



## 2014 NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Stanford Regional · Stanford vs. Penn State

Maples Pavilion · Stanford, Calif.

Saturday, March 31, 2014

### PRESS CONFERENCE QUOTES – Stanford

#### **Tara VanDerveer, Stanford Head Coach:**

*(After her introduction)*

And none of that will help us tomorrow.

We're really excited to be playing in the regional, wherever it would be, but we're excited to be playing here. Our team has been working really hard. I think it's a fabulous regional, with the talent and the teams that are here. We're really excited to be included in it.

*(On the matchup against a team Stanford hasn't often played)*

Basically, you have access to every one of their games and they have access to all of our games too, but I feel like I know them very well. I know Coquese and her staff personally. I've met with her in the offseason and we've talked about 'x' and 'o' things. I think she does a great job.

Their team is a prototypical Big Ten team in a way. They're big, they're physical, they run the floor, they've got outstanding guard play with Taylor and Lucas. We're going to have our hands full. We're going to have to play very well.

*(On the health of her team)*

It's about as it could be. Everyone is available. Some players don't do every single thing in practice, just because it can aggravate a situation. We've had a really good week this week. We've practiced very hard, and everyone is excited to play. There's no one that's not available for the game.

*(On her relationship with Coquese)*

I'm from western New York and I have a summer house in Chautauqua, N.Y. Penn State's not that far, maybe 3-4 hours away. Because we've run triangle for a long time, Coquese contacted me and she and her assistant drove up and were there basically all day. We watched a lot of video and talked about running the offense, what we like, and ways to improve things. I just think she's a great young coach, an up-and-coming coach. She's had terrific success as a player and as a coach, and it was really fun to get to know her and have a chance to visit and talk with her.

Obviously, we never dreamed that last summer ... actually, it's been the last two summers that they've come up. I don't think it gives us or them an advantage. It's just a situation where it will be fun to see her. I really admire her and respect the job that she's doing.

*(On running the triangle offense)*

Way back in 1995 or 1996, I watched the Chicago Bulls and the Lakers running triangle, and they were very successful with it. Connecticut ran a version of it early. But Colorado was the team that when we scouted them, and I believe it was in 2002, we really couldn't defend it.

Our team had so much fun in practice running it, and it was something that we knew who was coming – Brooke Smith was coming and Jayne Appel. Why don't we try it? When you have a really big dominant post player, it looks really good. We run variations of it now, we run different things with it, but our team is really comfortable getting into that alignment. It helps them with the shot clock. It's not a motion offense, but it's a read-the-defense offense. It's really helpful for our team to help them out on the floor get organized. Our guys' team ran some triangle and I think it was really helpful for them too.

It was exciting to meet Tex Winter and, obviously, watching the Lakers and Phil Jackson. But the person with the Lakers who helped me the most was Jim Cleamons. We sat down and talked about it and went over it, and he was really funny. This was when he was with Chicago, he went, "Well, Scotty, he needs to do this ..." I'm like, "Scotty Pippen?" He's like, "Yeah." Then he says, "Michael needs to do this ..." "You mean, Michael Jordan?" So, it was really fun to just listen, but Jim Cleamons helped me the most.

*(On playing a team with four seniors)*

You could look at the other side of it and Kentucky won with five freshmen starters. It's all about how good they are. A senior next to your name doesn't mean doodle unless you really are a good player. We have four seniors too, though Toni (Kokenis) obviously doesn't play, but you like to think your seniors are maybe more invested, they've gone through things, every summer and offseason. I think we have great senior leadership on our team with Chiney (Ogwumike) and Mikaela (Ruef) and Sara James, but that's not going to be enough. Just because a team has a bunch of seniors, whether it's our team or their team, you have to get the job done. We're excited about some of our freshmen. Lili (Thompson) coming in, she's as important as our seniors. I'm sure that Coquese has younger players that she's counting on too.

*(After coaching Dawn Staley on the national team, did you envision her as a coach?)*

Dawn could be whatever she wanted to be. She is a fighter, a warrior, a winner. To see her in women's basketball and coaching is fabulous. I'll be happy to watch them play tomorrow, because, obviously, we're not playing them. I cheered for her and her staff, because I know Nikki McCray also really well. She could do whatever she put her mind to. She is that determined. She's like a pit bull coach. She's really special. It's fun to be seeing her have such great success as a coach having known her as a player.

*(Do you still feel an intense bond with her?)*

I think we probably feel it more now than then. Then, it was a little of this [motions butting heads]. Dawn, her strength is she is tenacious, she's relentless. As a player she was a fabulous, fabulous point guard, and a captain, carrying our flag. I'm so proud of her. If we end up playing them, which would be great, or whoever we play, I'm ready to battle her too. I have good experience with that.

*(Does the team reflect her?)*

I definitely do. They're fighters, and she's a fighter

*(For those of us who don't get to see Chiney very often, can you just talk about what makes her such a special player? )*

The first thing about Chiney is she's a team player. She's all about our team being successful. She's a tremendous leader. She's really steady. Even with all the people that foul her, that double her, she's really a very poised player. I think that's her strength. She's strong. She's a warrior. She really puts her team on her back. She's someone who's so dependable. She works hard every day. I've never had to have a sitdown with Chiney and say, we need you to do this. I can only coach her four more games and I'm going to enjoy every one of them as much as I can.

*(Can you describe the season Mikaela Ruff has had and how she has caused you gray hairs?)*

Mikaela has had a fabulous senior year. She went in some respects from the outhouse to the penthouse on the basketball court. When she started out she really didn't understand the work ethic it took to be successful at this level. And once she bought into that, she's done very well. There are some times where there's this side of her where you know she's a very intelligent person, she's a very intelligent player, and will do a complete knucklehead thing and you'll just ask why? I don't understand why she'll do that. I guess some of it is just she really cares about her team and she really wants to win, but sometimes what she thinks should be done is not what I think should be done. I just tell her, "You need to do it my way, this is what I need you to do." Whether it's, you can't throw the ball the away, she'll do somethings that I'm like, "Nope, that won't work here."

One thing that I really love about coaching Mikaela is, as much as any player that I've ever coached, I am so honest with her, and point blank direct with her. I don't sugarcoat anything. She gets my wrath sometimes, but she doesn't take it personally, and I like that.

*(Are you comfortable more with how you finish or are you concerned with how you start, especially as you get deeper into the tournament?)*

I always like being ahead, so I don't like it when we start and we're behind. Earlier in the year, I felt like we were jumping on people and then relaxing, so it's almost like a pendulum that swung, and now there are some games where we haven't come out really putting the hammer down early. And, in the NCAA tournament, you've got to come out ready to play. Maybe some of it is adjusting to certain things, but we have to come out ready to go. We don't want any of the Penn State players to get in a comfort zone and do what they like to do. We have to come out ready. It's not something I'm overly concerned about, but we'll go to our bench quickly.

### **Stanford players: Chiney Ogwumike, Mikaela Ruff, Sara James**

*(Chiney, can talk about what you know about Penn State what will be important in terms of being successful tomorrow?)*

**Ogwumike:** It's just bringing aggressiveness from the tip. Obviously they have the size advantage but we want to have the heart, the will advantage. Being aggressive, everyone rebounding, everyone being aggressive to the rim. They're a very senior-heavy team. They get a lot of their scoring production from their wings. And Maggie Lucas is very talented. She's like the headline for that team. It will give us a good challenge, a good opportunity to show how hard we've worked defensively this year and assert ourselves in this game.

*(Chiney, can you talk about Mikaela and her contribution this year? What is it like playing with her, and is there anything about her that you don't think people are really aware of?)*

**Ogwumike:** Overall, in the women's game you miss people like Mikaela Ruef — the power that they bring to the team. And also Sara James, someone's who's been through here for four years and has asserted herself as an instrumental component to success for our team.

Mikaela, not only is she a fantastic passer— if she had no worries about turnovers, she would be doing behind-the-head stuff that would be SportsCenter worthy. But I think she's really refined her game. She has a great shot. I have so much confidence in her shot. It's just that she is so unselfish that she wants to pass it more than shoot it, which we're trying to break the mold for her and tell her to shoot the ball.

Honestly, she's just a joy to play with because she makes me look good. She puts me in a position where I don't even have to worry about making a move; I just have to go up with it. And also, she's the anchor to our offense. Amber (Orrange) sets the tempo, pushing the pace, but Mikaela is the one who sets the screens and creates in ways that are pretty unconventional for basketball. So if you just watch her, it's setting up a screen. It's the angle at which she sets the screen that is not the usual angle. It's the dribble-handoff she does that creates a shot. Or, it's like the fine touch shot with her off hand that leads me to the basket. That's Mikaela.

I have to talk about Sara James. She's the most mentally tough competitor I've ever witnessed at Stanford. From Day One, we'd go at it in pickup, coming in freshman year. And she comes in and she's starting for us again, which is huge. It's just something about when she walks on the court you feel more confident. Those are my teammates, and that's why I'm super excited to play tomorrow, if you can't tell.

*(Mikaela, how important is it, the deeper you get into the tournament, to start out well?)*

**Ruef:** You're right in that we have not started well the past couple of games and I think that was a little bit with rust and a little bit with putting a lot of pressure on ourselves, like, "Oh, we want to start out well and that's all we're thinking about. Just don't mess up from the start." And then, of course, the more focus you put on it the harder it is to come out and start well. One of our focuses for this game is to relax at the start. We're a great team and once we did settle down and get into the game then everything started going our way. We're going to try to do that from the start tomorrow, and, as we go deeper into the tournament, that's the goal, to just be relaxed at the beginning and have fun and know that we're a great team and we can play really well if we play relaxed and have fun.

*(Chiney, can you talk a little more about Sara and more specifically her contributions?)*

**Ogwumike:** What game was it, UCLA? I was having one of my worst first halves, and I was struggling, it was tough, and right when we needed to be uplifted, Sara James hits back-to-back 3's to start the second half. It's one of those things that only Sara James ... not like only she can do it, but it means so much to her that she will do it, because she knows our team needs it. She puts her body on the line, she puts our team first and she's one of those players that goes through a program and you're like, "Without her, we would be a different team," just because of the way that she exudes confidence.

She's fearless and she's tough. I would not like to get into a jump ball with her, tie up, because I'd probably lose. She means a lot to our team. It's one of those intangible things that gets missed in stats, but it's huge when it comes down to winning. Diving on the floor. She has this great picture of her face-planting on the court. It's those kinds of things where we're like, "Dang SEJ, you did it." And it got us going.

*(Chiney, Maggie Lucas has been a focus of a lot of defenses that we've seen this year. Can you talk about what it's like for you to have that focus on you throughout this season?)*

**Ogwumike:** Teams that try to stop post presence tend to go to zone, and they also risk outside shooting. That's one area our team has really tried to improve on. We have confident shooters, it's just a matter of, We just have to knock down those shots. I have full faith in our team.

Maggie is used to it, but it's way different for a post than a guard. She can bring the ball up, and I don't know if Coach would want me bringing the ball up that much. So I have to play without the ball in my hands a lot, and that's why I have the most unselfish teammates that find me even though I might be doubled or tripled or something like that.

Also, it's a great opportunity. If there's a zone, if there's a double team, whatever it is. Lili (Thompson) is looking for her shot, Amber (Orrange) is creating off the dribble, and the more they look for themselves, the better team we will be. And that's one thing I've been saying. We need more weapons. And I think we have a lot of weapons. I think it's just time for us to reveal them.

*(Sarah James, Taylor had career highs in points and rebounds for the guards. What do you have to do to contain her and make sure she doesn't go off like that?)*

**James:** Definitely focusing on stopping transition points. We're focusing on getting back and stopping the transition. Playing our game mostly, but keeping in mind how they play offensively. For any of the players, a lot of the coaches don't like the idea that we are playing the regionals on campus sites, but you guys get to play at home. Do you think you guys have an advantage or is this an opportunity?

**Ogwumike:** I don't know how political I can be, but I think there's a big difference between the men's and women's games. Men's game fans will actively travel. They have a bigger number of fans, not a more dedicated fan base, they just have more numbers. But you see homecourt teams have lost and there have been upsets on homecourts, So, it's not like its giving a significant advantage. Granted, on the other side of it, we are able to play at Maples and were really excited, but we earned that by going to the first and second rounds to a place like Iowa, the home of Taylor Greenfield, but it was unique.

Thinking about the positives, women's basketball will be on a big stage. You'll see dedicated fans, and that's what the world needs to see for the positive coming out. I know that Stanford will be sold out. Other places will be sold out and, honestly, it's the 5v5 playing the game not the crowd coming out and playing the game. It's good for our sport that we have support and dedicated fan bases.

*(Is it a compliment to Tara that coaches on other teams have sought her out to talk about basketball?)*

**Ogwumike:** We know how great Tara is. We witness that every day and then all the sudden we are reminded, "Oh my, she's big time. She's going to talk to Dawn Staley's team and Coquese Washington's. I think she's awesome too, but at the same time Coach Tara is very competitive. She's had great relationships with these people, but we want to beat them at the end of the day. That's our number one focus and priority. Maybe after the game she can do what she wants, but I know all the way up to the game were going to be focused.