

**October 21, 2009**



An interview with:

## **OKLAHOMA COACH SHERRI COALE**

PETER IRWIN: We're now joined by Coach Sherri Coale.

Sherri, welcome. Your comments, please, for the season.

COACH COALE: Thank you very much. I like the fact that we're in the arena. This is awesome.

Just want to say, I think -- they just reminded me in the old Big 12 showcase that I'm like the oldest person in the league. I think it's Deb Patterson, Bill Fennelly and I are charter members of the Big 12 conference. But it just made me think what an honor it is really to compete in this league.

I can remember in '96, when I got this gig at the University of Oklahoma and we were merging the Southwest conference and the Big Eight and becoming the Big 12, all the rumblings and murmurings about what would women's basketball be, what would our identity be as a league, it's pretty neat to sit here 14 years later and look at what we have become.

Ten consecutive years leading the country in attendance. Year in and year out, probably 75 percent to 80 percent of our teams participating in post-season. Just last year, six teams in the NCAA tournament, Kansas in the finals of the WNIT. We've done some pretty remarkable things as a league.

When people ask what is our identity, I have to say it must be excellence, and I'm sure proud to be a part of it.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you for your comments. We'll take questions for Coach.

**Q. Sherri, can you kind of talk about some of the players who are going to step forward this year. For instance, Nyeshia**

**Stevenson and Amanda Thompson. How big a role they're going to play for your team.**

COACH COALE: We have ten guys in a Sooner uniform this year. Every single one of them is going to play a role, I can promise you that.

I think our depth is going to be a weapon for us because we have a hard time, as we look out on the floor only five days in, trying to decide who the best five players are. And that's a great problem to have.

Nyeshia was selected by this league as the Sixth Man of the Year last year and rightly so. A player who really came into her own right, and I think still has her best days ahead of her.

I think Amanda Thompson is poised for the best season of her career, playing more in a position that is true to her strengths and her gifts. I think she's at a good place where she feels most comfortable with the players who are around her and in the role that she's been given.

I think you'll see Jasmine Hartman continue to develop, and that's going to be a key role. We don't need to wear Danielle out 40 minutes a game, and Jasmine is capable of playing in place of Danielle and alongside of her as well.

I think Carlee Roethlisberger has got to have a big year. I think it's time for her. I think her confidence is catching up with some of her skill, and that's an important combination.

And then, obviously, our cadre of bigs, those three: Abi, Lyndsey, and Jo, they're all going to be depended upon. There's not a single kid that is not going to be responsible for some things when the lights are on and everybody's looking this year.

**Q. What does your team need to do to make the Paris sisters questions disappear?**

COACH COALE: Tell you guys to go home.

I wish I had a dollar for every time I've been asked that today. First and foremost, I just want to say that every year, you know, when a team loses their seniors, there is a void. It doesn't matter if they combined to score 40 points a game

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or 6, there is a void. Their presence is felt.

And the most important thing that we have returning this year are guys in the backcourt who have the experience of going to the Final Four. So those guys translating the confidence that comes from that experience, confidence that can't come in any other way, shape, or form the way it can from playing on the brightest stage in women's college basketball.

Those guys set the tone early. And I don't think it's about post players producing 40 points a game. I don't think that's the answer. I think the answer is Oklahoma playing a solid, beautiful version of basketball.

**Q. Were you aware you had players jumping out of airplanes?**

COACH COALE: You know, not before it happened. Whitney was shocked to discover that I didn't discover that today. Norman is not that big, you know.

Actually, I'll tell you guys a funny story. Landry decided that he was going to treat her on her birthday, which occurs in the middle of the season, to a hot air balloon ride. Fortunately for us, we live in Oklahoma, where the wind comes sweeping down the plains, and conditions were not favorable for that in Norman during season.

And that was lucky for Landry because that's how I got to know him. Come here, son, let's talk about what you want to give Whitney for her birthday. No death-defying agents in the middle of season, please, thank you very much.

Apparently, she has that risk gene and got it out of her system hopefully this spring. I'm impressed. No way I have the guts to do that.

**Q. You mentioned Abi earlier. Talk more about her progression. This is her year to shine. She's been behind a couple great players, and this is really her time, isn't it?**

COACH COALE: It is. Abi looks fantastic. You know, the most important thing about opportunity is to be ready when it comes. Abi has had the foresight to be able to do that.

It's one thing to wake up in August and September and go, okay, this is my year, and another thing to realize it in the previous January, which she did.

That's really when she began to drop some weight. All season last year -- and I said this at the close of the year. I have no problems with Abi in practice. I had -- I loved coaching her every day. I thought you could tell at that point that she

had really decided everything she could soak up was going to be very important to her.

And that change in attitude and that increased attentiveness was the beginning of it. But then she began to follow it up by getting herself in incredible physical condition. She had an opportunity to leave Norman in July, had several internships that she could have taken and decided not to do it because she wanted to get ten more pounds off and really be committed to being in the best shape she could be in when school start.

And she has. When you see her, you'll just be blown away. She is has just put herself in a position to experience the success that she deserves to experience. And so we couldn't be more excited about what that will be.

Now, at the beginning, she's probably going to foul out the first five or six games. She's going to be so daggum happy to be on the floor, she'll just run up and whack people. But if we can get her through that and get her calmed down a bit, she's going to be a force to be reckoned with in her own right. She has skills and gifts that are uniquely hers, and I look forward to watching her use them.

**Q. Sherri, your thoughts on the WNBA team coming to Tulsa.**

COACH COALE: I think it's fantastic for the city of Tulsa. I'm happy for Bill and David. I know the time and the work ethic that they've dispensed over the last really two to three years probably to see this come to fruition.

So I'm excited for them. I'm excited for the BOK Center and the city of Tulsa.

I think any time you can have people in your state thinking about and talking about women's basketball for 365 days, that's a great thing.

**Q. Nothing unusual about you guys playing a tough nonconference schedule, but this is really tough, especially if you look at that tournament in the Virgin Islands in November. Can you just talk about putting that together, and obviously, once again, it will include UConn and Tennessee.**

COACH COALE: We have typically year in and year out had one of the toughest schedules in America. That's something that's important to us, something that we feel has given us an

opportunity to succeed in this conference and to be a part of six conference championships.

But this one got a little bit ridiculous. You know, you send in that you want to go to the Virgin Islands. Oh, I want to go. Sounds like a fun place to be over Thanksgiving. So we did that, and then we found out half a year later who else had decided to go there too. And our schedule went from really, really tough to ridiculous.

We're playing there. San Diego State, South Carolina, Notre Dame, in addition to Georgia, Arkansas, and Connecticut and Tennessee.

So one thing, when March rolls around, we will have been tested by just about everyone in America who's in the top 25. So we will know who we are. We will know hopefully what we're good at, and I'm sure we'll know what we're not so good at. But we will have a very cleared idea of who we are and how we have to play to win.

I think it makes for an exciting road. There will not be a week that goes by in which our players are not fired up about who they get to take the floor against.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you very much. Best of luck to you guys.

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