

October 21, 2009



An interview with:

TEXAS A&M COACH GARY BLAIR

PETER IRWIN: We are now joined by Texas A&M Coach Gary Blair. Coach, welcome.

COACH BLAIR: I'm glad to be presented this national championship trophy right in front of Peter and I, and hopefully we can live up to the expectations this year. Glad to be in Kansas City. Going to be eating at Gates Barbecue in about an hour and a half, and looking forward to it.

Congratulations to all you newspaper people that still have a job.

PETER IRWIN: Is that a paid commercial there about Gates Barbecue?

COACH BLAIR: That's why I didn't use my journalism minor to stay in that profession. I had to find something else. I was looking ahead a long time ago.

Q. Coach, you lost a couple players that seemed like they were there for ten years. How's the nature of your team changing? Do you think in general is there much of a big change in the conference as a whole from last season to this season compared to what this usually is?

COACH BLAIR: The core that we had together, those six kids, we graduated three of them a year ago, three of them this past year. They were very special. But at the same time, they had to come in as freshmen and play because we had nothing behind them as freshmen.

Now we're even having better recruiting classes, and our freshmen are having to wait to be able to play just because our nucleus is a lot better than what it was four to five years ago when we were here for the first time.

I like the makeup of our team because we're reloading. I don't think we're rebuilding. The

talent is there. What we've got to do is just learn how to turn talent into basketball players and to be able to contribute.

Those kids have played together for so long. They were so good defensively. Offense came second because they enjoyed the defensive end of the court. And we played very well as a team.

Our team is all about pressure. Offensively, defensively, sideline plays, inbounds plays, pressure on us old coaches in recruiting and in trying to figure out game plans. It's what we do.

And who's going to be the next core for us? I remember at Arkansas they had a group of triplets and then three more triplets and three more triplets back when Nolan was coaching. It's kids change, they graduate. But I think you'll start seeing the Tanisha Smiths and the Sydney Colsons, and the Carters, and these kids start contributing, and all of a sudden they'll be household names just like the Gant, the Starks, and the Morenike have been for us in years past.

I'm sorry. I missed your second question. I couldn't remember that far.

Q. Coach, we talked a little bit about Danielle Adams just a little while ago. Can you talk a little bit more about what you expect from her this season, the Big 12 Newcomer of the Year?

COACH BLAIR: Well, if some of you do not know Danielle, she was the nation's number one ju-co Player of the Year. Played up there at Jefferson. Very good player.

Offensive machine, can score, and I've never coached anyone like her before. Not so much of talent because of her size, it's sort of like a Charles Barkley that can play the three, the four, or the five position. That's just the way Barkley was, and this kid is just different. I'm going to have to work her into our system. She's been out for a month with a hamstring, just back the last week and a half.

We've got a lot of work to go just in the conditioning part. I'm not worried about her

offense. Coach Schaefer's really worried about her defense, but that all comes with all freshmen or ju-co kids or whatever. We teach them how to play defense. We recruit them for their offense.

Q. You said last year there were times when you had players you wanted to give playing time and you couldn't find playing time for them. How do you feel like the rotations are going to work this year?

COACH BLAIR: I think, if we had to play Duke tomorrow, which we have to play them first game of the year November 15th, I've got about eight players that are ready to play, and that doesn't include any of my freshmen or my ju-co right now because they're not ready for our system.

I think we've got eight kids that are ready to go. I think we're going to move Carter to the two-guard position and compete against Tyra White at that position this year.

Tanisha Smith is solid at the three. We've got Colson at the point where we can slide Carter over. I've got a freshman coming in.

So we've got a four-guard rotation that I'm very comfortable with right now. I'm just trying to develop who's going to be that fifth player to come in or that sixth player. Will it be a freshman? Cierra Windham. Will it be Adrienne Pratcher, the point guard? That has to be determined.

At the five position, we graduated Micheaux who was a four-year starter for us. She averaged 3 1/2 points a game last year. And you say how could she still be starting for you? That's one of the reasons how we were able to be so successful against Oklahoma the past few years is because of Micheaux and our team defense.

So sometimes you've got to sacrifice. We've got Damitria Buchanan, who is looking very good for us. She's been Micheaux's backup for three years. Her and Kelsey and Assarian will battle for that five spot.

The most improved player on our team is Adaora Elonu. You remember her brother played in the league and got drafted by the Lakers in the second round. He's over in Spain playing. That family just believes in work. In the classroom and on the court, she's the most improved player that we have. She'll be at the four spot.

Right now I don't see any of the young kids challenging her.

Now, as we in three weeks from now, hopefully I'll have some of those freshmen and the junior college player ready to compete. But right

now we look like a very athletic AAU team going up and down the court. And what we've got to do is learn how to play a little bit better basketball right now.

But that's why we've got the month of October and November in front of us.

Q. Want to know what you think about Nolan Richardson moving into women's basketball. He's going to be coaching this team in Tulsa, WNBA team.

COACH BLAIR: I think it will be great. I worked with Nolan for nine years. He has a passion for the game. He also has a passion for young ladies, as most of you know. His daughter died of leukemia. His wife was one of our biggest fans. They used to come to our ball games in Arkansas, and the kids would love to go up and talk to her. I think it's a perfect fit. I think we'll do very well, particularly if he's getting Detroit's team.

That's not an expansion team. That's a readymade team, ready to compete. And hopefully he'll look into some of these Big 12 players like Danielle Gant, who's over in Turkey right now playing, to say come back home and play in Oklahoma.

And maybe the other Paris. So hopefully he'll look at some of the Big 12 players and say, let's fill my roster with some of those kids in the Big 12 that can maybe put some butts in the seats.

He hasn't forgotten how to coach the game. He is a very, very good teacher and a very good coach. And I really believe, for him to get his legacy that he deserved, he needs to get back into the game and hopefully get into the Hall of Fame someday.

PETER IRWIN: Coach Blair, we appreciate your comments and your answers. Best of luck to you for the season.

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