

March 14, 2008



An interview with:

COACH BUDKE
DANIELLE GREEN
ANDREA RILEY
SHAUNTE SMITH

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the Oklahoma State coach, we'll let you make a couple of opening comments.

COACH BUDKE: We're very excited, obviously, as a program that's billed to be playing in the championship game of the greatest conference of America right now, the toughest conference of America.

And we felt all year that we've been very consistent all year, if you look at our scores compared to everybody else in the league. There were teams above us that got blown out of some games and we were in every single game this year. And we felt that consistency was because these kids have a lot of heart, a lot of courage, they play defense, they do the little things that we have to do to win.

We've gotten better balance as we've gone along the way. Early on, it was pretty much Andrea and Danielle, but now Shaunte Smith is as important as anybody on this team. And Taylor and M.C., all of them stepped up.

I think the difference between us now and us in January is that we go out every night and have three or four people in double figures. We know we're playing a great team in Texas A&M, and probably the most talented team in the league, but we're excited about it.

Q. Andrea, you guys have had classic match-ups with them the last two years. Is this what we should expect again?

ANDREA RILEY: Yes. This game is going to be a battle, because every time -- seems like when we see them, maroon and white, it's like, oh, we got a battle tonight. They're a great team and they're going to come out physical and we've got to match their intensity.

DANIELLE GREEN: It seems like we match up well against them every time. We have some athletic players and it's going to be a fun game to watch, competitive.

SHAUNTE SMITH: I agree. Every time it goes down to the wire, and I think it's a perfect match-up for us on Saturday.

Q. Shaunte, as you sit on this stage, tomorrow playing for a major championship, how far away does 6-22 seem today?

SHAUNTE SMITH: It seems far but I mean, you know, we've worked hard as a team, and I've worked hard as an individual and we've come a long way. Me and Taylor have come a long way, and to be this far is a blessing and it's awesome.

I couldn't do it without my teammates being here for me and Taylor and I'm excited for the University and the team and the coaches.

Q. Can you talk about the things that have happened getting into the NCAA, getting into the top four seeds, getting into the tournament finals.

DANIELLE GREEN: It's a big step.

SHAUNTE SMITH: It's incredible. I couldn't have imagined going to the Big 12 championship. I'm excited and taking it all in and one day at a time and I'm excited and blessed to be here.

Q. Andrea, you guys are playing for a Big 12 championship. Do you feel like there is more out there, maybe a seed and a chance to get to Oklahoma City that you're playing for tomorrow night?

ANDREA RILEY: I think we're proving that we are one of the top teams in the country and we're not going to stop. We're not satisfied. We're going to go out and play like we happen how to play as a team and try and get a Big 12 championship. And if that doesn't happen, then we'll try and go for an NCAA championship.

Q. Danielle, do you think you're playing for an added incentive other than this championship?

DANIELLE GREEN: Yes. We want to get to Oklahoma City but we just want to go out and win the game. And we will take one step at a time and worry about that after this game.

Q. Shaunte, how tough was that the first year in the league and how frustrating was it in practice, or did he keep it light-hearted?

SHAUNTE SMITH: Honestly, it was tough, but I never stopped working and I knew -- I'm confident now and I knew if we kept working, that eventually we could get this far. You've just got to keep up, working hard all season, and eventually I knew that I was going to be on a winning team. And that's why I came here to be part of a winning team and help them build to what we are today.

Q. You guys called a team meeting about three weeks or a month ago. Tell us what the mood was like then and how that compares to this weekend.

SHAUNTE SMITH: I think the team meeting was a big step for us. As a team, I think all of the team stepped up, the bench and the starting five. And I believe at the team meeting, it was senior night, wasn't it?

And we had that game against Baylor and OU and it's carried us to five wins in a row and into the Big 12 championship. So Coach Budke had a good meeting, a heart-to-heart and our team has heart and it shows on the floor.

Q. Andrea, this is Texas A&M's payback tour. They've started out slow and come on, but for you, the biggest is going to be on A'Quo Franklin, a battle of the epic point guards, talk about that.

ANDREA RILEY: Me and A'Quo, it seems like we've been playing against each other forever, even though it's only been two years. Me and her want to lead our teams. We're hard, competitive workers and we want to lead our teams to victory. And it will be fun leading our teams out there.

Q. Andrea, can you tell us what do you think the keys are tomorrow for you to have success?

ANDREA RILEY: The key is to play together and go out and play like we never played

before. Play hard, keep the intensity, hound them and just play with so much heart.

Q. Andrea, I think you said before that you chose OSU because you wanted to build something, you know? What do you think of what has been built, what is left out there for you all to get?

ANDREA RILEY: I think they're amazing at what's happening right now because it's just two years, and now we're playing for a Big 12 championship and we're ranked in the top 20 in the country.

I don't think people expected us to be where we are today, and that's why we're so motivated and we play with intensity and heart and we believe we can do it. Without anybody who believes in each other, we wouldn't be this successful.

Q. Players, talk about how important today is having it off, as far as being able to get rested for tomorrow.

DANIELLE GREEN: I think it's very important to settle our minds down and relax and get ready for tomorrow. Our bodies are a little tired; this is a great day to get ready, get our intensity back up, and it feels good to watch the guys.

ANDREA RILEY: Well, the day off is great. Today we're going to get out there and practice, because Coach always says it starts on the practice floor. We go out and start sluggish, we don't want to do that. We want to go out and play a hard 40 minutes to get to victory.

Q. Andrea and Danielle, things got heated last night with Texas. You know when you play Texas A&M it's the same thing, they're in your face defense. How important is it to keep your composure and not lose your cool when you're playing against them?

ANDREA RILEY: I think we've gotten used to their pressure and know how to handle it now. We have to keep our heads in the game and execute our offense without letting their defense get to us. If we just play hard and just focus on what we have to do, then we'll be fine.

DANIELLE GREEN: Composed, and it's important for us not to get emotional in the game and keep our heads, like she said. The coaches calming us down helps, and that's about all.

You face this pressure all year, they're not the only ones that pressure. They're a great team, but Texas, everybody pressures and we're used to it and we're ready to play.

Q. Danielle, what made you want to come here from junior college, knowing that they had struggled in the past, what sold you on the program?

DANIELLE GREEN: Truthfully, the coaches. I didn't know the teammates, but I knew two other junior college players that came here, and I just knew that -- I knew they weren't about losing and 0-16, you know, that was irrelevant because they were just starting out.

And I knew that they had faith in us and that's the bottom line. I knew it was going to be a battle. Big 12 is the best conference in the nation, that that is a lot of motivation, but coaches, you look in their eyes and you knew they were ready.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, ladies, we'll let you go.

Questions for the coach.

Q. (No microphone.)

COACH BUDKE: The batteries are charging as we speak. That's right.

Q. Coach, just put it point blank, is there any hotter team right now in college basketball than the one you're going to face in Texas A&M?

COACH BUDKE: I think they're a legitimate Final Four team. I think they've got what I see, at least, three pros on the team. They're the most talented six in our conference.

They're playing great basketball, they play great defense, they've got a hall of fame coach, and we've got our work cut out for us. But saying all that again, I don't think you'll find two teams in America that have played each other closer over the last two years than us and A&M. I think it's a perfect championship game, and you know what? We're going to show up.

Q. Can you really overstate how much has happened to your program since 0-16?

COACH BUDKE: That 0-16 year I've got to admit was pretty tough. It was tough especially on my coaching staff because everybody I had on my staff were winners. That's the biggest thing we wanted to do is go out and recruit winners.

I can't give my coaches enough credit for going out and finding players that wanted to come and play for a team that finished dead last. But we want to take baby steps every year. It's hard to take big leaps in the Big 12, but it's almost like we have.

You've got a team that's got a legitimate star and a bunch of kids that have their nights that don't care about who gets the points that has probably the best chemistry I've ever had in all my years of coaching, and they've been a joy to work with. We're obviously very proud of their effort.

We talk about it all the time, it's not just about us as individuals or us as a team, we don't want to let down our fans, we don't want to let down our alumni. And we're still trying to gain fans and support, and I think they appreciate how these girls play, whether they win or lose, because they see every night that we put it all out there on the floor.

There will be a day I reflect back about this night, but it's not now. We have places to go and we have goals and maybe 10 years from now, when I retire, I will think about this more.

Q. Coach, what happened between the two games, the one in Stillwater and the one in College Station?

COACH BUDKE: The biggest thing, we were 17-30 from the free-throw line, and we had an opportunity to win that ballgame at home. It was very similar, the girls said it, you've -- you can't let Texas A&M's pressure wear you out, and you can't get soft and lazy because of their pressure and just throw passes that you shouldn't be making.

You've got to concentrate every possession against A&M, because they play defense for every possession. So I really don't look for a high-scoring game. I look for the same kind of battles that we've had for the last two years, and you've got to do the little things to beat a team like A&M, and that starts with free-throws that we missed in the second game.

Q. At this point, how much do you think about a higher seed, the Ford Center, those kinds of things that might be dangling out there.

COACH BUDKE: Like Danielle said, we can't control the meetings that are going on out there, but I think we've earned the Ford Center, and you have to win two games to get back there

and get a chance, but if we get to the Ford Center -- get back there after winning two games, after winning two games in the NCAA tournament, you'll see orange in that Ford Center like you've never seen.

Three weeks ago, I wasn't sure we deserved it. I think we deserve it now. If we go out and win a championship tomorrow night, I think we can increase our seed another notch, too.

Q. So you feel like maybe both y'all are playing for a higher seed, whether it's a 2, 3, what have you, do you feel the winner gets that one more spot?

COACH BUDKE: I really do, I really do. Like I said, I think A&M is a 3 seed playing for a 2, and I think we're a 4 playing for a 3. A&M, again, one of the hottest teams in the country, legitimate threat to get to the Final Four. He should feel very good about how his team is playing right now.

Q. Coach, you keep referring to the Texas A&M as a legitimate Final Four team; are you guys a legitimate Final Four team?

COACH BUDKE: We don't put a ceiling on this team and I know there are a lot of people out there that don't think we are, but we honestly don't even look ahead.

I didn't know what time practice was today because we don't look past what's at hand. This team can get hot and when our team has four people in double figures, maybe five, we feel like we can play with a lot of people in this nation.

Q. How important is it to have your post players on their game tomorrow night?

COACH BUDKE: Well, I think -- it's obviously vital every night that we get good production out of the post. I thought we had huge production from Megan Byford last night. I thought she kind of came in and saved the day when Marina got those two early fouls and I thought Richardson came in and held her own off the bench.

The post play against Texas A&M is important, but you better guard the guards because if you leave it open for a second they're putting it in. You make a mistake, they're scoring. That may be the best jump-shooting guard in America.

She is so clutch, every time Iowa State made a run, it seemed like it was Starks that would pop up and make a shot. They've got at least --

I'm going to say they have four legitimate scoring threats out there at all times and very tough team to guard. The post is important because we need to rebound and defend the block, but we better find a way to stop those guards.

Q. You think a 2 might be a little out of reach for you guys, even if you do win?

COACH BUDKE: Yes. If they wanted to give it to me, we'll take it, but I think so. I've watched this for a lot of years, and I think if we can win this, I truly think we could be a 3. And if we win, I think A&M is still a 3, but we lose, I think it's a 4, no worse than a 5.

Q. Replays last night showed Andrea popped a player in the head going for a loose ball. It looked like extracurricular activity going on there. Has the Big 12 said anything to you?

COACH BUDKE: I have not seen it. I know it was a physical game last night, a lot of pushing and shoving and a lot of emotion running, and we talk to our kids about keeping their heads for 40 minutes. You don't have the right to push somebody or hit somebody, and we'll look at it and we'll look at it with Andrea, also. And Oklahoma State plays by the rules and whatever the commissioner decides, we'll live with.

Q. Let's talk bids in terms of the conference. Do you think it's a nine bid year? Does Kansas -- do they need to be in that field?

COACH BUDKE: I think Kansas is definitely one of the top 64 teams in this nation. I think it will be tough to get nine, I think there is no question there will be eight teams in the field.

Q. It's kind of like "let the boys play," you and Gary have gone into the two worst programs, do you see similarities in what you and Gary have done in the south? Do you see similarities in what you have done and the way you've done it? Can you talk about that?

COACH BUDKE: We both came out of system that we want to pressure, we want to run, we want to make the game exciting to watch. We don't have the athletes to do what he is doing. He's doing exactly what he wants to do and there might be a day we get to that point, but the one thing I've learned is you don't have to have a team of stars to win.

If you've got a team of kids that get along,

have good chemistry, that understands the roles, I think you can still be successful in the Big 12. Believe me, there are a lot of teams in this league that are a lot more talented than we are.

Q. I know you wanted to bring this program along at the right pace. If there is a knock on you guys out there, it's your nonconference schedule. Is it now that you've gotten to this point, is that something that you think maybe you'll upgrade? And is that why you don't think you're a 2?

COACH BUDKE: I think that's probably part of the reason, but, again, we're trying to build a program. And the day that I really feel like we can go out, and maybe that day is coming.

We're opening the year at Duke next year, is that good enough? I think that's a decent start right there. (Chuckles.) But, again, it's the baby steps. Let's get the nonconference a little bit better.

You don't have to have a crazy nonconference schedule when your conference is crazy. This conference, top to bottom, there is nothing close to it. You've got to be careful. I've seen teams that don't have the best talent in the world go out and build a great nonconference team, and they don't build confidence at all.

If you come into the Big 12, you're in trouble without confidence. That first win we had at Kansas, you can look back at that as if you lose that, we might not be sitting here tonight because things can change real quick.

Came home with Oklahoma, you lose at Kansas, lose to Oklahoma, maybe you're 0-2 and everything changes. I think we're smart about our schedule and we're going to continue to be smart.

Q. If the Big 12 does issue a reprimand, how will you deal with it?

COACH BUDKE: Like I said earlier, Lin, we play by the rules. We'll do whatever the Big 12 wants us to do and learn from it and try not to make the same mistake again.

We show our players on film when they make mistakes on the floor, especially on the emotional part of it. If they get too excited, if they react too much to a call, if they talk to an official, we talk to them all the time about that, but these are 19 and 20 year old kids that are playing a pretty intense game and not being paid a million dollars a year for it. They're going to make

mistakes, and hopefully you don't make the same mistake twice.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports...