

March 13, 2010



Texas A&M – 80
Nebraska - 70

An interview with:



PETER IRWIN: We're now joined by the Aggies from Texas A&M, Coach Gary Blair, his three student-athletes, Sydney Carter, Adaora Elonu, and Danielle Adams. Coach, your opening comments.

GARY BLAIR: Transition basketball. Tremendous guard play by my two Syds early in the game. Sometimes you just gotta let 'em go. If you put your thumb on them too much, that's not what you want. But Nebraska is such a good defensive team and they were going to take away a lot of our wing entries.

So we were trying to screen Turner off and get Colson and Carter in the open court, make good decisions. And they're streaky shooters. Neither are pure shooters, but they're streaky and they have no fear. What we did on the boards was outstanding.

I was really worried about them blocking us out and everything like that, but we did a great job on the boards. Our shooting percentage was good. We went into halftime, I told the Kansas City trio, it's your time now. Colson and Carter gave you that lead.

We have a lot of Adaora and some other kids, but in the second half I wanted to make sure

our scoring options was there. Try to shorten the game any time we had a chance.

But since they're going to press, it's going to open up the court. And when you press and you make a mistake, it gives us an easy basket. And we had about three or four easy baskets in the second half, and that takes the pressure off of you.

But this basketball team, everybody said, well, we're not going to be as good. You're picked fourth and fifth in some polls and graduate three- or four-year starters. And none of these kids here started last year. Danielle wasn't even here. We recruit well. My assistant coaches do a great job of teaching. And, hopefully, we can just keep playing a little bit longer.

But I told our team, we're very similar to Nebraska in so many ways, because we play with a lot of motion and fire like Nebraska does. And I said Stanford, Connecticut and Tennessee are all sitting back watching this ball game to find out if either one of us are for real.

I mean, Connie and Gary, you don't say that in the same breath that you say Tara, Geno and Pat. But Connie and Gary are not bad for what we've done with our programs. My AD back there, Bill Burns, hired both of them. He has a pretty good eye for talent and both of us have a good eye for recruiting talent, getting the staff together and getting the right players to fit our system.

But it's our kids. We executed the heck out of our offense today. And who would have ever thought a Coach Schaefer team on defense would play 40 minutes of some type of match-up zone. And that's what we did. There was some open holes in it. Okay, but they didn't find them quick enough. But give our kids credit. That's one of the reasons why we rebounded so well. We also had an umbrella in there. We were not trying to take out the passing lanes and everything like we normally do.

PETER IRWIN: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Danielle, you only played a couple minutes in the first half. I guess you made up for it in the second half. Can you talk about how you were taking it to 'em?

DANIELLE ADAMS: After those two fouls in the first half, I just told myself during halftime that I had to come back in, retaliate.

We knew we could beat them since the first time we played them, but we didn't succeed the first time. So we knew we had to come back and be more aggressive the second.

Q. Adaora, just talk about when you and Danielle are playing at the level you did today, how good is this team, because the guard play has been very consistent.

ADAORA ELONU: I think when the both of us step up our game, it's very hard to guard any of us, because you can't sag on our guards it opens the lane for either me or Danielle to drive. If one steps up, then the other one would step up as well. So I think if both of us play very well, it's very hard for any team to guard us.

Q. Danielle, when did you sense that Nebraska would be vulnerable under the basket and whether it was in transition or whether it was throwing the ball into the paint or getting rebounds that you could get position on their big girls and be able to use the glass like you did?

DANIELLE ADAMS: Since the first time we played them, I was pretty dominate down in Nebraska, so I knew I had to come back and be aggressive on the low post.

Q. Sydney, could you just talk about that 20-7 run that you guys had in the first half where you seemed to be pushing the ball, and also the all-Sydney back court that we saw out there, too, today?

SYDNEY CARTER: I just think that we knew that they were going to be pressuring us on the defensive end. So running our sets was going to be a little shaky, just because we knew how they were out pressuring the ball, especially Turner, she's a really great defender on ball. We were really trying to get transition. We did start running, grabbing the rebounds. I knew I had to get in there and help the post rebound.

So that's what I did today, and once we got it we were gone. And it's just good to have me and Syd playing together and playing well, and us

hitting shots is just a plus for our team because we do have the Kansas City trio. We have Adaora and they're all scorers. Makes it hard to guard us when we have all five people out there ready to score.

Q. Adaora, could you talk about the defensive effort on Kelsey Griffin, what was the game plan going in there?

ADAORA ELONU: It was the same game plan as any team. We front and we depend on our help and the pressure on ball. So we just really did what we always do, play aggressive defense, front her, make sure no post touches the ball. Not only on Kelsey but on No. 40, Redmon, and Montgomery. It's the same all around, basically.

Q. Danielle, when you do get the position inside and get the right entry pass, do you think anybody can stop you inside once you gain the ball five feet from the basket or so?

DANIELLE ADAMS: Not at all. I don't think nobody can stop me. I'm pretty aggressive inside and pretty strong, and my teammates depend on me so.

GARY BLAIR: Easy, easy.

[Laughter]

DANIELLE ADAMS: That's true. I don't think anybody can.

Q. Danielle, can you talk about this journey for you this season, because I know you hurt your hamstring in the preseason. You had to work at getting in better shape, even though you were hurt, and just what this means to you to play so well today and what all you've gone through this season.

DANIELLE ADAMS: I hurt my hamstring at the beginning of the season, sat out for like a month. I knew I had to come back and work hard, step my game up. And just did the extra conditioning that I had to do.

And it brought me out as the player I am now.

Q. Sydney, could you talk about just what about beating Nebraska, what does that do for the players looking ahead?

SYDNEY CARTER: Of course, this win makes us feel great. But like we said, like I've said before, we're not satisfied. Because we really

want this ring. And I don't have one, and I really want to get one for Tanisha and especially Danielle and Tyra because this is their hometown, and we've said before we just want to hold it down for them.

I mean, we're not satisfied yet. We got a game plan to execute tomorrow and finish it out. We're just looking forward to tomorrow.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you, ladies. Questions for coach.

Q. Can you talk about that match-up zone and why you came out and did that? Why were you so effective on Griffin and the 3-pointers? Let's talk about that, too.

GARY BLAIR: I just don't think they found Griffin enough on the zone. They're a very team-oriented team. And they've got a lot of scoring options. But all of a sudden when Griffin wasn't -- and we got the lead, then Griffin started forcing a couple of shots, I don't know if we really stopped Griffin. She was 7 out of 13. Four fouls stopped Griffin, then about three more that weren't called.

But Kelsey Griffin is by far the best player in this league and one of the best in the country. And I hope she gets State Farm All-American, but I don't think we stopped her as much as we slowed her down. And we did a pretty good job on Montgomery. And that was the key. She wasn't hitting the 3's. Kelly and Turner, they were just tough. I mean, Turner the best defensive wing in this conference bar none. She can guard anybody. We were just trying to get away from Turner as much as we could because she disrupts everything.

Q. Gary, yesterday you said a loss would probably be good for Nebraska going into the NCAA. How good is this win for A&M?

GARY BLAIR: I think it's great for us as long as we can keep winning. Hey, the difference between me and you is probably only about a year's age. I mean, all right, you need a good story, I need another good win.

[Laughter] And that's just the bottom line. And we need to keep going. And I think it will be good because it will take the pressure off, send them up to Minneapolis as a No. 1 seed and let Nebraska Nation all show up there. They

had a great crowd here today. But our kids respond to great crowds on the road.

We go to Oklahoma and we go to Nebraska and we go to Iowa State and all of them, that doesn't bother us at all. But this could help because now they saw a little chink in the armor.

The other thing that perhaps really hurt them, when somebody gets into foul trouble, their bench cannot just come in and play, their bench has got to score. We outscored them 36-2. Okay, that's the only thing that I think Connie has to develop is some scoring options off of that bench, because they've been coming in all year long and then holding the fort and making all the hustle plays. Now I think they've got to find a legitimate score coming off that bench.

Q. Danielle is sitting there with two points at halftime. Talk about the decision to start her and it obviously paid off. She had 20.

GARY BLAIR: Don't worry. Coach Schaefer was in my ear, we shouldn't do that, we shouldn't do that. Either I'm going to be a genius or a fool. I guess I was the genius because he loves to start defense no matter what. But I felt we had to stretch the lead. Nebraska has been behind the whole last month of the season, and then they come firing out and they find a way to get the crowd into it. I wanted to make sure that at that five-minute mark I was at least even.

And we were dominating the first five minutes of the second half and we were up by one point. Because we threw the ball away, they scored in transition. Even though we were executing our high series on offense to perfection, we were up by 1. And so at least I got my scoring, didn't allow them to get down under ten points.

Q. Gary, you guys played so well in non-conference season, and then a little bit of an injury bug with Sydney and that sort of thing. But are you guys playing, do you think, your best basketball right now?

GARY BLAIR: I think we are. We've done it for our last ten ball games, and we're playing well. We're practicing well. We've got depth. And

I've got a bench full of scoring options.

If Colson was healthy, she would be starting and Carter would be coming off the bench. And who in our league could bring Carter and Danielle Adams and then bring an energizer bunny like Maryann Baker off the bench, and nobody has that. That's something that we are proud of. My assistants have done a good job recruiting for our needs, and that's what we're going to stay with. We will play our bench in all sorts of situations and start them when we have to. 32-6 was the bench.

Q. Two years ago you were here as a No. 4 seed. I wonder if you could compare because the personnel has almost completely turned over. Compare this team because the obvious thing that stands out is a lot stronger post-scoring presence, but other ways that you compare to 2008?

GARY BLAIR: Perhaps we are not as good man to man defensively, but in the last 15 games our defense has got a whole lot better. When you lose three four-year starters that were all defensive players first, it's hard to bring in and replace Micheaux and Gant. So we had to develop an Adaora. Coach Schaefer has been very patient with the defense, and we've added a few things for our personnel. We're playing, instead of our full-court man-to-man press, we're playing more of a 2-2-1 when we have to. We're trying to slow them down and sometimes you have to adjust. Like we love to sit there and say we have kids that could play 40 minutes of help. But I'd rather just play 40 minutes of good Aggie defensive basketball. And two years ago, when we played Oklahoma State, it was two guys that have come from the bottom of the league.

Oklahoma State and Texas A&M were the two worst teams in this league, and I think it gave a little bit of credit to their administration and our administration for hiring the right people. You hire the right people, you're going to build up a program. But building it up in the Big 12 South is the hardest thing in America to do, because the Big 12 South is pretty doggone good.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you, coach.

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