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Texas A&M – 74
Oklahoma – 62

An interview with:

**TEXAS A&M AGGIES
COACH GARY BLAIR
SYDNEY COLSON
DANIELLE GANT
TANISHA SMITH**

PETER IRWIN: Coach Blair, welcome and congratulations on a big win. You have got one minute.

COACH BLAIR: Defense, rebounding, percentage shots, great point guard play, bench coming in, Micheaux, being able to rest her while Courtney was in foul trouble where she could come in and play the whole second half basically. Give Elonu and Buchanan a lot of credit because they held the fort until we could get Micheaux into the second half.

Proud of the effort and the stamina we had. We have to do it one more time. Remember, folks, we haven't won anything yet. They don't give any consolation prizes.

The last time we beat Oklahoma at our place our fans thought we had won the National Championship. We haven't won a thing yet. We'll keep it in perspective and we'll go back to work and we'll start teaching again and go over the film.

My assistants had a great game plan for them. We mixed up zone and zone-to-man and straight man and pressed a couple possessions.

But my minute is up.

Q. Danielle, coming home, how does it feel to beat Oklahoma practically in their backyard?

DANIELLE GANT: It feels good to beat Oklahoma. Not just Oklahoma, any team. It would have been great to beat any team here at home knowing we have a chance for the Big 12 title tomorrow.

Q. Sydney, how different of a team are they with Whitney Hand, seemingly still a little bit injured. She hasn't scored this tournament -- didn't score this tournament. How different are they with her injury?

SYDNEY COLSON: I think whether she was injured or not, we were ready to come out here and defend anybody that was coming at us. We knew if she was in the game, she was going to be mostly trying to get the three-point shot off because we did a pretty bad job guarding her at their place in Oklahoma a few months ago. So we knew we had to buckle down on her.

We were just mentally prepared this time to go out there and defend anybody because we know that Texas A&M, our style of play is just to come after them hard, get steals and get out in transition. We wanted just want to do the best job we could whether she was in there or not.

Q. Where does this one rank in terms of your great games north of the Red River?

DANIELLE GANT: One of the best, just knowing that it is almost our senior year, me, Micheaux and Takia, our senior year is almost over. It ranks one of the best for us knowing we have an opportunity as three seniors going out with a Big 12 championship.

Q. They got within one there, the second half, the crowd was getting into it, you guys went on a 14-3 run. Sydney, had you a pull-up three off the dribble. Can you talk about that stretch when you turned the game around back to y'all's favor?

SYDNEY COLSON: Like I was saying, we knew we were getting nervous. We were like we got to pick this up and try to get this lead stretched out much more so we can be a little bit more comfortable and back up and play a zone the rest of the game and just do what we need to do to get a bigger lead.

When I hit that three, I felt like we got a little bit of adrenalin going and momentum and it took us down the stretch.

Q. Sydney, it looked to me like during that run that OU made in the second half, right as they made that run, you guys took it to them strong and took it to them defensively as well. Did you feel like that was one of the key stretches right there, doing what you kept going?

SYDNEY COLSON: For sure in the first half, we knew that some of their players were in foul trouble and the coach, she rested some of the starters and we were like y'all, we got to buckle down and get the lead to something we can gain on in the second half, try to get it bigger.

Courtney wasn't in. Their point guard wasn't in. We knew we had to take advantage of the situation. We went into halftime with an eight-point lead or so and it helped us in the second half and getting Courtney in foul trouble. I think Damitria Buchanan really did a great job, changed the game around and great leader with getting our momentum going.

Did a great job and pulled out a W.

Q. Tanisha, the first time you played OU, you had four points I think you had 19 last time and then 13 today. Talk about your game against the Sooners.

TANISHA SMITH: My first time playing against OU I did have four points. It was a different atmosphere, came off the bench that game, got over my illnesses. They came to our house. A lot of the leadership coming from D. Gant to me. She talked to me before every game. We were roommates every time; so her leadership and her ownership of the team is helping me overcome a lot of the things that's going on.

Q. Gary, can you talk a little bit about NCAA tournament seedings. Kim talked yesterday how she feels like because of where this thing is RPI-wise. It might not be too much far fetched to have a couple No. 1 seeds. How

much could this tournament play into how that plays out?

COACH BLAIR: They are not going to let that happen. I think we have a chance for No. 1 with Oklahoma and two No. 2s with us and Baylor. But there are some other good teams who are up there as well.

I think that's more realistic. I would say Kansas State and Iowa State, all of us need to be in the top four.

People across the country are getting to see how good we are. We're doing it with some of the best officials in the country. They are all here because there is not much else going on. We are getting the best officials. You are getting the best games. I think it is good for our league, the exposure. Sometimes it is great playing this second week because the spotlight is on us and look at the media that's here today.

Q. Talk about your defense, if you would, especially out front, really getting the pressure there and forcing 17 turnovers today.

COACH BLAIR: Basically, defense started about six years ago when we were not very good in this league.

And so for us to play with the halves of the league, we had to sit there and try to win, try to recruit a different way. That's what we were able to do because the Courtney Parises were not going to come to us four or five years ago. But the Danielle Gants, the Takia Starks, the Micheauxs, the Renos, Morenikes, a lot of names all of you hadn't heard. All of a sudden, they bought in to what we were about and they said defense first, rebound the best you can and great point guard play. But defense is going to win you championships and that's our bread and butter. We don't apologize for it.

A lot of people say our style is ugly. They hold, they foul, they do this and they do that. There is a lot of ways to win ball games. If defense is the best thing we do, I wish that our coaches would say, "That's a damn good team sometime" instead of saying, "They play hard. They scrap. They lose balls." Damn good is a pretty good adjective, too.

Q. Gary, there has been a lot of blogs about late time-outs that you have called in games. Anything you want to address about that with the two you called?

COACH BLAIR: You noticed we ran the press breakers correct the whole time. I called one at the end because I had actually subbed Gant out and the whole nine yards and they ran to the wrong plays. And I'm not going to turn it over and let us screw something up.

We executed well down the stretch and if that gives them a chance to sell something else on TV, so be it. But we're not going to finish the game. It is a teaching moment, and so people get over it.

Do you think I'm trying to run up the score? Okay, I'm not trying to run up the score. I'm trying to make sure that we don't have a turnover because when we ran that sideline play, we turned the ball over.

That was the only turnover during that whole time. We execute press breakers and I'm going to teach. If other people get upset about it, then I can't help that. It's teaching and it's coaching.

Q. Kind of a rough shooting day for Starks. Talk about your other players and how they kind of stepped up, especially Colson, it seems like the last couple days she has hit big shots for you.

COACH BLAIR: Two comments on that. I wrote them down so I can tell the people back home.

First, Starks has got to fill up the right side of the stat sheet. She did great on the defensive end. She was 10-11 from the line, okay?

She didn't have -- she had three turnovers, three assists. She had 12 points, so be it. It was 1 out of 11.

But you see this at the upper levels all the time. I can leave you on the floor if you play the game, okay? Your game is not necessarily the score because if they have Thompson on you, a taller person, last time they had Hand on her and they changed it up. Hand on Tanisha Smith is not a great matchup. So we exploited Hand by using Tanisha as much as we could.

Colson, I said before the ball game, Shalee Lehning and Danielle Robinson are first team -- they are the two best point guards in the league by what they have proven. Where do we put you? Where do we put you as a sophomore? Can you play to that level? It is going to take the leadership. It is going to take the voice commands because they are not going to be able to hear me all the time.

So I challenged her before the game. This is the most minutes she has played in a long time. How many kids could be ready to go four months and two days after ACL surgery? And people don't realize that. That's very, very important.

Q. Oklahoma didn't have more field goals than turnovers until the last minute. Is that damn good defense?

COACH BLAIR: Yeah. Whatever you said, I'm not sure how we circled around there, but I'm a little slow now.

Q. They didn't have more field goals than turnovers until the last minute.

COACH BLAIR: I think it is good. We were forcing them into things. They were not able to run those pick and screens and isolate Courtney in there. They were able to do that.

You play Courtney by fronting her and ball pressure and praying for help. That's the only way you can guard her. If you are going to stay behind, you are going to see who's who in America like you did yesterday because she's too good. So you got to take chances. Our style of defense, that's how we do it.

If other people want to copy us, they need to come watch Coach Schaeffer teach practice every day on the defensive end. It works.

Q. Just talk about Danielle Gant's game.

COACH BLAIR: There is not much to say. Y'all can write about it. Y'all can throw the adjectives in there.

She does it all. She has to guard. She has to do it all. I took her out for one break for a minute and a half and I said, "I just want to get you" -- she said, "Coach, I am ready to go." I said, "You have got three fouls." I can't take a chance knowing as explosive as Oklahoma is to come back.

Danielle Gant just wants to win and isn't it a shame she's not on all those All-American lists? Because All-American lists are about reputation and how many points you score, and that's not how the game of basketball is played, okay? It is about doing all the little things. It is about what's on your hat there.

The Detroit Pistons, when they used to be pretty good, they used to have a guy named Dennis Rodman. They used to have a lot of

players that could do a lot of the little things in the game. Gant does the little things and she's hard to guard. She's going to shoot free throws well. She wants the ball. She is going to guard everybody's best player.

The most important thing is probably what she's done off the court academically by turning herself into a great academic student as well.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you very much for your comments.

COACH BLAIR: Don't y'all leave town tomorrow, okay? I want to see all of the Oklahoma people still back in here tomorrow because whoever wins this next game, it's going to be a shoot-out.

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