

March 10, 2007



An Interview with:

**OKLAHOMA
COACH SHERRI COALE
COURTNEY PARIS
JENNA PLUMLEY
LEAH RUSH**

MODERATOR: We're joined by the victorious Sooners from Oklahoma. Coach, congratulations, not only on a big win tonight but on the big tournament.

COACH COALE: Thank you. I'm so proud of the State of Oklahoma right now. It just would have almost seemed wrong to not win this for the people, for all sports association, for the mayor, for everybody who was involved with building the excitement that revolved around this entire tournament.

I'm just so proud of our city and proud of our state and I'm pretty proud of this basketball team I coach.

Q. Sherri, I want to talk about two moves that you made. One on Amanda Thompson, great freshman for them, slowed her down the second half. The move to put Kendra Moore in, you told her she's got to be ready and she can win games for you and helped you tonight.

COACH COALE: Kendra was terrific. Obviously toward the end of the first half, they were aware that Erin Higgins' legs are 96 years old. So they were just isolating her. We were afraid to help out the shooters for obvious reasons that you saw all night along. It was one-on-one in the paint there. Lacey is tough. She's a good little player and she's going to make a great hand for him.

So we made some changes there. And I felt Jenna and Kendra, because all of their guys can step out and shoot the 3s, and our lack of size

there wasn't such a factor because we weren't defending in the post, we were defending on the three-point line.

I felt like Kendra's aggression could make a difference. And the offense was going to be a bonus. I put her in to help defend the 3-point line. She did some great things offensively, obviously the big shot she had. But getting organized and getting the ball to the right place at the right time, huge minutes. I thought both the seniors, Kendra and Leah, were both just terrific.

Q. Sherri, to get where you all want to go, could this game tonight be the best thing that could happen for y'all?

COACH COALE: How do you mean? Oh, to come from behind?

Q. With the crowd and everything in your favor, to fight back.

COACH COALE: I don't know. I just think that you gotta figure out a lot of different ways to win games. That's what we've had to do throughout the entire month of February.

I said this immediately following the game. The Big 12 conference has put us in a position to be prepared for just about anything the NCAA tournament could throw at us. And I don't think we'd come back tonight, even with the big crowd, if we have not been tested the way we were tested throughout the month of February.

We've been behind before. We've been behind a couple of times when the game's over and the scoreboard's finished. So there's a poise that you develop after going through that.

So I think the month of February prepared us for tonight and hopefully tonight, coupled with the month of February, gets us ready for anything we might see next.

Q. Coach, how proud are you of Courtney? She hardly didn't have any fouls, maybe one foul in like the last few minutes. You pulled her out. You knew they were going to make their run and you put her back in. What kind of adjustments did you have to make

on that?

COACH COALE: Well, I was really proud of Courtney. I think she got a little frustrated in the first half. They were just bringing the house when she caught the ball and had trouble finishing. It was 4 of 13 at half or something. And then missed a couple early in the second half. And then gathered herself. And it's all about balance with her.

She wasn't in a hurry in the second half. She caught the ball in the vice. Looked, who's coming, when are they coming, where are they coming from, and looked at her options and when it was single coverage, she was able to use her skill and athleticism to get to the rim.

All she needed to do was get one or two rhythm shots, and we knew it was over. That's one of the reasons that nobody panicked. We're in that situation. And Courtney really hadn't gotten going yet. Courtney is going to get going. They just know that at some point. And once she did, then everybody just relaxed and everything was obviously much better.

Q. Sherri, did we see the Leah Rush of old in this tournament, and especially tonight?

COACH COALE: Oh, I think so. The way she started each game for us was just huge, sort of set the tone for everything. And that's just sort of the way Leah Rush plays in post-season. We've become accustomed to that, so that's a good sign for us.

Q. This goes back to the frustration question and it goes to Courtney and to Jenna because I don't know that Leah was frustrated too much tonight. But you certainly were. Courtney would you describe your frustration level and what you had to do to work around that, and Jenna, yours as well, because you had a lot of that tonight.

COURTNEY PARIS: Well, I think -- I was frustrated because you want to make big shots in a big game. And I wasn't. But at the same time I had teammates saying, "Court, don't worry about it, you got the next one." And I'd miss it. "Don't worry you got the next shot."

I've got great teammates that don't quit on me and stop throwing me the ball if I miss shots. So that helps a lot.

JENNA PLUMLEY: I felt like I kind of rushed myself coming in I had an easy transition back to the basket at the very beginning of the game coming in. And I saw the 3 and sometimes the first shot tells you how you feel, builds your

confidence, and I think I kind of let my confidence go with that first shot.

And then when I talked to Coach Coale in the second half and she came up to me and told me to get her 3, that just built my confidence back up. And (inaudible) made a wonderful pass to the top of the key to the corner of me when I hit my first 3. And all I could think about was Coach Coale because I felt she gave me the assist.

But other than that I just felt like I rushed myself. That's pretty much all it was was me, within myself, and trying to keep up with what I have to do.

Q. Leah, would you talk about your play here at the tournament this week and do you feel like you're playing as well as you have maybe all season?

LEAH RUSH: I think so, maybe. Tournament play is fun. I love tournament play. And it's kind of weird being the last time we'll probably play in Oklahoma in front of our home crowd. I know they'll travel with us, but it's kind of different when it's right here at home. I don't know.

I love tournament play. I think it's fun. Either play and win or go home. And I love to play so I want to keep playing.

Q. Leah, will you talk about just the craziness of the game. You guys going to 15 run, looks like they're going to run out of gas but it seems like they never do?

LEAH RUSH: Yes, Iowa State is one you can never -- with the way they're shooting the three ball, no lead is a safe lead with those guys. We knew they would make runs, and we knew that was coming. And I'm just proud of the way the team responded and was able to make our own runs and send off theirs.

Q. Sherri, your team came up with nine steals. Jenna got six. You only turned them over 15 times. But nine of those stole the ball. Talk about your defensive effort especially just to come up with the ball on key plays.

COACH COALE: Jenna, just has a knack for it. I don't think you teach any of that. It's just instinct. She catches guys with their back turned and she's so quick she comes from behind and knocks it loose.

Several of those in transition. Obviously the one late was huge, I thought. But she just has it and smells it. And we look down we were just talking in the holding room. We had nine steals and we only had 13 turnovers. We may have a

serious party on the bus. Finally got it under 15. Woo-hoo.

(Laughter)

Q. Coach, can you talk about just emotionally how maybe this is different than last year? You guys almost seemed a little more subdued.

COACH COALE: Which one seemed more subdued to you?

Q. (Off microphone)

COACH COALE: I don't know about that. They all feel great for me. But I think for a lot of us, I speak just obviously from my own point of view. It was one of those things where you know the game didn't go down to the wire. You knew we saw it for, 30 seconds or so there that we had it. But there were a lot of emotions, honestly, because of the crowd that we had, the way we had been embraced this week and this tournament.

And for me personally, the reward in women's basketball and the respect that people have gained for our sport and the way they've just embraced our players, it was sort of a surreal moment.

If you felt any sense of it being subdued, I think it comes from that, maybe just soaking it all in.

Q. (Off microphone)

COACH COALE: I don't think so. Because I don't think you can ever take a championship for granted. I told our guys in the locker room, I went 5-22 once and I made a decision. Every time we win, I'm celebrating it until the sun comes up the next day, no matter what. I told them we're not talking about the NCAA tournament we'll talk about it tomorrow. Tonight we won the Big 12 tournament championship and we're going to celebrate until the sun rises.

Q. Sherri, you talked about how the Big 12 prepares you for moments like these and for the tournament. Are you glad, though, now not to be facing a Big 12 team at least for a while?

COACH COALE: Heavens, yes. But you never know, when the committee puts the bracket together, we might be right back with somebody in another week. But I do appreciate the challenge and the coaching in our league, because I do think we go into the tournament. And our record in the NCAA tournament has been very, very strong. And I think a lot of that is a reflection of the competition we play night in, night out.

Q. Courtney, can you brag on Leah? Seemed like when you were struggling, it sort of kept you guys scoring and kept you going.

COURTNEY PARIS: We were down by 8. Her and Kendra both just making big plays and making big shots, being vocal and being leaders, that's big time. That's what kept us in the game is watching them be so confident. Kind of helped motivate us all.

Q. Courtney, after winning the Big 12, Big 12 tournament, is this team ready to win more games?

COURTNEY PARIS: Yes, that's the plan.

(Laughter)

I mean Coach said after the game that you do everything all season long. I know I guess I'm speaking for myself, but like you play your whole season and preseason and all that stuff you want to win the big thing.

So we definitely have a lot more to learn and a lot more things to get done. But that's what we're playing for coming up later in March.

Q. Leah, you and Kendra played basketball at OU for a long time. When she came in, I saw you say something to her. You guys know each other really well. Did it surprise you she got on that kind of role for that little stretch and what she did? And I don't know if you can share word-for-word what you said to her but could you give us an idea?

LEAH RUSH: Honestly, I don't even remember the specific moment. But Kendra has a knack for making big plays at big times, I think. She's a competitor and she's quick and she's a good ball player. And she knows what she's capable of.

When the opponent gives her something that she can take, she's going to take it. And she did that tonight. And Kendra's just a fun kid. I think when we play together we enjoy.

COACH COALE: We've been here for four years together. So I think there's kind of a special connection on the court with anybody in your own class.

Q. Coach and Courtney, I was really impressed with your sister, Ashley. She made some moves tonight and I want to know, how important is her confidence when she comes off that bench?

COURTNEY PARIS: I think it's so important and I think Leah did a great job the way Iowa State plays with those shooters, and I think

Leah a lot more tonight over Ashley. But her confidence, that's the big thing. When she goes in, even when she misses the shots, she doesn't care. She's aggressive.

A year ago you couldn't make her go score. Ashley you can score. She's like give me the post, I'm open. I think her confidence has (inaudible). And when she's playing great -- I thought she had a great tournament. And when she's playing great, being that confident and aggressive, it makes what I do -- and I think I speak for Leah, what she does in the post makes it a lot easier with another threat in there.

Q. Sherri, it seems like -- or I do not remember Kendra and Jenna playing on the court together for anywhere near that long this season. And do you think you found something that you might use a little more, both of them together, and what did you think when you put them in tonight?

COACH COALE: I put them in for defense. I felt like their speed and their quickness to get out to shooters quickly and we would be able to maybe control that 3-point line a little bit.

Is it something that we think is a weapon, a new game plan? We have all kinds of combinations, all kinds of combinations, and I think that's one of our strengths is we're able to be sort of chameleon-like and become what we need to be depending on who we're playing.

And that's a real strength of the depth of our bench and the amount of quality experience that these young guys ever see over the course of the season. Because of the (inaudible) earlier in the year, she ran into a situation, confidence is strong and she's ready to effect the game, which she did tonight. You could say the same about Amanda and Chelsi and Nyeshia. In certain situations we were close to sticking her in for a point or two tonight to try to change the flavor of things. That's the versatility of our team.

Q. Coach, the way you guys ended the season, ending the Big 12 championship, where do you think you'll be seeded in the NCAA tournament?

COACH COALE: That's a good question. I didn't even look at any of the proposed reports until yesterday. In the paper I scanned a couple. I don't know how we wouldn't be 2 because we shared the regular season and won the tournament outright. But stranger things have happened, and I'm just one of those people that thinks you've got to beat everybody who is really good if you want to win a championship anyway.

So send us where you need to send us and place us where you place us and we'll be ready to play.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

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An Interview with:

**IOWA STATE
COACH BILL FENNELLY
LYNDSEY MEDDERS
MEGAN RONHOVDE**

MODERATOR: We're now joined by the Cyclones from Iowa State. Coach, congratulations on a great tournament and a great year. Your comments on tonight's game, please.

COACH FENNELLY: First of all, I want to congratulate Oklahoma. That's an amazing team. We knew they were good. And they played that way.

I want to thank everyone in Oklahoma City, the Big 12, just a tremendous, tremendous tournament. It was an honor to be here all week and represent our university. And I told our kids before the game, I told them at half time and afterwards, that championship people, it's not always about trophies.

And I would not trade our players for anyone. I thought they played as hard as they possibly could play in a very difficult environment.

And I think that anyone who saw the game and watched the game can appreciate how competitive our team is and how special these young people are.

So it was a great event. And we were fortunate to play as hard as we did and wish we could have made a couple more shots. But we got beat by a better team tonight. And that's what this tournament's all about.

But the good news is we're not done playing. So that's the best news.

Q. Bill, will you talk about, they really just didn't give up. Looked at one point OU took, had a nice run and looked like there might be some gas out of the tank. But really they came back and hit the 3s late.

COACH FENNELLY: I think I told them, too, there were a lot of teams across the country again, against a good Oklahoma team in this

environment that would have given up a number of times. It's 11 to nothing. I don't know if I've ever called two timeouts in the first three minutes of a game in my life. We gave it back in half time. And the second half we were doing fine then missed some shots. They go crazy.

Kendra Moore steps up and makes huge plays. We're down 57-42 and call timeout.

I really thought in the last three weeks there was one time that we quit playing one possession. One possession. And that's where I challenged them in that timeout. We come out, hit three 3s in a row and go from 15 down, and we're back playing. And most teams couldn't have done that in this environment at all.

So you're absolutely right. To come back two or three times from big runs by the great Oklahoma team was something that really -- we knew we had to score and we just couldn't get enough baskets in.

Q. Bill, you know they're a team that runs like you all. But have you seen a team score 15 points like they did in about three minutes? Ever had a blitz like that lately?

COACH FENNELLY: No, we haven't in a long time. And retrospect, I probably should have called one timeout earlier. But we'd already used two and I knew we were getting a little bit tired. They made some shots. We got confused one time defensively and gave up an open look. They made some shots.

And we told our kids at the shoot-around we'll have to keep scoring. We couldn't stop them from scoring. There were too many options. They spread us out. And during that run, when the other guy's scoring, sometimes you gotta make a shot.

And I thought we had three, four good looks at the basket maybe they outscore you 15 to 6 or something. But we couldn't make enough shots.

You shoot 33%, it's tough to win, and we went 3 for 17 in the post and that hurt a little bit, too. But, yes, they scored in bunches and we just couldn't -- we couldn't stop it quick enough. Really couldn't.

Q. Bill, I thought you did a great job of spreading the court at one time, especially late in the first half and allowing your players to try to take Oklahoma off the dribble. Could you talk about the strategy and how it worked for you?

COACH FENNELLY: We felt sometimes when they went big we had to go small, spread them out, beat them off the bounds, kick for 3. We were struggling to score in the post.

We had to shoot the 3-ball a little bit maybe get to the free throw line a little bit. But and plus we were getting in a little bit of foul trouble in the first half. So we were trying to limp this to half time. Spread the court, use the clock. Get a one-on-one move to the basket and maybe make a couple of shots.

I thought the kids handled it pretty well. We worked on it this morning. It was something we talked about and thought we had to do, because their size advantage, we just couldn't handle it at times.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about the lift Kendra Moore gave them, especially during the 15 run.

COACH FENNELLY: No question those were probably maybe the two biggest 3s in the game. She's not a kid who played a lot. She's not a great three-point shooter, but she's a senior and made some big plays. I think when you have a team that wins tournament games, wins championships and NCAA tournament games, you often see someone that shouldn't be doing it.

But she's a senior. Coach Coale made a great decision to put her in the game and add another defender, I think, against us. But there's no question those two shots were really, really big during that run, and especially the one that was 47-42. She hit the three to make it 50 to 42. That was maybe the biggest shot of the game as far as the way the game was going at that time.

Q. Could we talk about Nicky Wieben play a little bit. Looks like she fought in the post and gave up --

COACH FENNELLY: I thought our post did the best they could. You're playing against the best post player in the country. We did some things, we just asked them to do the best they could. We knew you couldn't stop them from scoring. We need to get more points out of them. That hurt us a little bit. We -- when you look at the 3 we played, we were 5 for 22 in the post. We need a little more there. But again, they're playing

against good defenders, they're defending good players and being defended by good players.

So our kids battled them really hard. We told them we couldn't double team a lot. They did the best they could. I don't think there's any question that their experience tonight will try hopefully make them a better player because they're not going to play against a better post player. They're not.

If there is one, I don't know who it is.

Q. Lyndsey, what happened early in the game when you guys got behind and then what happened when you got back into the game and actually took a lead?

LYNDSEY MEDDERS: They hit some big shots coming out. We had some defensive mistakes right out of the gate. I think Leah Rush hit some big shots for them to start the game.

But it's something that this team's been pretty good at all year. We've been down on Iowa. Down on the road a lot this year. And we called the timeout when it was 11-0, and I think everyone -- no one freaked out at that point. Everyone knew it was about trying to get some scores and getting the stops.

And that's how this team has played all year long is not giving up. And so I don't think it really hit anyone or it didn't really faze anyone until the second half when we got down by 15.

But in the beginning of the game, it's as -- loud as an environment, which I think is good not only for our two teams but for Big 12, for women's basketball in general. But I think the way we responded was a good sign hopefully for future tournament games.

Q. Coach, earlier in the game they get out to the 11-0 run. Midway everybody gets a drought. But the best part out of that situation was Courtney was still having a bad shooting night and you all were staying in the game. Talk about that point up to the half time.

COACH FENNELLY: Yes, I think there's no question when you're down 11-0 in that situation, nothing short of a miracle to be ahead at half time. Both teams were struggling to score. We tried to go inside early and get some shots we needed to make. And they made their first couple.

So all of a sudden it's 11 to nothing. And we had to find a way to survive the first half. And we made a couple of shots after that. They missed a little. Courtney was missing a little that maybe she doesn't normally miss, and the pace of the game got a little better for us.

And we hit enough 3s to compensate for being so far down. So that was important. But, yes, to be ahead at half time, I'm sure a lot of people were getting the (indiscernible) ready on TV, Oh, my God, the biggest massacre in Big 12 history and all that kind of stuff. Luckily we showed a little bit of courage, tremendous amount of courage, and kept playing.

Q. Coach, what type of case did you make to the NCAA with this effort this week?

COACH FENNELLY: Well, I hope that the NCAA committee looks at us as a team that's as hot as any team in the country. We played at a very high level. We won eight games in a row. We lost to a great team in a borderline home game for them in the Big 12 championship game.

So I would think that they would look at us as a team that they would like representing the tournament. We have great fan support. So I think that we're a team that would represent -- it's the greatest sporting event in our country. And it's something that every single day, besides my family and our players, the only thing that keeps my heart beating every day is the NCAA tournament.

And for Iowa State to be in that tournament, if we're lucky enough to be in it, it's great for our school. And to be honest with you I think it will be great for NCAA tournament to have our team in it.

Q. Similar question, but what do you think you did maybe for your seeding for this run?

COACH FENNELLY: Well, I think we had to help it a little bit. When we beat the teams that we beat and we lost in a hard-fought game tonight. So you don't know how other teams fit the bracket and all that kind of stuff. So to be honest with you, I'm not really worried about if we get in the NCAA tournament where we're seeded. I just want to -- I want to get a match-up that we can handle and I hope that we can get our fans there.

Q. Megan, can you talk about what this last three weeks, this winning streak has been for both you and Lyndsey and the whole team, just kind of how everything just kind of turned around and kind of just how fun and maybe magical it's been the past three weeks?

MEGAN RONHOVDE: Yes. The turning point -- we talked about that last night -- was Valentine's Day against A&M. And I think if someone would have told me that we would have won eight out of our last nine games, I probably

would have told you you're crazy with the way that we started out, the conference play.

But it's been an amazing run. We're playing our best basketball, and that's what you want to do come February and March. And we put ourselves in a very unique position where hopefully come Monday night our name is going to come up across the TV.

But it is special for Lyndsey and myself and Abby, when every game that you play is your last and if we're lucky enough to get into the tournament, every game from here on out will be our last. So we're just hoping to carry this momentum with any post-season type of play that we do get in.

Q. Bill, you're not going to play in the NCAA tournament in this type of atmosphere being so hostile. How does it prepare for that and does it give your team enough confidence when it comes tournament time?

COACH FENNELLY: There's a possibility that could happen, that we could play in a hostile environment. But our team has handled that situation very well, from K State to Texas Tech to here, but this is a NCAA tournament, regional kind of atmosphere, I thought. It was tremendous. It was fun to coach in it. Fun to play in it. That's what these kids do. They watch this on TV all the time.

Now they get to be a part of it. I thought it was great. Any environment we were in, no question we've been in it the last three weeks and it's got to help. It's got to help and hopefully our kids can build on it and I'm sure they will. And our seniors will make sure they're ready to go whenever that happens.

Q. Coach, you touched on this at the very beginning, but this city's never hosted this event before. Just your thoughts of your overall experience of Oklahoma City and whether you'd like to see this tournament return here in the near future.

COACH FENNELLY: There are not enough words in my vocabulary to thank the people of Oklahoma City. It was an absolutely phenomenal event. They did a tremendous job in every area of the event. And I think what they did was they made it really, really hard not to bring it back here. I think they did that.

So we had a great week. It's a week that I will always remember. Our players will remember, and I sincerely want to thank the people of this community because it was a lot like home.

Everyone you saw was, "Hi, how are you doing? What's up? What do you need? What do you need?" And it's the environment that these young people deserve to play in and be a part of.

So it was truly special and I can't say enough thank yous on behalf of our program to everyone in this community for all the work they did, not just -- the amount of work you do to get to this point. I mean, we're here for a week and the people here who did it, did it for years. So unbelievable experience.

Q. Bill, can you just talk about the tournament that Lacey Alison had as a rookie? She hit some big shots for you and played very well as a freshman.

COACH FENNELLY: Alison is developing into an outstanding college player. She's extremely skilled. She shoots the 3 ball, gives us another ball handler. I've challenged her a lot. Alison is going to be as good as she wants to be. If her commitment to the game and commitment to effort every single possession matches her skill sets, she will be scary good. And that's what freshman go through. And the environment that she's been in and to learn from these two and to be in the environment that she's been in over the last three weeks, especially, and be put in that kind of position can only make her better.

And now the challenge is up to her to make that decision how good she wants to be. She's so skilled with the ball and has an understanding of the game, but obviously a very, very good tournament.

Q. Megan, talk about the two 3 points you knocked down in the first half to tie the game up and then get the possession again and you knocked down the score and you get a free throw. Now you're up and you're going in half time. Just talk about that point on.

MEGAN RONHOVDE: Well, it was huge momentum for us, and our teams, we really thrive on momentum. I think if you witnessed last night's game, you know, I think we went on a stretch where we hit eight 3-pointers in a row, and that's obviously an important part of our game. And we were really fortunate to be up at half time considering the start that we had at the beginning of the game.

Q. Lyndsey, Jenna Plumley came up with some big steals there when they were making the run. Can you talk about her quickness, maybe?

LYNDSEY MEDDERS: Much like Alison, she's as good as any freshman I've played against, I think. Yesterday she passed the ball to Courtney Paris better than anybody on the team. I think that helps out a lot. Defensively she was able to get around and get some steals. It definitely helped their run.

Q. Coach, can you talk about Lyndsey and Megan a little bit, what they brought when you took them out at the end of the game? You were kind of asking the fans to get up and show a little respect. Can you just kind of talk about them a little bit?

COACH FENNELLY: I took them out of the game -- I took them out of the game because I wanted to thank them for getting us here. And I took them out of the game because I wanted the fans and I wanted the Oklahoma fans to recognize two of the best people I've ever been around in my life and I thanked them for everything they did for me, and I told them they were still stuck with me for a little bit longer, because the one thing they'll help me get through the night is knowing that I get to see these two in practice next week.

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