

Pac-12 Conference Basketball Media Day

Tuesday, October 25, 2022

San Francisco, California, USA

Arizona State Sun Devils

Coach Natasha Adair

Sydney Erikstrup

Jaddan Simmons

Women's Head Coach

NATASHA ADAIR: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Natasha Adair, and I will tell you that it has been an amazing seven months. I did survive the summer, for all of you all who want to know that.

But most importantly, today is special because it's an opportunity for you all to hear from me about these wonderful young ladies, but also to learn more about me as a coach and our vision for our program.

We were fortunate to come in, and there were players that are here that chose to stay, and listening to their why and what they want out of this opportunity, that is what energizes me every day.

But we were also -- we hit the ground running and we had to sign seven new players, and so right now it is building a culture. When you think of our team, you're going to see a team that plays together, but we're going to be defensive focused. We're going to defend. We're going to rebound. We're going to run and score.

Just having an opportunity night in and night out to compete in the conference of champions, especially at this point in my career, it's a dream come true. I am just excited to get started and answer any questions that you all may have about me, about our players and our program.

Q. You said you'll answer anything, so there you go; we opened it up. What are your expectations for this year, how you plan to build this program?

NATASHA ADAIR: Expectations are always to win. I'm a competitor. When that ball gets tipped, we want to make sure we're the most competitive team, prepared team, and we want to be in sync, but obviously right now it's building



that culture. It's making sure that we have really good chemistry on the court, that they learn me as a coach and understand terminologies, all these different things that when there's change.

But the beauty of it is we talk all the time, and as a player, I want them to be able to come to me, and as a coach, I have to be a really good listener. So I have to meet them where they are and coach them to their why, meaning bringing them along.

But at the end of the day it's to be relentless on the court. It's to make sure we're the most prepared team and that we put a product on the court, not only is ASU going to be proud but we want the conference to be proud, as well. But it's to compete to win.

Q. For the two players, a lot of changes from -- obviously coaching staff but within your team. How is it different, and what are your expectations and adjustments so far?

JADDAN SIMMONS: I mean, yeah, our expectations are to win, but we know it's going to take hard work, time, so just trusting in the process. Like obviously Coach said, we have seven new players coming in, so it's going to take time to build that. But I think just meeting the players over these last couple months, I think it's going to be not easy but doable.

SYDNEY ERIKSTRUP: I think especially, too, like team bonding wise, it's been really big for us. We want to the pumpkin match a few weeks ago. We've done escape rooms. Many different things that just gets us all out of our comfort zones. We all have such different personalities but I think that's what makes us all so special as a team.

Q. I've gotten to know you just a little bit. I want you to tell the room about the drill you run to get up and down the floor within four seconds, because this Arizona State team is not going to take the air out of the basketball.

NATASHA ADAIR: No chance, and they're laughing. It is cycles. It is a drill that works on our transition. We run a



numbered break. But you're right, there's no error with that. We have 30 seconds, 32 seconds, and each player has an opportunity to score. They have to get the ball over half court within three seconds. So that means you have to rebound that ball out.

We've got to find J Smooth, as we call her, our point guard. But we're doing that to also build a pace. We want to play at a tempo that's uncomfortable to guard, and in all that we do in preparing for that, that's one of just many drills that we work on daily in practice to where it will be muscle memory, it will be second nature for them once we get that rebound.

But the first thing in order for us to run is we've got to play defense and we've got to stop, and then we will be rewarded in transition with our defensive efforts.

Q. J Smooth, what did you work on over the summer to improve your game?

JADDAN SIMMONS: I started behind the arc, three-point shooting. That was my biggest struggle obviously the last two years, but I think this year we've just done a good job of getting me comfortable when shooting gets fast, because I think that was the biggest thing.

That and just still working on always getting my teammates open and seeing the floor better. I think that's also going to be a big key in this upcoming season.

Q. Syd, same question for you.

SYDNEY ERIKSTRUP: For me personally, I've always loved the three ball, but I think especially this off-season we've really worked on creating opportunities for me to be a three-level scorer, driving -- I'm so long; really trying to utilize my length because my wingspan is quite long.

Q. Coach, when you come to this program and you're hired by Ray Anderson, how have you felt so far that the administrative support that you're getting from Arizona State has been through what's a bit of a tumultuous time in Tempe right now?

NATASHA ADAIR: Well, right now they have been super supportive in all that we're doing. Ray was in practice the other day, and so are all of the other administrators. But right now, I just focus on the players. I think that right now is where my energy needs to be, what the focus is, because like again, we're new and we're building a culture, but there's not an administrator that I can't pick up the phone and call or text if I need them.

I think that was part of me making that decision is making

sure I would have that support from the staff from the top down.

Q. You talked about some of those new players that you had to bring in. You bring in five transfers. Talk about what they bring to the team, specifically treasure and Tyi and Lauren. Tyi obviously you have a relationship with, but the other two, Power Five transfers, kids that can come in and help you right away.

NATASHA ADAIR: Well, I think when you talk about Tyi, and you'll learn her, she's show time. She may be tiny but she's a firecracker and she's fearless.

But where I think is the benefit is that yeah, she did play for me and she won a championship with me, but she's coming into a program, and there's no individual person that's higher or bigger than the team.

I think for her, it's also being that person in the locker room that can help answer questions to the current players that may not know me and they may not have played for me as of yet.

But just really working on her leadership. But what she's going to bring is just a fearlessness. She's the ultimate competitor. When you talk of Treasure Hunt, she's a national name, top 5 player in the country coming out of high school, another champion. She won a championship at her previous institution.

But again, she's coming into a team and a culture that we're building, and we're not just building it with Tyi or Treasure or Kayla or players that we brought in. We're building it together.

So Syd touched on just a lot of the team bonding, the community outreach. I think it's more about identifying roles, and as we put this piece, the pieces of the puzzle together and we're building a culture, just know that they are integral pieces to what we already have.

Q. Coach, when you took over at Delaware, you took over for a coach who had been there for 21 years, and Tina Martin was the winningest coach in program history; now you're taking over for another legendary coach in Charlie Turner Thorne. How much did that experience at Delaware kind of help you with this and kind of also taking over for an institution?

NATASHA ADAIR: Well, I think it even started before then at College of Charleston with Nancy Wilson, who was there 20 plus years, as well.

I think you learn. Along the journey, you understand coming into a program with rich history. You understand what was done before you. But you aren't intimidated by that if you're a competitor. You use that as fuel, and you use that as motivation, but you also talk to the people within the program, talk to the alum, talk to the donors, talk to the community, because you still want them to be very proud of your product.

But you also want them to know that they're not losing that connection with the program and with the university with change. But what did that teach me? It teaches me that I can do it, because I've done it before.

Q. Coach, I did my research on you; this is your 11th season as a Division I coach. You're one of 11 of 12 Pac-12 coaches that have one NCAA appearance, and you obviously coached Jasmine Dickey last year, who was drafted in the third round. I'm curious, how do you think you fit within this mosaic of Pac-12 coaches, how familiar are you with the other 11 coaches? Have you competed against them? Where do you stack up?

NATASHA ADAIR: I think I'm very prepared, first and foremost. Am I familiar with them? I actually won with Cori Close. We shared a sideline a couple of years in a row with USA Basketball where we won two gold medals.

But it's more about just the preparation, if you will, and just being one of 12 elite coaches here in the conference.

But I just think a 25-year career, obviously you said 11 years, but along that journey, you learn. There is not a team that we won't be prepared to compete against. There is not a stage that we won't be prepared to be on.

So to be on this stage, a conference of championship stage with elite coaches, I'm absolutely ready.

Q. Coach, your introduction day you wore black leather pants in Tempe. Did they survive the summer or not?

NATASHA ADAIR: Actually I did not wear that that day. That was a picture that they previously used.

Q. I wanted to ask the young ladies, you guys decided to stay when some of your teammates didn't. Can you talk about what made you stay and just talking to Coach Adair for the first time what your impressions of her were? Also, Coach, your first impressions of the players?

SYDNEY ERIKSTRUP: Yeah, I think obviously when change happens, it's always an uncomfortable situation,

but Coach A was really open and welcoming to all of us. We all had one-on-one meetings with her where she sat down and asked us what our why was, what we wanted to do in the future. Just anything about us as a person.

I think I just really hit it off with her personally from our meeting, and our energy is very much the same, so we got along just fine.

Yeah, so I thought it was going to be a good fit. And the family culture, too. She's huge on family and I could really see that within the staff and everyone.

JADDAN SIMMONS: Yeah, for me, like Syd said, change. I'm used to it, but -- I moved a lot growing up. But just being able to adapt to it. When I first met them, obviously I didn't know what I wanted to do, but after a couple workouts and meeting with her one-on-one, I knew it. Like I had to stay, give this a chance and see what was going to happen.

I am glad that I stayed. I know that this team is going to be something special.

NATASHA ADAIR: Well, my first impression of both of them -- I'll start with J Smooth here. But I think it's organic, and I think we used those words. For me, I'm a really good listener and I coach from a maternal instinct. If I know their why and what's important to them, there is not anything that I won't do to make sure Jaddan and Syd and every other member on this team achieves their goal. I think just as a leader, I have to be that example for them.

I know they're winners. Individually we talk about how they're going to grow as a player, but just more importantly for me and for my staff, it's the holistic approach to coaching, and I think it's recognizing that they're people first and just making sure that they continue to grow and making sure their families, their supporters, everyone that sees them and has a hand in their development are proud of who they become as women.

Q. For the players, this is going to be a program in transition this year. How much do you all feel like you're going to have to prove to the rest of the conference about how quickly that transition can happen and how quickly you all can get back into the thick of this Pac-12 race?

JADDAN SIMMONS: Yeah, I mean, obviously we were ranked last in the Pac-12, so we have a lot to prove. I just think that's what we do. We've always been the underdog. It's always better to be the underdog, show people what you can do and prove them wrong. This team can definitely do that.

Obviously we're going to come together even more over time. I think it starts with, like she said, defend, rebound, run, score. That's what we're going to do. I know we're going to show the Pac-12.

SYDNEY ERIKSTRUP: Kind of just going off that, I think it doesn't matter where -- we were talking about it earlier, it does not matter where you start, it's where you finish. I think that's going to be a big thing for our team this year.

NATASHA ADAIR: If I can just jump in on that one, we want to be our best team heading into March. So you're not your best team today, and we know that. But we're building towards that.

Again, it's the day-to-day grind of what these young women are doing in the classroom and on the court and in the community. We don't really talk about where they're picking us.

Again, no one has any basis on who we are and what we will do. But we will not be there at the end of the season.

Q. It's no surprise given your track record of building up teams that you're here in the Pac-12 at Arizona State. But what were your impressions coming into the league compared to where you were before? And also, did Cori Close have anything to do with you being here, helping you choose Arizona State? Because I'm sure you were recruited by other schools.

NATASHA ADAIR: Yes, Cori did not have any influence, but I do know what she talks about the league and how proud she is of the league, and just the relationships that she's formed with a lot of the colleagues within the league. Again, to know how elite the conference is, absolutely that was a huge draw.

But at the end of the day, I just look at the opportunity in front of me, and you don't know me yet, but you will; there's no opportunity that's too big. I wanted to be here at this moment with these young women to continue to grow and get us back to national prominence and stay there.

Everything that's in front of me to do so, we have every component, recipe, ingredient and support to get it done.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports