

March 7, 2007



An Interview With:

**OKLAHOMA SOONERS
COACH SHERRI COALE
COURTNEY PARIS
ASHLEY PARIS
LEAH RUSH**

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by Oklahoma University and congratulations, Coach, on the win. I don't know whether you were informed but you all set a new team record for team blocks with 15 for the tournament. The old record was 10 held by Kansas State on March the 12th, '03. Congratulations. Your comments about the game and upcoming opponent.

COACH COALE: I was proud of our kids. I thought we really competed. Gave up too many offensive boards. That's something that we had keyed on before the game. 19 is not a good number. But at the same time, we made a lot of effort plays. Forced some turnovers, did a great job of blocking obviously around the rim. Courtney, Leah, Amanda all those guys involved in that.

We felt we did a great job sharing the basketball. That's a great thing. 15 assists. That's the way we play. When that number is high we'll be pretty successful. I was really proud of our effort, and I thought Texas played very hard and competed for a full 40 minutes.

We just were pretty good from the three-point line tonight. That made a big difference as well.

Q. You obviously saw Texas was hot yesterday in their win. Can you talk about your defense performance tonight and what was the mind set coming in defensively?

COACH COALE: Well, Texas makes a living by scoring in transition. And early on, even though that's what we were prepared to stop, it's one thing to talk about, another thing to really be on the floor with it.

I thought it took four, five minutes to adjust to the transition. Did a better job getting the ball at half court slowing them down and it made us catch up a bit. We've been playing with more abandon defensively figuring out how to help each other and how important it is that five guys guard as one instead of five different guys trying to guard individually.

We pushed it up a lot and felt that could be effective against Texas. I think it was. Again, when you have somebody like Courtney hanging around in the middle of the lane where they can't get to the basket, that makes a huge difference. I suppose that's why she gets defensive player of the year.

Q. Sherri, this was a very physical game but it seems throughout the season when the games are physical, you usually come out on the front end of those. People don't talk about it very much, how tough your team is and when you get into these physical games, you usually come out in good shape.

COACH COALE: Well, we have a lot of experience. I think when a game is physical, seniors who have been through the battles understand how to handle themselves and I just thought we made some tough plays. A lot of athletes going after rebounds around the rim.

For people who might say women's basketball doesn't have anything to do with athleticism watch that game tonight. They were happy jumping around the rim. Chelsi took a charge that wasn't called a charge, but she planted herself. I swear the girl's feet hit her in the head. That's the only thing. Tremendous athleticism on the floor. We handled ourselves well in terms of staying tough, keeping the block out. Holding the block out against that speed and explosion is tough. And I thought these guys did a tremendous job there.

Q. Sherri, talk about Leah's game tonight. Seemed like she was on all over the court contributing in so many different ways.

COACH COALE: When she hit the first basket, I had a flashback to Kansas State and Dallas. It's something about the Big 12 Post-Season Tournament. Leah Rush is really, really good, and that's exactly what we needed our senior leader to be. She made big baskets. She was calm, she was poised, she defended Tiffany, kept the ball out of her hands for the majority of the early part of the game. And you know it's one of the reasons we got off to such a great start.

Q. Leah, can you talk about how the crowd fueled your effort tonight and was it any different than the crowd in Norman when you got a big crowd at Lloyd Noble or did it feel like the Lloyd Noble Center?

LEAH RUSH: It felt like a home game certainly. It's a huge advantage I think playing in Oklahoma City. Huge advantage for us. And it's fun, I think. Oklahoma City and the surrounding area, the Sooners fans around here are enjoying it and we love being here and letting them come out and support us. It's a lot of fun.

Q. Sherri, Jenna Plumley is someone that seems like you've kind of given her the green light, because tonight she had five assists, six turnovers, but still she was a spark plug. And I would think you would think she plays well. Do you coach her any differently because she is going to make good things or bad things happen, it seems like?

COACH COALE: I think that's the case with a lot of great players, particularly maybe point guards who create things. And I remember No. 21 for about four years here, Stacey Deals, every other pass might go to a security guard. If you're sitting on press row, you better have your hands up. But the ones in between those errant passes went right where they were supposed to go. The defense couldn't get to them.

So there's a risk/reward. You roll the dice a little bit. But when she goes four of five from the three-point line, I think that might cancel out a few of those.

Q. Sherri, your offense kind of went reverse tonight. I think your first five baskets were three-pointers and later you came back and hit them with Courtney in the hammer. Is that fair?

COACH COALE: Yes, that's a perfect assessment, John. It was sort of an atypical beginning because typically we established Courtney at the low block and we pounded in and pounded in and pounded in, and then when they started surrounding her, we kicked it out and got the 3s.

But with we had some opportunities. We had a hard time getting her the ball early. It wasn't that we weren't trying to. We had a hard time and credit goes to Texas for that.

It was two things. It was their activity and their active feet around her, but it was also their ball pressure. And we couldn't quite see to make those entry passes. So we were fortunate that we had guys step up and make 3s.

And, Leah really just -- you hit a couple shots early and suddenly you feel really good and the rest of them are a little bit more confident.

Q. Looking ahead, if you were to play Baylor tomorrow night talk about the pros and cons of playing a team in a tournament that you just played last weekend, really blew out.

COACH COALE: I hate to guess about who we're going to play. There's a 40-minute game that's going to make that decision. I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing to play someone you're familiar with. We played Texas not long ago. It was a fairly easy preparation in that our guys remembered everything that they do. And it was fresh on their mind. I think a little bit easier than had we drawn, say, Nebraska who we didn't play since opening weekend in Big 12.

COURTNEY PARIS: Like Coach said, we don't know who we're playing yet, but I think the big thing we're working on lately is focusing on Oklahoma and making sure we're playing our right kind of basketball. And our assistant coaches do a great job scouting, so we just need to play Oklahoma basketball.

Q. Sherri, talk about the play of Ashley tonight. And, Ashley, I want you to talk about playing alongside Courtney so much tonight.

COACH COALE: I felt one of the biggest plays of the games was when Ashley caught the ball (indiscernible) the timeout. And we talked about exactly what we wanted to do, but she executed it perfectly. And I thought that really sort of blew the game open because it was like we had the three-point basket going and now if we get the high-low game going as well, they may not have an ability to have an answer for it.

I thought Ashley played with great

abandon in the second half particularly going after rebounds, very, very tough and physical.

ASHLEY PARIS: About playing with Courtney, you said? I think playing with Courtney, (indiscernible), I mean that high-low thing is going to be there. She works pretty hard. She will go get it for you if it's any way possible. I think as far as having those shots open tonight, it's because so much pressure is going towards her, and it just let me take that. It just makes the game a lot easier for me with her out on the court.

Q. Courtney, could you talk about the adjustment you made and you had four shots in the first half. You had five I think in the first two minutes or so of the second half. And you scored the first eight points and just kind of gave you guys some distance there.

COURTNEY PARIS: I think Coach said it earlier. Normally we're usually -- we'll establish the inside and then we'll hit them with the outside, once they all come down. But Texas did a great job of playing the post, and they were there and they were fronting and it was hard to get the ball inside. But Leah Rush and these other guys were knocking down three-pointers.

For me it was just like, well, your teammate knocks down a 3, that's really good. They established, we established ourselves on the outside first and then Texas had to adjust, and then the second half I was open a lot more.

Q. Courtney, did this feel as effective as the game with Baylor? You guys put two of these together in a row now?

COURTNEY PARIS: Definitely we're excited and Coach except saying you just survive in post-season so you can keep playing. I think not only did we survive we got better and played with abandon. That's a fun thing to see.

Q. Sherri, a few times this year you talked about, you still have a potent offense when you take Courtney out of the game where she has to come out of the game because Ashley has become such a good low post score. Tonight that was very evident. That really benefits your team for the long run doesn't it when she can do that?

COACH COALE: Absolutely. I think what was special about Ashley's offensive performance tonight it came in a variety of ways. She hit a high post shot. Caught it at the high post penetrated got to the rim finished around the basket. Made a post move. It was a variety of different things which really keeps teams off balance. And I think

in the second half she and Courtney both ran the floor better offensively which created some opportunities as well.

Q. Sherri, I had the pleasure of sitting next to a genius in John Holcomb, and he was talking about how some women's basketball is more fun to watch than men's because you are fundamentally --

COACH COALE: Oh, John, that's precious.

Q. Anyway, the entry passes were something down to the low post. There were some terrific low post entry passes it seemed tonight.

COACH COALE: Right. Jenna Plumley has an uncanny court vision. And she can deliver in ways -- she had a couple of post feeds a week or so ago at home. I wanted to see them on the replay immediately. Like the ball bounced five different directions once it hit the floor before it came back to Courtney. She just has that sense about her.

When you're five foot three and playing against guys five 10 and six foot, maybe better be a little creative. It wasn't just Jenna. Amanda had a couple of great feeds and she has terrific vision as well.

That's something that we work on. I mean I think feeding the post is a lost art. I really do. I think finding kids who can get the ball to a post play in the right spot at the right time, that's a rarity.

And we spend a lot of time working on it. We're fortunate, a couple of our young kids come in with that skill. But that doesn't mean we're going to pull away from the reps on that. We have to do it every single day.

Q. Courtney, Texas shot 25% for the game. Was your defense that good, your team defense that good tonight?

COURTNEY PARIS: I think it was okay. I don't know. Yes, it's something that we've been working on all year long. So I mean I think we're getting better at it and our communication is getting a lot better as far as being there and contesting shots. I think, yeah, we were there and they had to shoot over us.

Q. Is that a big deal to you, Courtney? You talk a lot about double doubles and points and rebounds, but talk about blocked shots. How big or how important is that to you and the team and something to be proud of? How do

you feel about that?

COURTNEY PARIS: Yes, I've been asked before what's my favorite thing doing on the court. I think it's blocking shots. It brings a lot of momentum. The crowd goes crazy. It can be a blocked shot that stops the game-winning shot, you know, or it could be a ball that goes out of bounds and everybody goes crazy and it brings a lot of momentum. And it's fun. It's cool to see.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you all very much.

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An Interview With:

**TEXAS LONGHORNS
COACH JODY CONRADT
CARLA CORTIJO
TIFFANY JACKSON**

MODERATOR: We're now joined by the University of Texas coach and player. Tiffany will be here in a couple of minutes. Carla is here and she'll take questions and Tiffany should be joining us momentarily. Coach, your comments about tonight's game.

COACH CONRADT: To indicate how hard our team played. Tiffany cramped up on the way on the walk here. So as soon as they stretch her out she'll be here.

It was hard-fought. I think you saw two teams who really respect each other, really go at it. They play a little prettier than we do and they started out like lights out. I was hopeful they wouldn't continue to hit the 3s the way they did. We tried to tell our team to just try to weather that storm.

And I thought we did. But we had spells throughout the game where we really got pretty frustrated on offensive end. We got shots blocked because we went right into the big people and invited them to block it, and when we did have some opened looks, we were looking around to see who was going to block it.

And we missed some really good opportunity to score some baskets in transition, and we had some good looks and we didn't knock those down.

It's hard to believe you take 72 shots to your opponent's 54 and you still are struggling to stay in it offensively. But I look at the stat sheet. I see that we fought hard rebounding-wise and they're a tough team to rebound against.

We took care of the basketball. They have turnovers, but it all got down to one thing counts and that's when you put the ball in the hole. And we had a lot of difficulty doing that. It's no secret that that's been an issue with this team, particularly as the season progressed. We're not the best shooting team. And people have the ability to collapse on us and if we can't loosen them up then it's usually a long night.

But, again, Oklahoma is really good. They're hard to defend. I thought we did a decent job with that part of the game. But on the other end our inability to score, our inability to finish would have made it awfully hard for us to win this ball game.

Q. (Off microphone)

COACH CONRADT: I don't have any idea about that. With this team I don't think we have focused on that because I think that this team knows that they have to play possession after possession. You would hope so. Are we one of the best 64 teams in the country? I believe so.

I believe that our conference is very tough. I think we have beat up on each other. I heard someone mention today this is the only conference where there was a real conference race. Everybody else had teams at the top and teams at the bottom and they never met on our level at the conference, it's been a battle for everybody. And, again, I have no idea. We're hopeful. But on the other hand I think our team did everything that they could do to try to play themselves into the tournament.

Q. Coach, when they're hitting three-pointers like that how much more difficult does it make it guarding Courtney?

COACH CONRADT: They're really good. Any team that has inside/outside game the way they do, they're going to be successful. And, again, I thought we worked about as hard as we could work. We boarded with them. We forced turnovers, but they're hard to guard. And our team laid it all on the line. I don't have any problems with the effort we gave tonight. They're a lot

prettier than we are the way they play. But that doesn't get your points. What matters is whether you knock down shots. They did, we didn't. We had a lot of opportunities where we could have folded but we didn't.

We're going to take pride in that. We're going to congratulate Oklahoma because they're a very good team. They were predicted before the conference ever started that they were going to win the conference. And I don't think it was easy for them or for anyone else, but they persevered, and I want to say that this was a great venue.

I mean that was an electric environment. Oklahoma City has done a wonderful job with this tournament. And I enjoyed being in an environment where people are passionate about women's basketball.

And they've been very hospitable and done a great job. Our hostess, as I mentioned last night, really good. They went into the witness protection program now. But they did a great job. They thanked me for not naming them last night when I talked about them finding us a place to practice.

Q. Could you talk about the blocked shots Oklahoma had and how it played in to you guys couldn't score in the second half for a while.

TIFFANY JACKSON: That was huge. That's one of the strengths of having Courtney in the middle along with Amanda Thompson. They had us off on a lot of our shots. It played a big part in them winning this game.

Q. Tiffany, how badly do you want to continue your career here at UT?

TIFFANY JACKSON: A lot. I don't even know I didn't even know words to say to explain how bad I want to continue to play. I want to keep playing.

Q. Tiffany, Oklahoma's first four points came on five three-pointers how much did that just snowball the momentum and all of a sudden they blow the roof off with their shooting?

TIFFANY JACKSON: That was huge whenever anyone gets a 3 in transition or a 3 that's a big momentum changer. They had a great crowd behind them. And that got into our heads a little bit. We just tried to continue to play.

Q. Coach, you had nights where you shot bad, but when you mentioned about the rebounding and the turnovers and the steals

and you get down to the end, some nights you pull those games out. And tonight that just wasn't that way?

COACH CONRADT: You're exactly right. We've seen a lot of zones and people are going to zone us. I mean it's no secret we are what we are. We're really good defensive team. We're really hard-working team and when we can get in open court, we generally finish. Although we had difficulty with that tonight.

But there's a temptation. When you're seeing people not guard you there in the zone, you want to competitively you just want to make the shot.

And we needed to stay disciplined and for the most part we did. They challenge you to shoot from the perimeter, and we just don't have a shooting team from the perimeter right now.

Ernie Williams is probably one of our best perimeter shooters and she didn't have a great night. You know it's hard. She's from Oklahoma I know she put pressure on herself to come here and have a great outing. And that didn't happen for her. But she's as hardworking as anybody we have on our team. Carla willed some shots in tonight. That's not what Carla does best.

But I think you see competitors try to step up and it's no secret we were going to have trouble with zone, because Tiffany's going to have trouble inside if they double and triple team her and we did get going inside out a little bit, Carla knocked down some shots.

But we don't have the kind of shooters that we need to face the zone night in night out.

Q. Jody, with the youth you have on your team and the way they worked hard this year, would you entertain a WINT bid in case you all don't get one on Monday?

COACH CONRADT: You know, I really don't think that that's where this team would go. You know, you set your goals on going to the NCAA and that's still in the back of our minds. Hopefully something will happen and we'll get there. But in my mind it's awfully difficult when you're disappointed in one way to turn around and get ready to play again.

We've asked this team to do a lot. We don't have depth. Carla has played, I don't know, how many minutes, and you know when Tiffany starts cramping upcoming to the media room, then you know that your team has probably given you just about everything they can.

If we can get a little time off and make a run in NCAA be at home, obviously we'd be very

excited about that.

Q. For Carla and Tiffany, do you feel like you've earned that spot in the NCAA?

CARLA CORTIJO: Yes, we've been working real hard this whole season, and I think -- yes, I think we saved that spot right there on the NCAA. Anything can happen right now, and we probably would be there.

COACH CONRADT: I think if you asked if we were competitive against anybody we had played against other than Tennessee and Duke early in the season, I think we've been in games, I think we've been competitive. And I think we can play. We've got some really good wins but we had some losses that were disappointing as well.

Tiffany, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to take your question.

TIFFANY JACKSON: I agree.

(Laughter)

MODERATOR: Coach, best of luck in the post-season.

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