

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

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Stanford, California



Robin Pingeton Sophie Cunningham Jordan Frericks Missouri Tigers

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us. We are be joined by Jordan Frericks and junior guard, Sophie Cunningham.

ROBIN PINGETON: We appreciate you guys being here, obviously a really exciting time of the year. At this point in the season, with the NCAA Tournament, you know, everyone has a new record and a clean slate. It's going to be very competitive. I'm excited about the success of our team so far this season. I love my girls. They worked really hard. We feel like we've continued to raise the bar in regards to where we're at as a program and I had a little bit of a tough stretch there at the end of our regular season. But I think the last week and a half has been really, really good for our team and we're refreshed and know that we're going to have a big challenge in front of us with Florida Gulf Coast, great coach, great program. But we're looking forward to tipping the ball tomorrow.

Q. Coach, obviously Florida shoots a lot of threes, what's your defensive mindset going into the game tomorrow?

ROBIN PINGETON: Obviously, probably won't go into a lot of details about that for obvious reasons. Watching them on film I'm so impressed. Coach has done such a tremendous job with that program and I feel like we shoot the 3-ball a lot and it fails to compare against how much they shoot it. They spread you out, hard to guard. They have five kids that are interchangeable in the that starting lineup and the kids coming off the bench do a great job, very unselfish, great ball movement, great spacing on offense. It's a completely different look than what we're used to defending, so it's definitely going to be a challenge for us.

Q. Sophie, when you shoot 47% of your threes, what is the opposition generally doing to try to stop that? How do you counter what their moves are?

SOPHIE CUNNINGHAM: My teammates get me the ball when I need it. They set great screens for me and

I read my defense. But they're taking away the threes and if they lapse on me I'm going to dish it off to a teammate that's going to be wide open.

Q. Coach, you mentioned that Florida Gulf Coast, their style is something you haven't seen. Are there any opponent that they do remind you of or is this a new style for you?

ROBIN PINGETON: There's a few teams I think we've faced. Not necessarily within our conference, but over the years we've played some teams like a Western Illinois, Indiana a little bit. They shoot quite a few threes. We've faced some teams, but really I'm so impressed with their offense and their spacing and their movement. Just high basketball IQ kids. Really do a great job creating confusion for the defense and being able to take advantage of it.

So it's definitely a unique style. Obviously they're ranked I think second in the country in regards to three-pointers per game next to DePaul, 12 a game is quite a few. So it's definitely a different style.

Q. Robin, obviously it's a lower mid-major, I think it sounds like it and looks like on the odds up there that you have respect for FGCU. You're going to be physically much bigger. They do a good job of off-setting size against larger programs. Just your thoughts on that on your kids, you can say the right things not overlooking a mid-major and how FGCU is able to deal with a taller team and how you deal with a team that deals with taller teams?

ROBIN PINGETON: Mid-major, power 5, it doesn't matter. This time of the year the best of the best are in the NCAA Tournament.

You know, I've got a history being a coach of a mid-major team, so I understand what that mindset looks like. I think when it's the NCAA Tournament you're not looking at what conference they came from. So just knowing how competitive it's going to be and how challenging it's going to be. They've got an incredible record there at Florida Gulf Coast. They've got some really big wins. We've a common opponent in Kentucky and they obviously beat them. A great team like DePaul. I don't think any of us are looking at them as a mid-major by any stretch of the imagination.

We're looking at it as a first-round game in the NCAA

Tournament that's going to be a battle for forty minutes. I think it's a chess match a little bit, we might have more size but they're awfully quick and athletic. They do a great job defensively. They're not afraid to play physical and obviously I think they can exploit you with the way they can spread the offense with their 5-out motion. Like I said from the start I think it's going to be a tough challenge for us.

Q. Sophie, obviously the last game was almost two weeks ago at this point, but Georgia defensively seemed to have a good game plan against you guys. I don't know the last time maybe you thought of that game, but is there anything as you think back to what they did in that game that you looked at on film that have seen and adjusted to?

SOPHIE CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, Georgia is a really good team and we consider this team like a mini Georgia, just not with the height. So we have worked on our spacing and our motion and not collapsing on the ball. We did a lot to ourselves in the SEC tournament, but this team has bounced back. I think we're in a good spot. We have watched film and digested some things and our team is learning, but I think we're in a really good spot right now.

Q. Jordan, your team ranks 15th in the country in rebound differential. Rebounding, everybody knows is a lot of desire and all that and obviously boxing out, things like that. Is there something more to it that would explain why you folks are so good at it?

JORDAN FRERICKS: I would just say the emphasis that we put on it. Coach always tells us that we need to be outrebounding teams every game and I think, like you said, the desire and the grit to go get the ball, I think just to have pride in wanting to go do that.

Executing it, I think, is just like our game plan. But just emphasizing that, that's a big part of the game is what we try to do.

Q. Jordan, that Texas A&M game seems like a long time ago now, but for the team in general you had a long winning streak going into that and that kinda setoff a rough stretch. Did that game take the wind out of your sails when you look in hindsight what did that game do for this team?

JORDAN FRERICKS: Well, I just think that these past, like, three games we've just kind of had a rocky road, but I don't think it knocked the wind out of us at all. I think if anything it helped us see the things that we need to improve and what we need to do these past few practices. I think it's just encouraged us and helped us get a mentality that we do need to improve in some areas and that's where we're going to grow and we found those areas and trying to execute them in this

tournament. This whole year has been constantly learning.

Q. Coach, it seems like as consistent as Sophie is the very few times she doesn't shoot the ball as well she seems to be able to respond in the next game with a really big game. Is that something that as you've watched her grow over the couple of years with you you've seen her develop a good mindset in terms of how to wash off a bad game and come to the next one?

ROBIN PINGETON: I don't know that I can think of too many games that Sophie has had a bad game. I think she does so much better than scoring. So probably one of the most unselfish players in the game. I know she is not driven by how many points she has. She wants to help our team be as successful as she can. She has great court vision. She is a great passer. She shoots the three. She can attack the basket. She rebounds well. She is a tough defending and anticipates well.

I know a lot of times we look at box scores and from a black and white standpoint we have certain standards when we think it's a really good game and a lot of time it's predicated on points, but I think it's so much bigger than that.

Where I have seen Sophie grow over the years is from a leadership standpoint. A tremendous leader for our team and I think she is really invested in those relationships. The most important thing to her is the front of the jersey. She is a resilient kid. She impacts the game in a lot of different ways, and I'm just really proud that she represents our university.

Q. Sophie, China Dow doesn't start, but she is a terror lately. Kind of a tough match-up. She is not a small gal and she likes to put her head down and drive and she has a nice three-point touch. Your thoughts on not necessarily you matching up on her but just your thoughts on her?

SOPHIE CUNNINGHAM: I would love to have her on my team. She is a big kid but can handle the ball and shoot ball like a point guard. She is going to be a tough match-up for us, honestly. They can all shoot the ball and get to the rim if you close out hard on them and I have a lot of respect for her. I've only seen her a couple of times on film, but she is going to be a tough match-up for whoever is guarding her.

Q. Jordan, how much does it mean to be at this stage and to know that in your final run. If you don't lose you go out on top like this. How much fun is it to be here as a senior?

JORDAN FRERICKS: It's so fun, just enjoying these moments and these last few moments are bittersweet,

but like I said, just trying to stay in the moment and enjoy every part of it with my team and coaches. You know, freshman year we weren't in this position, so just not taking it for granted and like I said, enjoying it all.

Q. Coach, when you were a player and you started your coaching career at St. Ambrose, what did the NCAA Tournament mean to you? What was it like as a player and coach at that level?

ROBIN PINGETON: You're trying to date me and I don't appreciate that! (Laughter.) The game has changed so much. It's evolved. I played at an NAI school and we played Notre Dame and some of those big Division I schools as an NAI program and it's changed so much. From my coaching career to go from St. Ambrose which we competed for National Championships, but their National Championship is different than the NCAA. I had an opportunity to go on staff with Bill Fennelly at Iowa State and then I coached at Illinois State. For me, it's the Big Dance. It's what everybody's vision is, what everybody's goals are. You're in this business and you don't need to talk about it, but everybody knows everybody wants to compete for a Championship.

But for us, and for our program it's really been about the process and it's about, you know, just taking it one day at a time and constantly pushing that needle as a program. I think we've really worked hard at laying a strong foundation at the University of Missouri; and I feel like, you know, we're moving the needle in the right direction. Really trying to become relevant in regards to a top-20 program in the country.

You don't go from the bottom to the top overnight. There are peaks and valleys and a lot of challenges along the way, but it's been rewarding to see the growth of our program and we're looking forward to March Madness. Right? Anything can happen in March.

Q. Robin, two of your wins jumped out at me. One was at Berkeley, a 3-point win there, since we are so familiar with the Bears; and the other one being your win over South Carolina. Could you describe how you were able to win those two games? What kind of games were they? Just give using information about those?

ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, I think for that tournament in California, you know, a short turnaround between games. But we've got a lot of respect for Cal and they're a great program. We knew it was going to be a challenge, a physical game. I give you will at credit to these girls. They've done some things that just haven't been done at the University of Missouri in a long time; and, again, it's the players that came before and the foundation that's been laid. I think we've competed well in those big games this year.

I think everyone that we've gotten beat by this year is in the NCAA Tournament, they're all top-50 RPI teams. We've had some of those games where we came out on top and some that we fell short in regards to the scoreboard. Cal was a big one. It was a big momentum one for us. We lost the first game of the season and we said we have to steal one back in that nonconference, and Cal was that game we felt like we had to steal back to put ourselves in that position to get the high seed in the NCAA Tournament. South Carolina obviously is a great program.

A team that we had beat the year before so we knew them coming back to our home court they were going to be ready to go, but our kids competed and played at a high level. Playing those teams on your home court is huge. The six-man environment, our community has been tremendous in the support that they've given us all year long. So you want to play those games at home as much as possible.

Certainly that's a special environment for us. We've had some that we've come out on the good side of the scoreboard and some that we've lost, but playing in the SEC every night it's a battle and I think we've really had a successful year. Certainly you want to get a few more wins as you go through the SEC conference, but I think we've competed at a high level all year long.

Q. Speaking of competing well in big games you've never competed against FGCU or Gonzaga before. What are the challenges for you coming into the tournament facing a team that you've never competed against?

ROBIN PINGETON: I think it's being on top of your scout and really doing a great job of breaking it down and putting your players in a position to be successful. These guys have been here before and they understand it's survive and advance. If you don't come out ahead the season is done.

But we want to embrace where we're at. We want to stay true to who we are. You know, we want to go out playing our best basketball. This last week and a half I think has been huge for us. I think we're almost looking forward to playing someone outside of the SEC conference.

I think everybody gets to that point with postseason, that you've faced your in-conference teams so much that it's nice to get a fresh look. But certainly got a lot of respect for everybody that's in the NCAA Tournament. You're not in this tournament unless you're awfully good. So our players get that. They understand that.

Q. Sophie, when the draw came out and it was Stanford, you guys won a tournament here at St. Mary's here a couple of years ago. Is it nice to come back to the Bay Area?

SOPHIE CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, we wanted to host really bad this year. But we didn't get that opportunity, but we have a new one and California has been good to us, really since my freshman year. So we're all really happy to be back here. But we know it's going to be tough, but it is nice to know we have a couple of wins under our belt here in California.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everyone. Best of luck.