

March 28, 2011



An Interview With:

**TEXAS A&M
COACH GARY BLAIR
DANIELLE ADAMS
TYRA WHITE
SYDNEY COLSON
ADAORA ELONU
SYDNEY CARTER**

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. We're joined by Texas A&M student-athletes Danielle Adams, Tyra White, Sydney Colson, Adaora Elonu and Sydney Carter and head coach Gary Blair. Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Both Sydneys, does playing a team for the fourth time this season, how much of an advantage is it in terms of your knowledge of what to expect and is there any disadvantages other than the fact that you guys would like to win this time? Are there any specific advantages to playing them for the fourth time this year?

SYDNEY COLSON: I think so. Each game we've played I think we've done things better each time we've played them and it showed in the final score, just in how we've come out in the games and how we've defended, and I think that what we've learned most is that we have to play 40 minutes through. We've got to play from start to finish, and continue to do things that are working for us, and I think that will help us to get a victory for sure.

And of course the disadvantage is that just we haven't won a game yet. They've been close, but we haven't found what we needed to do to get over that hump, and I think we know what we need to do now.

SYDNEY CARTER: I definitely think it's a learning experience. I think that we definitely

caught on to some of the things that we need to work on in the next couple of games.

Like you said, the advantage is definitely you know what they're going to run and how they want to get into offense and you know what kind of defense they're going to put on us. And of course the disadvantage is the vice versa effect of that. They're going to know what we're going to want to do and how we're going to want to do it and stuff like that.

So I just think that we have the knowledge aspect of the game and how we're going to play it kind of down pat on both ends. So it's going to be who is going to be smarter and tougher in this game.

Q. Danielle, obviously the numbers say that Baylor's done as good a job defending you as any team this year. What specifically about Baylor makes it difficult for you in terms of what they throw at you and how are you going to have to change things up to tomorrow?

DANIELLE ADAMS: I mean, it's not really their defense. It's just me taking good shots. I haven't taken one good shot when I played against them. So, I mean, it makes it look like they're playing great defense, but it's just my shot selection.

Q. Danielle and Tyra, obviously there's -- kind of following up with the first question -- a lot of familiarity with Baylor and Texas A&M. Since that Big 12 championship game when you guys jumped up to a 12-0 lead and obviously things were going well, how much have you been looking forward to this game and obviously with so much on the line now?

DANIELLE ADAMS: We've looked for this opportunity since we lost to them in the Big 12 championship. I mean, we were hoping we were going to get this matchup again just so we can get over that hump. The first three times we played them we weren't quite there, and we played them close games all three times.

But we know we can beat them. And we

know what we can do. We've just got to make good shot selection and make better decisions.

TYRA WHITE: Just going off what Danielle said, we've been looking forward to this game since the Big 12 Tournament, but we didn't want to overlook anybody, but now is our time that we have to just do what we need to do, execute down the stretch and just do the things we need to do to get the victory.

Q. Adaora, the 4 player is huge in this game against them. With the way they guard, first two games not so good, really good in the Big 12 championship game with ten points and five boards, how important is it for you to hit the elbow jumper at the free-throw line and to do some things to spread them out a little bit?

ADAORA ELONU: I think it's important as far as whoever Brittney is guarding, which is the 4 player. I think we have to be cognizant and knock down our shots since it is pretty much open, since she's helping our offense, staying in the lane.

I think the 4 position is important because we have to knock down the shot and keep her honest. And as long as anyone in that spot is doing it, I think we'll be very successful.

Q. Sydney Colson, can you talk about -- Danielle was talking about her shot selection and maybe she hasn't had as many points against Baylor, is it something maybe you can do to help her really have a good game?

SYDNEY COLSON: Some of the things we thought were successful were some of the plays we were running and when the guards are getting to the rim and if Brittney is helping off or whoever happens to be down there, if they help off -- Syd did it one time, kicking to Karla underneath, if they don't have good rotation down, then the other post player is going to get a lot of good looks.

But as far as -- Danielle knows that she's capable of having a really good game against them. Her stats haven't shown it. But, I mean, she's done other things in the game that have helped us. And I think as long as she gets in there and she's physical with them and takes good shots and knocks down her 3s in transition, everything like that, I think if she just plays her game doesn't focus on it much, then we'll be fine.

Q. Both Sydneys, you've struggled on 3 against them this year, but you had a good

game yesterday against Georgia, and then you watched Green Bay having a great game shooting 3s against Baylor. What can you do to do better 3s? Did you take something out of the game yesterday that Green Bay did?

SYDNEY COLSON: I think just their shot selection and being patient really helped them out. I think that if we take the 3s that are there for us in our offense, then we'll be fine. As long as we're not forcing shots, 3s or 2s whatever it is, take good shots, rebound the ball well, I think that will benefit us a lot.

And I think that our offense is really successful as long as we execute it properly. And just in zone, if they happen to play zone or something, if we just swing the ball and people are getting shots on the reversals, then we're liable to hit those shots and those are always good looks for us.

I think as long as we take good shots within the offense and don't force stuff and don't try to go in there and get fouls against Griner that you may not get called, I mean, I think that we'll be fine.

SYDNEY CARTER: I also agree with the shot selection. I think in the Big 12 Tournament I got forced into a couple of bad shots at the end of the game. So I just think that all plays into the decision making on our end of the court on the offensive end.

So I just think those two go hand in hand when it comes to them. We've definitely got to hit shots. In the first half of the Big 12 Tournament we were hitting almost everything we looked at before we went cold kind of towards the end of it.

So definitely hitting shots is crucial against Baylor because you're going to get so many outside looks with Griner being such a big presence inside. So hitting shots is definitely important in order for us to be successful.

Q. Sydney and Tyra, could you talk about how you each match up with Sims and what you've taken from the other games that might work?

SYDNEY CARTER: Well, I've guarded her two of the -- I kind of match up against her a couple times the last -- the championship game and the Big 12 Tournament, but I guarded her in the first two games, and I just -- she's a great player. I can't take anything away from her.

She's really good on the offensive end and I think she does a really good job of drawing fouls.

And she just makes it tough for me to kind of switch my mindset from guarding a right-handed offensive player since she's left-handed, so I've got to switch my mindset.

But I'm looking to give my best defensive effort tomorrow and we'll see how that goes.

TYRA WHITE: I mean, I really don't match up with them, but I figure our point guards will be ready for it.

Q. Sydney Colson, Coach Mulkey has said, she told us last night that she wanted to see -- ideally she wanted to see both Baylor and A&M have a chance to make the Final Four this year, and that's why she was disheartened to see both teams placed in the same region. Could you comment on her feelings on that front and do you agree with that?

SYDNEY COLSON: Yeah. Just because I think that we are two of the top teams in the nation, and it is unfortunate we have to play one another. But there were good teams in other regions that have had to face up again. I think people were mostly mad because it's the fourth time we are having to play, and maybe people wanted to see both of us in the Final Four.

But I think whichever team comes out of this and ends up going to the Final Four, you know, it says a lot about the Big 12 for us to be the last two teams in the Big 12 men's and women's, just speaks a lot about our teams and the success that we have and how hard we worked.

Whoever goes, I know it's going to be a good representative for the Big 12. But it's unfortunate that we have to meet up at this point.

Q. Sydney Carter, what it means to play in your hometown, basically, to play this magnitude of a game in your hometown. If I could, Coach, follow-up to that is do you find players from their hometown do they press more, are they more relaxed?

SYDNEY CARTER: Well, it definitely feels great to play in my hometown, but just to have a game of this magnitude is -- it makes it even more exciting and it gives me more of a drive and more of a sense of urgency to want to be successful and come out here and be a part of history, because we've never made it to a Final Four.

So doing that in my own hometown and having everybody that I love around me and to witness history before their eyes, just as I would, it just feels great. And I feel honored to have this opportunity and hopefully I can make it happen.

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COACH BLAIR: To be able to come back to Dallas is a privilege. We blew it four years ago when we had that opportunity in LA to come back here and play North Carolina, and that would have really helped negate, I'm sure. But we didn't live up to it. We were the higher seed. We held serve. We did what we were supposed to.

I would love -- they've all got basketball coaches. I would love for my old basketball coach to come see me, because I was on the scout team most of the time behind Joey Dooley at Bryan Adams, where I was on the bench, a long bench, pretty good baseball. But it's just good to come back to this town. This is a sports town, this is a college town, a high school town, and a pro sports town.

And I was up late watching the Mavericks last night, and I get excited anytime I come into the city limits because this is my town and Sydney's town and Maryann Baker's town and Kristen Grant's town and -- who did I leave out? -- Skylar Collins' town. It's special.

But I really want the Aggies to come out. I saw a lot of green and gold in the stands, and that's to give a lot of credit to Baylor and their fans who bought the tickets before the tournament was even here.

Now we need the Aggies to realize we're here now and to come on out.

Q. Danielle, you mentioned that it was more a case of your shot selection against Baylor in the first three games. I was wondering, though, how do you balance that with the fact that obviously you're the leading scorer, a lot of the offense goes through you? How do you balance maybe shot selection and letting the game come to you versus the need to produce out there?

DANIELLE ADAMS: Just not rushing my shot. Just being patient and just looking to see what I have, and not just doing the turnaround fade-aways or anything like that, just being patient and let my game come to me and just getting a rhythm and a flow.

Q. Gary, speaking of Dallas sports history, this kind of reminds me of 1990 when Texas and Arkansas played in the regional final over at Union. I know you were at Stephen F. Austin, but do you remember particularly that game and do you see any parallels with this

even though they had only played for the third time and you guys are going for the fourth time?

COACH BLAIR: Did Arkansas win that one? Well, that's where I coached, so hopefully the same thing will happen. Nolan was great back then, and it's just part of it. The Big East does it all the time. And nobody says anything about it. And Charles Barkley calls it the "Big Least" and all that kind of stuff.

It's good basketball. That's what's good about the country now. Way back when you were talking about it, all Billy Packer could talk about was the ACC and Dick Vitale. There's basketball all across the country now. But isn't it surprising in the state of Texas, which is supposedly the "who" football state, we have the Mavericks, the Rockets and the Spurs, and we get national champions in women's basketball, and we're still waiting for the Aggies to get there and junior college. It's the best high school basketball in the state, and we're still writing about spring football.

Okay. This is basketball time, and the last two teams that are standing are women, whether we like it or not. Embrace it. Write about us. These are the stories right here. And you've got some great stories here in the press conference right after this. You've got great stories there. But it's not all about Brittney Griner and Danielle Adams, it's about A&M and Baylor, and the other young ladies that are on the team.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies. Coach wanted to make a comment or two.

COACH BLAIR: I'm glad you're here. I know it's around lunchtime and a good sportswriter knows when there's a buffet.

This is big time. Last night Kim and I had the opportunity to be on the Dale Hansen Show. That was very similar to when in 1977 I won state championship and Brad Sham asked me to come on his radio show. Never knew him. That was the best of the best for a young high school coach.

It was special. But you've got something special here. We had almost 10,000 here last night. Great crowd. I hope they have to remove the black curtains that go around. And I hope we can sell more seats. But we need your help, okay? I know that's not your job. But we need the stories, we need the interviews, and we need you to write about the game itself.

A lot of the sportscasters all across the country, the Kornheisers and the Jim Romes and everybody like that, they knock women's

basketball. Embrace women's basketball for what it is.

We're not trying to be the men's game; we're trying to be the best women's game we can be. If some of you all want to see a great women's player, look back to your left with the white shirt back there. That's Ann Drysdale, and she was one of the best of the best. And that's what this sport is all about.

We stand alone. We do not need to ride the piggybacks of the men's game. We are what we are, and we like it and we're growing. Questions?

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. Gary, from a coaching standpoint, we always hear how hard it is to beat a good team three times in one season. From that perspective would you rather be the team trying to beat a team for the fourth time or being that 0-3 team trying to break through for the fourth time?

COACH BLAIR: Shoot, what would some of the big-timers do with that question? I can just hear Bobby Knight. But I like my chances, because I think Robert said a while ago: We struggled against Baylor for three times. We didn't struggle against Baylor, we had three damn good ballgames ... three pointers.

Baylor is able to extend their defense a little bit further because of Griner in the middle can take care of home base. And then all of a sudden they can extend and play pressure defense and Destiny Williams does a very good job on Danielle.

We have to move without the ball. We just saw Green Bay shoot 28 of them last night, made a good percentage. I'm not sure what it was. But they did a very good job of ball movement and player movement and getting the ball inside and then kicking it back outside. Maybe we need to do a little bit more of that ourselves. Hopefully we can pick up a little bit of chapter from what Green Bay did, but I thought they had a very good game plan, very good sets.

They did everything right in the game except for about that five- to eight-minute stretch in the middle of the second half when Baylor looked like the best team that's ever played the game. They looked that good during that five and eight-minute stretch.

Q. Obviously Danielle, you look at her

numbers, she's had some of the tough scoring games against Baylor when you look at it. Talk about what you can see in her. What's happened in these games against her? Or is it just something maybe she's pressing, and what do you expect out of her tomorrow night?

COACH BLAIR: I think a lot of it is Danielle has rushed her shots, even though she's 90 percent of the time she's been guarded by Destiny Williams or Brooklyn Pope. But Griner is nearby.

Just like in the men's game, when you would have Chamberlain or Alcindor over, they would influence the game, because in the corner of your eye you see them coming. And sometimes that's good. When she comes, that takes her away from the defensive boards. So that's where our other kids have got to do a better job of getting in.

Danielle needs to have a little bit of everything to just not settle for the 3-point shot. Okay. She was 2 out of 9. That's her worst percentage, I think, of the year so far. Go inside. Go inside the lane, get yourself to the free-throw line where Griner can't do a damn thing about that.

So if we can get the calls every now and then. But at the same time be selective on your shots. We've got other scoring options. Okay. Just like the same way with -- Griner had 40 last night, and the others they did not need as much. Sims dropped in 14 or 16 or something like that. But on certain nights you're going to need balanced scoring.

To win we have to have balanced scoring. We do not need Danielle Adams to shoot 28 times against Baylor. We need Elonu to light it up just like the kid in the second half did and knocked down a couple of 3s with some nice screens inside to get her some open looks.

We need to have that balance as well, but remember defense creates offense for us. And if we can force some turnovers and get into transition, I like our choices, either shooting 3s off the breaks or trying to jam it in and draw fouls or knock down easy shots.

But our defense has got to force turnovers. Baylor has no fear. They will send four to the boards because Odyssey can get back and defend pretty well on her own. So they're very good offensive rebounding team as well.

Q. Gary, talk about the game last night with Green Bay, and where they were successful. And you talked about maybe bringing that in. Are you going to tweak

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things? Will you take something? Or is it just too late to just add so much, it's about execution?

COACH BLAIR: A lot of it is execution. It's passion, it's how you start a ballgame. With Baylor, we started off 12-0 in the Big 12 championship game. Against Baylor in the second game in Waco, I think that's the one we should have won. We were up 11 in the second half.

And it's a game of streaks. Sometimes you just have to pat Griner on the back and say nice shot. Because there isn't anything you can do about it. You just try to keep her from her spots. You're not worried about the dunk or anything like that. You're worried about her spots, and when she jumps in to you and draws the foul, when you're holding your hands up she just forces her way in to you.

Sometimes it's called, sometimes it's not called. And so you try to limit that side. That's her favorite shot over there. And what you hope that she shoots a lot of skyhooks and fade-aways and everything like that. And if she makes one, that's two, but don't give her the and-one.

We will tweak up a few things. Our inbound plays last night were very good. We threw in a lot of lob plays. Obviously those lob plays will not work against Baylor. We'll tweak a little, but you'll be the last to know, though.

Q. Coach, obviously like you mentioned, three great games with Baylor already. And you guys have come up just a little short in each game. Is there a psychological hurdle you have to clear as well when you've played a team that close and not won?

COACH BLAIR: I hope when we get to 37 minutes it's a tie ballgame again and it's just like Aggies do in football when we go to the fourth quarter, they hold up four fingers. We need to hold up three fingers and say play the last three minutes like you played the last 37. Don't play not to lose, play to win. Make plays down the stretch. Okay? Make plays down the stretch. That's what separates the teams that are going to the Final Four and the teams that play the what-if game.

I don't want to be on the third bar stool at the Wright at Indianapolis playing what if I had done this, that, that call or whatever. Done that too many times.

And the team that gets there and the team

that doesn't get there, they should not use this region as an example. Whoever gets there has earned it. Whoever doesn't get there, you had your chance. And we're not here to get to the Final Four, we're here to win the Final Four. But first you have to get there.

And whoever gets there, I promise you has got a great chance of winning. Look at what's left. You've got eight great teams that are left. Don't be surprised about Gonzaga now. They're another Wisconsin Green Bay but with an even better point guard out there with Vandersloot. Don't give up on them against Stanford.

Q. Wanted to ask, you guys have played great in this tournament, won by 40, 20, 40 in your first three games. And I wanted to ask, do you think that's because of the disappointment that you felt after the last Baylor game, or do you feel like your players just feel like it's time to play?

COACH BLAIR: We're just playing well. There's no way I could have drawn up those numbers that we won by. At halftime yesterday I was the most flabbergasted guy around. I could not believe. That's why I was coaching so hard on the last two possessions we had trying to get it over the hump.

And I still remember that television commercial that they had when the football player came in in the half and he's just berating his team and the guy looks up and he says, Coach, we're up by three touchdowns. See, when you're finished, you're finished as a team when you think that that happens.

You've got to continue. That first five minutes we opened up, they hit a basket, we hit two back-to-back 3s. We ran two set plays to perfection. That's teaching and that's coaching, and that's players playing. And that's what we have to do.

We're here to win the whole thing. Baylor's in our way right now, we're in Baylor's way. You're going to have a great game tomorrow night. And you're going to be -- it's going to be fun. It's going to be entertaining. And it will be the best basketball game, women's game that's ever been played in Dallas, the best game -- go back in your history book -- that's ever been played in the city of Dallas or maybe in Texas.

But it's going to be something special.

Q. I was hoping you could compare the last time you were in the Elite Eight playing,

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also playing the nation's top player, and does it help any having played Griner before?

COACH BLAIR: I think it helps a lot. I felt sorry for Green Bay. Never seen her before. You could only see it on film. And until you experience it, until you walk up with her, shake hands with her after the ballgame, and to see her size and be able to just see the warm-ups she does out there, it's an experience that you have to play yourself.

We've gone five times against them now. I've lost all five. But I'm keep knocking on that door and I'm getting closer and closer. And if it doesn't happen this year, it's going to happen next year and we're going to keep going.

Kim is going to be very, very good the next two to three years, and so are we. So this is what it's all about right now playing at the highest level. I'm proud of my conference. I'm proud of Baylor, I'm proud of A&M for making this now sort of the mecca of women's basketball right here in the state of Texas.

Q. How big a role do you think 3-pointers might play? It seems like in a tournament game, particularly with so much on the line, they're kind of the -- that shot can be the dagger either way, and both teams have players that are pretty proficient at that. Do you think that can end up being a factor that might be getting overlooked right now?

COACH BLAIR: Listening to Andy's comments last night. He said that's the furthest thing from his mind is hitting the 3-pointers and Colson hitting them.

I don't think he's watched Colson enough. I mean, she's got no fear. I mean, she's like Odyssey for Baylor, the kid's a freshman, no fear. That's the way Colson -- sometimes my hair gets grayer on some of her decision making, but when it goes up on ball reversal I feel very good about our chances, because when she makes one, it just excites the floor. Everybody gets up.

Danielle hits a trailing 3 or Carter comes off a flare screen or something, or Tyra can create her own shot, whether she's guarded or not, but when Colson hits one, knowing now you've got to stop her penetration. If you come out on her, she's going by you. That's the strength of her game. And I think 3s will come into play.

Who we've got to stop is not Griner as much as stopping Odyssey and Melissa Jones from making all the hustle plays, which she does

better than any player in America, is Melissa Jones making the little glue plays that you have to have when you form a team of five players, not just one player.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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