

March 14, 2009



Texas A&M – 74
Oklahoma – 62

An interview with:

**OKLAHOMA SOONERS
COACH SHERRI COALE
COURTNEY PARIS
DANIELLE ROBINSON**

PETER IRWIN: We are joined by the Sooners from Oklahoma. Coach, would you like to make any opening comments?

COACH COALE: Congratulations to Texas A&M. I thought they were hungry. I thought they competed at an incredibly high level. I thought they fought for every possession for an entire 40 minutes and they deserve to play in the championship.

Q. Could you both talk about the shooting problems today at the free-throw line and even on the floor because of A&M's defense.

COURTNEY PARIS: A&M did a great job being scrappy and hustling. But we just -- we weren't as tough as we usually are. Normally -- we've had games where we didn't shoot very well and we still find a way to fight through it. That's the number one thing we didn't have tonight is any fight.

DANIELLE ROBINSON: The free throws, it was just focus. We would hit one and miss the second one. We were 1-2, everybody in the first half. It is just the idea of focus.

The threes we hit we were 0-4 in the first half. It was our shooters resting. They were closing out quick, kind of rushing them into their shots. I definitely think that affected them.

Q. Would you just talk about your night. Obviously the fouls just kept coming for you and how frustrating was it for you to watch what was happening from the bench?

COURTNEY PARIS: It is my own fault. I wasn't ready to go. A lot of my fouls came off situations I could have controlled.

I don't know. I got to come out ready to play. A lot of that is my fault and make sure my teammates are ready to play, too. So ...

Q. D Rob, you got to the lane but they weren't dropping. Was it something defensively or was it one of those days for you?

DANIELLE ROBINSON: It was really just focusing on the target. I mean, I would get there or I would be sped up a little bit and rush a shot. So that was just needing to slow down or have a change of speed, really just focus on the target and finish it.

Q. Danielle, it seems like Sydney Colson has really picked up her game since early in the season when you guys played them in Norman.

DANIELLE ROBINSON: Yeah, she had a great game today. She wanted it and especially when they had the momentum, she really sparked it. By hitting threes, she got to the lane in transition, she led her team today. She got the ball where it needed to be for them to score. Danielle Gant had a great game.

Q. Danielle and Courtney, I suppose, one thing you're not getting both days is really 3-point shooting from your 3-point shooters. Is that a concern going forward, and how badly do you need somebody to come in other than Jenny and make a few?

COURTNEY PARIS: I think our shooters will do just fine. It really comes down to all the things that happen before that, if the post -- post starter, they have to help down and their shooters are more open. We set better screens and our

plays flow more and the shooters get better shoots than having to rush. I don't think it is necessarily the shooters have to make shots, it is more a team effort and everybody getting those guys to have opportunities.

Q. Would you just talk about what this does for you heading forward. Does this make you more determined whenever you find out where you are going on Monday?

DANIELLE ROBINSON: This is the final stretch. You know, we're really only guaranteed going into the NCAA one game. And from here out, it will be a dog fight wherever we play. We have to learn from this. We have, what, a week to prepare and get ready for whoever is coming up.

Like I said, we have to learn from it and take the loss, really.

COURTNEY PARIS: I second what she said. You have to learn from it. I mean, the tangible things, following the scout, blocking out, those things, knocking down free throws.

But, also, I think this game can remind us what makes us so special and I think that's fight that we have and that togetherness and that urgency we get in games, even when it is not going our way. I think that will remind us. That's the X-factor for Oklahoma and we have to get back to that.

Q. Coach, is there any common thread in these couple of losses to Texas A&M, maybe something particular they throw at you that makes them a tough out for your team?

COACH COALE: They speed us up. And Danielle at the point position has to learn how to go at the pace she wants to go at.

Everybody about her offensive execution was just a step too fast and that's part of our finishing problem.

They do a great job offensively, too, of attacking the glass. While we get a lot of rebounds, we don't necessarily always block out real well. When they crash really, really hard, they present some problems. That's really what got us on our heels early, 13 first-half offensive rebounds.

Q. The last maybe two weeks the offensive problems, how concerned are you about the off -- I know Whitney has been out, but getting her assimilated back in, how much of a problem is that right now?

COACH COALE: I didn't feel like we had any offensive problems in the second half last

night. There were a couple games down the stretch I didn't feel like we had any offensive problems in either.

So we have to make open threes, but not making open threes was not really the problem tonight. We took a bunch of threes right down the stretch trying to close that deficit. But that wasn't the problem. We have to make free throws. We have to make two-foot chippies. We have to execute our plays. We have to attend to the scout. Those things are far greater concerns than missing or making some threes.

Q. How frustrated were you that -- as you kept trying to find personnel that could work or was throwing, even putting in your second unit at one point trying to get something going today, you never could find that right combination.

COACH COALE: It was frustrating because I didn't think we played as hard as we needed to play. I didn't think we played with a sense of urgency that deserved an opportunity to play in the championship game. I really didn't.

That was the frustrating part. You know, you miss shots, you sometimes dribble off your foot. You sometimes do crazy stuff. But not giving maximum effort from start to finish in a semifinal game of a conference tournament is baffling. That was the frustrating part. I thought Jenny Vining came in the game and competed as hard as she could compete. I thought Abi's minutes were as much as she could give us. We got it in places.

We have to get it all the way across the board. If you want to go deep in the NCAA tournament, everybody better come to play every second they're on the floor.

Q. Yesterday, Sherri, it seemed like everything was clicking and things were going well. Today it is almost night and day opposite. Does it show you how fragile it is when you are playing good teams this time of year? What do you take away?

COACH COALE: Absolutely. There is a breadth of difference between the guy that gets to keep playing and the one whose season is over.

It is little things. You know, we preach them all the time. It is blocking out every time whether the shot goes in or not. It is making 100 free throws every single day, whether you are shooting 95 percent from the line or 25 percent

from the line.

You could go down the list, and a million different ways. When the NCAA tournament rolls around, you are a breath away from going on or your season being over and our guys understand that. They understand it.

Q. Most people still projecting Lady Sooners No. 1 seed. Talk about that and about the Big 12 heading to the NCAA as the conference.

COACH COALE: I do think we are still a No. 1 seed. I think what we did in our tournament schedule, our strength of schedule is No. 1, our RPI is No. 1. Currently ranked two or three depending on the poll you look at. I think we are still definitely a No. 1 seed.

I think the Big 12 as a whole has a great deal of respect from the committee. They understand how difficult our league is and the quality of basketball that's played on a nightly basis. I think they certainly take that into consideration as well as the fact that teams in our conference have done a really good job of scheduling in the early season before conference play rolls around.

So strength of schedule is really high and quality top to bottom is as good as it gets.

Q. Sherri, Sydney Colson and Tanisha Smith have had great games the last two times you have played them. Chance you could see them again in Oklahoma City. Talk a little bit about what you guys need to do against those two players.

COACH COALE: We need to follow the game plan. That would be number one.

Colson made some big plays, she did. She had a little step-back three that was nasty. You give her that. I thought she competed in a really high level. She ran her team and played with a lot of confidence. I think Smith makes them a lot better, even though her percentage wasn't great tonight. She stretches them and makes you do some things that you might not otherwise like to do.

But Gant -- in my opinion, Gant and Colson stole the show tonight. I thought Danielle Gant just wanted to win worse than anybody else on the basketball floor. The results speak for themselves.

Q. Whitney seemed to really hustle, play well, some of that stuff, but she has yet to

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make a shot since coming back from her injury. How concerned are you about her on the offensive end?

COACH COALE: We knew it would take her a little bit to get back into rhythm. It is hard to try to get back into rhythm on such a grand stage as this. She's just got to slow down a little bit.

I am not worried about her shooting the basketball. She will make open shots. The finger is not affecting that. She is just playing a little bit too fast right now and that's pressing, trying too hard to get back where you were in three steps. You can't do that. You got to take them one by one.

Q. You put Courtney back in the first half with three fouls. You kind of did that in the Tennessee game when you guys were down. Was it a matter of having her on the floor at that time?

COACH COALE: I felt like maybe we could loosen up things with other guys with her attention to her at the block. Instead, what we did is we tried to cram it down to her at the block two or three consecutive possessions which resulted in turnovers. It was her presence more than production that I was after at the close of the half.

That being said, we score on the last possession and have a chance to go in the locker room just down six. In my opinion, the exclamation point of the game was that one before halftime. That one showed. They really wanted to win and they were going to play through every possession and we didn't. We stopped short. Because of that, we do not deserve to play tomorrow.

Q. Can you dissect not playing hard a little bit because Danielle mentioned lack of focus at the free-throw line. You have mentioned speeding up. Is that -- is getting rattled part of not playing hard? Is that in addition to? What was the problem there?

COACH COALE: It could be the impetus for not playing hard, everything from foul trouble to pressure defense, forcing you to go too fast to -- there are a million things that can force you or that can send you in the direction of not competing at the highest possible level.

I thought that things distracted us, and that just means you are not very tough. It means you are fragile. If getting pushed three times when you shoot and it doesn't get called, if that makes you

not play hard, you are not very tough. If a defense putting pressure on you the length of the floor makes you not focus on a free throw, you are not very mentally tough.

(Cell phone ringing.)

It doesn't really make me happy.

Q. One of the bright spots was Jenny coming off the bench and giving you some good minutes. It seems she is playing her best basketball as you go into the tournament. What does she add to your team going forward?

COACH COALE: Competitive spirit. She's not going to quit. She is not ever going to quit. She is going to fight.

I like the element that she gives us offensively in that she has a real high basketball IQ. She moves without the ball well. She reads the defense well. She wants the ball at all times. And I thought defensively tonight she did a really good job of adhering to the scout. She is the one that really paid attention and did the things that we talked about in terms of our strategy before the game.

So I think her confidence has grown and obviously we get that three ball from her. That's big-time. But she does a lot of the little things extremely well, too.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you very much and best of luck in the NCAA tournament.

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