

March 8, 2006



An Interview With:

TEXAS A&M

COACH BLAIR: We put them to sleep across the country on that one, didn't we? I've seen all the other media room, all the others were full, even the writers went home, they were bored to death. If you all want something with TK, she had to get ice down. She had cramps the last couple of minutes, so that's why we had to take her out, as hot has it was.

But give credit to Nebraska. Hardy came out on fire and most of the time we had our best defensive players on her. We had **Starks** on her early and we had **E-Roy** on her. And basically in the second half, **Mo** hit her a few times, a little bit taller, had to shoot over her a little bit more, and we slowed her down a little. By them not having at driven full strength to play her normal 30 or 35 that made a huge difference in the game because they had to keep rotating people. But give Nebraska credit, that girls has been playing with mono the last four or five games, hard time in and out, and the other kids have stepped in and done a good job.

Folks, you saw three very, very good basketball games tonight. You saw two teams play hard tonight in the last game. Neither one of us played well. We make no apologies. But at the same time, I'm happy to move forward, get this one out of the way. Hopefully we can play a little bit more poised, particularly on the offensive end. They were doing a good job of taking away our driving names. We had them 19-8, I think, something like that, and then Mo drew a second foul which was a careless foul and she knows that I felt like I could hold her out to the half. As ugly as the game was going, she probably would have picked up her third foul, and I put in TK and she picked up her third.

We'll just go and enjoy the game. I'm sure y'all have a lot of questions about my offense that didn't work too good. I think you've got a lot of

questions, my point guard didn't have a good night, but she hit the free throws down the stretch. She's been there all year for me. That's the most turnovers she's had all year. But don't worry, she'll play a lot better tomorrow night.

Q. Can you talk about what you thought the offensive problems were, it seemed your team was struggling, can you talk about the struggles and what you thought the problem was tonight?

MORENIKE ATUNRASE: Well, TK and myself got in foul trouble pretty early. That put two shooters on the bench, so we had to look on the bench for other shooters. But the guards that we had in really kind of stretched our offense well. Erica had some nice 15-foot jumpshots, **Danielle Gant** can also shoot the 15-foot jumpshot, but they were mostly playing a second-off man on us. We were also rushing our shots on offense. We just didn't penetrate their defense as well as we usually do.

COACH BLAIR: These are the most mind-boggling stats I've of seen. We shot 44 percent, 43 percent from the 3 and 70 percent from the line. It sure didn't feel like it. I think because of the 19 turnovers.

Give **Danielle Gant** a lot of credit. I know she had a lot of rebounds at the half, and that kid just knows how to play. She knows how to play. That's how good this league is with all of the freshmen in the league. This kid didn't make any all-freshman teams, but by gosh, she made my first team, and that's the one that counts. There's so many good freshmen in the league, you can't have a ten-man freshman team, about this gets pretty special and it's going to get better and better.

Q. Why do you think that Danielle is such a good rebounder, what is it that allows her, especially with her size, she's not particularly big, but she has amazing numbers?

MORENIKE ATUNRASE: I don't think it was anything she learned while she was here at A&M. She's a great fundamental player all-around.

ASAP sports

...when all is said, we're done.®

visit our archives at www.asapsports.com

Texas AM 3 8 06

1

She knows the game well. She just looks for it, she always presses the boards. Even in the summer, we knew she was going to be a great rebounder. Like I said, I think it's just her fundamentals.

Q. Is it a sense of relief getting by the first round, you're guaranteed to play more than one game up here? And all three games the favorites really struggled at times, are you glad to put this game behind you and get a win up here in the Big 12 tournament?

MORENIKE ATUNRASE: Well, yeah, we're going to watch film and correct our mistakes and come out and just come out here ready to play the next game and take it game by game.

Q. How tough was it to play teams that are fighting for their lives, the lower seeds? They know they have got to put everything on the floor, and you're in a position now being the hunted.

COACH BLAIR: I think you saw that in four games today. Four games today, the team that played yesterday, was fresher, their offense was working better, and the four teams that played on their first day today like us and **Baylor** and **Oklahoma**, we all struggled. That just comes with the territory. But I think we all rebounded, we found a way to get back in it. I think all four of us, there wasn't any upsets today. We almost all struggled and we almost all lost.

But, hey, it was hard. Before each ballgame, I put that little plus on my hand at the scorer's table. Everybody thinks it's a cross. That's a plus. That's for me to try to stay positive during the game. I needed a couple more positives all over my body in that ballgame because I was getting frustrated, our kids were getting frustrated. I didn't do a good job of coaching, getting us under control today, and I think that had a lot to do with the chaotic play.

I could see how we were struggling on offense, so I tried to get the tempo faster and uglier, faster and uglier, thinking we could get a couple of layups off of it which we did. But at the same time, I did a poor job of coaching. I think we did a good job of preparation and I did a poor job of coaching being able to get into the continuity set. And when I do a poor job of coaching, my point guard usually follows right behind me and she usually struggles.

Q. Looking ahead to tomorrow, can you talk about playing Baylor for a third time this year?

COACH BLAIR: No, I'm not going to think about that until after midnight. It's just about midnight. I'm not looking forward to that.

You know, I've been seeing 3s ever since I got here, I see **Courtney Paris** with a 3. I saw **Hardy** wearing a 23. Now I've got a 33 tomorrow. I'd love to see a 43; that means we got by Baylor. But it seems like anybody that's got a 3 on their number is a big-time player.

Sophia Young, that last shot she made in overtime, was one of the most incredible shots I've ever seen. The kid has so much energy and so much pride on how she plays the game. That's what separates, that's what makes her a Kodak All-American. That's why she'll be drafted in the Top 3 players in the country. She's just special. But she has fun. She plays with a smile on her face, and that's something that more of us need to do, coaches and players: Play to enjoy the game.

And I'm not looking forward to playing Baylor, but, I'm very happy to play Baylor, because how we played tonight, I thought we were going to be getting ready for another game at another venue. But we're here. We haven't won since 1998 here. We're going to enjoy it, we're going to get better, we're going to rest. But for once, I need that rest to play the 8:30 ballgame.

Q. What did you see that made you decide to start Gant for tonight?

COACH BLAIR: Just flip of a coin, mainly because of the boards. I figured we would struggle early offensively and she could get me some put backs. I figured she might be able to give me some transition baskets because she can go coast-to-coast with it. And all it was was a hunch. I might go back tomorrow and put in **Reado** because that might be a better matchup there. But another unheralded kid that I thought did a good job today was **Micheaux**. She was throwing her body around and the refs all day were letting all of the teams play. That fits our style very well. I thought **Micheaux** did some things.

But remember, the key in the second half was when TK went off. When TK went off and hit all of the big shots in a row, she started feeling it. That's the TK that was playing the early part of Conference play, and that's how she looked. This

has really been her best game since then. I think it's probably the first time she shot over 50 percent in quite a while, but she hit some tough shots.

Q. You said it's an ugly game, but you all shot 56 percent in the second half, what did you see that you did like in that half?

COACH BLAIR: When you're playing that fast, you're taking the other team out of the flow of their offense, okay. That's what we do defensively, whether we're pressing or playing halfcourt defense, we're not letting you play pretty ball, okay. So we force people to do things that we do not want to.

We could have made it a lot easier on ourselves. Just think how many transition baskets we screwed up, okay. Almost three out of four in transition, we screwed them up. Did I answer that question right? Probably not. Do you want to try it again?

Q. Your defense obviously is feeling what your offense is trying to do, and did you see that, how you would like it to be in the second half?

COACH BLAIR: I liked our defense early. Really with hearty hitting those shots that she hit, some of it was just hearty. Sometimes you have to pat the kid on the back and say, hey, that's No. 23. She did a great job. She has a great step back move. She played I thought very average I thought the night before.

I thought the key to the game was really we also slowed down **Howell** a little and if **Howell** had played as well as she played the night before, we would have had a whole lot of trouble. Even though she scored a couple early ones on us, I think we wore her down a little. You wear **Hardy** down in the second half by the pressure that we put on.

March 8, 2006



An Interview With:

NEBRASKA

COACH YORI: I heard about 20 minutes ago **Coach Blair** was talking about wrapping it up, about 20 minutes ago. (Laughing).

Very competitive game. I thought two teams really fought hard and went after each other. I was happy with the effort that we put forth. They are extremely athletic. Hence, the differential in the area of rebounding. Yes, we needed to box out more, but this is a very, very athletic team that we played against tonight. I thought our kids competed very hard. **Kiera** made a lot of plays, obviously, on the offensive end and kept us in the game from that standpoint. But we also had some other players step up, TK being one of them.

I like what we did. I thought we competed hard, and that's what we ask from our players every night.

Q. Can you talk about how difficult A&M is to defend?

KIERA HARDY: They are already difficult as it is, so you've just basically got to try to play them the best way you can. She was feeling it tonight and I mean, that was one of the big keys.

Q. Can you talk about them, their defense and what makes them so tough on that end?

KIERA HARDY: They are a very physical team, probably the most physical in the league. When you play them, you have to be ready to play and know that they are going to play their hardest and you have to bring it. So you can't whine, you can't complain about being physical because that's what the **Big 12** is about. If you don't bring it that night, they are just going to hurt you real bad.

TK LaFLEUR: Well, they are physical. You just have to find a way to beat them at their own game and be physical back. When they are

ganging you up, you just have to be strong and know what you're doing and not hesitate on anything that you do and relieve pressure as best you can.

Q. Kiera, you had a tough night the first night with A&M, did you have extra incentive tonight to show a little better this time?

KIERA HARDY: I really have this thing backwards, all I wanted to come out and do was play the best way I could for us to win. Regardless of scoring or anything, I try to do what is needed of me and tonight, scoring was one of them.

Q. What were you willing to give up, you can't cover them all at all times, did is that correct surprise you?

COACH YORI: No, they are a great dribble jumpshooting team. You know, you don't want to allow them to get all the way to the basket. Our focus was to contain dribble penetration. They didn't get a lot of things going all the way to the rim, but they shot the dribble jumpshot well, **Starks** being the main force there.

But then other kids shoot the dribble jumpshot well, and those are tough shots and a lot of them were challenge shots. You know, I think we wanted to force those shots and then we wanted to do a better job rebounding. They just got too many opportunities on their offensive glass.

Q. You were up at half, what were you talking about in the locker room, what were you thinking it was going to transpire from there?

COACH YORI: Well, we needed to continue to do the things that we were doing and do them a little bit better. I thought we didn't handle full court -- their full-court press very well in the first half. We had not -- when you have one day to prepare, not even a day to prepare, and you know, you don't see that kind of pressure every night; and we talked about that and handled that a little bit better which I thought we did.

But obviously, you know, defensively, I thought we got a little tired in the second half. I

thought that was definitely a factor. We played a lot of kids, a lot of minutes and you're trying to slide your feed and guard, and I thought that was a big factor, but at halftime we felt good. We talked about rebounding. We talked about trying to do a better job there and obviously that didn't happen.

Q. How do you think A&M's style of play will translate into the NCAA Tournament, considered a physical tournament?

COACH YORI: Well, I think it's unusual, and so I think whoever draws them -- it's hard to simulate, and whoever draws them has to find a way to simulate that and hopefully I think one of the things that we like to do against a team that plays that kind of pressure is play against some guys. You know, we don't have guys to play with in our shoot around today, but I think that will be a difficult task to simulate for a team.

I do think, though, the fact that they have a little time to prepare and when you have more time to prepare against a pressure team, I think that you naturally can handle it a little bit better.

But, you know, I think that A&M is going to make a great run. I think they are a quality team. I think they are different than a lot of teams you see. You look at them and you think, you know, they are not that big, but they are a great rebounding team, despite the fact that they are not that big.