



CINCINNATI BEARCATS

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CONTACT: Nate Jarrett, Assistant Director, SBE and Communications (jarretne@ucmail.uc.edu)

Cincinnati Women's Basketball Big 12 Tipoff

Head Coach Katrina Merriweather and Players | T-Mobile Center | Kansas City, Mo.

Head Coach Katrina Merriweather

On besides her playing career, why Cincinnati?

"Honestly, it is the people, my past teammates and the coaches, past and present. I really loved Memphis, the city, and the basketball part of it all, but I truly believe the only reason to get me to leave Memphis would be my alma mater. I can't discount the people in the equation, the facilities and all the resources are high level, but that wouldn't have been enough. It is the belief in the administration, the way that they want to put student-athletes first despite the high level of competition, the community and how they embrace sports, and all of the opportunities for these student-athletes. The people would have to be the main reason for why I chose Cincinnati. It was a difficult decision, most people wouldn't believe it would be difficult as it is my alma mater, but the only thing I could think of that would be worse throughout my career than not having the opportunity to work at Cincinnati, would be to work at Cincinnati and not be successful."

On her toughest challenge at Cincinnati

"I think our toughest challenge will be confidence. I think when you have young women, who haven't experienced the success they wish they had individually or collectively, it is getting them to believe in themselves, what they can do together, and believing in us as a staff. We have to be aware that opening up and embracing us is an obstacle for them. If we can take steps forward and build confidence in each other then we will be on to something. "

On what her style of coaching is

"My style is a combination of pushing you to be the best that you can and being there to support you when you feel like you aren't. Whether that's on the floor, in the classroom, or personally. I want to do everything I can to be supportive. We are going to teach, grow and develop. We would be missing out if we did not understand all of the challenges and obstacles that this generation has that I didn't have when I played, and the majority of my staff didn't have when they played. On the court, we will rebound the ball and play with effort on both ends in order to represent this city and program proudly with the way we attack each day."

On her message to the seven returners when she arrived

"The important thing to say is that we are there for them. That's not cliché, we don't say it because it's the right thing to say or the best thing to say, but they allow us to prove that to them. That is the most important thing. No matter how good my staff is or how good of coaches we believe we are if the current team is not

bought in, we are not the coaching staff they signed up to play for. We are invested in them, and we will do whatever we can so they will have the best student-athlete experience.”

On how practice is going and what fans can expect to see

“Practice has been going very well, we have had the five best practices in the beginning that we can recall having together as a staff. It has so much to do with these athletes and the women you see on the stage and their teammates. They show up with an attitude or gratitude, knowing that we get an opportunity to practice, we don’t have to practice. The leadership must be going on in the locker room and back at their apartments where they live. Our conversations that say let’s show up again tomorrow. Even through the adversity when practices weren’t as great as the first five, they were able to turn it around and pick it back up. We are seeing growth, commitment, and leadership in this group. Going into the Big 12, we will look different come December compared to games in November. We are in it for the marathon and the long run. I am excited to have growth throughout the season and to be playing our best basketball come March.”

On the leaders of this team, players like Jillian Hayes, Mya Jackson and Braylyn Milton

“We couldn’t be in the position that we are in where we are as confident as we are without the leadership of those three in particular. Kudos to the entire seven returners for stepping up and making sure that they are being an example for these newcomers. Our newcomers and our freshmen are all extremely coachable and they are able to govern and have conversations for us when they are in the locker room as well as in their apartments. I think without that buy-in and without them being able to see the importance of everybody being on the same page, we would be very far behind. Fortunately, that’s not the case.”

On her thoughts about the offseason to this point ahead of the season opener against No. 17 Louisville

“It has been a lot of hard work; our strength and conditioning coach Hong Tran has done an amazing job with this team. I think our kids are in shape, they are strong and ready to compete. We are looking forward to the season and home opener against Louisville. Obviously, Louisville is very stiff competition as they are the only team in the country that have been in the Elite Eight over the past five years. What Jeff Walz and his staff are able to do every year is amazing and it is going to be a great measuring stick for all of the work that we have done up until then and to see what else we need to get better at and to see what we are doing well.”

On Jillian Hayes decision to stay at Cincinnati despite the coaching change

“It means everything. No matter what we say, this feels different. I don’t believe that this is more pressure, but it is a different type of pressure. Her and I can connect and relate on that point and the way that she wants to make her city and this university proud and I feel the same way. Our connection is without a doubt that we are going to put our best foot forward as we know that this is bigger than us individually, it is even bigger than our team. It is the statement that we are making for the city.”

Jillian Hayes

On her expectations going into the season

“I am just excited for this year and this opportunity. Whatever this coaching staff and team needs from me, I am ready to give. I worked a lot on expanding my game and adding more to it to change the scouting report.”

On what she has learned from Coach Merriweather

“I have learned a lot from her so far. She played at Cincinnati, so she’s been in our shoes before. She knows what it is like to win here. I am just grateful to be learning from her. She has bled that red and black, she has

put Cincinnati across her chest. That brings a whole other level of passion and purpose to everything you do, and you can see that through the way she coaches.”

On how it is playing for her hometown team

“Growing up I was able to watch Cincinnati basketball and see all the tenacity and grittiness that came with the so-called “Nasti Nati”. I wear Cincinnati across my chest very proudly, after the games getting a hug from my mom and dad and little brothers means the world to me.

On what made her want to stay at Cincinnati

“Katrina [Merriweather] and her staff are incredible coaches, but also people and that really attracted me to stay. Cincinnati is my home first and obviously, I wanted to stay in the city. Hearing her talk and her passion for the game, her being in our shoes before and wearing the same uniform really made me want to stay.”

Braylyn Milton

On the Big 12 Tipoff Event

“It is just a great opportunity to represent Cincinnati on this stage. I feel appreciated and support for all the hard work we have put in. I thank the Big 12 for that and everyone here for coming out and support women’s sports, we love it.”

On her relationship with the coaching staff

“They are so caring, the whole coaching staff. Not only do they make us better players, but they make us better people off the court as well. Going into the season, we will be prepared for everyone in front of us, and outside of basketball, they have us prepared for life as well, so I am really appreciative of this coaching staff.”

Mya Jackson

On her transition and the staff

“For me, the transition has been really smooth, I had made a commitment to stay here for two years, so when you transition with a coaching staff, you never know. I came in and Coach Katrina [Merriweather] is very team orientated as well as family orientated. She really cares about us more as people than she does as players. Her leadership, her work ethic, and her determination reminded me of myself as well, so there was no better choice than to stay here at Cincinnati.”

On the Big 12 Tipoff Event

“My biggest takeaway is that the support of the Big 12 and women’s basketball is huge, you don’t see that in every single conference, just to have that exposure and support from everyone around the conference, around Cincinnati is an honor. I am just excited to be here.”