

2017 NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

First Practice Day · Texas A&M
Pauley Pavilion · Los Angeles, Calif.
Friday, March 17

FIRST PRACTICE DAY QUOTES – TEXAS A&M

Gary Blair, Texas A&M Head Coach:

on tomorrow's top priority
"One of the things, I'm glad we're playing Saturday instead of Friday, so we can look at all the upsets that happened in the men's game on Thursday. Or even the WNIT games being played today. Either upsets or near upsets. I believe when you come to the NCAA Tournaments, nothing's an upset, unless maybe you're a one (seed). Other than that, we need to get off to a good start. That's just something that we haven't done just about all year. There's a couple times, we've always been a second-half team, but I'm tired of giving those halftime speeches. I'm ready for the prep work that we've done to put in to get ready for Penn. I want the little things to be done. Penn will not beat themselves. You talk about a well-coached team. They're going to make five-to-six passes sometimes—and that's hardtop do sometimes with the shot clock. They move the ball, they run a lot of different things, but I still think the flex is the best thing they run, with a lot of backdoors on it. I told (Boise State head coach) Mike (McLaughlin) up there, west of the Mississippi, we don't run the flex, so I don't want to see that tomorrow night. I also told them no back picks—that's rude when you back-pick somebody, so hopefully they'll adhere to our rules west of the Mississippi. Very well-coached team. I recruited Michelle (Nwokedi), their leading scorer. She was from Houston. Just a great kid, but she wanted Ivy League and she's done very well there. I wanted Ivy League, too, but I didn't quite make it. So, I went to Texas Tech."

on Los Angeles
"It's good also to be out here in the middle of the winter. You guys are spoiled rotten out here. I lived out here from '67 to '69 before I went into the Marine Corps, so I know every inch of this territory. Sometime while I'm here, I'll head down to the Apple Pan to get my burger and apple pie, and is the Jolly Roger still around, too? There's a lot of good places around here and I really like my time here. I love my time back at A&M right now. It's the best place I've ever worked."

on what the team learned from last year's second-round loss
"If you get by the first round, the seconds rounds are dead-even matchups. Both teams have one game under their belt. You only have one day of prep, and I promise you—we have not prepped for UCLA or Boise State. We're throwing the wrench at Penn. Everything that we're doing is to get ready for one team and, tell you the truth, I do not know a lot about Boise State. I know their coach. He's very good. I know UCLA very well because we scrimmaged them last

year. Everything is getting ready for Penn. If some of you, besides my local guys, I'm part of the 1998 Final Four where Harvard beat Stanford and we sitting there, watching it happen. We had won, we were the ninth seed. Harvard just played the perfect ballgame and that's what the Ivy League can do. All of a sudden, it doesn't matter what you tell your team. Those kids are realize those are not McDonald's All-Americans you're playing. They're probably the people that are going to own a hell of a lot of McDonald's. You've got to get your kids to believe in—it's just basketball. It's five-on-five. People are playing the game. Coaches coach kids up. It's just basketball. Go in and who can execute what you've done all year—and that's the hard part—can you make shots? Can you play tough defense to keep them from making the wide-open shot? Can you stay out of foul trouble? Which obviously, we have to do. Can you play with that momentum that some of the teams so far in the NCAA have done. Saw Maryland today win by 41. They're probably still hacked off that they weren't a number-two seed after winning the Big Ten. Everybody has a different motivation."

Khaalia Hillsman, Texas A&M Center:

on a pivotal moment this season
"One of the most pivotal moments of our season was that four-game losing streak that we had. It was tough on us. We lost to some teams we shouldn't have. We came back together and went into the SEC Tournament with a no-fear mentality and showed some fight."

on what to expect from Penn
"In practice we have been working on double-teams, that is what we have been working on all season. That is nothing new to me. If they take me away it won't be a big deal because a lot of scorers. I am not the only option on offense so if they double me that isn't really a big deal to me because it opens up the other scorers."

on the size advantage over Penn
"When we were watching film we feel like Anriel (Howard) can attack off the high post depending on where they double from. I feel like if they double me and play the same defense, we will get some of the same things."

on the venue and time in Los Angeles
"I have never been here before. It is actually gorgeous out here. The diversity here is amazing. Everything is so care-free. It is just great being out here. I am a Chicago girl so I am familiar with diversity but earlier here is saw a group of friend and they were Voguing down on the walkway so it's just pretty cool to be here. I feel blessed and cannot wait to play."

Anriel Howard, Texas A&M Forward:

on what was learned from last year's NCAA Tournament
"It was definitely a learning experience for all of us. We took that and are using that for motivation. It started at practice for this tournament. We told each other to be focused and to not be distracted. So we have our eyes on our target."

on the venue and time in Los Angeles
"We went to Universal Studios, that was my first ever time going. It was really fun. The first thing I went to was the Harry Potter Land, it was a lot of cool virtual reality rides. That was really awesome to experience that. I had turkey leg. That is one of my favorite parts of going to a theme park. I have to have that turkey leg."

Curtyce Knox, Texas A&M Guard:

on getting ready with two weeks off
“We took a few days off but we were practicing really hard and working on transition. I think we look great in practice and I hope it carries over to the game.”

on setting the pace against Penn
“Defensively, we need to play the whole shot clock. They are a team like Missouri that run their motion flex offense to the end of the shot clock. I think that if we are able to defend for 30 seconds then we will be good. Offensively, we need to come out and attack them early to set the pace with our transition offense.”