

Tricia Cullop Presser Q&A Transcriptions – 4.11.2024

On building up a fan-base in Miami, particularly as the women's basketball game is continuing to gain popularity across the nation:

“You know, when I was at Evansville, there were about 300 fans in the stands when I started, and when I left there were 1500. That doesn't seem like a lot until I tell you there's only 2400 students in the whole school. When I went to Toledo there were only 1500 fans in the stands, and the program had been through five losing seasons. But we finished up with 4500 fans in the building. It doesn't happen overnight; I don't expect to do it in a blink of an eye and just tell you it happened. We're going to have to roll up our sleeves and we're going to have to begin get out in the community and establish relationships. People don't come because there's a billboard or there's an advertisement; they come because something in their heart draws them to come to the game. So, my job is to get our kids out. I'm not going to wear them out and make their academics suffer, but there's a lot of opportunities in the summertime when they're here to get them out to meet with different groups, different basketball clubs, go to schools and read. We want to make sure that people know that if we want them to care about our program, that we care about this community too, and we're willing to roll up our sleeves. When I when I took the job at Toledo, I never turned down a speaking engagement and it wasn't because I enjoyed speaking, it was because I knew that if people could learn more about our program that we could draw them in. And, little by little, whether it was a group of 12 or a group of 5000 that I spoke to, we got them there. And I think once we got them in a game, we got them hooked. But it's all on us too when they come, they need to be inspired. It needs to be a style of basketball that they enjoy, so we're going to do our part, and obviously winning helps, but so does building relationships and that's what we've got to roll up our sleeves and do.”

On her decision why this was the right time to make the move from Toledo, and what appealed to her about Miami:

“Well first I'll say what kept me there: unbelievable people and I had the best mid-major job in the country. I could be picky, and I didn't want to just go

anywhere; I wanted to go where there were unbelievable people in an administration that I was set up for success. This was an unbelievable situation because Katie and her staff did such a great job, so the coverage is not fair. It's rare that you could come into a program that has all these things and it didn't go through a losing season to have to make the change. When the job came open, I was like that is such an incredible opportunity. And then when I came to visit, I was blown away when I got to see campus and when I got to learn about what an amazing education it is and meet all the integral people that are involved with the program. So, for me, it was an opportunity to be successful and be supported and be at a place where they actually care about women's basketball. They don't just say they care, and they want this program to be successful I want to be supported in that way, and that's why it was the right time. Also, who can't sell this? I mean anytime I call recruits all I have to do is walk outside and FaceTime or send them a couple pictures. I mean this is an unbelievable place. College kids don't have much free time and when they do, they can go to the beach, they can go to a soccer game or a professional baseball game or professional basketball game. We have so many things that our fingertips here that their college experience can be unbelievable.”

On the impact of Coach Lin Dunn, and how she factored her into the decision to come to Miami:

“Well, it is a full circle moment. I saw her at the Final Four... I will tell you; she did an unbelievable job here and she taught me an awful lot in my career. I wouldn't be standing here in front of you if I didn't play for her, so I really appreciate the doors that she opened for me. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to play for her. A lot of us went into coaching that played for her because she inspired us, so I'm grateful for that. I'm still learning from her, and I hope we make her proud.”

On what her questions were for AD Dan Radakovich in the process:

“I think the main thing for me was just about the team, you know. I wanted to know what was going on and what the state was. I wanted to know if there any

problems academically or if there was anything I needed to worry about that I was going to walk into that was kind of blindsided by. And I was thrilled to find out that it was a great situation, so honestly there was nothing that really caught me off guard. More, quite the opposite, I was more and more impressed the more I found.”

On returning players, the transfer portal, recruiting, and players from last year’s roster staying with the program:

“That’s a great question, and first let me say this: when a coach of Katie’s caliber and stature retires, after all the relationships that she’s built, you can only imagine how young people feel. Think back to how you felt when you were that age, how you would have felt in their situation, having those relationships that were built over a long time. And I’m trying to do a really fast get to know you, but it takes time. So, we’re still working on it. I do feel that we’ve got a good chance to keep a lot of the kids that are here, but it’s an ongoing process. My hope is that they stay, because I’ve told all of them, I really want to coach them. I think there’s a chance that there’s one that’s in the portal now that we can maybe get her back. I told her today that I absolutely love her game and I love how she plays, and I would love to have her here. I think she’s a difference maker, but I also want people to be two feet in. It’s awfully hard to build what we’re trying to build if you’re not two feet in, but I’m also trying to give them some space knowing that they just went through: a gut-wrenching heartache moment in losing somebody that they really cared about, even though I know she’s to be on campus and still help them in any way she can. So, you know, I’m not giving you a definitive answer because it’s kind of in process, but I will tell you that’s why after I got back from the Final Four, I packed two bags and I’m here till school ends. I could care less about the housing situation the hotel is great, because building relationships with these players matters more to me than anything. And starting to get a grasp on recruiting, we’ve got visits set up already, because I want to get kids here and I want to fill in the holes that we have regardless. I really think this is a special program and there’s a lot of kids who are very interested to be here. And that’s been the fun part of being on the phone and hearing the joy and excitement in their voice. I can’t wait for the first official visit to have the opportunity to show all those things that we have.”

On what her working relationship with Katie Meier will be, and how she anticipates her involvement with the program:

“Well, I'll say this, when I took over at Toledo I knew Mark Ehlen, the coach before, and he and I went to dinner for two hours and I said tell me everything you think I need to know. And he gave me the Cliff notes to help me not step in any potholes, to meet the people that I needed to meet, to avoid things that were going to take a lot of time, and that we're going to waste my time. I told Katie, when the dust settles, I want to do the same thing with her. I've also reached out to her two or three times just about things that I need to know and even just to say man you did such an amazing job here. I want her to know that we will only ever speak extremely highly of her and her program because how can you not? I mean she did a tremendous job and history books will show forever what an amazing job she did here. So, I would be crazy not to lean on her and try to gain as much advice as I can, but also her staff. And that's why I kept them on, because you know there's a lot to have. I jokingly call our staff the Brady Bunch because it really is two families that are combined. I do think it's the best of both worlds and I'm so glad that they're here, but to answer your question, I will lean on Katie from time to time. She retired for a reason, I don't want to be full time asking her, but I will definitely reach out to her when we need it.”

On the new-look ACC, and how she feels about the longer travel schedule:

“I think the nice thing to know is that when we go out to California, we'll play both teams and come home. If we had to do it in separate trips it might be a little bit more daunting but in non-conference, you're doing that anyways. I think the big goal for our team is not to make too much of it and understanding that's the hand we're dealt. So, we need to roll our sleeves up and go to work. It's a daunting schedule anyway because it's the ACC. I want our kids just to get ready for the challenge and that starts now. It started this morning with lifting and workouts, you know, we get better now, and I don't want them to waste a second.”

On her philosophy when it comes to recruiting and what she is looking for in potential recruits:

“There are three things that I look for with high school kids and any recruit and it starts with the first thing that catches anyone’s eyes: athleticism. Can they help us win our conference and can they help us go deep in the tournament? If they can do that, that's just the first thing, but that's not the only thing. And it's not the most important thing, that just might be the thing that catches your eye when you walk through the gym. The second thing is attitude; I watch the little things and so does my staff. We write down stuff like how do they treat their family, how do they treat their coach, how do they act when the game's not going well, when they missed five shots in a row are they still good teammate? Because we don't build great culture, which we're trying to build, without having kids that really care about each other and care more about their own individual stats. They need to care about the team and win together. The third thing is academically can they be successful. This is a great school, and I don't want to set a kid up for failure. So, if they hit those three things then and we need their position then we're going to go after him with everything we have. But I think it's important to note too if we fit what they want. I don't want to waste time with a kid that's not interested in coming to Florida. I mean who wouldn’t want to come down here, but you know, if that's the case we're not going to waste time.”

On the biggest adjustment she needs to prepare for coming from Toledo, OH to Miami, FL:

“The housing market. Just joking. That was eye-catching. No, in all honesty, and I told this to Dan when he asked me the same question, basketball is basketball. If it wasn't, Felicia Legette-Jack, who came from our league, wouldn’t have been ACC Coach of the Year this year. More than half of the coaches in this league came from my level. Basketball is basketball. The difference is what you have to sell and the caliber battle that you can sign. So now, I have more to sell and that's why we retained some people. They know the recruits that were being recruited there's a relationship established there. We don't have to start from ground zero, but I think the important thing now is making sure that they know that we're here, they have our contact

information, and that we'll aggressively go after them. Other than that, I'm very excited. We played a tough schedule, I'm not scared. We scrimmaged Notre Dame, we played Duke, we have played Virginia in the past. We were never scared to play anyone, so we're not going to be scared of anyone now. We just need to get ready because we're not just ready to play them, we want to beat them.”