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An interview with:



PETER IRWIN: We're joined by Sooners from Oklahoma with coach Sherri Coale and her two student-athletes, Danielle Robinson and Amanda Thompson. Coach, thoughts about today's game.

COACH SHERRI COALE: I want to congratulate Texas A&M. I thought they played extremely well and fought for the entire game. And I thought our kids fought, too. And I could not be prouder of our basketball team and the effort that they displayed. I just thought it was a fantastic women's basketball game. And probably showcased our league to the country in a magnificent way.

PETER IRWIN: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Amanda, they kind of hide Danielle Adams for a half. Yesterday they only placed six minutes in the first half and she explodes for 17 quick points. Talk about when she comes into the game, what she brings them and what problems she causes you.

AMANDA THOMPSON: She's definitely a big impact to their team. She comes in. She's very finesse, and she's really good with the basketball as far as on the jump shot and she has a soft touch. Her body size really affects the game. It affected us today.

Q. Danielle, can you talk a bit about the challenge of three games in three days, and especially with a team like A&M and the energy they play with? Looked like you missed some layups that I think you normally would make. Was that a sign of some of that and sort of the second part to that question, the way you were able to compete three games does it bode well for the NCAA tournament?

DANIELLE ROBINSON: We have to play back-to-back games in the NCAA tournament, but regardless our team came out fought tonight. Regardless if we were tired or not we proved we could fight through that and we didn't let it affect us //.

Q. Amanda, you guys got in a little hole early and you never got the lead. You caught up three times. Can you talk about is it hard to play from behind the whole game, is it hard to get back on top or is the score and situation something you never think about?

AMANDA THOMPSON: It's there, because ultimately you want to be above, you want to be in front of the team, but it's hard but I think that we've been there both these games in the tournament, and we know what it feels like to be behind, and today, unfortunately, we couldn't get that lead in the second half. But it's hard but we know we can do it. It was just one of those days.

Q. Amanda, after the way you guys played this weekend so well, how do you feel heading into the NCAA tournament? Just give me your thoughts as you look ahead to that.

AMANDA THOMPSON: We fought today.

And I felt like we can go as far as we want to in the tournament, however far.

Q. Amanda, talk about the play of Joanna off the bench?

AMANDA THOMPSON: She was huge today. She fell down with their post players, got a couple of and-1s we needed her down in the post. She was there. I was proud of her. That was huge for a freshman, and I think that will take away a lot of pride going into the NCAA tournament. So I'm really proud of her.

Q. Could you talk about the emotion? It's running pretty high right now. You guys played so well. Talk about where that's all coming from for both of you.

DANIELLE ROBINSON: For me, it's about our team this year and what they've done for the program. And we would love to give them this Big 12 title going into the NCAA tournament for their senior year, they've given so much to the program. And it's kind of frustrating, I think, to give it to them. But we have a bigger picture ahead of us. This is the best preparation we could have.

Q. Danielle or Amanda, when there was kind of that scrum underneath your basket in the second half. Five minutes to go and Jasmine makes a diving effort for a loose ball and I think taps it up to you. Somebody hits a 3?

DANIELLE ROBINSON: Gave it to Jo and she made a layup.

Q. Not the one where she went head first. But at that point did you feel you were right there, right at the cusp?

DANIELLE ROBINSON: I think we felt that way all along. We've been that way the whole tournament. These single digit leads is nothing, really, for us. I mean, we've done it multiple times this season.

You know, we fought. We tried to win all loose ball battles. I think they came up with a lot of them, we came up with a lot of them. But ultimately in the end they made some tough shots.

Q. Danielle or Amanda, you guys have played Tennessee, Connecticut, Nebraska, who everybody expects is going to be the 3 No. 1 seeds, and now an A&M team is playing like they might be a No. 1 seed. Could you talk about preparation? It even goes beyond the

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Big 12 of who you've faced and how that's gotten you ready for what you're going to face now?

DANIELLE ROBINSON: I think that's a credit to our coaching staff and who scheduled those big games for us, because, ultimately, you're going to see them in the NCAA tournament. This is why we come to Oklahoma, to play teams like that, to fight for championships. And we couldn't be happier with our season thus far. And we're excited about going to the NCAA tournament with the conference and non-conference schedule that we've played.

PETER IRWIN: Congratulations on a great season. Questions for coach.

Q. Sherri, is it possible this game really came down to the fact that they made 3-pointers on a pretty good pace, eight out of 14 and you were not quite as good as you sometimes are, 4 of 11?

COACH SHERRI COALE: Yeah. Our number was fairly commensurate with what we did the rest of the season. They made open 3s. They shot incredibly well in the first half, and we didn't shoot well at all in the second half.

And despite that, we kept the margin. So I thought we missed some easy shots. We missed some layups more than missed 3s. Layups that we depend upon. And I think some of that was just we were just dead-dog tired and we just fought, and fought, and fought. You would like to say it doesn't have anything to do with it, but I think late in that game Amanda Thompson is absolutely spent. Danielle and she spent 40 minutes a game at warrior speed for all 40 minutes. And I think of a layup that Amanda missed and I look at her line. Are you kidding me who has a stat line like that. It's unbelievable.

I'm just incredibly proud of our kids, and A&M, they were good. They just shot it a little better than we did today.

Q. Sherri, these tired old eyes seemed like you were pushing a big rock up a steep hill all day after the start. The fact that you guys were there you had so many shots, and misses, does it bode well how you will play in the NCAA tournament?

COACH SHERRI COALE: We feel great going into the tournament. Our preconference schedule and what we've had to fight through in

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the Big 12, not just the Big 12 season, but putting these top 20 teams back to back to back, maybe top 15, I guess which poll you look at, back to back to back in this conference tournament. There's no better preparation.

I tell you what, this year in the field of women's basketball, A&M plays like that, they'll be in San Antonio and so will we. That's the quality of this game.

Q. Could you talk big picture NCAAs. I think Amanda's emotion kind of hit on how hard you guys are playing in that sense of, boy, this could be something special. But talk about your impressions of where you guys are as you head into NCAAs?

COACH SHERRI COALE: One of the closest teams I've ever had an opportunity to coach. These guys just wanted to win this championship for those three seniors. They just love them. And when the team is wound together that tightly, you have a chance to do extraordinary things. Your whole is greater than the sum of your parts.

And they want the ride to continue. And it's somewhat surreal for us when we were here and won the Big 12 tournament championship in 2002, which we're reminded of because there's a shadowy figure above our locker room of our 2002 team hoisting the trophy as the theme of the building. And that team didn't want that season to stop. They were having so much fun together and they enjoyed one another so much, they played for one another, that the wins were kind of gravy.

The cool thing was you got to play together. And I get that sense for this team. And that's sometimes all it takes once you get to this level.

Q. Similar question for Danielle, you're in a pretty unique position. I don't know anybody who has played three of the No. 1 seeds who we expect to be the No. 1 seeds plus A&M, could you sort of give us a quick breakdown? We know a lot about UCONN, just about the strengths of all those teams going into the NCAA tournament.

COACH SHERRI COALE: We do have our strength of schedule is number one in the country. It just so happens that we had an opportunity to also play Notre Dame, so they're in that top mix somewhere, too. So we have seen them all. And in no way shape or form makes me

the Einstein of comparing them. They're just so different.

But I said this yesterday that I really do think there will be some surprises in the Final Four. And I think it's really hard to separate, obviously, UCONN, rarefied era, but the rest of them, really good basketball teams with lots of different parts. And a lot of what happens in the NCAA tournament, I think, is going to be based upon matchups. If you get a certain style against another style, you could see some lower seeded teams moving forward. There's just not that much of a difference between teams, I think. And maybe not a whole lot of great teams but a lot of really good ones.

Q. I know you've said in the past like you've said matchups are where it comes down, where do you get the sense where you guys are going to be at this point? Two, three sort of area for you?

COACH SHERRI COALE: Yeah, probably a three, that would be my guess. How many recollect technologies, trust me, I've been to a lot of them. The unique thing about our tournament as we go into the tournament we have the ability to be a chameleon and I'm not sure all teams do. There's a certain way that Notre Dame has to play and Texas A&M has to play to win. We sort of have been able to become whatever we need to become. We're maybe not as good as the style of play that Texas A&M has as they are, but we can play the kind of game Notre Dame does. I choose those two at random. I think you can do it with several schools.

I like our ability to sort of be what we need to be in whatever type of game presents itself. I don't know that there is a horrible matchup for Oklahoma out there. And that's comforting.

Q. The 3s they were getting, particularly, was there a particular thing they were doing? They seemed to make a lot of cross-court passes over to the weak side to get people. Was that something they haven't done, or something you guys didn't react to? How did they get those 3s?

COACH SHERRI COALE: Well, early on we were trapping the ball screen in the middle of the floor. I thought it did give them some trouble. But then they adjusted to it and probably stayed with that a little bit too long.

The biggest reason they got the 3s were the skip passes where our hoop was in a little too tight, when our post defender is behind the girl doesn't have to be there. She can cheat out a little bit. We were hammering on them. Stop penetration, make them penetrate and pitch and close out. And so they were trying to do what we asked them to do. We just needed them to cheat a little bit more.

Q. We've seen an incredible tournament, and we've talked a lot about where the level of play is right now on the Big 12, and it's not as if the other conferences aren't trying to make something of this sport. Can you talk about how the schools in the conference, your school and some of these others, have managed to get the level to where it is right now, because we've seen women's basketball in this conference just really improve pretty dramatically in recent years.

COACH SHERRI COALE: I think it's a combination of things. I think it began maybe with breaking out and getting to the Final Four. And we were able to do that, and then Texas and then Baylor, and Baylor winning a championship. And I think that we go back and that continual arrival into the deep part of the tournament is how you build it. Kids want to come. You get great recruits to come and play in this league.

The other part of that is the fan base everywhere you go, kids want to come and play in this, they want to be in this environment. They want to come play in front of 8,000 every night you play in conference. Who wouldn't want to do that? It's that coupled with some really quality coaches in this league. Some people do a great job.

And consistency. Coaches being at institutions and building programs. Not just putting teams together but building a program, which is an entirely different thing. And I think the Big 12 is in good shape and here to stay.

Q. Danielle is playing really well, but she's played similar to that for a long time. Amanda seems to have gone into overdrive here in the last two or three weeks. She's approaching 20 rebounds every game. Would you agree she's all of a sudden playing much better than she was earlier, and how often have you seen a player make such a huge jump late in a season?

COACH SHERRI COALE: I do think she's in overdrive, to borrow your word. I think it's the

urgency that a passionate senior feels. And Amanda is an old soul. She has a special, special quality about her. She cares deeply for her teammates and for our coaching staff and for this institution.

And she wants to do special things. So what you see right now is just an indomitable will just bubbling out off the surface. And I think everybody else attaches themselves to that and tries to measure themselves by that same standard. She is our captain, our leader. I think in a big picture, philosophical sort of way that's what college athletics is all about right there.

Q. For lack of a better way to put it, this A&M team seems to be a more aesthetically pleasing team than some past teams. Are they tougher to guard because they seem to have some more offensive skills and maybe some better shooters on this team than maybe some of their past teams that were successful?

COACH SHERRI COALE: Yes. They're much harder to guard. They just have so many weapons. And I think their offensive confidence is a big part of that, too. They all want to shoot it. Everybody wants the ball. And that can be a very difficult thing to defend. Can sometimes get you in trouble. But doesn't seem to be bothering it too much. They're all making them.

Q. You just talked a little bit about Amanda and Danielle Robinson. Could you talk about how they've played since Whitney Hand went down with her injury?

COACH SHERRI COALE: I was thinking about this before the game, that when Whitney went down, I never saw our kids wince. And it was not that they didn't care about Whitney. And they cried in their rooms and they cried far away from that locker room probably hundreds of times with her and for her.

But I never saw us as a basketball team even wince. We just took it and said, "All right, this is what we have. This is what we've got to do and let's get about the business of doing it." And I knew the day after it happened we were going to be just fine because of that attitude and that resiliency. And so much of that is Danielle Robinson and Amanda Thompson as our leaders. And Danielle, I think, has not gotten enough credit this season for the job that she has done with the load that she's had to assume.

She was fantastic last year. But everybody in the country was watching Courtney Paris at the block and the three people that weren't watching Courtney were guarding Whitney. So Danielle, it's a lot easier -- you can ask any great player anytime to be fantastic when you're maybe the third thing that they worry about. Every game we go into, guess what everybody's first thing is to think about? Keep Danielle Robinson from getting to the rim. That's it. That's number one on everybody's scouting report. She's been able to do it anyway. She's continually led our team. We asked her to guard the best offensively player and set everybody up and get assists and we ask Amanda to get every rebound and score every time she catches it and she's been fantastic doing it.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you very much.

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