

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

Thursday, March 21, 2019

Coral Gables, Florida



Charli Turner Thorne Courtney Ekmark Charnea Johnson- Chapman Kianna Ibis

Arizona State Sun Devils

THE MODERATOR: Up first today is Arizona State.

Coach, if you'd like to start with an opening statement.

CHARLI TURNER THORNE: I read right after the bracket, I'm not sure who said it, but we were the biggest loser for our draw. I've been doing this long enough to know that any appearance in the NCAA tournament is really, really special. We don't mind traveling. There are no easy brackets or easy games. We're just really excited to be here.

I'm from Los Angeles so I can relate to the traffic. I don't know about these guys. But no, we obviously have a veteran team that has been here before but does not take this for granted.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Kianna, you have been most successful this year when the defense really seems to be at a certain high gear. Every coach would tell you that's the key to winning this time of year. How important is that that it's already in your DNA?

KIANNA IBIS: I mean, having a coach that really coaches us and prepares us to be, like, our best defensively always helps us in every single game we play because we always find enough points to win. Having our defense be the kind of identity of our team I would say is kind of an advantage, especially going into the tournament.

Not many people know how we play. I feel like it's an advantage for us.

Q. Courtney, we've been through the trials and the

road of the Pac-12. We know how difficult the conference is. How do you feel playing in the Pac-12 against so many quality programs has helped prepare you for the NCAAs?

COURTNEY EKMARK: It's a great question. I definitely think playing a tough conference schedule is going to help us. We've played against the top teams in the nation. We've beaten some of them. I think that's really going to carry us through this tournament.

Q. Charnea, obviously three veterans here on the dais. The key aspect of the season has been the bench, averaging over 23 points a game. How key has that been?

CHARNEA JOHNSON-CHAPMAN: I think our bench is doing a great job. They come every day in practice, even when we have shootarounds, they are focused and ready to go. They know it's next-man-up at any point. I think when they come off the bench, they're ready to go, and it's shown.

Q. Obviously with five starters returning, tons of veterans on this team, how much has the experience of the team, not only the competition you played, but the team internally played a role in the successful season you've had?

KIANNA IBIS: I mean, being able to go through this experience, like, four times that I've been here, that only helps. It's always different because you never know what to expect, then you do, especially with any team you play.

I think having the experience and being able to help our freshmen, the new players on our team who haven't experienced this, it always helps when we can help them, as well.

COURTNEY EKMARK: I agree with Kianna. To add to that, us being seniors, we know it's our last time. We're going to give it everything we have. We also know going through this so many times is not every game is guaranteed in March. Right now it's win-or-go-home. It's serious.

CHARNEA JOHNSON-CHAPMAN: Add on to what Courtney said, having so many people return, veterans, our team knows it's go big or go home now.

THE MODERATOR: We will excuse the student-

athletes and go into questions for Coach Turner Thorne.

Q. You said you're excited to play anywhere, you don't mind traveling. I don't know if you can use it as motivation, you're here with three Florida teams, also time change, can that be some motivation for your team?

CHARLI TURNER THORNE: We don't really operate that way. I mean, maybe for some teams. I think for us, I'll have to share this, I have three sons, my youngest son is a basketball fanatic, taking a redeye tomorrow night to come to be at the games. We're very grateful. We're good with the draw.

But he was very fired up because he's reading all the stuff. I'm not going to say what he said about the committee, because I had to clear him up on that and everything.

No, I don't. The trend of the tournament is keep the higher seeds, the 14s through 16s, in their regions because we're trying to have this great experience. Miami has to play Florida Gulf Coast. That's a tough game, a local team. That's kind of the way the tournament is being structured right now.

I was pretty sure, been doing this a long time, yeah, we're going east. I was thinking maybe North Carolina on that neutral site. But it's all good. If you want to progress, we want to progress in this tournament, you got to beat top teams. For the women's tournament, that means on their home floor unless you're hosting. We were probably a game or two away from earning that opportunity. We get that.

We've been a good road team all year. Beating Oregon State, that is one of the toughest places you will ever play, at Oregon State. It's not going to be anything this team hasn't experienced with their fans here. I think they said we'll have no fans. We're going to have some fans, just so you know. We have some people coming out.

Basketball is about matchups. It's an interesting first game for us with Central Florida. Pressing the end zone the entire game, it's a little different. We've been preparing for that. We'll be prepared for that. Depending on after that, we'll see.

Katie does a phenomenal job. She's a really good coach. They're a veteran team like us. A lot of similarities. Great defensive team, veteran team. Should be a really fun game.

Q. It's not uncommon in the women's game for a team to have a really long break between

conference and NCAA. How do you deal with that? It's what you have to deal with. Is it ideal? How did you deal with the 14 days?

CHARLI TURNER THORNE: So when this first happened, I actually called Sylvia Hatchell. I talked to a few coaches, used to having longer breaks. In the Pac-12 we bumped up our season. Early on in my career, play your last game -- I remember because I had a baby, three days later we were traveling for NAAs. It would have been great to have that two weeks however many years ago.

Now I wouldn't know what to do without it. We're used to having the extra rest time, the extra practice time. It is a little bit nerve-wracking because you try to stay healthy, but you want to practice and stay sharp.

In the middle we do a scrimmage game against our scout team, bring officials in. That's the best thing I have found to kind of keep us sharp. Then just have days where you limit contact.

Yeah, going that long without a game, it's like, Okay, hope we're ready. Again, this team has done that, so I think we'll be okay.

Q. Six straight 21 seasons, six straight NCAA tournament appearances. Both school records. How proud are you of this group? What does that say about them to be setting school marks in such notable categories?

CHARLI TURNER THORNE: I think we have 15 out of the 17 years post-season. We've had a great staff. We've had great players that have come in and joined our family, our culture, bought in to who we are, what we do. It's really fun.

Obviously incredibly proud of the players, what they've been able to accomplish at their time at ASU. Going to hopefully keep it going.

Q. You're focused on UCF tomorrow. Indulge me and speak broadly for a second. I love the women's game. This is the first time that I can remember there might be legitimately eight or ten teams that could be the last one standing. Has parity arrived? How good is that that it's not going to be basically the same four teams in the Final Four?

CHARLI TURNER THORNE: I think last year was one of the best Final Fours in terms of the overtime games. It's been coming. The parity has been coming, getting better and better.

Sometimes with media coverage, it doesn't always reflect how much parity there is in the game. UConn, great program, done a ton for the game. They're a 2

seed. Hopefully it's opening people's eyes to the level of parity in the game.

Going into this season, as coaches, we're looking around, This is pretty wide open. We played Baylor the second game of the year, played Louisville two weeks later. We had a controversial one-possession game with Louisville. We're looking around going, Okay, yes.

It's fantastic for the game. Players are getting better and better. The commitment by administrations, by everybody, to women's basketball has been amazing. I've been fortunate enough over the last 30 years to see immense growth. Hopefully we'll see it in the tournament.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us.

CHARLI TURNER THORNE: Thank you.