

March 15, 2009



Baylor – 72
Texas A&M – 63

An interview with:

**TEXAS A&M AGGIES
COACH GARY BLAIR
TAKIA STARKS
DANIELLE GANT**

PETER IRWIN: We are now joined by Texas A&M and the Aggies.

Coach, you've had a great season. Tell us about today's game.

COACH BLAIR: It was a great game for T.V. We had things going our way early, when they were in man-to-man and they couldn't guard us man-to-man and in transition and the game was getting fast.

Kim did a good job of adjusting to the zone, also to rest her players that were playing as many minutes as they've had to. They were spreading us wide on the zone with the 2-3, taking things away. We were not coming off of the screens.

But at the end of the possession, we had great shots in the first half. When you have great shots in the first half, you have got to trust your kids. But when you're not on and you have got four out and only one under, you have got to at least make a better percentage of the shots than we did.

Second half, we attacked the zone pretty good but we couldn't get them. There is not too many times we've gone into a ball game and said they're just going to execute us to death and they did. Everything was on the pick-and-roll and drive and pitch and kick. Give them a lot of credit. They made some plays.

The key play of the ball game, I thought, when it was a three- or four-point ball game and we started our rally, shot clock is going on, and we fouled over there in the corner on a 3-point attempt. I thought that was a momentum, and then we came right back down and fouled another shooter and came back down and fouled another shooter.

But give them credit. We're supposed to contest shooters, not try to block jump shooters. We learned our lesson. Give them credit. Kudos to Baylor. They are a very, very deserving Big 12 champion that deserves the high seed that this league can possibly give them.

If it is a one, give it to them for heart. Give us the high seed, we'll take whatever you give us, whether it is a two seed or a three seed because this team is going to dance a long way in the NCAA tournament.

Right now, let Baylor enjoy the nets. They've earned everything that they deserve. They play together as a team but so does this team right here.

Questions?

PETER IRWIN: That was a little longer than a minute.

COACH BLAIR: What else do I have to do today? I am not cutting down nets right now.

Q. After a tough game yesterday, one of nine bouncing back, moving forward, what kind of confidence does this game give you the way you had individually in the finals?

TAKIA STARKS: It is a feat for us making it back to the championship game second year in a row. We are going to use this as going back to film and use it as a learning experience. Like we said, we still got NCAA. Whatever seed we get, we are going to be happy with. We want to move forward from there.

Q. Baylor is known for man-to-man defense, they played y'all man-to-man the other two games. Were you surprised when they

switched to a zone?

DANIELLE GANT: No, not really. Coach knew it was coming. He had plays before the game drawn up, a play that they were going to run against the zone. I wasn't surprised at all.

Q. Danielle, disappointing for you to lose this championship game in your hometown and then can you comment on the possibility of a regional back here, you guys could be back here?

DANIELLE GANT: Yeah, it is a little disappointing losing here in my hometown knowing that this may be my last game here. But I think my team and I, we put a good effort in this whole tournament so I'm not too disappointed. I'm just happy we got the opportunity to get to play and make it to the final two.

Q. Can you talk about Jhasmin Player and what she was able to do with penetration in the second half especially.

TAKIA STARKS: Actually, I would say her game plan was I'm going to drive to the basket. I'm either going to get fouled or I'm going to get the score. She stuck to that.

Sometimes we were able to keep her from the point. Most of the time we weren't, and she got that foul called. That was a very smart move on her part. I'm happy for Baylor. They played great. They deserve it today.

Q. Takia, if you guys could talk to the selection committee, what would the message be? Where should this team be seeded?

TAKIA STARKS: That's probably a question for Coach Blair. He really worries about the seeding. We just show up to play and we want to win.

Like I said earlier, whatever seed we get, we are going to be happy with that. We are going to embrace it and we are going to be ready to play.

Q. Danielle, is it a little bit frustrating that Baylor, they just kind of seemed to have your number. That's three times. They have all been close down to the wire.

DANIELLE GANT: It is actually knowing that we are capable of beating them, I guess they wanted a little more down the stretch.

But the question about -- I mean, it's been three times, like you said, so it is heartbreaking losing to a team three times in a row. All we have

to do is go back, get better and hopefully the team next we will go out and beat them.

Q. You pulled it 60 to 58, two points with about four minutes remaining. Was that a situation of exuding so much energy to get back into that game and not having a whole lot down the stretch?

COACH BLAIR: I think the whole second half carried over. You look at the percentage, how many teams are going to shoot 62 percent, 50 percent from the three and lose in the second half? You are going to do it when you put them at the line 31 times. We would bail them out late in a situation that they constantly moved or waited for the pick-and-roll.

That does a great job of taking your pressure defense away sometimes and you cannot cause turnovers.

Similar to what K-State used to do when they would play us, run with the ball for 22 seconds and then penetrate and make a play. It worked again. Give them credit.

You didn't ask this question but here's a very telling sign. 24-2 their bench outscored me. My bench has been our savior all year long. I couldn't pull the right numbers at the time. What Medlock did in the first half was big time, and she was making -- she did the same thing, if y'all want to pull up the story at our first game at our place, 17 points, coming in with her variety of spin moves.

Then when we stopped the spin, she kept going. Look what the Energizer Bunny did, Jones, she just finds a way. One time she came down, just knocked Carter out of the way, picked up the ball and we stood around and said, "Wow. Look at that" and she just puts it in after she knocked Carter down. But Carter has got to be strong enough to not get knocked down.

I want somebody that's got that Energizer mentality on my bench to come off and do the same thing. We'll find that person.

But, again, give those two kids off the bench a lot of credit.

Q. Coach, you talked about Medlock a little bit. I'm sure you know everything she has been through in the last year. How much can this mean to a player when you have had such a rough year personally and then win a championship?

COACH BLAIR: I think it is sometimes --

you know, a lot of times stories are not written about our student-athletes on just a feel-good situation.

Would we be talking about her today if she hadn't scored X amount of points? We should be because of what she's done to come back and to play at this level and particularly right after it happened. I think it was just a couple of days. Give credit for Kim for being able to handle the situation and letting the kid have her time.

You got to find out what's going to make that kid come back and want to play. Could I have dealt with it as a student-athlete? No way. She dealt with it pretty good. But she's accepted her role and she has come in and playing behind some pretty dog-gone good seniors in there.

Sometimes your best players don't need to start. Your best players need to come off the bench like we did with Danielle Gant her first two years. But Medlock was a force that we couldn't stop.

I had a freshman on her when she got hot in there, and my freshmen really couldn't guard her and we had to put Micheaux back in there.

But yesterday it worked by me playing the young kids. Today it didn't.

Q. Coach, could you just talk about the effort of Takia today and then also on the flip side Jhasmin Player for Baylor.

COACH BLAIR: Well, Takia, there is nobody that felt worse than what she's done in the first two ball games because her shot wasn't going. It wasn't going in the first half. Two-for-eight and about six of those were opens.

Second half she came back in and stepped in. She's been a second-half player her whole year. That hasn't changed. And Starks is just a winner. She never wants to come out. This is a kid that will do whatever it takes. I just love the kid to death. She's got so much passion and heart.

But you are talking about Medlock, how would you like to have your dad have cancer for three years and have to live with that every day and going through chemo and her mother just get shipped to Afghanistan last week, the day after senior day. There are stories all over the page. It doesn't always have to be about wins and losses and points and rebounds. This is what women's basketball needs is sometimes to talk about the positive things that we're adding to this sport. There are some special kids out there.

I'm sorry, the second kid on Baylor, you wanted me to talk about?

Q. Player.

COACH BLAIR: I just call her a basketball player. I think that's the best term for her. She knows what to do. I recruited the kid hard. Sat in her living room, too. I got some on my team that Kim sat in their living room. We're carbon copy of each other.

I told my kids in there as we were leaving, one, to stay positive, to realize the other team just outplayed us this time, more so than the other two games. This time they just flat out out played us and out executed us.

The other two times it could have gone either way, a call here, a call there, a shot there, a free-throw there. But Player -- isn't it unbelievable that Morrow and Player are not even on the second team all-conference? And Danielle Gant not on the second team? And Kathleen Nash not even on the second team? And Alison Lacey not even on the second team? That's how good this league is. You got to produce every night because you can't live off of what you have done in years past.

But she's the glue to that team, period. Allison does her thing. The Energizer Bunny comes in. Morrow can hit the threes. But I think the glue is Player.

Q. You have played them three times. How were they different now without Danielle Wilson in terms of what they are trying to do on offense and defense as opposed to previously? How are they different now?

COACH BLAIR: I think you can get better shots on them now on your offense because Wilson controlled the paint. She along with, I'd say, Sade Morris of Kansas might be the two improved players. Danielle Wilson before she got hurt and Sade Morris because they play both ends of the court. Defensively, offensively and she could block shots, change rhythms and the whole nine yards.

Now what you got to do is put it down. And as a coach, if you write every day or you talk every day about who's not playing for you, you are not going to give credit to the ones that are playing for you.

Too many times as coaches, we tend to do that. Every story, there is a little blip or something.

Trust the kids. They give us 15 scholarships. And those kids are playing their heart out there. Danielle will be back next year with you know who, and they will be fine.

They're a different team because they did not have as much scoring power, so they have to do things like drive the ball, pick it. Morrow has to really -- what Morrow has done really in the last five games is probably what Kim wanted her to do all season. The stats that Allison and Morrow didn't have going into it, now they are stepping up and becoming the senior leaders and the good players. I'm talking too much about Baylor. I want to talk about my kids. Does anybody else come in here and talk about my kids? But I'm always asked to talk about everybody else's kids, and I do it.

Q. I will lob a big softball up there for you then. Talk about your senior leadership, what they have done for you through this tournament, how you think that part of your team helps you in the NCAA tournament.

COACH BLAIR: I think it helps me. Look at Micheaux what she does. Wasn't that a shame she got fouled out on that wonderful call at the end? She just went through and she says, "I'm going to get that rebound. I'm going to get that rebound."

That's leadership. And by then we were finally playing with the energy that we had to play with at the end. But that was just special. Gant and Starks, they wear it on their sleeves. Those kids are leaders and they are quiet leaders, okay? They are not the rah-rah types. We have to leave that to Colson and some of the others.

But those are kids that were not all-Americans and neither were Baylor's. And you got two teams that are in the top ten doing it with kids that aren't the who's whose list. Basketball players win. Coaches coach them up.

I think both of our programs are doing a pretty damn good job of that.

Folks, I appreciate all the attention. Oklahoma City has done a great job, again, of hosting this thing. I would love to have it back here, but I want it back in Dallas, period, period. It needs to rotate back. It needs to be there, and I hope the ADs and the other basketball coaches need to realize that if we're going to grow our conference, it needs to be in Texas one out of three years, okay?

This is kind of a home-court advantage. You know what I mean? But in Texas, we need it there. In the north -- it is going to recruit in Texas.

Then they need to come down and also bring their teams down as well. We need three different. Kansas City, Oklahoma City, and Dallas somehow, some way.

Thank you y'all.

PETER IRWIN: Coach Blair, thank you. Good luck in the NCAA.

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