

March 7, 2006

An Interview With:

IOWA STATE

COACH FENNELLY: Welcome to the **Big 12** tournament. Could not be more proud of the effort of our team. We beat a tremendously talented team, Hall of Fame coach. Down seven late in the game and I think if we would have left, everyone would have said, that's okay, with what happened to us a couple of months ago in Austin. As gutsy an effort as we had in a long time. We challenged our efforts to come and stay, not to have to go back to school; didn't want to pack; my wife wants to go shopping, spend money. But tremendous effort, tremendous finish, and we're honored to be playing again tomorrow.

Q. Can you just say what it was in those last seven, eight minutes that got you on that roll like that?

COACH FENNELLY: I think far too often, there's a lot of us that want to take credit. The players did it. They just willed themselves to things, **Megan** and **Lyndsey** have led this team all year. I think they just kept plucking away. We have come-from-behind a lot. In our last four or five wins, now five, we have been down at halftime. You want to be around people that just don't quit fighting and competing, and I've been honored to be around this group all year and they have kept plugging away. We have had some ups and some downs, but we made some huge shots. I thought we guarded at some critical times, but the bottom line is, you've just got to will yourself sometimes. Everyone was tired.

I think this group of kids gets along great together and they figured out a way to win a game. And we changed defenses almost too much. But, you know, when we made a couple big threes and we got **Brit** the ball a couple of times, kept us in the game, we always made one more pass before we got knocked out. It was close. We were on the ropes a few times and we always made one more play and that kept us around.

Q. What was your strategy when Brittany got in foul trouble? You put her back in the game during that huge run.

COACH FENNELLY: Pete Gizel (ph), who was the coach at Notre Dame, the assistant when I was there, he said, "I don't want to be the richest man in the yard." And **Brit** is our best low-post player, and we were going to win or lose with her.

And to be honest Coach Easley (ph), he talked me into it. He just said, "Coach, we can't wait, we have to go." If you look at our team over the last few weeks, when **Brittany** is out of the game, we have trouble scoring on the block which makes it harder for our perimeter players to score.

You know, you have to handle it sometimes and it worked out. We got some good decisions, got her the ball and maximized her time on the court. But it was a gamble, and really, Coach talked me into it, and glad he did.

Q. On the intentional foul, what part of your anatomy or what part of your uniform got grabbed?

BRITTANY WILKINS: My hips, actually. I just felt two hands on my hips and I'm not going to go any further than that.

Q. How big of a play was that that that allowed to you take time off the clock?

BRITTANY WILKINS: Yeah, I think it gave us a chance to score. When it gets to a situation like that, wish I would have made both of them, but great down the stretch there. Putting the free throws in, I think it was a huge advantage for us, it gave us some momentum. We were kind of, I don't know how you say this, but were like getting the ball taken away. I felt like I was getting fouled but can't really argue with the refs at that point.

So, yeah, it was a good game and competitive. Definitely, this is **Big 12** basketball and everybody is throwing up elbows and things like that and you have to play through it.

Q. Heather, the past few games, not much scoring, what changed now, as opposed to the end of the season when the season was wrapping up?

HEATHER EZELL: I don't know, just seemed to get out there today. You know, you lose, you're out. So it's time to no matter what, no

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excuses, put the ball in the hole, doesn't matter what's going on. So kind of got that mentality, and if I was open, I was going to put it in.

Q. Explain how a 30-point loss turns into whatever this was, a victory that, seems unfathomable.

BRITTANY WILKINS: It is a bit, but we didn't play our best game down there. Our scout team played harder defense on us the past few days than I think even Texas did. So we were a little more prepared for that.

We had a great game plan, **Coach Fennelly** and the rest of the coaches, they put us out there and they put us in the right situations. Like Coach said, "You lose and you go home." I told everyone last night specifically that I unpack everything in my bag. So when you're out there in the game, the last thing you want to think about is now having to go back to the hotel and pack up and now you've got to sit in class tomorrow. So that's not really my style, class. Just kidding. (Laughter).

So I think that's part of it. And we just -- I think we were a bit more prepared this time and knew what was coming so it was not such a shock right out of the gate.

Q. Your freshmen really kept you in the game and the experienced players finished it off for you, when it got to the point where it was there to win.

COACH FENNELLY: I agree with that. I think **Heather**, you know, we challenged **Heather** pretty hard in practice the other day, and to her credit, she stepped in and made some huge shots. It seemed like every shot that she made was at the perfect time. We got the open court. They are going to guard **Lyndsey** hard; she had some looks; she made them. And at the end of the game, when you get into tournaments, you have to have great guard play when we have in **Lyndsey Medders**. You have to have the leader on the block, which we do in **Brit**, and as aggressive a defender as we've had in a long time in **Megan**.

Those kids, you have to make a decision the last four minutes, take care of the ball, make the decision where the ball goes, who shoots it, step up to the free throw line and do the little things.

There's no question the experienced players have an advantage, but at the same time,

too, we're a team that's not played a lot of players all year, and at this point, everyone had to contribute. And I thought they did. We struggled inside a little bit, but we made some plays down the stretch.

For us to outrebound Texas by nine is maybe the stat that I thought I would never see against a Texas team. That said, we were playing hard, we were competing and we shot 52 percent the second half. And no one -- I'm not very bright, but when you make baskets, you look pretty good and that's why they call it basketball I guess. For us to get 72 points, that's an explosion for us recently. That was kind of cool, yeah.

Q. Heather, you are a freshman and this is your first big tournament kind of situation, did it feel any different than a regular game, and it looked like you responded really well?

HEATHER EZELL: You know, it's no different, it's getting on the floor and playing basketball. We obviously had a few more things pushing us with the tournament, like we talked about, where if you lose, you go home. Now, you know, we're playing for a little bit of pride in the **Big 12**. We didn't, you know, do great in the season, so we just come in here now, and it's just another chance to get back at people that got us in the regular season.

Q. Coach talked about the different defenses that you threw at them, did you get a sense that was affecting them on the offensive end, and what gave you confidence that you could do this today after what happened in Austin?

BRITTANY WILKINS: Well, I think the defensive plan the coaches came up with was great. I think any team if you change defenses on them, that always throws you out of your rhythm. Coach told us that; be ready for any possession that we're going to change and I think that does throw them off. You've got to change your zone offense to man offense and that gave them some off-shots, and that's what we wanted to do, is get **Tiffany Jackson** away from the basket and get them shooting those kind of shots instead of off the block.

I told these guys after I fouled out, I said, hey, remember what they did to us down in Austin, and that was a game we'll remember and that kind

of stuck with us. I think we remembered that at the end and hopefully they remembered that, too, and we can use that as momentum going into our game to, even playing OU, what they did us at home, the **Big 12** opener, they beat us at home. We remember that kind of stuff, and hopefully we can teach our young kids how important that kind of stuff is. It's that you remember losses like that, and learn from them and we can use them to our advantage.

Q. On dead balls and free throws, you were really encouraging the team to hustle down there every time. Why was that so important, and what difference do you think that made down the stretch?

COACH FENNELLY: We were pretty tired. And I did not want Texas even to have a glimpse that we were struggling. So I was just -- every dead ball, every situation, get down the floor, act like you're ready to play no matter what the score is, get to the other end and let's go. It's like you watch football teams when the quarter changes, you just run to the other end of the field to the other. I think it sends a message to yourself more importantly. I wanted our kids to just keep fighting and get to the own end. If they being looked at us like, well, maybe they are not ready to quit yet and whatever, but you know it's not something we've done in the past that much. I just felt like we needed to keep them energized because we only played six players. We were really tired at the end.

You know, I just did not want us to have any sense that we were going to show any sign of relaxing, because they are too good, too athletic, too good, too big, too strong and we have to find other ways to beat teams like that and that was one of them.

Q. In the last ten minutes, it looked like Brittany was the All-American the way she was playing in that game. Talk about her and the whole season she's put out for you.

COACH FENNELLY: Well, it's the first time I've been asked about **Brit**, and I will tell you, and I will mention it to the coaches in our league, I was extremely disappointed **Brittany Wilkins** was not an all-conference player. You look at her numbers, seventh in the league in scoring, rebounding, field-goal percentage, blocked shots if

you would have said in the last ten minutes who is the all-Conference, I think it was **Brittany Wilkins**.

Tiffany Jackson is a great, great player but **Brittany Wilkins** has done a phenomenal job for this team all season. She did it again tonight. She's our only true low-post presence and just kept fighting through it. You score 19 points against a team like that, you're doing something right. You know, the good news is we get to keep playing, and **Brit** gets to go out there one more time.

Q. They had their way with you in the first half under the basket, and the second half you clogged the middle a lit bit maybe.

COACH FENNELLY: We were worried about Erika and Daria on the perimeter, and we were kind of thinking we were going to trade two for threes maybe. And they spread us out so much we could not get to the rebound and so we gambled a little bit. We changed our defense, and we changed our rotations and tried to rush the shooter a little more starting out with them. So starting inside and just tried to clog it up as best we could, get some -- get a tip rebound, get our guards in, get in there and rebound. You know, we lucked out a little bit because Erika had a couple looks and Daria, that's the nature of the game. We could not continue to keep spreading our defense out and let them call us on the block.

That's the way we always have to play, you kind of -- luckily the second half, we made the decision to do it that way most of the second half. We changed a little, but we just felt, when we got down ten the first half, they were fighting each other for a rebound a couple of times. We had to gamble, and luckily they missed a couple of shots that probably they would normally make and the ball bounced our way.

Q. It's hard to say from the outside, but what's your thoughts on what went wrong with Texas this year? At the beginning of the season, a lot of folks thought they could win this conference, and now they are not even going to go to the NCAA Tournament.

COACH FENNELLY: Well, I don't know, I think Texas is a very talented team. They are playing with a lot of young players, and maybe in spots that are not normal with some injuries. I watched their **Duke** game back when Earnesia (ph) got hurt and I thought they could play with anyone.

You look at their record, Jody, I'm surprised the Lakers were not on the schedule. Come on, a lot of us would be 13-15 if we played that schedule. I think Jody has done a great thing every year for women's basketball. She challenges her team, challenges the **Big 12**, she puts the league out there -- we see her in the Bahamas. They play great and we're in the airport, we're coming back to play I don't know who, and they are coming back to play **Tennessee** and **Duke**.

I think we have to be very careful about over evaluating a great program, a great coach, a lot of great players, and just, you know, things happen, things fall together for one team. They didn't fall together for Texas this year. And believe me, I'm in no position to critique what Jody Conrard does or says. She forgot more about the game than I'll ever think about.

They are a great team, great program. And, you know, that's what I told our kids, we not only beat a good team, we beat one of the storied programs in this country, and that's something we're very proud of.