

**March 9, 2015**



UConn 84  
USF 70

An interview with:

## UConn

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Head Coach, Geno Auriemma, senior forward, Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis, junior forward, Breanna Stewart, and sophomore forward, Morgan Tuck. We will take questions for our student-athletes first.

Q. Morgan, how did it feel to be playing in the championship, and what did you feel your contribution was this year?

MORGAN TUCK: We tried to make sure that we were boxing out and being more aggressive than they were on rebounds.

Q. Morgan, it's fair to say that no one has played you guys tougher than them this season. What is it about them being able to stay in the neighborhood?

MORGAN TUCK: I think they have a mentality where they're just not going to quit. I think sometimes when teams get down a lot they quit, but USF hasn't done that. You know, this is the third time we've played them and each time, you know, we took a half, they came out even more aggressive, and it doesn't matter what the score is. They play hard the whole time.

Q. Kaleena, two games in a row, East Carolina and USF today, you guys came out not quite matching the other team's intensity in the second half. Does that concern you at all, or is it you are up so much it's hard to match the intensity?

KALEENA MOSQUEDA-LEWIS: Doesn't concern me, very much. We do need to focus on coming out in the second half as aggressive and intense as we were in the first half, but I'm not too worried about it. It's something that we're going to

work on in practice and something us as starters and upper classmen are going to make sure we focus on going forward.

Q. Kaleena, going into the NCAA Tournament, how would you assess how this team is playing?

KALEENA MOSQUEDA-LEWIS: I think we're doing a great job. Everybody on the team is playing great, Morgan is doing well inside, Stewie is playing great, and Moriah is playing as confident as she has all season, so I'm not too worried about it, especially when people like Gabby come in and make big contributions for us.

Q. Stewie, we know there has been a lot of physical play against you, but watching the way they were playing against you today and the way that the lack of calls were going, how difficult it to resist just going out and standing at the 3-point line, since you can make that shot as easily, too. You managed to stay inside and deal with it.

BREANNA STEWART: I think all game the coaches were telling me to keep moving, that kind of thing. I was expecting this. It was there this whole weekend, and it was there last weekend, and I'm expecting it in the future. You have to play through it whether the refs are going to call it or not. You can't let refs decide the game.

Q. Stewie, how well did these three days set you guys up for what's to come in the NCAA Tournament?

BREANNA STEWART: I think it prepared us. Teams are going to give us their best shot, and three games in three days is a lot, but it's fun. It's exciting to play this many games, and I think that each game we've grown and our bench has gotten deeper and Gabby coming off the bench and Kiah coming off the bench and others coming off the bench, they all made big contributions.

Q. Breanna, sum up the young lady to

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**your left? What has she meant to this tournament?**

BREANNA STEWART: You know, Kaleena does a lot and I think sometimes people underestimate her talents and that kind of thing, and it shouldn't be that at all. The way she came out and played this three-game stretch, that's exactly how she plays. When she has confidence and everything is going for her, she is hard to stop, and as you saw tonight she got whatever she wanted.

**Q. Morgan, you're playing this year, you're a part of all this as a player, student-athlete, how does it feel and to make the All-Championship Team in that first year?**

MORGAN TUCK: Feels great to be out there on the court, it beats last year sitting and watching. I'm just glad to be out there with my teammates and doing everything I can to help us win.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies. Questions for Coach.

**Q. Geno, is that a typical Kaleena performance to you? She played 40 minutes and all the assists and rebounds she had --**

COACH AURIEMMA: Yeah. I was saying to one of the other coaches that one of the important things that I thought came out of it was that she, you know, K had 23 points and only made one, three. Usually when K scores a lot of points it's four or five three's and not as many others. I thought today she made it hard to guard -- she made herself hard to guard because she was scoring from all over the court, not just beyond the 3-point line. And that's something she has been working on, to her credit. She has become more than a 3-point shooter, and tonight she certainly showed that.

**Q. Geno, how would you assess how this team is playing heading into the NCAA Tournament?**

COACH AURIEMMA: You know, at this time, this time of the year, because the NCAA Tournament is so far away, 12 days or something like that, you really can't put a lot of stock in what happens this weekend. This weekend you're just trying to win and hopefully building some momentum, but there is so much time that's going to be -- between here and the opening round that

we did what we needed to do to win. We played great, and we didn't play so great at times.

So that's probably the way you would want it to be. You know, you would want it to be where there are enough things that you want to get better at so that you don't feel like we don't even need to practice, we're so good.

I think we're probably right in the spot that we enjoy being at this time of the year.

**Q. Geno, do you believe it benefits USF going into the tournament to have played you three times, or do you think the tournament is just about match-ups and whatnot? Is there a tangible benefit?**

COACH AURIEMMA: There is, for sure. They're one of the better teams that's going to be in the tournament. They haven't gotten a lot of respect over the years. They've allowed a couple of bad losses to kind of dictate who they are, according to the media and the polls.

But they're a lot better than people give them credit for. One of the things that I was happy to see for them was that they got more people involved in their offense today rather than just Courtney Williams. That's when they are really hard to guard, when she is doing her thing and everybody else is involved as well.

That's going to help them going forward. I don't think they're going to play a lot of teams that are way better than us. So if they get the right match-ups, I don't think there is any team that they're going to play that they can't beat.

**Q. Geno, when it comes to March it's about winning championships. Do you see a difference in your teams annually when it comes to March?**

COACH AURIEMMA: General speaking I would say yes. There is a different vibe on our team come March. We go about things a little bit differently than we do during the regular season. There is a certain excitement that maybe isn't there in February because it's been a long season, but when it's time to play in the Conference Championship or for the National Championship in the NCAA Tournament, if you stay the same as you were during the regular season, you're not going anywhere. You can't stay the same. You can't stay the same mentally, emotionally, physically. You gotta change.

There has been very few years, let's put it

that way, when there hasn't been an uptick in our team come March, and I would expect the exact same thing is happening right now.

The only problem is you have so many young guys that are going to play some roles that you don't know how they're going to react. That's why it was so important for our four starters to play great during this tournament, because that's where it's going to fall; it's going to fall on them. Those other guys can come off the bench and give you a little bit, and Gabby gave us a lot, and Saniya gave us a little bit. Those four guys are going to have to get it done, and hopefully we get a little bit out of those other guys.

**Q. Geno, Both Carolina and USF came out with very strong second halves against you, and you guys seemed to drop off intensity-wise. Does that concern you at all, or is that a by-product of being up 40 or up 20?**

COACH AURIEMMA: Anytime somebody goes into the locker room and they're down 30 or they're down 20, and they're getting blown out, and they come out and they stay blown out, then you know what, they shouldn't have come out in the second half at all.

So teams like East Carolina and teams like USF, you like to think they are going into the locker room and they come out with a sense of we're going to at least compete. But I think one thing that gets lost when you cover a lot of UConn games is that the other team is not allowed to play well. I think it's a reminder today that those guys recruit guys that are scholarship players, and every once in a while it should be okay for them to play well, without us having to answer why we didn't play well.

**Q. You know, there was a point in the first half when Morgan picked up her second foul, Kiah came in and picked up two quick fouls and you put Gabby in, and she got two quick offensive rebounds and put-backs. Can you talk about what that did to set the tone for the rest of the half?**

COACH AURIEMMA: If we didn't have that, there would have been a different feel to the game if Gabby hadn't done that. And then in the second half, she did a really good job defensively. So going forward, there are going to be players that we play against, I think, that for stretches, Gabby might be the only person on the team that can guard them. Because she is big enough and

quick enough that she can do it. So it was big for her to contribute and feel confident and feel like she did some good things and that she is able to, you know, start the NCAA Tournament and go, "I wonder if I'm good enough to play in the postseason." I think what she did today was really, really important; important for her and important for us.

**Q. Geno, Stewie scored in double figures in every post-season game she played, and Kaleena in every one except for one of her games, including 18 in a row now. Are they just wired differently, or is that the type of kid that you commonly recruit here?**

COACH AURIEMMA: Well, you would like to say that we recruit those kinds of kids, because we recruit those over the years. But the other thing that is notable, those two have a unique quality about them. They love the big moments, they love the big games. Stewie more than K. K has grown into that, because every year since she was here she has been kind of like the other guy, and this year we're kinda going to her a lot, and Stewie has been the other guy. When they're called on, they always deliver; they have a knack for it. We try to get K in as many different situations as possible today, and wherever we put her, she came through. Stewie is Stewie.

I think if we change Stewie's number from 30 to something else, the people that are officiating our games wouldn't have as much trouble calling fouls. I just think they just are allergic to saying No. 30 is going to the free-throw line. I don't know whether there is a conference rule on that, I'm going to have to check with the conference office.

**Q. Geno, in the last 25 years how accurate have your instincts been at the end of the Conference Championship about whether your team has the capability to win a national championship?**

COACH AURIEMMA: Um, you know, I'm not bragging, but I'm rarely wrong in that scenario. After you spend five months with your team you know them pretty well. The years that we've gone to postseason play, we knew we were the best team in the country. It turned out to be we were the best team in the country and we proved it. There has been a number of times where we've even gone to the Final Four and I knew that unless something magical happened, we weren't going to

win. I just knew it.

I don't let the players know that, but I would keep my fingers crossed thinking, man, I hope this doesn't happen and that doesn't happen, and that doesn't happen. And then there are years like last year, and 2010, where you don't give it a second thought; you just know. We're going there, and we're going to win, and that's all there is to it. So your team tells you a lot over a period of five years. I mean, five months, this team -- this team is not very loud. I don't know -- they haven't said a lot. They're constantly just very quiet. So I'm always kind of surprised by the things they do because I watch them sometimes, and I don't think they can do them, and then they surprise me.

But I also know if our four starters play like they did this weekend and like they did in the big games, like we played this year, we're going to be hard to beat, really hard to beat.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach.

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