



2019 NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

WRIGHT STATE RAIDERS

Practice Day Press Conference - March 21, 2019

College Station, Texas

QUESTIONS FOR COACH KATRINA MERRIWEATHER, EMILY VOGELPOHL, MACKENZIE TAYLOR, AND MICHAL MILLER

COACH MERRIWEATHER: First of all, really excited to be here. Everyone has been extremely accommodating and welcoming. It is a great place to be right now. We're excited for the opportunity to play Texas A&M coached by the legendary Gary Blair. Great team with a lot of really good players. We're just hoping that tomorrow's going to be a fast-paced, up-tempo, fun game!

Q. When you are -- the toughest team in the tournament for the first time and -- the first time in a few years and you're facing a team that's in it 14 straight years and has so much experience, what do you do or what do you say to your ladies to kind of help them deal with that situation?

COACH MERRIWEATHER: We don't talk about the 14 years. What we do is talk about the team that's here right now. I think that again there are some things that will help us in terms of the first time. I think [Gary] Blair's teams have been this young. There are some things that hopefully we'll be able to take advantage of. Again, that's hard to say with a team that's so good.

But I do think that what we do is stay focused on us more than anyone else. And that's what we've done all season, is concentrate and making sure we're playing our best basketball and at the same time respecting anybody we play but making sure we're not fearing anybody.

Q. Coach, if you could face any guard the caliber of Chennedy Carter, how do you go ahead and defend her or keep her from going on?

COACH MERRIWEATHER: Any kid that's that talented -- I remember Chennedy Carter from Nike Nationals when she blew up right before her senior year. She's really a fun player to watch.

What we're concentrating and focusing on is making sure she doesn't get easy shots. We're going to try to contest them as well as we can, and we're going to use all five people to defend her. We have got some that are willing to step up to the challenge, and we'll see what they can do.

Q. You talked about being focused. But as far as fundamentals, what's one thing that your team will have to do, do you think, to come out on top tomorrow?

COACH MERRIWEATHER: One of the reasons we've been successful is we've put a lot of emphasis on defending and rebounding. Obviously, you've got some really good athletes on A&M's team, including [N'dea] Jones who is averaging 11 rebounds a game. That's something that we have really concentrated on all year. And I think that's the most important thing.



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One of the things we do is try to get as many opportunities as we can at the basket, and we do that through offensive rebounding. So it's going to be a really big deal that we are aggressive and trying to make sure that we accomplish that like we have all year.

Q. Have you played anyone, Coach, that you can compare A&M to? You played Michigan State during the tournament. Green Bay is always really good. Anybody remind you of A&M, a similar style?

COACH MERRIWEATHER: No. Actually, it is our guards that are usually the best ones in the game. So they have got some challenges ahead of them.

We have got some really good seniors that are 1,000-point scorers that are used to getting the ball up and down the floor. We have additions with Michal Miller and Angel Baker that are really good off the bounce who like to create for themselves and other people.

So, honestly, when we play people, we usually have the best guards. So tomorrow will be a big challenge for them to step up and play.

Q. You talked about Gary Blair being a legend in coaching. Did you have a relationship with him? And have you known him for a long time? Could you discuss that a little.

COACH MERRIWEATHER: I'm fortunate that my father has been coaching for 30 years in summer ball. So he's had some pretty talented teams, which has allowed him to build some relationships. And I've been fortunate enough with those relationships to pass on to me, and Coach Blair's one of them. So he and my dad have far more of a relationship than I do.

What's really cool is Tennille Adams, my associate head coach, played for him in Arkansas on that Final Four team. I think when I wanted to hire her this year, she had his list of records. And I jumped at the opportunity to call Coach Blair just to get him on the phone to talk for a few minutes.

I just think that he's just a really good guy who obviously knows a lot about basketball. And anyone who's in our basketball community has a great amount of respect for him. I do think it is pretty special to have connections to him especially, with Tennille being on staff.

Q. He (Gary Blair) said Tennille [Adams] might be giving away some of his secrets. Do you think she's helped you out at all as far as knowing what to expect from him?

COACH MERRIWEATHER: Absolutely. It helps you a little bit when there's some familiarity. I think it helps our kids, too. Like you alluded to earlier, there's no secret night in and night out they play in the SEC and their level of competition is extremely high.



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I think in order for us to make sure our kids are aware that we can compete and not just to count only on that, that she's been really vital in that situation in saying hey, This is some bigtime basketball but we've played some, too. So we have got a chance out here.

Q. Talk about, they have the home-court advantage. Green Bay, you lose on the run. You win at home. How did you prepare that A&M has just a home-court advantage?

COACH MERRIWEATHER: The best weapon we have is we don't give a lot of information. We don't talk about a lot of things that appear to be a disadvantage. What we do is we focus on the things that are an advantage to us.

And this is a position that we haven't been in all year, or at least for not a long time, I will say, in where we're the underdogs. It has been, historically, a position that we're probably more comfortable with. We're a battling, fighting, tough 40 minutes of grind-it-out, figure out a way to win type of team.

So I think that today when we're preparing, we'll talk a little bit about that. Hey, there's not a lot of pressure here because it is their home court, because they do play in the SEC, and they're the four seed. Our job is to go out there and play as hard and as well as we can.

Q. Mackenzie, your coach (Katrina Merriweather) talked normally about when you go in the game, she has the better guards. Tomorrow you're a little bit of an underdog with Chennedy Carter. How do you deal with Chennedy?

MACKENZIE TAYLOR: I think we have got to take it as a team, not leave anyone on an island. We have some good players. She's going to make shots. As a team, we've got to play good team defense and really come together and stop them as a whole but really focus in on just playing together.

Q. Emily, when you're a team that doesn't have NCAA experience and you're facing one that's been in the tournament every year, how do you guard against the experience factor? What do you think when you go into a game like that?

EMILY VOGELPOHL: We're just going to have to stick together. We know it's going to be a tough environment out there; but if we stick together, we'll be fine.

Q. Michal, what's the difference -- what got you guys over the hump to get to the NCAA tournament? It's been awhile. What's different about this team than the other teams?

MICHAL MILLER: I would say it's playing as a team and not playing for ourselves but playing for our team, playing together and sticking together and keeping our main goal in front of us and not letting any of the obstacles, personal injuries that we've been through, take a toll on us and just sticking together.



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Q. Mackenzie, if you had to pick one thing you guys have to do tomorrow in order to win, what would be the most important thing?

MACKENZIE TAYLOR: With my coach sitting back there, I would say defending rebounds (laughter). It's going to take everything. We're all going to have to play well, and we're all going to have to show up. I think if we all show up, we'll be all right. We'll be able to compete.

Q. Michal, weren't you here in Texas last year?

MICHAL MILLER: Sure I was, yes.

Q. What was that experience like?

MICHAL MILLER: It was different obviously in the different environments I've been in. Actually, we scrimmaged against Texas A&M last year. I went against Chennedy Carter and a lot of other good players that were on her team. She's a great player. She made good plays. She made good reads, got her team involved. She can do things that not many other players can do. But we're also good and we can also deliver when we're playing together. So there's nothing to worry about.

Q. Michal, that was Trinity Valley Community College?

Q. Yes, it was.