

April 6, 2008



Stanford – 82
UConn – 73

An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: We're now joined at the podium by Stanford head coach Tara VanDerveer as well as student-athletes Jayne Appel, Candice Wiggins and Kayla Pedersen.

Coach, when you're ready, an opening statement and we'll get started.

COACH VANDERVEER: This is a great win for our team, our program. I'm just so proud of all of our team. Everyone really worked hard. Connecticut is a great team, and obviously with their success, Geno is a great coach, so we knew we would have to play our absolute A game.

And I think what we were able to do was we were able to keep them off the O boards. We boxed out pretty well. We took care of the ball, especially in the first half, not turning it over. And we didn't take -- our shot selection was good. And I think people worked really, really hard on defense. And we had to, because they have great talent.

And I'm just really excited to see the improvement in our team, and I just -- we want to keep it going, obviously just one more game.

But this is thrilling for me, personally, and for our team.

Q. Candice, it was such a hurdle to get back to the Final Four, can you just talk about the team's focus and sort of coming into this game, you know, what everybody's mind-set was?

CANDICE WIGGINS: Well, I think, first of all, we were just -- the thing that's driving this team is the fact we don't want to stop playing with each other. Me especially, this is my last time I'll be able to play with this group. And everyone, they just don't want it to end. We don't want the season to end. I think that's what's driving this team.

And especially you look at we lost to Connecticut. We got killed by Connecticut back in November, just absolutely killed. And, you know, they changed the whole dynamic of our team. And so we grouped before the game and we said: Let's see how much better we've gotten. This is a test for ourselves to see, you know, we're not the same team we were in November. I think that's what we really wanted to prove to ourselves and then the country, too.

Q. Jayne, about six -- I think I wrote it down in my notes -- I don't have it here -- 6:33 left, looked like you got a little tired. Were you feeling a little bit down and UConn seemed to have energy, but then you guys came back?

JAYNE APPEL: I think going into the game, UConn is a good team. They're going to make their runs and it's a lot easier to run when you have a lot of momentum and everything. It's how you counter those runs, I think.

I think that we did pretty well, when they went on a run we kind of picked it up on our end and countered that back.

Q. Candice, they got within one there early in the second half and you hit the two 3s on the wing there. What did that do to help the momentum for you guys to never let them get the lead back?

CANDICE WIGGINS: I was kind of

struggling in the beginning of the second half. And they went to a zone. And just caught it and just made a few 3s, I think that really helped our team's confidence, where the pressure wasn't really on us.

And I think just our drive and our will not to let them come back. And we stuck together. They had runs. They're going to -- teams are going to make runs, but I think what our team is best at is not letting that discourage us and pulling ourselves together and saying, okay, let's stop it.

Q. Kayla, at least two or three different people had part of the time on Maya Moore, and everybody did a pretty effective job. Can you just talk about the rotating defense that you used on her?

KAYLA PEDERSEN: Well, I think that our guards did a great job switching. At the end there we switched 1 through 4, so just whoever was guarding. I think we did a great job contesting all of her 3s and a great job, like, Jayne helping making our layups.

Q. Candice and Jayne, Kayla was so consistent, probably the most consistent player on the floor tonight until you two got going. Freshman coming out here playing like that in a national semifinals, what did that mean to you?

CANDICE WIGGINS: First of all, Kayla is not a freshman. She hasn't played like that since the first game she played in a Stanford uniform. I think it gives us so much confidence as teammates to look at Kayla and know that every single game she's going to go her hardest and she's got this focus and this will to win. And Kayla might be quiet. You know inside she's so fierce and just not going to let up for anything.

And I think the best thing about Kayla, personally, is that, you know, she does something, she makes any kind of mistake, you look at her, she's like: All right, all right, I got it. She doesn't get down and hang her head. Which I think is a rare quality, I think, to have in a freshman.

Q. Candice, you guys, there was so much talk about Geno and Pat and what the Final was going to be like. Did you feel like you guys were a little bit of a stealth candidate here, and are you happy to disrupt the story line?

CANDICE WIGGINS: Yeah, I think we were probably slept on a little bit. A lot of people didn't have us coming to the Final Four in the first place. I think we've being on the West Coast we haven't been in the Final Four in a while and we understand that maybe our names aren't as big. But that just -- that feeds us and we have a lot of motivation behind that.

Q. I haven't seen the final box scores, so I don't know your total tally, but how important, I guess, for any of you ladies, were your rebounds, Candice, especially with how you were able to get your defensive rebounds?

CANDICE WIGGINS: I think I was sort of not necessarily a helper. But I wasn't really focused on Maya Moore, so kind of able to let me go in there and help the posts box out and rebound. I think rebounding in general is important. And I think we won the rebounding margin. I think that really helped us a lot.

Q. Jayne, can you talk about the minute you guys got off the bench from Jillian tonight?

JAYNE APPEL: Tara called it. She said she was -- Jill's game in the beginning. Jill I think has been due for a really good game. And Jill's, if you sleep -- we felt like our team was slept on, but Jill kind of had a feeling they were sleeping on her, you know. But I think she really came off the bench and she really got us going and had some really key plays for us and rebounds. And Jill's just a tougher player and she's the kind of player that's really hard to scout on her.

Q. For any of the players, there's been talk of a Big East kind of bias. Obviously, all people East Coast in general, Maryland getting the No. 1 seed, I know you were a little disappointed with that. How much does this disrupt the bias about East Coast women's basketball?

JAYNE APPEL: I think that from the very beginning everyone saw our faces plastered all over ESPN at the seeding show when we got the No. 2 seed. But I think it almost drives us more to prove not only to ourselves but to everyone else that we can play out with the East Coast teams and just because we're on the West Coast we have a lot of talent out there. And I think it will be a lot more to come in the years.

CANDICE WIGGINS: And just to add to that, I think the biggest thing is winning games and winning games like this to show in the past maybe in these kind of games we lose, but just I think it was important for us to show through our play instead of through words. So that's really also another thing.

KAYLA PEDERSEN: Yeah, I think that them giving us a No. 2 seed they could have done for us, because that just motivated us and gave us that extra push to show the East Coast what we're all about.

Q. Candice, what's the magic behind this year's team that has made you guys be able to get to the Final Four and now a championship game?

CANDICE WIGGINS: You know, it's the type of chemistry that you cannot fake. You can't try to create. It just happens. And I just think it just happened from day one. We knew this group was special. We went out to the East Coast. We played Rutgers in our second game.

And just those moments, we knew that this was the team. And we had two losses to UCLA and USC earlier, and I think the biggest thing that showed me that this team was special after the UCLA and USC losses nothing changed. We didn't say we're not a good team anymore. We knew we were still a good team and we just had two bad games and I think that's the best thing that happened to us this season, too. We kept it going. We didn't let that make us crumble.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, student-athletes.

Questions for Coach.

Q. Jumping forward here, who would you like to play in two days?

COACH VANDERVEER: I have no choice. I mean, we are so excited to be playing in the championship game. We play Tennessee -- we've played Tennessee the last two years and we played LSU in the regional final two years ago. So we're semi-familiar with both teams, and I'm just more concerned about our team and us playing well.

And our team is really excited.

Q. Is there any particular way that you're going to change your game plan heading into the next ball game?

COACH VANDERVEER: No way. We're just going to come out and do what we've been doing all year and just absolutely -- just do the best that we can.

Q. Can you talk about the advantage from playing the earlier game and maybe having a chance to go out at least in the second half and look at both teams and seeing which ones you might be facing in the next round?

COACH VANDERVEER: I love playing the first game. Just such a long day anyway. And to sit there and just to play the first game is great. And as soon as I can, I'll be out there watching the tip-off and try to just figure out who we're going to play and what we need to do.

Q. I asked them about Kayla and just to see what she did until Candice and Jayne found their touch a little bit. How important was that in her performance?

COACH VANDERVEER: I thought it was huge. I think that was the real key for us. I thought we were working hard defensively, but Kayla hitting her outside shot, Kayla hitting her high post shot, it didn't allow them to stay in that extended two-three defense.

I think actually the fact that they had -- Swanier was in foul trouble in the first half, might have been really the thing that hurt them the most.

But with the two fouls, they were out of their rhythm a little bit. But Kayla made big plays. Obviously then Jayne and Candice had huge plays.

Q. Couple of questions. One, Connecticut is known for their come-backs and having big runs, but your team looked very confident. What did you tell your girls to keep them confident the whole time and not rattled? And, two, Stanford has obviously had the longest wait to get back to the Final Four stage. Is a championship going to mean more to your program than any of the other teams here?

COACH VANDERVEER: Well, as far as I really didn't tell our team anything special. I just said these are things we need to do. And our team really takes a game plan to heart. And they really worked hard at not allowing Connecticut to do the things that Connecticut does so well and is so good at. They love to run. They love to get on the

O glass.

So we really worked hard at that. The fact that we played Connecticut earlier in the season helped us and helped people's confidence. And I think people were upset with how we played the first time and we learned a lot from Connecticut. They have been both Tennessee and Connecticut have been the gold standard for women's basketball. And so they both have helped us get here.

As far as the second question was what?

Q. Is it going to mean more to your program?

COACH VANDERVEER: Will it mean more to us? A national championship would mean -- I mean, it would just be awesome for any team. I think that you look at LSU. They've been here five times and haven't won. I know it would mean a lot to them.

With Tennessee, I'm sure it would mean a lot to them. But, you know, we're just going to give it our absolute best effort. And it would be very meaningful to our team and to me personally.

Q. Was there a point in the season where you knew that your team was capable of making it to the Final Four and even advancing to the championship game?

COACH VANDERVEER: You know, I never thought about it. I never looked forward. I just focused on what we were doing in practice every day, and I think that I really focused on enjoying the journey with a special player like Candice. Not wanting any day to be a bad day in practice. Tried to just keep it fun. Have people relaxed and enjoying playing. And identifying things that we need to improve on.

And I think our perimeter shooting, our guard play, trying to keep people healthy. I think Jill coming back was huge for us, the fact -- she was out for basically seven weeks. But we never talked about it with our team. We never talked to our team going to the Final Four, winning a national championship, but when it happened, we've enjoyed it.

Q. Could you talk about Jayne's vision and how that affected the outcome tonight?

COACH VANDERVEER: Well, I think Jayne started a little bit slow, but she made some amazing shots in there, I mean, finishing. And I think our team has great confidence in Jayne, and

she's a big target for us. She gets in deep and scores. And I think she's an absolute franchise player. And I am just really proud of her development. She's come a long way from her freshman year. In her development and along with other player's development is the reason we're here.

Our team has improved. I made the point I think when we were -- I can't remember what press conference it was, but we do a lot of video presentations with our team. And this is a team that's gone from a caterpillar to a butterfly. We have totally transformed how we've played.

And Jayne is part of that transformation.

Q. Have you had any time to sit back and reflect on what your team's been able to accomplish, or is it just moving at lightning pace at this point?

COACH VANDERVEER: You know how sometimes baseball players or basketball players, they see the game in slow motion? To me, I'm seeing it in slow motion. I'm thoroughly enjoying the journey.

I think that for me personally the experiences of whether it's coaching the Olympics or being in the Final Four before, I feel very comfortable being here with this team and kind of helping them along, saying this is what's coming next. And it's very different than the regular season with the press obligations, the practices, all the excitement.

But our team has really kept a very level head, and I think our coaching staff has done a fabulous job. And honestly when you have leadership like Candice Wiggins, Kayla Pedersen, very low maintenance kids, it's a fabulous opportunity and fabulous job.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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