

# Pac-12 Women's Basketball Media Day

Wednesday, October 10, 2018



## Kelly Graves Sabrina Ionescu Ruthy Hebard Oregon Ducks

KELLY GRAVES: First of all, we're honored to be here and really excited about the night -- I guess the 2019 and '20 season. Feel really good about our group and the cohesion that we've built over the last couple years, and we don't have a big roster, but I think every player that we have on it is capable of having big nights for us, and like I said, we're just kind of thrilled to get this thing rolling.

So there you go. What season are we in? You know what, you guys? You know what I've learned from these two guys? It's day-to-day. Everything is one day at a time. We just try to get better each and every day, and that's something I've learned from both of these two, and I really respect and am grateful to them for that.

What season? '18-'19. All right, Go Ducks. '19 and '20 will be pretty good because they're both juniors, so that might work out, too.

### **Q. First time in a suit since --**

KELLY GRAVES: Yeah, I don't really like it. You know, and I think Chris Dawson should allow me to just wear our polos.

### **Q. How different is the mentality now that you have players -- and I'll ask this to Ruthy and Sabrina, as well -- you already know how good you are and have already had success in Elite 8 twice, how different is the mentality entering this season with the knowledge that you know how good you are and it's not having to prove yourselves?**

KELLY GRAVES: Is that to me or is that to the student-athletes? Well, I think for me, it hasn't changed really. I mean, we've had high expectations ever since these two got on campus, and they've lived up to that. I think last year our exit from the NCAA Tournament got us even hungrier for success this year, and what I've seen is great focus and intensity and nothing but positive things from these guys since -- and the rest of the Ducks since that day we lost in Spokane.

I think they're hungry, and I can see a real confidence in each and every one of them.

SABRINA IONESCU: I mean, everything he said was right. I mean, I think our demeanor stayed the same, but I think just the experience of having gone through for us at least these last two years of achieving getting to the Elite 8, I think this year we know what it takes to get there and practices have been great. I mean, I've been telling everyone this. I think our practices this year have been the most competitive and the most dialed-in since I've gotten to Oregon, which is inspiring to see.

So I'm excited. I think we have a great group of kids here, and everyone is dialed in and understands their role, and we're just ready to start playing.

RUTHY HEBARD: I agree with both of them. Like she said, we're dialed in. We're all really competitive. We hold ourselves and our team to high expectations, so it's going to be a great year for us.

### **Q. Kelly, how disappointing is it to lose four transfers, and how will that affect your bench strength?**

KELLY GRAVES: Well, I've never really worried about the players that we don't have and just am concerned about the ones that we do. Obviously it hurts. It hurts our depth. We have a thinner roster. But the reality is most of our production is back. We never like players to leave our program, and they all did for different reasons, but again, we've really tried to focus on looking forward, and I think from the coaches that I've talked to, I think everybody -- all of those coaches have told me that once you go with a smaller roster, actually it's hard to go back because of the benefits.

### **Q. Coach, I want to ask you about Erin Boley, you get her eligible this year after the redshirt year transferring from Notre Dame. What are you expecting from her? And if I can get your comment on it seems like there are a lot of high-impact transfers in the Pac-12 this year that could really have a big say in the way things play out.**

KELLY GRAVES: Well, what I love about Erin, number one, she's a great competitor. She's used to playing at a high level. When she was at Notre Dame she actually started for them and was a key player for them,

so she comes in with experience. She also comes in with a year under her belt having worked out and practiced with us last year. She understands what we want and the kind of game that we play.

But she's really competitive and highly skilled. I love her versatility. We can put her down low. She's a strong player, so she can play around the basket. It's going to be a match-up advantage for us on many nights, and then she is a big-time elite shooter, and she's the kind of player that can get on a roll at any time. We lost a really good shooter in Lexi Bando, but I don't think we'll miss -- we'll miss her because we loved Lexi, but Erin gives us that same kind of game, and she's also 6'2" and really strong.

And she's a great teammate, an awesome student. She really is the whole package, and we're glad that she's with us.

**Q. And then talk about the transfers from throughout the Pac-12 --**

KELLY GRAVES: Yeah, obviously a lot of high-profile ones. That's great for the conference. The conference is already going to be really, really strong, but I think with the addition -- especially up the road with Destiny Slocum up at Oregon State, I think that makes us all better, and when the Pac-12 is better, I think that's good for everybody, and I anticipate, again, it's going to be an awesome season.

**Q. When you guys got on campus and got to play with Maite and got to understand the beauty of how she ran the ship and was an extension of Kelly, how much did she help you when you were freshmen, and how much does she continue to just kind of be that rudder for your club?**

SABRINA IONESCU: Well, funny thing is he didn't let me play with her for a while. He always kept us on separate teams in practice.

**Q. Because?**

KELLY GRAVES: Because we had to even out the teams. That's stacking the team.

SABRINA IONESCU: So my first year, like I hadn't played with her really on the same team for about a few weeks, and then slowly I started to be able to play with her, and we had an instant connection right from the start just being able to see the court well. I think we're both on board with just facilitating and trying to get players in the right spot.

But it's been great learning from her. She runs the pick-and-roll better than anyone in college basketball, so it's been fun to be able to watch her and learn from her, and she just helps our team so much. She's just

so composed and always is making the right play and such a team player.

So I think everyone is really blessed to be able to be led by such a great point guard.

RUTHY HEBARD: Yeah, definitely. I mean, being able to step on the court with Sabrina and Maite both was eye opening for me when I was a freshman and Maite with her composure and just leading us, from post players to the guards. She's a great leader, and you can always look to her for help or where you're supposed to be, and she just makes the whole offense flow.

KELLY GRAVES: Yeah, you know, I'm not a man about hyperbole, but I really believe with Sabrina and Maite, that's the nation's best backcourt. I don't see two better players on a team. I always say Maite is our most important player. Sabrina may be our best player and Ruthy is our most dominant player, but Maite is our most important player. She kind of is fine with kind of going -- flying under the radar, so to speak, but Sabrina said it, there's no guard in the country better in the pick-and-roll than Maite Cazorla.

I was really happy that last year our conference coaches saw that and understood that, and even with two great players here, voted her All-Pac-12, because she deserves it. She's our best defender, and she's one of our smartest players and is going to be a great pro.

One of the things people don't realize, Maite has won five gold medals for Spain. She may be the most decorated player in the world right now, certainly in college basketball. So that's just kind of who she is. She's a winner.

**Q. Sabrina, what was it like having that experience with the USA team training for the World Cup? And for Coach, what have you seen any sort of improvement or difference in her game from that experience?**

SABRINA IONESCU: I mean, it was an eye-opening experience. I wasn't sure what to expect going in, but I was just eager to learn from everyone that was there, players that had walked in my shoes and had played in college already and now were playing professionally. It was a blessing to be able to learn from them, especially in the guard position, to just be able to learn how they see the court, how they play defense differently than we do in college. The intensity was a lot different, and they really helped me get better in a lot of ways.

I think I was able to bring that back to Oregon with just my defense and intensity, and I think Ruthy learned a

lot, as well, in the post. She had come with me, as well. So it was a blessing to be able to do that, and I hope I'm given the chance to do it again.

KELLY GRAVES: Yeah, I think reality is good for anybody. You know, they went back there and had a chance to compete with the best and against the best, and I think it exposes every player in a certain way, and certainly a couple of collegians. But at the same time, I think they both came back with great attitudes. They know they've got to get better, but they also came back with confidence. I've seen two very confident players, especially in Sabrina. She's never really lacked in that area, but in a good way. But just by being mentioned and being allowed to do that I think is just a great honor, and I can tell they both came back with a lot of confidence and hunger to get better.

RUTHY HEBARD: I definitely learned a lot. You walk into the gym and you see WNBA players, gold medalists, and it's just great to be able to see how they talk on and off the court, and just learning more about your game, watching you get better. Like Sabrina said, they play defense a little different than we do at college. So just seeing how they think all the way on both sides of the court was definitely very helpful.

KELLY GRAVES: One of the things Ruthy said when she first got back, I kind of debriefed her, was, I've got to get better with my left hand, and that's what happens. You get exposed a little bit, and I think that's great. That's how you develop as a player.

**Q. We talked briefly outside, Sabrina, and you mentioned, it was interesting, with three on three, you really had to coach yourselves during the game. You couldn't talk to a coach until after. How does that help -- being more vocal, how did that help you as a player, and how does that help your team?**

SABRINA IONESCU: Yeah, so like the rules are you're not allowed to be coached during the game. It's either before or after. And none of us had any three-on-three experience. Erin had played, I think, once before. So we were still learning the rules during the game.

But I think it helps us here at Oregon just because we're not always looking for someone in the middle of the game. It's more read and react. We have to talk and communicate within ourselves with what we see and how we think this play will be effective, this play won't.

And so I think that's helped us bringing now in practice, we're not always looking for Coach on what play to call or what mismatch we see, it's more just trusting and talking within ourselves to figure that out, and he trusts

us and he allows us to do that because I think we've proven that we can.

**Q. You had a tremendous year, obviously, last year, very high expectations for this coming season. Why is this -- it's early. You haven't played a game yet, but why is this year's team better than previous?**

SABRINA IONESCU: I think experience helps a lot with that. Everyone knows how close we were to making that jump last year and getting to a Final Four, and I think everyone wants it more than ever. So I think everyone has been practicing like we're going to get there, and it's been so fun to be a part of.

Expectations are high within the team, as well, this year, not just from the outside, and I think that's helped us continue to get better every day. But we're excited. I mean, our freshmen coming in, Taylor Chavez, she's great. She's one of the best freshmen, I think, in the Pac-12 this year, and she's been practicing like one, and then just having Satou have another year under her belt is going to be great, and then us having been in the conference a few years now, we're going to lead the team.

**Q. Kelly, you've been to back-to-back Elite 8s. How do you fight off the "Final Four or bust" mentality that I'm sure is out there from the outside? Or do you? Do you welcome it, or do you try to tamp that down a little bit?**

KELLY GRAVES: Well, we always -- I think our players understand how good we are and where we are in the women's basketball landscape. We're certainly capable of doing great things, but the reality is we just -- we're not a huge goal-setting team in terms of this is what we want to accomplish. I think they are very great in compartmentalizing every day as a new challenge and an opportunity to get better.

And so that's been our goal from day one as a group. We want to get better each and every day. So I know they're hearing it from other people, but we don't talk about it as a team. We know that a lot of things have to happen, but we're good enough, and these two, it's great to have them leading the way.

And I'm glad that you mentioned Satou Sabally. She is incredible right now. She came back better than ever. She's playing at such a high plane. You're talking about some elite, elite players who are now hungry and really driven, and that's a good recipe for a coach to work with.

Yeah, what people say externally, we're not that worried about. We know what we're capable of, and we always put high expectations on ourselves, not necessarily an

ultimate goal.

**Q. Kelly and ladies, so external prognostications, et cetera, it's interesting and it's a tip of the cap that your colleagues are picking you guys to win the Pac-12, a good, deep, quality conference, your colleagues. What does that mean to you, or is that just something else that you deal with in terms of that outside kind of blabber?**

KELLY GRAVES: No, it's just something you have to deal with, and I think it's a great honor. And I think deserved. This is a really, really good group. We're not going to shy away from that. But at the same time, it doesn't mean anything. When we play the Washington schools opening weekend, we're all going to be 0-0 and competing for the same prize. And I think our players are smart enough to know that and realize that.

But I really see a focus in this group that I haven't seen in my time there. I'm really excited to see how we can come together and what we can accomplish. I think it can be really great things.