in 3-point field goals. And if you look at almost every offensive stat there is, they're in the top 10 in the country. They really, really know how to play basketball.

So it becomes a fundamental continuing thing. You know? How disciplined are you going to be? How good of a job are you going to do in defensive transition, stopping the ball and protecting the basket.

And then, on the offensive end, it's all about shot selection and not turning it over, because that's part of their offense is taking advantage of your offensive miscues.

So we've got our hands full. They're a great team. They're a great product for the sport. I think our game in November was maybe one of the best games of the entire women's college basketball season. It was just -- I would say it was a blast to be a part of, except I didn't like having three less points than them at the end of overtime. Otherwise, it was a beautiful thing.

Q. Sherri, what were you able to learn from that game that you were able to take forward into the season and into this particular matchup?

COACH COALE: Well, when I go back and watch that film, the first thing I notice is how green our freshmen were. No idea how to stop the ball and protect the basket when it's coming at you at the speed at which DePaul brings it at you. And they spread the floor with shooters, so it's an atypical type of rotation. And they were really exposed. Ana and Shaina were really exposed.

Now, they did a great job offensively, but it was that give-and-take. They were doing a great job offensively, but then they couldn't get back defensively and get matched up, so we were trading baskets. And, unfortunately, Most of ours were 2s and theirs were 3s, so that doesn't bode well.

But as far as what you take away from it, it was November. What we took away from it was we have to do a better job communicating in our matchups and defensive transition.

And that's been hit and miss for our team. That's why we're a 12th seed. We have to talk to each other and -- shoot, we were late getting here today. It's my fault because we were in the film room and I probably said "have a sense of urgency and a sense of purpose" 12 more times than I needed to, but I felt like I needed to say it a couple more times. Maybe that one last time it's going to sink in.

But you have to be urgent and you have to be purposeful. And you have to have a conversation with each other when you play against these guys. If you don't, they exploit you.

Q. Sherri, could you talk a little bit about the adjustment that you have to make? Is it a matter in that first game you can kind of cut loose and just play with them? Do you have to make significant adjustments this time to go into this game? And how different is it when you're in the first round of the tournament like this?

COACH COALE: Well, a layered question there. I'll try to get all parts of it.

First of all, I think it's difficult for a five-man defensively against DePaul because you're chasing somebody around on the perimeter. In Big 12 conference, you got Kalani Brown from Baylor who runs and buries you at the block, and I could go team by team by team that has that. This DePaul team is very different. So Vivi will be put in a position that's not ordinary for her. Does she know how to do it? Yes. Our preconference schedule was full of teams that ran five out and spread the floor, and she had to figure out how to do that, and got much better at it. But it's been a while since she's had to play that way, so there's an adjustment there.

I think the other adjustment you make is you can guard these guys beautifully and they can still get really comfortable and make shots. And they got guys who can shoot stepback 3s. Millender gets it off so fast. You can be there and she still gets it off.

So you have to find ways to break their rhythm, and that means adjusting through the course of the game. Whether it how you guard screens or whether you're in a man or zone or whether you're trapping or pressing or whatever, you got to find ways to affect their rhythm and not let them be really comfortable.

First round of the tournament, that piece of the question, you know, to our freshmen, they're wide-eyed and bushy-tailed and loving life right now.

And I was taken back to a moment -- our selection show was very euphoric in a way. I've been a part of 19 of these in a row now. And you never ever take it for granted, but there's a different level of emotion when you know you're in and trying to see what seed you are, especially if you're in the top four, than if you're on this bubble or, this year, in the great debatable eight,

whatever that was about.

So it was a very emotional moment, but I was taken back to a moment earlier in conference season, early in January, when my little freshman guard from Canada came in my office and said very sheepishly, "Coach, I just have a question. Is there any way we can still make the NCAA tournament?" And her voice is just quivering. It's January.

And I knew then I needed to talk to these guys about it, and then we need to put it to bed. And we've revisited it only one time after that, and it was very briefly.

So for these guys, you know, they came to Oklahoma. Think about my freshmen. They came to Oklahoma and for their entire lives, they're 18! Oklahoma has been in the NCAA tournament. And so they're carrying that. And I know I'm talking about champagne problems, and I field guilty about that. But it is a thing. And to act like it's not a thing is wrong and unfair to them.

So they are so excited to be here. Getting them in the right frame of mind to compete, not go too fast, not be too wound up, as Vivi spoke, I think will be the job of our upperclassmen as much by how they carry themselves and how they perform as anything that they could say to them about what the experience is like.

You really have to go through it, but if our seniors come out and play with the right pace, with the right intensity, and with the right sense of urgency and purpose, the freshmen will follow suit.

Q. Sherri, you look at these matchups -- yourself, Gary, Doug, three programs that have a lot of success. Being in the first and second round, how good is this for women's basketball? And maybe it's been a while since you've been -- four people like this, four games, four programs. It's great. Could you just talk about how great this is for women's college basketball?

COACH COALE: Well, I think there are a lot of great stories and great traditions in women's basketball that maybe don't get talked about enough.

The job Gary Blair has done here in College Station is unbelievable. And I know you guys here locally are talking about it all the time. I don't know if the nation is talking about it as much as they should. And probably, if I had been given an opportunity to make an opening statement, I would have started with congratulations to Gary on hosting. It's not an easy thing to do, and here he is doing it again, just a tremendous program.

And, Doug, I can't -- I can't even put into words how much I respect Doug Bruno. And, really, he's given a lifetime of service to our sport. And he's a legend in Chicago and has had, obviously, a great run of success in the NCAA tournament.

I don't know what it is about DePaul and Oklahoma, they like to see us play early in this thing. I just -- I guess that's luck. I don't know. It is what it is, and we're here playing.

But there's a lot of tradition here and a lot of programs with high expectations, and I think it will be a great first round, first and second round.

COACH COALE: Thank you, guys, for coming out and covering. We really appreciate it.