

PAC-12 Women's Basketball Media Day

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COACH VANDERVEER: First, it's a pleasure to be here this afternoon, and really excited that we grew out of that little room, and it's really awesome to have Karlie and Bird here. We're really looking forward to a great season, and happy to answer any questions that you have about our team and our preparation for a great season.

Q. Tara, how tough was it for you to fill out that coaches' poll, trying to figure out where everybody belongs?

COACH VANDERVEER: You know, first of all, I guess I'm not in favor of that coaches' poll. I'd let you guys do it, and I didn't do it. I mean, I let my assistants do it. I just focus on our team, and I think that it's better that the media do it than the coaches. But it would be really hard.

Q. Karlie, 47.3 percent on threes, just 45.5 percent on other field goals. Why don't you just move back every time you're going to shoot and shoot a three. No, that's a facetious question, obviously, but I'm kind of wondering, do you just feel that much more comfort, confidence shooting threes than other shots?

KARLIE SAMUELSON: I think I practice threes the most, so I do know that my three-point percentage is greater than my overall, so I've really got to work on my lay-ups is what that tells me.

Q. You've been recruiting very well for quite some time, another top-ten class, but now it seems like the conference overall is really starting to improve its recruiting, as well. How have you kind of seen the PAC-12 landscape on the recruiting trail change over the years, especially these past couple of years when the conference has had a lot more success?

COACH VANDERVEER: Well, you know, obviously the conference had a great year last year, but I think that quite honestly, in my 30 years of watching, we have always had great players, and I think PAC-12 Networks has showcased these players. But I think back to Lisa

Leslie, Tina Thompson, you could go through so many of the great players and great programs. Joan had a great team at Arizona, all the great players we've had. I think a lot of times we haven't gotten the seeds that we deserve, and we haven't gotten the recognition, but now it's all coming together.

The conference has always been the conference of champions, and this year we demonstrated it.

Q. What did the Elite 8 loss, what kind of taste did that leave in your mouth, and how did it impact your off-season?

ERICA McCALL: Yeah, I think it left a really bad taste in our mouth. It was a tough game for us. Just right from the start, you saw point differential there, and it was just a really bad game for us, but I think it really helped us boost our motivation for this year. We're really excited. We know that's not how we wanted to end last year, but I think we can have a great season with the mix of returners and freshmen that we have this year.

Q. Bird, we all remember you as a freshman being mentored by Chiney. Now that you're a senior, what did you learn from that experience, and who are you taking under your wing to help work through the Stanford process?

ERICA McCALL: Probably the biggest thing I learned from Chiney is always staying positive and just communicate with each other. I mean, she's just a great communicator. Chiney is just a naturally loud person so that already makes her a really great communicator as is, but she also took the time to speak with one another, one-on-one, and making sure that you were doing all right, and I think that's one of the biggest takeaways I had from her.

First player I'm trying to take under my wing is Nadia Fingall, another post player from Florida. I think she's doing well, and I'm really excited to see how she does this year, so hopefully if I take her under my wing, you know she'll become a little baby bird.

Q. Bird, you developed that three-point shot and it became very effective toward the end of last season. I want to know for both of you what's new in your toolbox that we can look forward to seeing this season?

ERICA McCALL: I think for me just scoring down in the

post more consistently. I think that's something all of our bigs have been working on over the summer, and I think it's really shown off in practice, so I think that's something really special that you can see this season.

KARLIE SAMUELSON: I think for me working on my lay-ups and taking my time on my lay-ups because sometimes I close my eyes when the contact comes. Look at the basket when I shoot my lay-ups.

Q. Tara, what's your sense of how the National Championship race is going to shape up this year, especially since UConn seems to be a little bit down. No offense to your sister, Karlie, but they've lost three All-Americans, and how many teams do you think have a realistic chance of winning the National Championship this year?

COACH VANDERVEER: You know, I would love for us to be one of those teams, and I think the most important thing for any team is just to really get and stay healthy. And honestly, once -- there have been years where we've been ranked No. 1, we've been No. 1 seeds, and you get people hurt, and it all goes right down the tubes really fast. I am enjoying today being with these two outstanding women players on our team, and I look forward every day to being in the gym, helping our team improve, and then just kind of one day at a time. I don't worry about that a lick. But I feel like if -- I like that Karlie is going to open her eyes on our lay-ups. I think that's great work. Bird working on her post-up, being a mentor, all these things will help us achieve our ultimate goal of winning a National Championship. I think that as you saw this past year, like who would have picked the Washington team that finished fifth to go to the Final Four.

What we're seeing in women's basketball is what we've asked for is parity, and we're seeing a lot of good teams stepping up, and it's playing well at the end. It's not the start of the race but the finish, staying healthy, improving, having players that really enjoy playing with each other, players that are coachable, playing unselfish basketball, and anything is possible.

Did you want other names of other schools?

Q. Sure.

COACH VANDERVEER: I mean, Notre Dame has a great returning group. I would never count Connecticut out because they have a system. You're looking at -- these are teams outside of her conference. Inside of our conference, we have, I think -- I wouldn't rule any team out. I think UCLA has a lot of experience coming back. Washington has experience coming back. Cal has great young talent. Oregon, Oregon State, you know, just -- I think Colorado maybe and Arizona are probably in some kind of a rebuilding this year, but you

don't want to sleep on anybody. You'd better be ready to play anyone in our conference. And Texas, also, I'd put on my list, and Tennessee.

Q. Tara, you talked about playing well at the end, and I know I'm going to ask this for both the players and I'll ask you first. Who's going to be the key freshman at the end that you think are going to help you achieve getting back to Final Four?

COACH VANDERVEER: Great question. I mean, I think you're right, the freshmen come along -- it is staying healthy. Bird will take Nadia under her wing. Nadia is going to help us. Nadia can hit threes. She's not waiting until her junior year, she'll be taking them in her freshman year, and Bird is going to help her. That's something I really love about our team is the sisterhood that we have, how the older players really help the younger players. And I know Karlie is working with Anna and Dijonai, and they're both going to be awesome.

And then Mikaela Brewer is our freshman. I really see our freshmen all contributing right away, and by the end, it's really maybe the one that puts the extra time in in the gym based on maybe what we need out there, but I see them all contributing. A lot of our success will be our point guard play, and I think that we're really excited about how Marta Snizek is playing.

ERICA McCALL: Our freshmen are doing well. I'm really excited about how they're going to play. I mean, like Tara said, Nadia has that confidence to knock down the deep shot and play well down low, so I'm really excited about how she's going to do.

Dijonai Carrington is a player that I've never seen before with her frame. She is strong. That girl is strong. And so I'm really excited to see how she plays. Mikaela Brewer has a beautiful shot, and Anna Wilson, I'm really excited about her point guard abilities.

With the combo of that, I think you guys can be the judge of that. You guys can tell us who's going to be the last bird standing, but obviously it's up in the air right now, and they're all doing really well.

KARLIE SAMUELSON: Yeah, I don't think it would just be one at the end. I think they're all doing really well.

Q. Tara, you've kind of morphed your system over the years, used to be really high-low and now the game has changed where post players are coming outside and shooting threes like Bird learned to as a junior. Can you talk about your style you imagine it to be this year with this particular group and it is what we've seen from five years ago or if it's something a new tweak this year?

COACH VANDERVEER: Well, I think it would be very similar to what we did last year. Obviously we have so many returners, but we went away from -- we ran the triangle offense for a long time, and we had kind of big, really physical, maybe less mobile -- someone like Jayne Appel, put her in deep and you can get her the ball. Also the officiating I think allowed too much contact. I thought Chiney got beat up in there, so now we spread things out more, and that's the way we're going to go.

I just feel like facing up, you have to take your hands off people, and we're going with spreading the floor, attacking the basket, more pick-and-roll, hopefully more transition, and just I think it should be fun basketball.

Q. You referred to Marta, but it's going to look a little bit different this year. What you're expecting in terms of how your young players can contribute in the development and who you've got back there?

COACH VANDERVEER: Well, you know, we have three I would say -- I'd say maybe two, quote, pure point guards in Marta Snizek and Anna Wilson. Bri Roberson can play a 1 or a 2. Mikaela Brewer can play a 2 or a 1. We're also looking at other 2s that we'll look at will be Karlie at the 2, even sometimes Dijonai maybe with Karlie. So perimeter players I think will be pretty -- it'll just be based on maybe situational or -- how anyone is playing.

But Brittany McPhee on the wing has been doing really well. Karlie and Brittany give you really good shooters on both sides of the basket. You've got -- today I would say we have six starters, and that would be mostly our upperclassmen that know what we're doing. Bird, Karlie, Bri, Brittany McPhee, Kaylee Johnson is playing awesome, and then you've got Marta.

So then I think other people will fill in with what we need and how quickly they catch onto things and how much they improve.

One other person I think that is really going to make an impact for us this year is Alanna Smith. Alanna has been practicing really well, and she's really our only player that plays a 3 and a 4. She gives you that versatility, unless Dijonai learns that, but that's a lot to ask a freshman to learn. And we're happy that Shannon Coffee is healthy. She didn't play that last year, but she gives you a big body inside that I think sometimes you need, and Alexa Romano is doing really well for us, so our sophomores have really improved a lot, and we know we're going to get contributions from our freshmen, and it'll just be who stays healthy, who improves, just kind of be ready when we need you to be.

I like Steve Kerr's approach to playing a lot of different lineups, and everyone contributing. Strength in numbers; I like that.

Q. I was going to ask you about the sophomores and their development, but you just went down the roster. We can't let you leave without talking about Nneka Ogwumike. Your thoughts on that? Last year you said when it was Game 5 Finals, you said, you can't go against Minnesota.

COACH VANDERVEER: Right, definitely. I just loved coaching Nneka. I love coaching Chiney. They're really special. Nneka had a fantastic year this year, and I hope that she plays really well, and I hope their whole team plays really well against Minnesota. I'd love to see her have a championship.

Whether she wins a championship or not, she is just an outstanding person. She'll play overseas. I think someday, as long as she's healthy, she'll be an Olympian. All good things will come to her. I'm really proud to have been her coach.

You know, I just -- I loved coaching Nneka in the same way that I love coaching Karlie and Erica. They're just that kind of player. These two are in Nneka's league in terms of the type of people they are, and they have -- she sets a great example and is a great leader for our program.

Q. I guess I'm just wondering, you mentioned Steve Kerr. I know you always take little bits and pieces from a lot of different coaches or maybe an author. Has there been a book or anything you've read in the off-season? Talk about things you've done in the off-season to bring into this year, maybe to energize the group.

COACH VANDERVEER: Well, you know, I think that our spring was -- we had different speakers come in, and I think that was something that was really special, and maybe the student-athletes can talk about it a little bit more, but we invited Julie Lythcott Haims who wrote the book "Raising an Adult," the New York Times best seller, and she spoke with our team. I think she was very powerful.

We had a Skype with author of "The Energy Bus," Jon Gordon, and he was fantastic, David Shaw. So we really try to take advantage of different people at Stanford, but also just meeting -- we did a really fun -- we played water polo. I got a couple assist passes to Bird, so we had fun playing water polo. That was on some kind of Stanford YouTube thing or something. We had a great spring and a really fun summer.

One of the things that I did -- because we kind of did

some books together, I got a book for every player on our team, a book that I'd read that I'd really liked, and then they got me one, so it was really fun. I just think that kind of thing really gets everybody kind of together on the same page. We did a really fun communication workshop, too.

Q. Playing water polo, I still think about the charge you took and the injury there --

COACH VANDERVEER: Face in the water.

Q. Karlie, what book did you give to Coach, and vice versa with you, Bird? And what's the cast on your arm?

KARLIE SAMUELSON: I fractured my wrist in practice before official practices started by falling on it, but a week and it'll be off.

But Tara didn't say, when she gave us all books, she thought about each of us and picked one especially out for each of us. It was really awesome. She gave me "Marley and Me" because we both love golden retrievers, so that was great.

As a team we gave Tara "Racing in the Rain."

ERICA McCALL: I got "The Secret Life of Bees." Great book.