

NCAA Women's 1st and 2nd Rounds: Stanford

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Stanford, California



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Gonzaga Bulldogs

LISA FORTIER: Good afternoon. You know, our team is excited to be here. We have had a great season. I think we've overcome adversity early. We've overcome things throughout the conference slate. We've proven that we're capable of playing a variety of different styles and being successful doing a variety of different things. I don't know if our team has distinguished itself as an offensive team or a defensive team, but we've shown some great strengths in both of those areas, and hopefully tomorrow we'll put forward a great effort, and be able to do one or the other or hopefully both very well against Stanford.

Q. Jill, what do you remember about the game last year when you beat Stanford? They don't lose at home very often, but you got them. What do you remember about it?

JILL BARTA: It was a very disciplined game for both of us. I think that's what it's going to come down to this year is who's going to be more disciplined on offense and defense. When we played them last year, it was super fun. It was exciting. But it just came down to who was going to get stops and stuff.

Q. Coach, over the years that you've been able to play Stanford, they've obviously been a consistently successful program. Beating them here last year and getting that first win against them, did that kind of have a moment for you, for the program, to kind of say, yeah, okay, we've done this now, and do you kind of feel as if that kind of thought process of we haven't done it before has kind of evaporated since you were able to do it last year?

LISA FORTIER: A little bit. Actually, I mean, I definitely don't think -- we were talking in the locker room about the fact that last year Kiara Kudron, Elle Tinkle, Makenlee Williams and Emma Wolfram -- Emma is on the roster, but those four players played really well here and did big things for us and helped us to win that

game, and this is a very different team.

I look down the row, and all three of these were part of that team, as well, and they had a big impact. So it's nice to say that we've done it. I can certainly now say we can do it again, versus before we're saying we can be the first team to do this, and it was very exciting for all of us as a coaching staff and definitely one of our highlights for last season, and something that you can kind of talk about in your career.

But it's just a new team that we have. I think they have different strengths than they had last year and different weaknesses, and so do we. So it's somewhat relevant but not entirely with just the way that -- sometimes from one week to one week, or definitely one month to month, but certainly a year brings a different thing, but it is something that we do have.

Q. Lisa, we talked about earlier this week the slow start last year against Oklahoma and the uphill struggle; how do you go into this game with a different mindset of hitting the gas pedal right away?

LISA FORTIER: Definitely wasn't the plan last year, but I do think that having had that slow start, we've experienced it now. It's just like anything. Once you experience it for yourself, you can talk about it and talk about it, but once you do it for yourself you have a different perspective. For these players that are still on this team, we know how important it is because after that first quarter we were about even, or maybe we even finished ahead, I'm not sure. It was close. You just can't afford -- when you're a 13 seed playing a 4 seed or last year a 12 seed playing a 5 seed, you can't afford to have a quarter like that. It's debilitating, and it's just really tough to overcome.

We've had quarters this year where we've been on the opposite site of that. You were at our BYU game at home where we gave up two points in a quarter, and that's going to make the rest of the game a struggle for that team. So we have to be ready from the start.

Stanford is not the kind of team that beats themselves. So if we're not ready, they're not going to make very many mistakes, and we're going to find ourselves in a hole quickly, and so we're doing everything we can within our power to come out with the right mentality,

play call-wise. I'll be ready with a quick time-out if we need it. We're thinking through those things and trying not to recreate that from last year.

Q. Coach, what can you tell us about the basketball culture up there? We see it in the media with all your fans traveling for the WCC tournament. You're about 4,000 plus season tickets for women's basketball. What's it like coaching and playing in that environment?

LISA FORTIER: It's so much fun. I have been to a lot of towns and cities in the country, but I've spent a lot of time in ours, and there can't be a better basketball town than Spokane. Driving around, I feel like I'm in an old movie or old book with all the signs everywhere throughout the town and the flags.

Our women's program is supported as well as any program. We're regularly in the top 10, 12 in attendance, and capacity attendance last year we were first because our building only holds 6,000, and it's almost full every time.

It gives these guys the true student-athlete experience that we're looking for, and there are a lot of places where people treat their players well and they have good coaches and they bring academic support, but the fan support isn't quite the same. So these guys, I know they all appreciate it, and they really enjoy what it's like to walk out of that tunnel every day with all those people there. But it's pretty special and something I'm very proud to be a part of.

CHANDLER SMITH: Yeah, well, for me when you're coming out to the gym two and a half hours before the game and all the parking spots are full, it's just a different experience. I mean, all of our fans are out there trying to get pictures with us going in the building. You feel like a celebrity or superstar, and it's actually a great feeling to have so much support. I'm biased, but I feel like we have the best fans in the world. Just super thankful.

Q. What bothers you, or from what you've seen in the scouting report, what do you think is the toughest thing about Stanford?

JILL BARTA: I'll just say it like I said before, how disciplined their team is. They know who's going to take the shots. They know exactly what role they play on each team, each number. I think that's going to be the hardest thing is we're going to have to overcome that a little bit, and we're going to have to show that we're just as disciplined as they are.

EMMA STACH: And I would say like Lisa already said, just like Jill just said, they're really disciplined. They know what they're doing. They do it for a long time,

and they're really good. They really know their strengths, and they just like highlight every person when they play. They know their role.

Q. For the players, you talked about how much fan support you guys get, but this is going to be a road game for you guys here versus how it was last year when you were in Washington with the drive over to Seattle. How much of a challenge is that going to be playing against such a tough opponent in their home gym?

JILL BARTA: I mean, we of course hope to see as many 'Zaga fans as we can, but it's really not about people coming to watch us right now, it's about everyone in this room right now sitting next to me to my left and right and everyone that's back in the locker room. We've got to step up, play together as a team, and really stick together.

Q. Emma, three-point shooting has been an issue all year, but you guys are hitting the mark at the right time. What kind of confidence booster is that to be shooting so well from three-point right now?

EMMA STACH: Yeah, I think it's -- I mean, it's a confidence booster, especially when we started in the beginning. But I think just like making the right reads during the game and just like looking for open teammates, so I think that's just like playing together. That's what really made the difference in our last couple of games that we made threes. So just like playing together, finding the open shot.

Q. Lisa, I don't know how much of being a point guard is genetic or inherited or anything like that, aside from speed, I suppose, but how would you describe Laura's game? Let's start with that. How would you describe her game?

LISA FORTIER: She's feisty, and she's competitive, and I think those two things have come from her dad. I'm guessing that's kind of part of where this is going to go at some point.

She's a great competitor. She uses ball screens well. She's getting better and better at using ball screens. She wants to make the big play, whether that be a pass or a shot. She has that kind of confidence and that kind of drive. She's a good defender. Actually that's a growth area that she's made in the last year, I think, is she's become someone who we trust as a defender who can guard a variety of positions who's a very strong guard, but she doesn't typically get overcome by people who maybe have some size on her height-wise. She's a good floor general. But I would say that her biggest attribute in my mind and why I love her as a point guard is how competitive she is.

Q. What was it like recruiting her? Obviously both

her parents went there and her dad was the most famous Gonzaga athlete ever, but what was it like recruiting her and her family?

LISA FORTIER: Yeah, it was fun. I got to recruit her as an assistant coach first for a little while. Since she was local, we were recruiting her for quite a while, and then as a head coach. She was one of the players that I kind of continued on as main recruiter. When you become a head coach, you don't have the luxury of necessarily being the lead on a lot of the recruitments.

But so with her, I got to know her pretty well personally. She actually tried to totally disconnect her family from the equation. She really wanted to make the decision on her own based on her and not her dad and brother having her basketball careers there, her mother having her college career there. She made us work for it quite a bit.

But they're a fun family. You can tell they're extremely family oriented, so it was great for me to see how loyal they are to their siblings and to their family and kind of to their -- they don't really have a brand, but their family dynamic. It was great. John has been fun to have around. He's been coming to our games for a long time. He was around when Courtney Vandersloot played with us, and he's actually been a lot more hands off with Laura here because he wants to let her do her thing, and I think she prefers that, so he's become a great fan of ours. And her mom had these guys over for dinner a couple times this year. She's a great cook.

So they're kind of just like all the other parents that we have, the local ones who chime in when they can, support us the best that they are allowed to do and give their daughter an extra hug after.

Q. Being here is kind of déjà-vu for you guys since both teams played there in Las Vegas. What are some of the things that you saw in Stanford then that are different now and maybe the growth of their team and how that may be something you have to look at or could be dangerous for your team?

LISA FORTIER: Well, Stanford at that time -- first off, we were hoping to match up with them down there, and after our first game we realized that that wasn't going to happen. So I didn't get too deep into the scouting of them.

But at that time they didn't have Brittany McPhee, and I think Dijonai was out either then or shortly after, as well, so they were dealing with some pretty key injuries. We had several injuries of our own at that time. All three of these guys -- no, two of these three up here escaped around that time, as well.

So I think the biggest difference in them then and now is Brittany McPhee. She's a good player. She's so versatile, and the pace at which she plays and her athleticism, she wants to -- again, talk about Laura and her competitiveness and her desire to make the big plays, Brittany has all of those things in her. So I think that she's going to be problematic. I like our game plan. I think people that we can run at her defensively, we can throw different things at her. But if we can't slow her down, then that would create some issues for us.

Speaking of injuries, Dijonai is so great on the glass, so those are two things that I think would have changed some of the outcomes that Stanford had early and as far as the games go, just win/loss. Alanna, they have a variety of players that I think our team has articulated that well. I'm glad to see we've gotten our point across that they play to their strengths, and their players know their roles, and they play to them as well as anyone in the country. And so they don't have people going rogue and doing things, shooting threes when they're supposed to be driving and just doing weird things. They do what they're supposed to do.

So regardless of the time of the year or different center now, I think that's a trait that's been consistent with them throughout all the time that I've been playing against them. It's been several years now. That and their rebounding is something, they're always among the best, in our opinion, rebounding teams in the country. So those are two areas that if we don't follow the game plan, we could be in trouble in those spots.

Q. Lisa, can you talk about the influence Tara has had on the game and on you personally having grown up in this area?

LISA FORTIER: Oh, she's just -- I mean, I always wanted to play for or coach with a great female head coach, and I didn't have the opportunity to be with someone who was well-established. My college coach was new, both of them. I played junior college and four-year with new head coaches. They were both female but new. I worked with Jaime White for one year at Northern Colorado, and it was her first year of Division I, and then I spent a lot of time under Kelly Graves, and he was a great coach but he was a man, obviously.

I've tried to seek out -- not necessarily -- I wouldn't say that Tara has been a mentor to me, but she's someone who will always answer the phone when I call. She's spoken to me before about hiring staff, and a few years ago we exchanged scouting reports with her staff. She's interested in growing the game of women's basketball, not just in her team continuing to be successful, and that's something that I really admire.

Of course I admire the way she pulls the best out of her team every time and demands that you -- demands greatness really. And she's someone who -- I've told you this, but I worked for camps when I was in college. I came over here and worked camps, the Tara VanDerveer camp for three or four years, and so have great respect for her and what she does. Obviously her teams are always well-schooled and well-prepared.

Q. Chandler, a lot of teams sometimes go into Selection Sunday and they don't know what their status is going to be. You had the luxury to kind of know you were going to be in, it was just a matter of where. What was the first thought that came to mind when it showed up it was going to be Stanford and you guys were going to be playing them?

CHANDLER SMITH: Overall it was excitement. I think going in, we kind of knew just from bracketology and just kind of listening around that we were going to be around this area. We didn't know if maybe we'd face them first or second round, but just knowing that we were in the tournament and had an automatic bid that we were going to play Stanford, someone who we were very familiar with, we were very happy, so very excited to be here.