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An Interview With:

MISSOURI COACH CINDY STEIN

PETER IRWIN: We're joined by Cindy Stein. Would you like to make an opening comment or two?

COACH STEIN: We're looking forward to, obviously, coming back to Oklahoma City for the Big 12 tournament. We're very excited about the season. I was trying to prepare for what was going to go on today, because you hear about so many different things that are always going on throughout the summer, coaches.

It amazes me, with women's basketball, because we always talk about fashion. So we're either talking about like what Kim Mulkey is going to wear, Sherri Coale's stilettos. Now I hear Coach G has her own clothing line.

I thought what I was going to do was I thought about coming naked because I thought that would be the only way I'd get any attention, but they wouldn't let me on the plane.

But we wanted attendance this year to -- we wanted our attendance to go up, so that wasn't going to help us. We are excited about being here. I brought two outstanding young ladies here: Shakara Jones, a sophomore, returning starter. And Alyssa Hollins, another returning starter, senior.

And they both have been providing such great leadership this year for what we plan on being a very, very good year for the Mizzou Tigers. Why do we say that? We returned all our starters. We returned 99.9 percent of our offense and 99.9 percent of our defense.

And now we've added four freshmen. Three of them are 6-3 and bigger. The other one is six foot. And they're very talented freshmen. We're very excited. We feel our depth is so much better. We feel we have seasoned veterans coming into play and we obviously can't wait to get things going.

PETER IRWIN: Questions.

Q. Want to ask you about the size. You brought in a lot of size. Obviously Shak did a lot of yeoman's work as a little bit of an undersized post player last year. How much is the size going to help you overall and maybe help Shak also?

COACH STEIN: The biggest factor with our size right now is just the fact that Shakara is about 6-1 going up against 6-5, 6-3, 6-3 in practice, which never happened at all last year, unless one of our guy practice players happened to be bigger.

She's able to go up against bigger kids which is making her actually finish around the basket probably better. She's so much more comfortable inside. It's no longer an eye-opener when you see somebody coming up bigger, and especially like a Courtney Paris type player, she was going to have to play in the post.

She's no longer threatened and has a lot more confidence going into that. I think that that's one of those things. Plus, the depth. I mean, we had Nicole Wilson last year who was a volleyball player, hadn't played collegiate basketball. And just the kids coming in off the bench now will be players that have more basketball skills, probably more basketball knowledge. Even though Nicole did a great job for us, these kids are just going to keep improving.

Their shot blocking abilities and scoring abilities just give us so much more depth inside. We probably went from one of the smallest teams in the Big 12 last year to now I would put us in the top half.

Q. You've got everybody back. You talked about 99 percent of your offense and defense. Out of all those returners, who is really stepping up? Who have you seen like a whole new part of their game?

COACH STEIN: It's interesting, because I feel like everyone's returned better in some way. Obviously I think that -- I was a little surprised in

individual workouts this year, Alyssa making some of the moves that she did, because I've been talking to her about being a little bit more physical going inside and getting to the basket a little bit more.

She's doing all those things. And so she had a couple of moves earlier individual workouts, just she's pulling something out of her pocket again and playing extremely well. And you're talking about your best player on your team coming back better.

Obviously I talked about Shakara. She's just so much more comfortable inside. She's stepping out on the perimeter now and hitting some 3s. She's doing some other things.

Jessra Johnson has always been somebody, she just scores and she rebounds. But Jasmyn Otote has come back better, more consistent shooter, working harder on the defensive end. RaeShara Brown was going to play her mainly at point or back-up point depending on how she did. She came in playing the wing really well for us, being very physical, another tremendous rebounder, defender.

So I could go on down the line. I think that they've all come back better. Toy Richbow has come back better. It's just, you can just name them.

Q. You had three overtime games last year, the biggest being the Oklahoma game, talk about what your kids took away from that.

COACH STEIN: The Oklahoma game I think was big on the fact that we were very disappointed in our season up until that point. And we knew that we had some close games that we had lost and we were hanging in there. But no one wants to hang in there. You want to have something.

So I think the Oklahoma game gave us some confidence. It gave us a reason to kind puff out our chest, say we're going to be a lot better next year. But at the same time we also understood that the Oklahoma game meant we needed to make sure we were doing all those little things in the summer to return better. I think that's what it did the most.

Q. Following that, you guys nearly beat Oklahoma in Columbia, basically down to the last minute and then you beat them. Not to ask you to give away all your secrets against Oklahoma, but why were you so successful against them and what do you think about them

being picked number one, although a lot of teams got votes for number one, about them being picked to win this year?

COACH STEIN: I think Oklahoma is a good pick for number one. They returned everybody. As many of our conference teams do, I think that when we ended the season last year, I looked at the Big 12 and knew that we were returning probably 80 plus percent of our best players in the league. And, of course, I was hoping they were all graduating.

So it just put a little more emphasis on what we needed to do. But as far as our play against Oklahoma, I think it just had to do more with our players being a little more aggressive. And that's something that we got better at during the year, but defensively, especially. In the Big 12 you can't sit around and wait for things happen. You've got to help make things happen. And against Oklahoma I think we probably always did that better in those games than some of the others. It's just playing all out defensively a little bit more aggressive.

For us to compete in the Big 12 we have to be a highly aggressive and intense team.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you, Coach.

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