

# Big 12 Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 12, 2021

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

## Oklahoma Sooners

### Sherri Coale

#### Postgame Press Conference



Oklahoma 80, Oklahoma State 89

**SHERRI COALE:** I'm incredibly proud of our team. What they've done this year has been nothing short of is remarkable. The stoppages in play, the low numbers, the perseverance that they have shown. I just told them in the locker room, you know, they got what that they played for. Why do you play? You play because you love it. You play because you love each other. You play to learn. You play to grow.

They got what they played for. The season has rewarded them. It's not the everything that wanted. Did they want to win? Oh, my heavens yeah. They wanted to win.

But there are bigger things than winning and this team individually and collectively, they got the spoils of giving all you got and throwing your heart and soul in the ring and doing the best you can with the hand that you've been dealt.

It was extraordinarily the effort that they showed and the February that they had together. I'm an optimist. You can't tell me we're not one of the best 64 teams in the country. I don't know how tight the formula is, how stiff the box is. I don't know. But what we've done in the month of February, we've put ourselves in a conversation, that's for sure. So whatever happens, happens moving forward. But for right now, I have nothing but pride and admiration for the work this team has done.

**THE MODERATOR:** Questions.

**Q. You almost had the perfect game plan. You dominate this game until three and a half minutes left in the game; you even have the final shot. The play is going to work. You have an unfortunate travel. Almost like it wasn't in the stars tonight because of how well your team played. I don't blame you for being proud of this team. Covering them all year they've been a thrill to watch. They almost pulled off the perfect game plan.**

**SHERRI COALE:** Well, thank you, James. It did feel like a couple times that maybe the stars were not lined up in our favor. Just some very odd kinds of things happened an at inopportune times. Still felt like at the end of regulation that we could really get rolling. Unfortunately Ja'Mee Asberry was the one that was rolling.

The two bigs were just a problem for us. We don't have any size, and so when you have all that size in tandem it's tough to get a rebound. We were square on the boards at the half and I think we ended up getting out-rebounded by 15 or so. So that was due in large part to the two post guys being in.

But we didn't finish shots. Boy, we had some great chippy looks in the third, and that's where it started to kind of splinter for us a little bit and we carried that and I felt like got a little itchy from that point forward.

**Q. You guys have been so short-handed all season, and especially in 2021. Did you see that get into them again tonight down the stretch the last five minutes and then the five minutes of overtime when you guys went from having a ten-point lead to being down by ten in overtime?**

**SHERRI COALE:** Well, perhaps. We just played six games in 15 days and I think Oklahoma State has been off for 10, 12 days. And they have 14 or 15 people on their team and we have 7.

So, yeah, there is a fuel tank issue there I'm sure. But I think you know what great players do and what elite athletes do is find a place to put their tired, and we've done that really well. I think when so much was on the table there late, you take your eye off that, and all that tired just piles on top of your head and you feel it.

So to say it's not a factor and it's not there would be a lie, but we've done a great job of putting it in a place where we can do what we want to do anyway. I just think we took our eye off that for a minute and it strangled us.

**Q. You've had so many amazing players and amazing**

**teams over the years. You summed up what this team means to you I think personally. I know 12, and 12 is not your standard, but big picture, is this going to be one of your favorite teams ever just for the way they played six girls at a time almost?**

SHERRI COALE: Yeah, probably so. They've been nothing short of remarkable and it's been a joy coaching them. Practice has been so different. We talked back in November when it all started to pile up, all the quarantines and the contact tracing and stoppages, and we talked about how when we have six players we can't expect practice to feel like practice. Be frustrated every day if that happens.

So you break the mold and you -- there is a new way that practice feels. These guys have gotten better without having the opportunity to get reps, which is amazing. And I think one of the beautiful by-products of COVID is it's taught us how to do a lot of things better, more efficiently, how to waste less, how to focus harder and more intently.

These guys, they're 18, 19, 20 year old kids who are not having a college experience obviously, as no one is. But yet they're coming in and learning and getting better. We kept getting better without being able to rep things. I mean, we couldn't rep things. When coaches are on scout team trying to teach while we're running the other team's plays, takes a pretty mature student athlete to get better in that environment.

So yeah, John, the rewards are just -- they're everywhere, and I'm not taking one of them for granted.

**Q. It's like you anticipated my next question, so I'll rearrange it and ask it this way: What did you learn about yourself as a coach this year with all the challenges, personal challenges and all kinds of things that bubble up? What did you learn about yourself, Sherri?**

SHERRI COALE: So much. That less is more. That the process really is more important than the outcome. I think there is so much, John. That a united group -- and I don't know if there is learning about myself or not -- but from a program administration standpoint, we can't sell ourselves short. There is a lot of stuff that we can do and may not think that we can, that we don't have enough help or enough of this or enough of that.

It's not about the bells and whistles. It's about mindset. It's about perspective. And so probably if you want to boil what could be a 30-minute answer to that question down to maybe a line or two, I think more than ever I've been reminded what basketball has to stay on the right shelf.

When it stays on the right shelf, not only do you enjoy it more, but it's better. You do it better.

And so as coaches we have a responsibility I think to help our athletes keep that on the right shelf, because the world doesn't want it to be there.

**Q. You mentioned your team is going to be in a conversation. What would your message be to the committee about why this team deserves a shot to be considered for the tournament?**

SHERRI COALE: Well, I could talk about the games that we've won and the stretch we've been on in February. I could talk about the caliber of opponents that we've faced. We lost a pre-conference game to Georgia who's one of the top 15 teams in the country. We played Baylor, who's arguably -- I think a one seed. They're arguably a top 2, 3, 4 team.

And we played them. Ended up losing by 11 I think but played them toe to toe, square the whole time. We lost a few close games, really close games, but we've battled with everybody.

And our strength of schedule is phenomenal. I would say had though: I feel like the NCAA tournament has -- getting to it has become so formulaic that coaches schedule to it, and this committee that gets together has all these rules to follow. Let me preface this by saying I wouldn't want their job. It's a horrible job, a tough job. I get it.

But as humans we tend to want to build all these box that things fit in so that we take away any discretion or discrepancies, and I think this year more than ever the committee has room to feel because of COVID. They can go back and say, look, this team lost two games and they had six players. Or look, this team was right here and they'd had 14 days of quarantine.

They are going to be those factors that come in that I think give officials room to feel and make decisions. Because the NCAA Tournament is supposed to be about the best 64 teams this the country. And I know they're automatic qualifiers and I get all that. I understand that.

I would hate to have their job. They have a very difficult job. But they have room to be human this year. They have space to make decisions on what they see. I think that they will look at that and I think they will see what this extraordinary group of seven people have done and that they might be able to do with a week off to come out full bore.

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