

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Texas A&M Aggies

Coach Joni Taylor

Women's Media Day Press Conference



the first drill. It's taken us about 30 seconds longer to jog that lap because we have 15 players. It's a great thing to see.

So yes, I think it is something that allows us to get a lot more done at a lot faster pace. We obviously have some players who we still modify. Lauren Ware is in her sixth year of basketball. There's still times we can modify her and some other players. In the past when we had to modify, it changed our practice structure because of the limited number we had on our roster or we got players who were injured and that changed it. Now we're able to have the flow that we need. The continuity of our practice structure has been a ton better.

Really proud of the young ladies who are there, what they're doing, and excited about the work they're putting in.

Q. Obviously you have 12 new players. When you think about having a player like Lauren Ware come back, how beneficial is that to the new players?

JONI TAYLOR: It is something that I can't place a value on. I said this earlier. I will cry buckets of tears when she has her Senior Night this year. She didn't have to come back for a sixth year. Her body hurts every single day.

She understands just how important it is to continue to leave things better than she found it. She wasn't satisfied with the way we ended our season last year after we got hurt. She didn't want to walk out that way. She wanted to come back to not only have a better season for herself but she knew some of the players we were bringing in, she saw the players we were signing, she wanted to be a part of passing on to them what it means to play at Texas A&M, to go to that great institution and to be an Aggie.

She leads with her voice every single day. She leads by example every single day. She leads in the classroom every single day. She's getting her master's. She's already gotten her undergrad.

Is she perfect? No. But she shows up every single day with intention. She's a great example for the rest of our roster.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome Joni Taylor, head coach at Texas A&M, to the stage.

We'll take questions.

Q. What is the lure of the foreign player, international player? You've been on that circuit. Explain that.

JONI TAYLOR: We have five international players on our roster this year. I think it's second most behind Florida, who has seven.

There's a few things. Commissioner Sankey spoke to my experience with USA Basketball. I spent the last four summers abroad. In addition to sharpening my toolbox and coaching great players, it allows me to see a lot of players from other countries. That's one thing that has really helped.

I think the other thing, Darius Taylor came in and right away with his contacts, the people he knows overseas, was able to help us in that regard.

There's a few different things. Our staff has done a really good job. We've talked about recruiting internationally in the past and never really fully committed to it. This year we did and you can see the results of that. It's something we decided to be really intentional about. We're really happy with our success in that area.

Q. I know y'all have struggled with health. Do you feel this team this year is better suited starting with 15 healthy players?

JONI TAYLOR: Knock on some wood there, yes (smiling).

Having 15, we huddle up every day before practice and stand in a circle. After we talk and set our intention for the day, they jog a lap, then they meet us on the baseline for



Q. With the 12 new players and five international players, do you expect a different type of play style this season?

JONI TAYLOR: I want everybody to know I recruited Richard Hendrix to Alabama. I'm the reason why he went to the University of Alabama. I take full responsibility for all of his success. Richard, how are you (laughter)?

In all seriousness, one of the things we talk about with five internationals, freshmen, transfers, three returners, is being very intentional in our conversation, having effective communication.

It has stretched me as a coach. I thought I was a really good communicator. I have some players who are looking at me like I have two heads when I'm explaining drills. It has really forced me to slow down and make sure I'm effective in the things that I say.

I think it's also allowed us to figure out ways to connect, to create a bond. 12 new players is a lot. We have a team retreat every single year. In addition to that we have journals for them, and they journal about five minutes every day after practice. Sometimes they do it alone. Sometimes they partner up to do that. They read through their journal entries.

One of the things we've asked this team is what do you want to interrupt? What in your life do you want to interrupt or what in practice and on the court do you want to interrupt in your pattern to make you a better person or a better player? They journal about those things.

One of the other things we do is once a week after practice is over, they walk two laps with a partner, has to be a different partner every week. First lap one player talks about their week, something that happened good, not so good, something they're praying about, something going on in their family, something they got stuck in practice doing. The next lap the second player takes a walk. It is a way for them to connect, to continue to get to know each other.

Again, how can we find small pockets of time to be intentional about getting to know each other. We have players from all over the country, the United States. There's some homesickness setting in. Just make sure we're checking on each other.

Q. Can you talk about Fats Janneh, what she means to your program, what you saw bringing her in, and her personality, how that helps your team.

JONI TAYLOR: I just like to hear her talk. She's one of

those people, like you want her to read the encyclopedia and talk. We call Fats all gas because there's no brakes. She's all gas in everything she did. It's how she shows up every single day, with great energy.

You take someone who is the leading rebounder in the country, ask them what their goal is, she is like, I want to bring the juice, I want to be known for bringing the juice every day.

She does. She has a toughness to her. Obviously her skill set is really good. She can play with her back to the basket, shoot it, handle it in transition. She just sets the tones in terms of our mentality, our toughness, being the one who we know on both sides of the basketball, it's going to bring the juice that we need.

Q. Talk about what you're looking for from your team in non-conference play.

JONI TAYLOR: Our non-conference schedule, we've got a home game against West Virginia who is really, really talented. Then we're going to go to Kansas State and play. Obviously everyone who comes into Reed Arena is going to be a tough opponent for us. We're going to go to Hawaii and play three tough games there.

I do think our non-conference schedule is going to prepare us for what we know is the toughest league in the country. So I'm excited to get started.

Q. What can we see differently from Janae Kent coming into the season?

JONI TAYLOR: I think Janae has her feet under her. This is her second year in our program. She has a good understanding of what my expectation is for her. She knows the offense, the defense. She really worked on her game this summer. She's walking around lighter, with more confidence. She created a vision board over the summer of what she wanted to do.

She's someone who has really high goals for herself, as well. As you may know, her brother played at Texas, now playing professionally. She has high aspirations and big dreams. I think she has taken the next step in the right direction.

She's someone else, along with Lauren, who is leading by example every single day.

Q. Coach never liked to prepare for your teams because of the defensive toughness that we knew we would encounter for however long the game lasted. I know that's not going to change. Will it look different

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

with 12 new players?

JONI TAYLOR: Thank you for saying that.

I hope it doesn't look different. Something interesting about our defense is that we don't do anything defensively over the summer at all because we ask them to play at such a high level once the game starts.

The first time we put in anything defensively is when practice starts September 24th. We spend a ton of time working on that side of the basketball.

I hope it doesn't look any different. We still have some things to figure out. But we've got players who play with great pace and who have some toughness to them and skinny themselves up through some screens.

So far I'm liking what I'm seeing.

THE MODERATOR: We have a guest question.

FATMATA JANNEH: Hi. Lauren Ware and Fats Janneh from Texas A&M women's basketball. So, Joni, why do you wear your shorts so high (laughter)?

JONI TAYLOR: My players, and staff, ride me every single day because we have to be tucked in. I know there's no rule this year that says we don't have to tuck in our jerseys. We will be tucked in, in case you're wondering.

I believe that your shorts fit on your belly button. That's where your waist is. My shorts are at my belly button because that's where my waist is.

Our motto last year was burn the boats. They told me I had to burn wearing my shorts on my waistline. Last year I did tuck them one time. I've gone back to wearing them where I'm comfortable. My pants right now are sitting right here because that's your waist. It's what's comfortable for me, and it's what's appropriate (smiling).

LAUREN WARE: The decision is purely based off of anatomy.

JONI TAYLOR: Yes, yes.

LAUREN WARE: Thank you for the clarification.

JONI TAYLOR: Effective communication. Was that better (smiling)?

LAUREN WARE: Yes.

Q. What is the team motto for this year, and can you

explain what it means?

JONI TAYLOR: Thank you for asking.

Our team motto is PTI, program, team, individual, in that order, always, in everything you do, with urgency and impact.

In every decision you make, the program comes first, whether that's this drill you're doing in practice, being on time to class, in the community when you go serve, speak, when you're out socially. The program always comes first. The program will always come first.

That's something that was important not because we just have 12 new players, but in the new model where we see so many players coming in and out. Whoever steps into this program has to understand that everything we do, coaches and staff included, the program is what's most important and always will be.

After that it's the team. We tell our players all the time, This is the only time this team will be together. You are unique in that way. So everything that you're doing in your preparation, in your thought process, helping to serve the team the best way possible.

Then lastly is yourself as individuals. What we have found is when you think program first, think team second, then usually the individual gets taken care of, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time this afternoon.

JONI TAYLOR: Thank you.

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