

*March 7, 2007*



An Interview With:

**TEXAS A&M  
COACH GARY BLAIR  
TAKIA STARKS  
A'QUONESIA FRANKLIN  
PATRICE READO**

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Texas A&M and Coach Blair and his players. Coach, congratulations on this afternoon's win. Your thoughts on the game and your upcoming opponent?

COACH GARY BLAIR: I always believe the team that played the day before that doesn't have the by has the advantage. Because I really like how Colorado played the day before, and they held a pretty good Texas Tech team down the stretch in check, and they were playing with nothing to lose. And we had that attitude, that's why we went out there with such hard intensity on defense. I was really proud of my half-court defense.

We've got to do a better job of scoring in transition. When we do force turnovers or we do make them miss, we just were not doing a good job unless we had break-aways.

Of course, as most of you know, I didn't like the last minute of the game. We had a chance to really hold the team down to 10 points, and it's not that we're trying to ever do anything like that, but you want to take that momentum and pride in there. And we were substituting a lot there.

And we wanted to keep the kids out of foul trouble. We made some mistakes, and that comes with the territory. We had kids come off the bench not knowing who they're guarding.

But I was proud of our effort on the defensive end. I thought it took eight minutes into

the second half to get out of the sluggishness that we had.

And I got on my Energizer bunny here pretty hard, but she's been able to take me for three years and is going to because the team responds around her. If she walks to the huddle on a timeout, the team's going to walk with her.

If she runs to the huddle, the team's going to run. If she gets to the huddle and acts like a leader and a captain, the team is going to respond. And if she starts making excuses, our team will make excuses with her.

And this is what a point guard is all about. And she's a very, very special one. I'm prejudiced. I think I got the best one. And there's some very good ones in our league. But she's got her job tomorrow. It's going to be a tough ball game tomorrow, whichever one of these teams, because we beat Nebraska all by a total of one point and we got beat up there by Iowa State. So that's the Big 12 tournament.

I'm just glad to be here. I'm proud of my kids and I thought we did some good things in the ball game. We were a little sluggish. Perhaps that's the first game of the tournament. But I commend Colorado because we really didn't force the turnovers that I thought we were going to off of the press.

And the press sets the tempo and the attitude of the game. It doesn't necessarily mean you've got to steal the ball. But it sets the tempo and the attitude and you wear it down.

Coach Schaefer's number one thing was to stop the guard-to-guard passes. Make them go guard to post instead of guard to guard, because when you go guard to post, we've got a lot of help side in there. And I believe they only had one lob the whole night, and that was in the second half to McFarland.

And other than that, that's just how we play. It might look a little ugly to you, but we're sitting up here right now and so it's still pretty.

**Q. A'Quonesia, will you talk about that leadership you need to have. And then there was a stretch there after they hit two**

**three-pointers in about a minute and a half and then you had two three-pointers in a pretty crucial stretch, you had the three-point plays.**

A'QUONESIA FRANKLIN: Well, it's a hard role to fill on the team. But my team is behind me and they respond well. And with the three-pointers, at that time we knew we had to break the lead open. If we didn't, you knew it was going to be a close game and we didn't want that kind of finish.

**Q. This is for Patrice. It looked like you really hit the boards very hard there the first two games. You guys got a lot of points on some of the points. Can you talk about how you felt that you really took it to them from the beginning, scrapping, rebounding, et cetera.**

PATRICE READO: Well, every game I go into the game just wanting to play defense. For the past couple of games, I haven't been going to the boards. Coach Blair has been getting on me about going to the boards. This game I just wanted to go in, rebound and play defense, so our team can get the win.

**Q. Patrice and Takia both, they cut it to five. It looked like you got a good delay up there with the three-point play, and you all really kind of got going after that. At that point was it almost like, all right, enough of this, let's put it away? Was it that feeling?**

TAKIA STARKS: I wouldn't say it was that feeling. Sort of like we had been playing the whole game. We thought we should be up by more. We weren't up by more because didn't play like we should have played. And as soon as we got that run, we just kept trying to keep running and getting defensive stops and getting the transition shots, and that was really our game. When that started happening, you saw us start to take the game away.

PATRICE READO: Once we get the momentum on our offense, that's what leads us to the momentum down on the defensive. That's how the big plays gets us started.

**Q. Coach, you guys were on the offensive glass a lot, getting a lot of steals. Just kind of the way the entire season has gone?**

COACH GARY BLAIR: I think so. It's what we do. There's no great formula. Basically the run started with that Oklahoma tornado in there, Danielle Gant, when she made the block on the baseline right in front of Kathy. Those are big-time plays, and gave stops to finish down

there. I thought it killed Colorado by her two blocks and what she did there.

And make sure you give -- McFarland got 17. But Reado did one heck of a job on her. She was on her the majority of the game at 5 foot 11 and I thought that was the difference in the game because I had nightmares last night of her getting 32 again.

And a lot of it is because of that little kid who is usually not up here in the press room. She's back there in the garage doing the dirty work, and that's the type of player she is.

But I was really pleased at how well she played at the floor.

**Q. Gary, can you talk about Gant in general, what she does for your team. Doesn't seem like she shoots a lot. Can you talk about the stuff she does to help you win.**

COACH GARY BLAIR: You're right, she doesn't shoot a lot. She makes a lot. When you look at the field goal percentage leaders in our league, they're all post players, except for Danielle Gant, who plays a 3 the majority of time for us. But all of the others, the Mosleys, the McFarlands, the Riddles, everybody but Jackson, shoots great field goal percentage. But we get all ours almost from a little almost five-10 kid. She means so much to this team because how many players of that stature would come off the bench and be able to handle that without phone calls: Hey, my daughter needs to be starting, and all that jazz.

She handles it. She's the ultimate team player. And so are her parents. We're happy to have her here. It's not how many she scores, but she sets the tone of the game. She's a great defensive player.

**Q. Will you expand on Jackie McFarland. She takes nine shots but they really struggled to get the ball to her at all in the first half.**

COACH GARY BLAIR: Well, a lot of it, when you do not have the guards that can dribble penetrate besides Houston, they can't create passing angles to get it in. And that's the hardest thing, and that's what we try to take away is make you run your offense 25 feet from the basket. And then we gamble a lot.

And we're going to get beat on layups, but we said whenever McFarland did beat us, let's try not to foul her because she just doesn't miss. That kid is a great player and just a sophomore. Special, special kid there. And I'm sure that will be one of the all-time greats to ever play at Colorado.

And did you recruit that young lady? Good job, hon.

**Q. Coach Blair, back to Danielle Gant, did she seem to have a little extra pep in her step in practicing this week as she was having to come back to play in front of her home crowd, or did it really make any difference to her? Was she just locked in?**

COACH GARY BLAIR: She's the most low-key individual you ever met in her your life. Sometimes I have to check to see if there's a pulse there. All of a sudden she's smiling more, she's talking more, she enjoys coming back home, and I think that's special.

I think you saw that with Earnesia Williams from Texas, also played the same type. Kids like coming home. And she's played very well in this state, and I just like to thank the State for putting out as many good high school players as there are in this state right here.

This is probably the most underrated state in the country as far as producing big time quality basketball players. I think Connecticut has won a couple of national championships with some Oklahoma kids, too.

But Danielle Gant is special. The best thing about Gant is she's got two years and hopefully a month left to play.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations.

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An Interview With:

**COLORADO BUFFALOES  
COACH KATHY  
McCONNELL-MILLER  
HANNAH SKILDUM  
JACKIE McFARLAND**

MODERATOR: We're now joined by Colorado. Coach, your comments about the game and your thoughts about this afternoon's performance.

COACH McCONNELL-MILLER: Well, it wasn't pretty. But it wasn't for lack of effort or a true commitment to coming in here and trying to beat A&M. But you gotta give all the credit to A&M. They're a phenomenal team.

They're the type of team that makes it impossible to run your stuff. They denied the wing entries. They denied the post entries. They put an amazing amount of pressure on the basketball. Their depth is exceptional.

And there's really no weak spot in their top six players. So for us we felt like our strength was inside. But we really struggled to get the ball to the wings. We struggled to get the ball inside and really their pressure was too much for us.

**Q. Kathy, will you just expand on even getting the ball touches for Jackie was pretty hard. And they really, I think it was Reado, you know, kind of undersized but did a pretty good job on her.**

COACH McCONNELL-MILLER: I think it was a pretty physical game. And it's not one that Jackie particularly loves. But I thought they did a great job of fronting her, not allowing touches, and it was very difficult for us to get it, to lob it when she did have position because the ball pressure was great. Our guards kept picking it up. You know, we weren't just trying to get the ball to

Jackie, there were a lot of things that I thought they took away from us. Jackie was part of our options. We needed Kara, Jasmina struggled a little bit on the offense to score, and with that type of pressure we just took bad shots. We took them bad and we took them early.

**Q. Kathy, could you expound on guard play not being able to get the extra passes. You mentioned it earlier. But also a little impatient on waiting for the wings to clear and making passes just to get the ball into the post?**

COACH McCONNELL-MILLER: You know, when we try to do a lot of dribble entries, we try to change up our sets a little bit. I think which leads to the lack of assists. We didn't do a good job of putting the ball in people's hands. Any time we scored, it was really off of penetration. It was off of an offensive board or it was just, you know, working somebody to get to the rim.

They're good. They wait on top of your screens, whether you got a double stack high, double stack low. Inverted screen. It doesn't matter. They'll switch it. They'll get up on the wings and denying. Whitney is not the best at entering the ball into the wing to begin with, yet she's better full court than Susie Powers would have been.

So it was really a Catch-22. If you have Susie at the point where you're struggling to get it up, you have Whitney at the point, we're going to get it up. But at the half court, we just weren't able to didn't execute. They're quick, they overplay, they deny.

**Q. Jackie, can you sort of expand on what Coach was saying, do you almost feel like sometimes playing Texas A&M you keep trying and trying almost like they force you to try to do more than you can even do?**

JACKIE McFARLAND: I don't necessarily think I'm forced to do more than I can. I think we struggle when we can't get the ball inside and use our inside/outside game, and that's not just me. That's Kara, too, and some of our other posts.

And we never got set into our offense. So I think when you do get the ball inside, kind of need to make the most of it.

**Q. In the second half, when you were down by 6, 11 run, what keyed that run for them?**

COACH McCONNELL-MILLER: We were in the zone. We were doing a great job in the zone with the exception of a few slips in the back of the zone and then they start hitting their outside shots. We were trying to take away their penetration. We were trying to take away what they were going to do on the offensive end. In the zone they were one and done in the zone we were going to have them rely on their guards to hit shots.

And I think Jackie was on the line to get us to 6. And then they just stepped up and hit shots. A'Quonesia Franklin hit one with the shot clock winding down. When they hit the 3s is when they broke it open.

**Q. Coach, why do you think you were never able to get ahold on the turnover issue this year?**

COACH McCONNELL-MILLER: Well, I think a couple of things. There's no doubt that our strength is in our front line, which is where our experience is as far as playing time and being in this situation. Our weakness all year has been our guard play for a few reasons. The youth of the guards; the inexperience at this level, coming in playing Big 12 schedule. A really tough non-conference schedule.

I think one thing if I were to do differently was schedule a little bit better in the non-conference to give these players a little bit more confidence, because players like Whitney Houston and Candace Rucker and Aija and Bianca and have been battling tough teams all year. There has been no let up in our schedule. So they never really got the chance to get any momentum, great games back to back. It's been tough for them all year. So I think we work on it. It's something I think it's a mental thing.

I think we've tried several things as far as watching film, different wing entries. Sometimes fatigue set in. And you know you also gotta, when we talk about the turnovers, I know most people think it is just our guards. But you know yesterday our 3, 4, 5 hit 15 of our 25 turnovers. Sometimes it's travel, three second calls, offensive fouls. It's really a combination of all of them.

We do concentrate on taking care of the basketball. Sometimes -- most times it hasn't

translated. It's something we'll have to work on in the off season.

**Q. Either Jackie or Hannah can answer this question. Just talk about the physical play inside the post. Coach mentioned about trying getting lobs on the inside, but you all were always getting fronted or backed up, two on one or weak side help.**

JACKIE McFARLAND: The physical nature of this game really didn't bother me. We played more physical teams. It was the pressure of the guards getting into the post. I don't think they even helped that much on the backside but whether they fronted or whether I was in front and they were playing behind me, I think we struggled getting the ball inside.

HANNAH SKILDUM: I think on the guards it's hard to get open on the wings. I think we struggled with that. So that was definitely something that we needed to do better this game.

**Q. Kathy, what did winning yesterday do for the program and do for giving you a boost in terms of next year?**

COACH McCONNELL-MILLER: Well, I think it's progress, and that's just the way we have to look at it. We won nine games last year. 13 games this year. First win in the tournament.

But, you know, that's all it is. It's just progress. And with this particular group, I've seen so much progress throughout the year. I've seen Jackie do incredible things with a great group of young women that she's been a great leader for them. She's brought them along. Put them underneath her wing and really tried to lead them. There's been some great games. There's been some not so great games.

We've played well at home. We really struggled on the road. There's just a lot of things that we're going to look back at and learn from.

But the biggest part for us is to bring our guards along a little bit quicker and to be able to have a more balanced attack. I'm excited we won yesterday.

I don't think our players were satisfied with that. I don't think they rested on that. But it was definitely progress made.

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