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An interview with:



PETER IRWIN: We're now joined by the Sooners from Oklahoma, Coach Sherri Coale and student-athletes Nyeshia Stevenson, Danielle Robinson and Amanda Thompson. Your thoughts about today's game.

COACH COALE: I thought Oklahoma State played extremely well and they played hard and they competed for the entire 40 minutes. Made us earn every second of it.

I thought the difference was we just played like a team. We had four guys in double figures, and yet the minutes from Carlee Roethlisberger, the minutes from Joanna McFarland were huge coming off the bench. I felt like it was a team effort. You have to guard Andrea Riley as a team.

And on the offensive end, sharing the basketball and a lot of guys getting involved in scoring, that was the difference. And down the stretch some key rebounds, and just a great team effort. Proud of our kids.

PETER IRWIN: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Danielle, could you talk a little bit about two things: First, you hit a jumper and got to the line late, that kind of extended your lead. Talk about that sequence, you turned and motioned to the bench. And can you also comment on the fact that you were guarding Riley so much of the day, and how does that impact things when you're having to follow her around all day?

DANIELLE ROBINSON: First, I had missed the jumper before I made that one. And we had a little timeout. Coach said get under that one. That's the one I hit. I got under it. And then I got to the rim, knew they were in bonus, so we were going to get two shots.

And then as far as Riley, I mean, I've been guarding her all year. We had that little switch where Jasmine guarded her some and I guarded her some. But she's a tough player to guard. 32 points, she was hot the first half. But like I said, like she did yesterday she was going to take whatever it took for her team to win.

Q. Nyeshia, second straight game, didn't do much in the first half then came out and lit it up in the second half. Is there a problem with knowing what the tip-off time is or what's going on?

NYESHIA STEVENSON: I'm not sure. I was talking to AT, I don't think the goal liked me over on the other end. But most of the time just takes me to slow down. In the second half I always figure out what's not making my shot go in. The first half I'm rushing, trying to do things too quick.

Q. Amanda, you had 15 points in the first 11 or 12 minutes, whatever it was. And then you went about 31 minutes without scoring. What went on early and then what happened after that in terms of them stopping you on offense?

AMANDA THOMPSON: In the first half,

just the high post area, I took advantage of it. The way they were guarding. She was sagging off me a little bit. So I took those jump shots. Then I found some lanes to the basket.

In the second half, I figured since I wasn't scoring, I figured I could start rebounding and playing a little bit of defense. I wasn't playing defense in the first half. So just gotta find different parts of the game to do.

Q. Amanda, talk a little bit about Danielle and her steadiness. It's about the same every time out for her. Just talk about what she brings to you guys and that consistency.

AMANDA THOMPSON: She's just a natural leader. She's the one that gets us all together when we're starting to spread out. I know the look on her when the game is on the line because she'll take over and she'll want the ball. And that's what I love about her. She's just a great point guard, and I know she wasn't going to back down to the challenge.

Q. Danielle, talk about Riley, is it just a matter of, you know, she's going to get hers and just take care of the rest of them, or what's the attitude? Because she's going to get her 30, isn't she?

DANIELLE ROBINSON: You have to contest everything. Just keep her hands up at all times because her range is incredible. So that's the mindset going in. She's going to hit some. That's just what she does.

Q. Amanda, maybe you had a little dry spell there, but knocking down those last two free throws, can you talk about your mindset there?

AMANDA THOMPSON: They were huge. I mean, we only had maybe like a 3-point lead. So if I would have missed those they probably would have got another 3-point attempt. I've been in that position before. So I just had to stay calm and knock them down like I always do in the free throw position.

Q. Amanda, you guys split with Texas A&M this year, and they have a little bit stronger post game in terms of their scoring than they've maybe had in the past years. Could you talk about the matchup in the post and also facing them for the third time?

AMANDA THOMPSON: We just have -- we have to guard them together. What is her name? Adams. She's real big down there, and she's got some good hands. Need a little help down there, but I think we can guard down in the post. Abi is a strong post down there, so is Joanna McFarland. So I'm not really too worried about that. We've just got to play good defense.

Q. Amanda, in the last 24 hours I've watched three games here. OSU, Iowa State, and Baylor and OSU went down to the wire, great games the whole way. Were those games for you as much fun to play in as you think they were probably to watch?

AMANDA THOMPSON: Oh, yeah, that's what we live for. That's what we play the game for, is to live for opportunities like that. And how great it is to get the win when you're going point for point, point for point. I'm just happy to do it with our team. And my teammates, we just enjoy the game together. And it's a ball. It's a good time.

Q. Nyeshia, I think just externally a lot of people saw what you lost in graduation and the way Whitney Hand goes out. I don't think a lot of people would have expected you to make a championship game in the Big 12 championship. Can you talk about how you guys came together in spite of the things you lost from last year's team?

NYESHIA STEVENSON: Starting from the beginning, we always talked about our bubble. We have a bubble within our Oklahoma family. No matter what people say, we have to be the ones to believe in -- I think everyone in our program has bought into it. So that bubble is working pretty well.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you. Questions for coach.

Q. Can you just talk a little bit about Danielle and her continued consistent play and then the jumper she hit, the plays down the stretch?

COACH COALE: It's such a blessing to have a kid that is so dependable as she is. She's just so reliable. She has worked very hard at channelling her frustration, if she misses a few shots or if she gets scored on because she takes that personally. She's learned to play on and move to the next possession.

The thing I love most about her is that I can communicate with her constantly. I can get to her. Some kids get involved in competition. They get lost in it, they have that glazed look and no matter what you say they don't hear it. Danielle was a sponge. She hears everything. And we call the low play to get a jumper that she missed.

And the next time down the floor, it wasn't even a timeout, I just said, called the next play and said just get under it. She looked at me. I knew by the look on her face before she ever even got involved in the set, when the shot developed, she would make it. I just knew. It's a great blessing as a coach to have a point guard like that.

Q. Can you talk about Nyeshia. She hits a couple quick baskets in the second half and kind of gets you guys going.

COACH COALE: Yeah, once again she came to the party a little late, but earlier than she did last night. So maybe tomorrow we get the whole thing. She has such an ability to ignite our team. Everybody relaxes a little bit. There's less stress on every possession when she hits a 3. And that gives us defensive life and it's a real positive chain reaction.

I thought it was huge for her to come out and hit that one that early in the second half.

Q. A little disappointed you don't get a crack at Nebraska. And just kind of talk about A&M and what they -- certainly they got your attention, but would you like to have played Nebraska? You've been the one to hand them the loss.

COACH COALE: I would have liked to play someone different in terms of we come up here. You've been in the Big 12 South battling people, we play south, south, south. So in that regard, you know, yeah, it would be nice maybe to play somebody that we haven't just played within the last week or so. But still A&M is a fantastic team, and I think this tournament has been such a reflection of the strength of this league that we talk about all the time. Nebraska was undefeated. Undefeated. And they lose in the semis of our tournament against a team that played very, very well, and you see all these close games. Gary alluded to it earlier. Every game has just been a fantastic basketball game.

Today's between A&M and Nebraska was probably the largest margin of all throughout the entire tournament. So I think, again, just a reflection of the incredible parity within this league,

and I think a lot of teams in this league have a chance to go into the tournament and really make some noise.

Q. How do you see A&M, your matchup with them?

COACH COALE: A&M is very good. Different, I think, than they've been in the past. Much more volatile offensively. I think they see themselves more as a scoring team than necessarily a defending team, which is a little bit of a shift in identity for them. Don't get me wrong, they still guard the heck out of you. But they really want to go score it. And they have a lot of people who can. I thought they looked really good today. Really in sync and in rhythm with one another. And AT was right, Danielle Adams is a tough matchup for most teams in America.

Q. Thompson and Riley put on a show the first ten minutes or so. Riley 8 and 9 and Thompson 7 and 9. Thompson eventually cooled off and then Riley cooled off. What happened to both of those players that the defense sort of got ahold of them eventually?

COACH COALE: That's a pretty predictable trend for Riley. She's going to make some unbelievable shots. You can't be adversely affected by that because she's also going to come back and miss some, too. And you have to stay with the game plan. We didn't change a single thing defensively, not one thing. She just made really tough shots in the first half and missed them in the second half.

As far as Amanda goes, I really thought Amanda just had that. She gets this will look, this possessed look in her eye when she knows we have to have baskets. And she did that last night for a stretch. We couldn't score, couldn't score. She is just creating ways to score, making plays. I don't think she felt that sense of urgency in the first half tonight.

And I think to a great degree she expended herself. And I think in the second half, if we had needed her or asked her to continue to score at that pace and rebound and defend, I'm not sure we could have gotten all that. But fortunately other guys stepped up in scoring, and I'm not sure it was a conscious decision by Amanda, I'm going to go rebound now since I'm not scoring, but I think it was probably subconscious. She understood she had to affect the complexion of the game and

she certainly did.

Q. First of all, Nyeshia talked about being in a bubble, but it's taken more than just that. When Whitney goes down, that's three-fifths of your starting lineup that's gone from last year to this year. Can you talk about from a basketball sense everything you guys have had to do to make up for that. And also, completely different question, you guys lost in the semifinals last year and you still made to it the Final Four. Can you talk about what you have to do? Because Nebraska is in that situation now of getting past the loss in the conference tournament to get ready for the NCAA.

COACH COALE: First question, the key there is we teach our kids all the time. So while you guys are writing about Courtney and Ashley Paris, Courtney, and Ashley Paris and Whitney Hand, we're still practicing, teaching Nyeshia Stevenson and Jasmine Hartman and Amanda Thompson and Abi Olajuwon, working with Abi every single day, so when this opportunity came she was ready to grasp it and take advantage of it. So it's more -- it's more shocking, maybe, to you guys than it is to us.

We just got kids ready every single day. When Whitney went down, I think that was the significant thing. Because turning last year into this year, you prepare for that. We prepare for that. We knew Courtney was going to graduate and Abi was going to have to be great. We knew that. We knew Amanda would be able to move to a true 4 position and be comfortable there and shooters there. We were planning for all that. The tough one was Whitney. You're not planning for that. All of a sudden you're in the middle of a tournament and you've got to figure out how to try to beat it. At that time the No. 3 team in the country, which was Notre Dame. When we came out the next day and fought against Notre Dame the way we did, we're in the game, down the stretch with Danielle on the bench in foul trouble, and Jasmine and Nyeshia with very little experience actually running the team from the guard position.

I knew we had a chance to do something extraordinary with this year, because these kids, as Nyeshia said -- she said it perfectly, they've all bought in. They just believe.

Q. Could you address the whole bouncing from the tournament loss?

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COACH COALE: When you play in a league like this, you can't be too affected ever. You know, in the middle of conference if you lose two in January, you can't be too affected, because somebody else is going to lose two in a little bit and it's all going to even out. You just have to stay the course. And the conference tournament is the last leg of that journey. We're all trying to survive and play somebody new, play somebody different. And I think this is a year in women's basketball where a lot of things could happen. Yes, Connecticut is up there. In their own rarefied era, I suppose. But it I think it will be an interesting year. You listen to the pundits what's going on on the men's side. I heard people say there's not a great team. They haven't watched Kansas. I think it's one of those years in women's basketball just about anything in women's basketball will happen. I think Connie Yori and Nebraska will be just fine.

Q. Can you talk a little bit more about the play of Carlee and Joe from what you said earlier?

COACH COALE: Carlee coming in and making a 3 was absolutely huge. I loved the way Carlee continues to shoot it with confidence, when you go through a stretch where you're not making very many baskets, you can start to wonder should I, should I not? And the first time she caught it on that second cutoff of a screen, she was absolutely sure she was going to shoot it. I like that, and obviously those three she hit helped us tremendously. And Jo continues to look better, looking less and less like a freshman and more like a post player that belongs right in the mix in the Big 12.

Q. Can you talk about kind of winning a game on the defensive end, because Danielle takes that charge on Riley with about 7:30 left and seemed like you guys took the momentum for good right there.

COACH COALE: We had to win games in a lot of ways this year. And that's one thing I don't think that our kids are familiar or unfamiliar with any sort of situation. And we've had to grind out a bunch of them. It would be lovely if they could all be like last Sunday was in Norman against Oklahoma State where everything goes in, every defensive possession is not so urgent. But it can't always be that way. We've had to win a lot of games when we don't shoot it well, and you do that

by defending and rebounding. We had a mixture of that tonight, made some shots and coupled it with difficult defensive stands, but our kids know in tournament play defend and rebound. Shots will come. You've got to defend and rebound.

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