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Texas A&M – 65
Kansas State Wildcats – 63

An interview with:

**TEXAS A&M AGGIES
COACH GARY BLAIR
DANIELLE GANT
ADAORA ELONU**

COACH GARY BLAIR: A great game for Big 12 basketball. People look and say why do we play conference tournaments? That's why you play conference tournaments. The same way what happened in the men's game with Syracuse and Connecticut. You have championships to win. Okay, a lot of coaches think they're useless, I think there's an opportunity to get better as a basketball team and improve your seed. And improve our thinking process as we go.

We had to use a lot of different parts today. Kansas State in the second half shot 62 percent or something like that. Give them a lot of credit. Gipson, I voted for her first team. I think she is one of the best in it the league. Colson hitting that big three when we had to have it, and we missed a couple down the stretch, but. I can't believe Sweat missed the last shot. We defended very well on the play. The ball rolled loose and we should have sat on the ball. But, that's all I have to say, Peter .

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Gary. That was very nice.

COACH GARY BLAIR: Forty-eight seconds.

THE MODERATOR: It was more than a minute and a half, but that's okay. What we would like to do is confine the questions to the student-athletes first. If you would, please, identify

which student athletes you would like to ask a question and give them a chance.

Q. Just your thoughts about the thrill of getting the last shot to go in your hometown. It must be another thrill to come home and do that.

DANIELLE GANT: I know they were going to play good defense. Coach wanted the ball in my hands and I could get to the hole. And he wanted Adaora to set the screen, and I could get to the hole. The last couple of second I knew I had to score unless we were going to go no overtime and they were going to win the game.

Q. Talk about being here and how you perform when you're here in your hometown?

DANIELLE GANT: I think I perform better. A lot of family and friends that seen me growing up but never have seen me play at the college level. So just coming home, playing for family and friends is a great feeling and making that winning basket is also a great feeling.

Q. You got them pretty good in their home gym a couple weeks ago. They are national-ranked power. What is the biggest difference today, being back and forth from the whole second half?

ADAORA ELONU: The first time we played we were hitting every shot we put up. And we were -- we had a lot of fast-break points. Today seemed to be more of a defensive game and slow down a little bit. But we have to execute a little bit more. And it was just different from the first two games where we did win by 26. We have to fight a little bit more this game.

DANIELLE GANT: I think the point guard play, she was coming off some kind of being sick a little bit. I think she came out today with a little fire knowing the last game she wasn't very healthy, so I think that that was one of the big keys in the game tonight.

Q. Danielle, talk about the run that K-State made in the second half and what you all did to get back to finish the game.

DANIELLE GANT: Well, we have been in this situation before knowing that this tournament is a great tournament. There are no bad teams in this tournament. Knowing that every team is going to give it their all. So them pushing the run a little bit, we know that we should have had a lot of time to come back and win the game and locked down the defense and executed well on the offensive end.

Q. Can both you talk about Sooners up next. You've had some classic battles, almost like you're rivals now. Talk about tomorrow's game.

DANIELLE GANT: It will be a big game, it will go down to the wire like it did tonight. I think it is a matter of playing good defense. Great teams from great offense, both OU and us. And I think the key thing is defense.

ADAORA ELONU: Yeah, I agree. I think defense will play an important part and wins the game. We're looking forward to it and will be pumped.

Q. [Inaudible] Courtney?

DANIELLE GANT: We are going to play team defense, not Courtney down low. We are playing good team defense and have two in the lane every time she touches the ball.

Q. Danielle, about 15 minutes left you had a lay-up behind the back pass from Sydney. Were you expecting it to get you the ball quite that way? Did it take you a second to adjust?

DANIELLE GANT: I knew it was coming. When there is a fast break I knew she would throw the behind the back pass, I knew it was coming.

Q. Adaora, talk about coming off the bench and helping out today when you all were in trouble.

ADAORA ELONU: I know when Coach pulled me off the bench, it is not just to fill in a spot. It's to pretty much either score, play good defense. Like bringing something else to the game and that's what I think I did when I came in.

Q. Danielle, it seems like every time you come back something crazy happens with

you. Just describe your feelings hitting a shot like that, playing in your hometown.

DANIELLE GANT: Like I mentioned earlier, I mean, I mean, it was a great just hitting the game-winning shot. Coach wanted the ball in my hands and I had to score or get to the foul line. And I took it upon myself to get to the bucket.

Q. Can you guys talk about when Takia went down and were you concerned at that point? Or kind of what went through your heads?

DANIELLE GANT: Yeah, we were concerned a lot, knowing that she is like our leading scorer and best 3-point shooter. Plus, she has great defense. Knowing that she went out, but also we have great bench. Knowing we can sit Takia down and bring Tanisha or Tyra off the bench, that was a great lift for us.

ADAORA ELONU: I agree, the bench is pretty awesome. Her going down, we were concerned, but we have others to step up and play for her.

THE MODERATOR: Any further questions for the student-athletes before we let them return to the locker room? Thank you very much. And good luck tomorrow. And, Coach, we will let you answer the questions for as long as you like, within reason.

COACH GARY BLAIR: Oh, Peter. Are you on "60 Minutes," Peter or anything like that?

Q. Coach, talk about Gant's effort, the double-double and playing in Oklahoma City.

COACH GARY BLAIR: She just has that mentality that refuses to lose. She had to guard everybody on that team. Because Micheaux had trouble guarding Gipson and Adaora couldn't guard Gipson. Finally we had to put her over there. And sometimes we put her over on Lehning and on everybody. We have to do a little better job of the rest of our kids taking care of their business. We're better than that. But Gant is Gant. There's not a 5-foot-10 player in the country that plays harder and better than her. And that's why the Danielle Gant show is not going to stop. It's going to keep on going. I just hope they're on the same team after this.

Q. Gary, this is obviously not the first time that Danielle played in front of her home folks. Can you talk a little bit about when you

take players back to play in their home towns, the different players react differently to that.

COACH GARY BLAIR: I think so. Sometimes they try to do too much, but not Danielle. Nothing, nothing frustrates her, nothing gets her too excited. She is just very low-keyed person. She doesn't want all the compliments. A lot of times she doesn't want the basketball on certain situations. She says let's get it over to her, let's get it over to her. But when you're going down to NCAA time, I know where my bread and butter was. They were doing a pretty good job of defending Starks out there. Smith was missing a lot of easy stuff, and she played well early and didn't do much late. And so, I'm going to keep going to the horse in there, and that play was supposed to be a flash. But my freshman was getting so excited, she wasn't supposed to -- she was supposed to flash from the low block up and set the screen. But she got a little bit, she scored over a double-team. Gant could have threw it back to Adaora who was wide open on the play as well.

Q. Gary, you can first talk about what did you think was different with K-State's defense in the second half. And also if you can talk a little more about Gipson and the way she played.

COACH GARY BLAIR: Obviously Lehning wasn't tiring out, she wanted the ball and was making plays for other. And every time we come off to help, Gipson would free up and our kids were pointing fingers, making excuses. We're supposed to help, we're supposed to rotate, but not come off of their best shooter, the girl that kept them in the ballgame.

But there, Michelle, basically you look at the stat sheet. They had three in double figures, we had four. That is probably a little bit of the difference. The kids had to play a lot more minutes than ours besides Gant and Starks and eventually you wear down that load. If you had to play four games in a row of playing those kids that many minutes you are not going to have anything left for the NCAA tournament. So in one way it might be a relief for Kansas State to get back and to rest their bodies there because their owe going to be able to go pretty far in this thing. They have got a lot of different weapons. And see, we shut down Kincaid and Zanotti today. One out of nine from the three. That's huge. K-State -- one out of nine, nine that's not bad, but we had a hand in their face and then sometimes they missed some open looks. But K-State is a legit team that has a great chance to

get to the Sweet 16 and I wish them well. A very well-coached team.

Q. Coach, it's late in the season. Two starters down in this game and the bench comes up and helps you finish. Let's talk about the contribution of Adaora and the bench help.

COACH GARY BLAIR: Adaora came in. Coach Shaffer was wanting defense in; I was wanting offense. Adaora is a lot better. He kept wanting another one of my fives in. And we argue like brothers sometimes, and that's just the way it. I said, hey, they can't catch us if we can outscore them. And Adaora came in and hit the big shots that we had to have. And she is just a very good player. She was all Big 12 Freshman of the Week three different times. Didn't make all-conference freshman, but she's had a great year for us. And I'm not afraid to use whichever five-player I need. Now, probably couldn't use Adaora like in that situation against Oklahoma, because of the Parises. She couldn't handle the weight. But against Kansas State, which are smaller like us, we could use her at the 5 a little more. Adaora will be a very good player, just like her brother.

THE MODERATOR: Any further questions for Coach?

Q. Coach, you talked about Kansas State maybe being in a Sweet 16 team. Also you guys, OU, Baylor, go down the list. What does it say about this conference when you play a Kansas State team in the quarter finals?

COACH GARY BLAIR: This is very similar to when I was back in the SEC when the SEC was at the top. And I think we're at the top now, along with maybe the Big East and the ACC are playing very well right now. But the depth of this league, the strength of this league is the continuity of the coaches much that's what made us strong in the SEC back then. We let the coaches build their programs and we stayed with them and we built them. And kids want to come to places where they're going to be seen on TV, we have a great TV package, we have our great media that is writing about them. And we're putting butts in the seats. And that's something that people want to come to the Big 12. And I just think that's very, very important. But I think K-State has a great chance, but it depends on our seeding. It depends on who you play.

Because they have a team that's more of a finesse team that has to be can't be perfect. They are not a team that needs to face Rutgers. Years past I remember when I got beat by old Kansas State up at Kansas State, then they had to go play Old Dominion. That was a very physical team, and that wasn't a good match-up for them. The it just depends on where we go.

Of course, we both want to go where we're going to be the higher seed. Where the home team is not going to be in that region. So send me somewhere, send me home to Lubbock. [Laughter].

Q. Starks looked like she was still pretty hobbled there when she came back in. How will be for tomorrow do you think? Did she ask to come back in? Was she in your ear?

COACH GARY BLAIR: No, I asked her to come back in. There was no thing about it. Even if she is out there, she is a hell of a decoy out there because if the ball came to her, she has the ability to make the play. And I had a time-out to go if I needed I could have used it to put in a defensive sub for her. But her one leg, with her heart, you are not going to take her out. You are not going to take Lehning out. So you are not 100 percent, none of us coaches are 100 percent in March right now either. We're worn down.

THE MODERATOR: Anything further for coach? Good job, Coach. Congratulations, we'll see you tomorrow.

COACH GARY BLAIR: Thank you. When you have 10 turnovers by one team and seven turnovers by the other team, you have a got a well-played ballgame.

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