

Pac-12 Conference Basketball Media Day

Tuesday, October 25, 2022

San Francisco, California, USA

Arizona Wildcats

Coach Adia Barnes

Shaina Pellington

Helena Pueyo

Women's Head Coach



hoops hiring her because she was affiliated with some of the players before, so there is always compliance things.

But once we were able to get it done, just incredible. My goal for her is to one day be a coach, someone I want to bring along, someone I really trust and love and care about, and I think she can bring so much to our game.

ADIA BARNES: Another exciting year of Pac-12 women's basketball. I think just excited to start a lot of new players and just a great turnout for the best media day in the country. Welcome, everybody, and thanks for having us.

Q. Had a very fun last season watching you guys play. To the players, both of you have played on the international stage, in the Olympics, World Cup. How do you feel like that gives you an advantage playing in college?

SHAINA PELLINGTON: For me personally, playing overseas, you're playing alongside pros basically all the time. They're very wise. They know the game very well. So I feel like every single time I go overseas to play or play with my national team I learn a lot about the game.

I learn different aspects of the game that I was never open to before. I think it helps me develop really well as a player, and also just as a person.

HELENA PUEYO: Yeah, for me also personally I think my national team helped me a lot with all the basketball stuff, also like keep growing up as a player, and it's really fun to go back and support my country and just trying to do my best for them, and I think it's really fun to do it.

Q. Coach, Aari came back to play for you. How is that? Is it nice for the players to have her around, and with the WNBA experience now and all that? That was fun to see.

ADIA BARNES: Yeah, it was great to have her. It was sad she didn't have any more eligibility but she actually had one more year but didn't use it.

Just wonderful. We had to kind of jump through some

There's one thing me talking about it at 45 years old saying I played back in the day 25 years ago, and they're like, what? But for them to learn from Aari and to see Aari do things every day and to listen to her advice, they're really listening and then to watch her in the summer play, she's doing it, so I think there's a tremendous amount of value to that, and just the knowledge and I think the mentoring she brings is good, as I think she's going to be a great coach one day.

Just excited to have her, and I think one of the best decisions I made as a coach.

Q. Last year at times you guys really struggled scoring the ball. How do you improve on that, and how much did adding Esmery and Jade and Lauren helped with that, because they're three Power Five big time scorers from their respective schools?

ADIA BARNES: A lot of people say that. I never really look at it as struggling offensively. Our strength wasn't offense but our strength was defense. I think every team has a different identity, and ours, we didn't have those prolific scorers but we had those awesome defenders.

I don't look at it like that. I look at it like ideally in a perfect situation you're going to have great defenders, great offensive players. I think when you're becoming like a championship team you have one or the other.

I think now we have a really solid defensive system. We have players that can play on both ends of the floor, so I think the areas that we improved in this year is adding some players that can play our type of defense and that can score the ball really well.

I think with those three transfers, stretches the floor, it



leaves Shaina a lot of lanes to create and Helena a lot of lanes to create and you can't help off of. Hopefully we're able to maintain that same defense with improving the offense, and I think that's a challenge as a coach.

You get this great offensive team. A lot of teams can't play defense. You get this great athletic defensive team that can't score to save their lives. You kind of work with what you have and make the best out of it. Otherwise if you're doing both, great on both ends, you're probably winning multiple championships. Hopefully we'll get there.

Q. Coach, I was just wondering if you could discuss a little bit about kind of what this Tucson community means to you? I know it was a few months ago but you were the grand marshal in the Tucson Rodeo parade. What does that community mean to you and the support that you've gotten from that community for what you've done with the basketball team?

ADIA BARNES: Yeah, so Arizona is an incredible college basketball town. We're not only a football town like a lot of other places, but we're a college basketball town. The fans have supported me since day one. I think for me what is special is we weren't good, so I wasn't inviting the whole city to games my first year.

But to see 300 fans the first year to now sell 6,000 season tickets, I think that's amazing. Obviously you support teams that win, so that's been great.

But let me tell you about the rodeo. I think I made my mark as the rodeo grand marshal. It was not the championship game, it was the rodeo grand marshal. I probably got more texts about being the rodeo grand marshal than winning games we shouldn't have won.

I knew it was a big deal in Tucson, but I didn't know it was the deal. That's what made me popular in Tucson, was the rodeo. And I had the boots, I had the hat, I had it all. It's like the biggest non-motorized parade in the country or rodeo in the country.

The fans love that stuff. I think what sets our program apart is how we serve the community and we go out and we do things in the community, we care and we give back, and I think that's what's made the fans come and watch us and support us. They love what we're doing. I think they're excited about women's basketball, so it's awesome.

Q. What were your duties as grand marshal?

ADIA BARNES: Absolutely nothing but sit on a wagon and wave. I didn't have the good wave. Actually I think Joan was on the wagon with me and Rocky LaRose. The

wagon was like 150 years old so it was kind of bumpy.

You guys have never been on a wagon with like -- you know tires have rubber? Well wagons don't have rubber because it was like 100 years ago so they just had like iron. So I just sat there and waved.

And there was like 100,000 people. I'm like, who goes to rodeos? I guess like everybody. I have the boots, I had the hat, and I was like a true cowgirl. It was awesome.

Q. Adia, to have fifth-year seniors and as many as you do, what does that mean for your team this year? What does that allow you to do to have that much experience on the floor?

ADIA BARNES: It means a lot, because you can't teach experience. So it's just -- to have that and to have players that have been to the championship game, I think that's really valuable because you don't know what you don't know, and having that experience I think takes us to the next level.

We have that in three of our seniors.

Then to add someone like Jade Loville who's been in different programs, she's really got really good late and adds a lots to our team. It's a lot of leadership, and now it's mixing those pieces together and pulling along the young kids.

I think people sometimes ask like what's the difference like of having some success now, and the difference is your freshmen are better, so you can recruit. Now you don't have to recruit the 100th ranked player; you recruit the 10th ranked player.

I think you can see the difference. So the freshmen want to be great. They're in the gym. When I got the job at Arizona we weren't able to recruit those kind of kids. So now the Maya Nnajis, the Parises, the Lemyah Hilton, Kailyn Gilbert. They are like gym rats. They want to win a championship, so the level has risen. They're following these young women and they're aspiring to be great.

So yeah.

Q. Coach, I think we all know the transfer portal is just kind of part of the equation now, but when you lose a young player like Aaronette Vonleh to a league rival in this case, is that particularly tough at all?

ADIA BARNES: No, not at all because it's the way it is. It's hard because as a coach you've got to recruit your players, you've got to recruit the next class. You're trying to be

great.

I think I don't worry about that stuff. You've just got to coach with what you have, and that's the way it is. Basketball has changed. The players have changed. Like Joan used to run -- don't be mad at Joan. She used to run me to death when I was a player. You can't do that anymore.

It's different. Transfer portal is different. Your players aren't happy -- if your players aren't playing you're going to lose somebody. That's kind of how it is.

I think as a coach, there was some decisions I made this year -- I could have taken two other really good transfers, but I knew if I took those two transfers our freshmen probably not play because the transfers are going to be better. They are more experienced, they are better players.

So I made the decision not to, but we probably would have been a better team. We would have probably won more games.

So I think there's a balance of like do you want to be all transfers or do you want to bring younger -- I prefer to get some great young talent, keep them, and win with them big when they're juniors.

But that's a hard balance because you invest in these freshmen. You recruit them from eighth grade, ninth grade, and then you invest, and then they don't play their first year, they leave.

So I think that's hard. It's hard because then in a way you're like, okay, you invested this time. You might as well get a transfer, keep them for a year and you win more and they score 20 points a game.

So the transfer portal is the way it is. I think we were the conference -- we had 10 inter-conference transfers, which is a lot. If you look at the SEC they had -- this is thanks to Michelle -- 14 teams and they have 11, so we have the most percentage-wise.

Is that good or bad? It is what it is, and I can't worry about that. I've just got to coach the best players. I want players that want to be at Arizona. If you come to a top team and you're not playing your freshman year and you're not willing to put in the work and get better, then that's on you.

And if you have to leave to go somewhere else, that's okay with me. I'm perfectly fine with that. And I will sign the papers and let you go, and I did that this year.

Q. When you guys look at your schedule you have two big games at home on ESPN and you guys have for a while now been able to do a really good job of getting McKale full for some big games late in the season. How much does maybe having those games in a national spotlight sense and you can sell to the community that we're going to be nationally shown, we really want -- how much does that make an impact for a program in your ascension that way?

ADIA BARNES: Well, I think that -- so I don't need to sell to Tucson. That's the great thing. Tucson kind of -- they support us, so I don't have to sell that. I don't have to tweet as much. I still do. I don't have to auction off my husband to sell tickets. I did before.

But now it's like they're excited. We're winning.

Unfortunately it was really hard for me. We hosted last year. I really thought I had a great chance to win and lost against North Carolina, and that was hard because we weren't expected to. We don't lose a lot at home, knock on wood.

But I think that it matters. The fans want to come support -- I don't have to sell. I think now it's just recognizing we can have these big marquee games. We're going to be playing UConn in a couple years with a home and home, Texas home and home, so they're exciting games, and I think we don't always have to go out of conference to get those. I think we can showcase those ESPN games, the Oregons, the Stanfords.

They can also get those in our conference, which is special, but we don't have to sell it. They want to come. I don't want to guarantee, but I'm pretty positive we're going to have sellouts, and how many venues in women's basketball can sell out arenas, can have 15,000 people? We're going to be one of them.

Q. To go off of that, when you look at the future and obviously knowing that the conference is about to have a media rights deal where women's basketball is growing all across every TV platform you can look at, college, WNBA, even the FIBA World Cup got a ton of people watching it, to see and know those opportunities are there, is that something you feel like the conference needs to take advantage of?

ADIA BARNES: Absolutely, so this can be our pitch now. They'd better take advantage of it because we're getting big time. They're going to lose out. Yeah, for sure our game is growing. It does matter. I think years ago -- you see with soccer, you see it with the tournament. It matters. If we had 18,000 people, I think we could sell out 18,000.

Maybe not every game but a few times a year.

You should invest in women's basketball. It can make you money. I think that it's important.

I hope we get a great deal. I think we will. I think our conference and our young women deserve it. I think that what's important to me is even more recruiting for all of the coaches, we want our talent showcased. We don't want to be the stepsister on the West Coast. We don't all the voters, everybody voting on the East Coast, because we have a great product on the West Coast and we want to keep great players like we are now on the West Coast.

So we deserve that. We should get it, and I think people would be crazy not to give us a big deal and showcase the Pac-12 nationally.

Q. For the student-athletes, Shaina, I'll start with you, I remember last season you looked me dead in the eye and you said, reps remove doubt. The look on your face was so cold, I got chills. I wrote it down, and I saved it for today. What did you do over the summer to remove doubt?

SHAINA PELLINGTON: I mean, for me personally, like obviously I just identified my weaknesses, things that I wasn't great at the previous season and how I can improve on those things, so like for me it was a lot of my outside the arc shooting.

So that's something that I've invested a lot of time in, in developing to become more of a triple threat.

My strengths are getting to the rim. I personally feel like I can get to the rim against anybody in the country when I want to, and I know that.

But to be able to force people to guard me now when I have the ball in my hands, that's just going to make me even more deadly, and it's going to help the overall success of my team.

I've invested a lot of time in that and also becoming just a better leader. I'm not always the most vocal person on the floor, but there's many other ways that I'm starting to learn that I can be a better leader, whether that's by example or whether that's just anything, off the court, being more social, just different aspects of where I'm trying to be a better leader for my team and so I can contribute to the overall success of this program.

Q. Helena, for you, three level scorer from the day you stepped into the gym at Tucson. What have you done over the summer to improve your game?

HELENA PUEYO: So me personally, over the summer I'm just trying to improve like also some of my weakness, maybe my speed like trying to go more to the basket, and I think the 3-on-3 really helped me a lot because it's a really fast game.

You never know what's going to happen, so you have to be ready always. I think that kind of game really helped me a lot like in that kind of things.

Q. Did we get a measurement on your wingspan. I know it's gigantic, I just would love to put a number on it. Coach, that's your assignment.

ADIA BARNES: First thing I want to say Helena. Round of applause, because she's been amazing. When she first came to Arizona she only could say thank you, and she barely said it.

But I love it, to now have this moment. I'm watching her with the media talking, comfortable. You don't understand how much she's changed. I think you guys should give her a round of applause. She would have acted like she had COVID and said I can't go. But just to see after four years -- we talk about why we love coaching.

It's for moments like this. You watch her and it's just awesome. I get like, Aww, like my little mom moments for a second.

Q. For the players, both of you were very integral parts of the run to the championship game a couple years ago. I'm sure you learned a lot from that. Tell me how playing in that game, in that season, is going to help you this year.

SHAINA PELLINGTON: For me personally, it helped me a lot obviously playing at a very competitive stage and getting the national recognition that we got. I mean, it's helped develop me as a person and as a player a lot.

Obviously last season didn't end the way we wanted it to, but I also learned a lot from last season, as well, and to have that experience and know what it takes to get to that level and compete at the highest stage you can possibly play at for a college player, I feel like it's detrimental because a lot of coaches will ask us, our goal is to get to the National Championship game, but nobody really ever knows what that feels like.

Nobody ever really knows what that might entail because sometimes our coaches haven't even been there before, so how do you know what it might take to get there. It's just all of us as players or some of us as players and our coach

alongside us to experience that, I think that was a really cool and a really good thing for us. So yeah.

Q. Helena, you had some really important parts on that run.

HELENA PUEYO: Yeah, for me personally I think that experience really helped me a lot. I like it was just my second year, so I was like, I'm impressed because I've never been in a situation like that, so I was like very happy. I think it was an amazing experience for me.

But as Shaina said, I think we didn't do as good as we could have, but I think we hope for a deep tournament run for the NCAA Tournament, but I think we can bring the experience to try this year to go back there.

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