

**March 9, 2006**



An Interview With:

## OKLAHOMA

**Q. You guys have talked all year about how they have to choose one, whether they cover Courtney, cover you guys or whatever, is this the best you guys have played in terms of everything being on at the same time in the first half?**

ERIN HIGGINS: I would say so. I think the main thing was, is we went inside early, Courtney and Leah both were doing a really good job of getting offensive rebounds.

**Q. Talk about how important it was that you were able to rest your starters a lot?**

COACH COALE: I think it's really important. I'm really proud of that second group we had coming in there, they played hard, they made big plays, big shorts. Ashley played really, really well and gave us a big spark when we had a couple of turnovers. It's good to rest her legs. We have a day tomorrow where we can kind of collect ourselves and get back to focusing on us for a day.

**Q. Erin, you've been here four years, what is tonight, especially the first half, rank in terms of how well you guys played?**

ERIN HIGGINS: I think it's pretty high up there. I can remember kind of the same scenario two years ago when we were here against **Kansas State**, just everything was going for us, everything was going well for us, we were having so much fun. Like Courtney says, it's a bubble. It just doesn't seem like anything could waver us one way or the other. It was so much fun, and I thought about it when I was on the bench; it's just like **Kansas State** two years ago, and look what happened.

**Q. Coach and Erin if you could both answer, did this feel like a Big 12 semifinal tonight?**

COACH COALE: Yeah, because we were in Reunion Arena and the crowd is full of -- the fans are from a variety of schools. You look up and the Baylor people were lingering in and the Tech folks were lingering in, and it's the hoopla that surrounds it all. You're playing here with all of the banners above. It's not necessarily so much about what happened in those 40 minutes as there is just a special spirit that surrounds this event.

ERIN HIGGINS: I agree with that. I think that our fans were really, really great. They really got us going once we hit some big shots and they got into it. I think this is one of the biggest crowds we've had down here Reunion Arena and they were unbelievable.

**Q. Courtney, you could have gone as long as you needed tonight, but was it sort of good for you, 17 minutes; in Iowa State game yesterday was pretty taxing, was it a good thing to have a little bit more time to rest and then have tomorrow to rest?**

COURTNEY PARIS: I think whenever you can rest your legs, it's great and that was good for everybody. I had a lot of fun just watching and seeing Beky and Ashley and Krista and those guys go at it. It was a good break and entertaining.

**Q. As far as if you can just talk about what Leah meant to you guys tonight and what she's meant as a teammate all year for you.**

ERIN HIGGINS: I think Leah has been the epitome of the most selfless teammate you can have. She goes from being one of our leader scorers last year to giving up some points because she's guarding the best players and blocking out the tough people. She's completely selfless. She cares more about the score board and how we're doing as a team, and I think that

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she's grown in that sense from last year to this year. She's completely invaluable. You can't replace her.

**Q. Oklahoma wins the rebounding by a wide margin and you get ten rebounds yourself, but talk about the role that plays for this team, because very seldom this year has Oklahoma lost a rebounding battle.**

ASHLEY PARIS: Coach talked about before the game that if we in the game get more rebounds than the other team, we're most likely going to win, and that's the case. I got a lot of rebounds tonight, and it's just my teammates making it easy for us.

**Q. How much of an impact has this been to you the first year to be a part of a tradition of playing for Oklahoma, because this is a dream come true, how does this feel, and talk about the performance of your guards.**

ASHLEY PARIS: I don't know, like when I was being recruited, coach coal talked to me about all of the things that could happen here. The coolest part is coming and look at us now, like it's happening and her vision was true and I'm just happy to be a part of it.

COURTNEY PARIS: I think the same thing. I mean, even before coming here, it was just looking at what they already had and their relationship off the court and just Coach Coale's confidence and their swagger. You know that you're going to be special here and us with them -- doing what we're doing right now, so it's just pretty exciting to see it all happening.

COACH COALE: I probably think if there has been a surprise or if there's been a development in our team from what maybe people thought at the outset, to where we are now, it's been the play of those point guards, the development of **Britney Brown** and **Kendra Moore**. You could just sense **Britney's** confidence, her attack mentality. She's really sort of known, quote, unquote, as a defender, but you saw her get to the rim repeatedly. She's taken great care of the basketball. And **Kendra** comes in and continues what Britney starts.

So having both of those guys playing in a tandem has really been the reason in my opinion. Some nights we shoot it really well and some nights Courtney gets 36 and some nights

Britney and **Kendra** just right the ship and that's the reason we're able to go 18-0 so far.

**Q. Courtney, is the way you guys played tonight, is that what we can expect you to play the rest of March and next season?**

COURTNEY PARIS: Well, I certainly hope so. I mean, I think we're able to do a lot of special things if we're able to play like that. That's fun and that's what basketball -- that's when basketball gets perfect, when everything is going well and you're having fun and you're staying together and everybody is a part of it.

**Q. We talk a few weeks ago about if you go 16-0, what about an NCAA seed, and I'm just wondering if you think that kind of performance gives everybody something to think about if you maybe should be in the running for a 1 seed?**

COACH COALE: Certainly, I think it makes for some interesting conversation around that selection table on Monday. I think we have to follow that with similar performance on Saturday, but if we do, absolutely, particularly when viewed in light of what has happened around the country in various Conference tournaments: Rutgers going down and **LSU** going down and **Stanford** going down. And it's happened -- I don't know of a league off the top of my head, I guess Ohio State squeaked by **Purdue** in the championship game. And maybe if we can take care of business on Saturday with some sort of exclamation point, certainly creates at least a cause for a conversation about it.

**Q. Could you address the luxury of being able to rest your starters so much?**

COACH COALE: Yeah, I think, also, I just spoke about the guard play and one of the reasons we were able to come out unscathed in Conference play. I answered one of the questions last night about Courtney, you know, is she going to be worn out -- well, we were able to play her, 24, 25, 26 minutes on a number of occasions in **Big 12** play. And she has young legs, she's 18. When she's a senior, this conversation might be just a little bit different. But right now, when you were 18, couldn't you do just about anything?

So we get a chance to rest her, she plays -- and trust me, she's already given me grief about 17 minutes, "What's up with that Coach, 17 minutes? Ashley has played more minutes than me." I already heard that.

So, yeah, it's nice to have. Both she and Britney particularly, because their tasks last night or yesterday afternoon were so large, both of those guys, they just went at them and went at them. Britney had to guard Medders all night and Courtney we were throwing the ball to her and they were making her score offensively. Yeah, it's go to have them on the bench and get those other guys minutes, too. We're going to need them down the strep.

I don't think it matters who we see. I don't think it's about who we play, I think it's about how we play.

**Q. He stole my thunder with his follow-up question. You look down the list of wins and the only one with an OT next to it is Baylor, a really good game a couple of weeks ago. If it is Baylor, does that just seem like the way it's been setting up all season long that you would meet in the championship game?**

COACH COALE: I don't know. I think that Baylor is clearly -- and you guys gave me all kinds of grief for saying this during *Big 12* play, but clearly they are the second-best team in the league, they finished in second place and they separated themselves, is my point, from the guys that were behind them.

I think what *Sophia Young* does for that team and the sense of urgency that she's playing within her final season, a valiant opponent, and they still carry that National Championship banner around, it's theirs until somebody else takes it in April. We'll play whoever it is.

**Q. In the name of looking ahead, is this what we can expect you to be like next season?**

COACH COALE: Well, I hope not, I hope it's better. When you get a year older and a year wiser and better condition and understand things intently at a different level, I hope it's getting better and better. If it's not, I'm not doing my job.

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An Interview With:

## MISSOURI

COACH STEIN: I thought Oklahoma, obviously they were hitting on all cylinders early, and I think that's a lot of credit to them. I think they are an outstanding team. I think that they showed why they won the Conference.

But I'm very proud of our team. I think that we fought back, things were to the going real well for us, we were missing a lot of open shots, but I thought our kids came out the second half and gave everything they could and really worked hard. We'll be okay. I mean, obviously, sometimes you have one of these days where things are not going your way and that was today for us.

But this team has accomplished a lot. I don't think that we should forget that, and you know, I think the main thing for us is to get ready for the NCAA Tournament.

**Q. Does this leave a bitter taste in your mouth, how much does it take away from everything else you guys did and how hard you worked to really improve from last season?**

LaTOYA BOND: I think we're upset. I mean, we wanted to win and, you know, we've still got the NCAAs and we've got to keep our head up and focus on that.

TIFFANY BROOKS: It's not going to take anything away. I think we've worked too hard this year. We're not just going to lay down. We'll take this as something to learn from and we're going to regroup and continue.

**Q. Is it still disappointing?**

TIFFANY BROOKS: I would say a little bit. We worked hard out there. We never gave up, we fought back, we left it out on the court. I think we came back out the second half and we

worked hard, played hard and tried to come back.

**Q. What goes through your mind after such a brutal first half like that?**

TIFFANY BROOKS: Just wish we could have it over again and start all over. We got off to a bad start, and like I said yesterday, we're usually doing that. I mean, we've just got to learn from it. Like I say, they got off to a great start and, I mean, we didn't and we were not, you know, hitting. You know, at halftime we just came in and tried to regroup and get, you know, to run the offense and play better defense.

**Q. Tiffany, can you talk about Oklahoma's offense, they played six-of-nine 3-pointers in the first half, when they do that and have Courtney Paris on the court, can you talk about how difficult it is to try to stop them?**

TIFFANY BROOKS: It's very difficult. *Courtney Paris* is a great post player. The only way you can try to contain her is to double-team and when you double-team, you leave people that are open on the perimeter. That's just a gamble that you have to take. Tonight they were knocking them down.

**Q. At the beginning of the game, when they are playing like that, did you guys feel at all unprepared for them to come out that strong and that on fire?**

LaTOYA BOND: We know what a great team Oklahoma is. I think they came out ask they ran the ball. I think we just were not prepared for that, we were not getting back and we were not matching up. But they didn't surprise us. We knew Oklahoma was a great team.

**Q. LaToya, can you talk about your troubles offensively, you didn't get many shots off, was that something you guys were**

**doing or is it something their defense was doing or what was doing going on there?**

LaTOYA BOND: Oklahoma has great defense. They play a 3-2 zone and we just weren't moving on offense. We became very stagnant and just didn't get any open looks.

**Q. It seemed like you kind of came out shooting and really attacking the basket, did you feel like there was more responsibility on your shoulders to take those shots?**

TIFFANY BROOKS: I did a little bit. With them playing zone a lot, there was gaps, and so I felt like I had a great opportunity to attack the basket and started to get easy baskets for us.

**Q. Can you talk about how good Oklahoma is now, and how good they could be next year with everybody back?**

COACH STEIN: Well, obviously, that's not something I like to think about, having to prepare for next year already. But they are an outstanding team. As I told Sherri, I think they deserve a **No. 1** seed. Surprised they have not moved up in the rankings.

I would hope the Selection Committee would really look at that and the strength of our Conference. For them to basically be able to go through everybody like they are, an outstanding team in the fact that we were going to try it do some things with **Courtney Paris**. But at the same time, you're giving somebody an open look and they are too great of shooters. And their spacing is very, very good. I mean, it's not easy to get down there to trap Courtney because of their spacing and because of their movement.

So Sherri has done a great job of getting them to run an offense that creates a lot of trouble for a team to trap someone on the block and to cover everybody else, too. When you've got a Higgins on the outside that has a range 10 to 15 feet behind the 3-point, I mean, it puts a lot of pressure on your defense. And obviously, we did not do a good job of doing the things we wanted to do today. They took that game plan and threw it right out the window that first five minutes. But that's a credit to how good they are.

**Q. You worked so hard this year and tried to rebuild the program from last year, and you came such a long way, how much does this loss hurt after that and all of the work you guys put in?**

COACH STEIN: Well, I would tell you that we don't like losing, obviously, and this team has taken losing very hard. But they have also looked at themselves internally just to see what we have to do. They are reflective of the things we've got to do and they have usually responded.

No one thought how we played today would happen. We knew what they were going to do. It wasn't anything out there on the floor that we didn't know that they were going to try to do. It was just fact that we didn't have our A Game today and you can't beat Oklahoma when you're not playing at full capacity. And again, that's a credit to Oklahoma.

**Q. Going back to something you said yesterday, do you think Oklahoma came out a little pissed off today?**

COACH STEIN: Well, believe me, that first five minutes, I definitely thought they were a little pissed off. I was a little pissed off at Femly (ph) myself. (Laughing).

**Q. Three time-outs in the first ten minutes of the game, you mentioned having to scrap the game plan in the first few minutes. Why did you have to take all of those time-outs, to throw their momentum down?**

COACH STEIN: Yeah, you know, our team, one of the things that we have to do, we've had to make adjustments all year. Meaning, this year, psychologically to how we prepare for everything, it's a first time for a lot of things.

And so this is a first time we've been in the semifinals. It's a huge day for Missouri women's basketball. Our kids, to their fault, they really want to please. That's where they feel the pressure; it's not the pressure of winning, it's the pressure of they want to please everybody. They really want to make a hit on the Missouri history books and they really want to do these things.

You know, it's a great day and I don't want to lose sight of that. But sometimes when

you want something so badly, sometimes you overreact; sometimes you underreact; sometimes you freeze. But once our team goes through a situation like this, we have always responded ten times better. We'll be able to handle it so much better the next time. I think that's what I know about our team, and then we'll continue to focus on that.

**Q. Carla was saying she thought the most important thing was tone in practice the next few days and not letting this linger over. Are your kids the type that they can make that happen, or do you sort of have to get their spirits up?**

COACH STEIN: We don't have any real natural leaders on our team. That is something that we've had to teach probably a little bit more. But I think that what I've seen in our team, especially prior to coming into this tournament, was the fact that we've had a lot of kids trying to step up and do all of the right things.

Like I said, we don't have natural leaders, we don't have a lot of vocal leaders. They all just kind of want to prove it in their own way. Tiffany Brooks is a great example of that. She knew what she wanted to do, she was trying to do it as hard as she could, and that was her way of stepping up. You're not going to see Tiffany any clapping hands and running all over the place and high-fiving people, either. At the same time, we have to build off that kind of energy. We're getting there, and that's us being in a position now of being able to do those things.

**Q. Yesterday you guys felt really confident about the NAAs, after this loss, do you still feel confident about the NCAA Tournament?**

COACH STEIN: Absolutely, absolutely. I don't see any reason why we shouldn't. You know, like I said, and this is what's frustrating about being a coach and having to hear questions like that. It's like, you know, do you guys not realize how good Oklahoma is? I don't think it says anything about how bad we are; I think it's telling you how good Oklahoma is.

As I think you heard them say, that's probably the best first half they played all year. You know what, if it takes that to beat it, so be it. I'd rather have fun have to play like that. If they

came out and didn't play well and we were losing by that much, I'd be extremely disappointed. That's going to happen in sport. You know, our kids are not going to hang around crying about it. We're going to respond in a very positive way to this.

**Q. In that same light, do you see either of the teams tomorrow having a chance Saturday to beat Oklahoma?**

COACH STEIN: You know what, I think both of them have an opportunity. And the reason is because I think that like Baylor, for instance, those kids have been through the Fire. They kind of know the expectations. That's something we were still learning on how to perform in a semifinal and get there. Baylor has been in that experience before.

Now, A&M, I don't know, they have a lot of young kids but I think **Gary Blair** is one of the best coaches in the country and he's done a great job this year. I tell you, it's going to be very tough to beat Oklahoma, but I think that those two teams are pretty good and if they are playing well, they have got an opportunity.

**Q. The 2002 OU team with Stacey Dales, Rosalind Ross, do you think this year's team, even though they are younger, might be better than that team, or what are your thoughts?**

COACH STEIN: You know, that's tough to say. But I mean, my first impression is absolutely, just because they are so deep. I think that those kids on that team, a lot of their starters played a ton of minutes, you know, and really, like say Stacey Dales, you don't want to take her off the floor. That's what I talked about with Oklahoma. They are just so deep, they have so many kids that come in and the intensity that they play with, every single one of them, and the confidence they play with is incredible. I think that's a credit to Sherri.