

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Media Day

Tuesday, October 10, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

California Golden Bears

Coach Charmin Smith

Marta Suarez

Leilani McIntosh



Q. With that, we continue Pac-12 women's basketball media day. Charmin Smith, head coach of the Cal Bears. You had some good moves walking to the stage. Nice. Shoulders loose.

CHARMIN SMITH: I try.

Q. It's great to see you. I know every year around this time there is so much hope and excitement about the group that you have and what is possible. Six newcomers, one of whom is here today. We will talk about Marta in a minute. If you would open with the state of the program and what excites you most about this group.

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, as you mentioned, six newcomers, seven returners, and just a really good group that's extremely close already. I would say the best chemistry we've had in my tenure as head coach at Cal State, which makes me happy. They have me smiling all the time. Not all the time, but, you know, they're working really hard and I think this is going to be a great season for us.

Q. The word when we talked about your team, versatility just keeps coming up. What does that mean and how will that translate into some wins?

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, that means multiple ball handling options, shooters all over the floor, several really active and aggressive defenders.

We can really just do it all right now, and I'm excited about the pieces that we've added and I'm excited about the way the returners have continued to develop and grow. Now it's our job to figure out how it all fits together.

Q. I wanted to ask, you bring in four transfers, three of whom played over 1000 minutes at their last school,

and and Marta who played at a high level at the SEC. How have they fit so far with your group and how to you see them playing a role with this team this year?

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, great question. I see them having a huge impact. I mean, you think about Krimili being one of the most prolific three-point shooters in the country, Ila Lane who has dominated and commanded a double-double on the low block. Marta playing at Tennessee, a winning program, and Kay Kay being with Gonzaga. She's cut down nets. I mean, we brought in dogs, we brought in shooters, winners. We have it all.

Q. I just was curious specifically more about McKayla, what kind of role you expect her to be playing especially early on?

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, she's just so versatile. You speak to that piece. She can be a ball handler, a great rebounder, three point shooter, great passer. She one of her biggest assets is probably that defensive presence. She's changed our press already. She's active on the ball. Can give Leilani a break as the ball as stopper, so she is going to play a number of roles for us.

Q. We texted about a player of year candidate in your point guard Leilani McIntosh. How has she changed and elevated her game?

CHARMIN SMITH: I think you saw it a little bit last year in just her three point shooting. She was leading the conference for some time scoring the ball with much more efficiency.

Then it's just what I see right now is this desire to want to win. She came back for a reason. I'll let her tell you those reasons, but she came back because she believes in this program, her ability, and her teammates, and we're ready to win.

Leilani is a definitely a key piece to that.

Q. You mentioned the new additions. Obviously merging a half of a roster with returning players and half new. You mentioned chemistry. How do you

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expect the team's style of play to change this year?

CHARMIN SMITH: I think we're going to score a lot more points. We just have shooters everywhere, and with Ila and Michelle in the low block, it's really hard to guard us. I'm excited about our offensive firepower.

When you think about the pieces we've had and what we've added and what we can do defensively, we know we were a really poor defensive team, so that's been the emphasis all off-season, is we have to be better defensively. We have to be able to get stops.

You think about the close games we had in our conference. We couldn't get stops down the stretch. That's what is going to get us over the top. I love that we have the scoring, but that defensive piece is the most critical piece.

Q. Charmin, talk about the offensive side some more in terms of you have some high scoring teams in this conference. The ability to upgrade your team offensively, keep pace with some of the conference's top scoring teams, discuss that a little bit more.

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, I mean, it's important because as you mentioned, people are putting up numbers and they can put the ball in the basket. Not that we've even know a starting lineup just yet, but when you think about Kemery Martin and Krimili and Leilani and Aaliyah and Lulu, a freshman from Australia that you guys will get to know, Marta, Claudia, they're all three point shooters, versatile, can all attack, get to the rim. As I've mentioned, we have scorers all over the court.

Ila has been used to the double and triple team. You can't do that with us because we have people who can knock down shots. So it's going to open up things for her to dominate and have one on one coverage. Michelle is going to be loose in the middle because you have all these shooters around these two great low block players.

Q. This is a little bit less about your team specifically, but with the news that the WNBA will be bringing a franchise to the Bay Area, what have you seen from that perspective of the excitement surrounding that, and what do you think could mean for your program and the synergy with WNBA?

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, I was so excited. Maria and I were at the press conference and I had a lot of just enthusiasm surrounding it heading there. When you get there and you see the video of Steve Kerr and you hear the owners talk about what that means, Cathy, the commissioner talking about expansion, I had chills. It was

really, really special moment.

I think about all the players out there who we know are talented enough to be in the WNBA and don't have a roster spot, so that's No. 1. We need more teams. Because we have too much of our talent sitting on the sidelines.

I'm really happy for this reason. Then for that team to be in the Bay and, oh, to practice in Oakland who desperately deserves a team, right, I'm extremely excited. To have my young women be able to I don't know go get some runs in with WNBA players, that synergy you talked about, it's definitely going to be something we'll take full advantage of.

Q. You played on two NBA expansion teams in Minnesota and Seattle. What does that experience bring to you use a coach?

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, playing in the WNBA is a phenomenal experience. Getting paid to play basketball at the highest level, I'll never forget that. Marta and I were talking about it over dinner the other night. My experience wasn't all rosy, right? I told her, I was no Sue Bird. The way I got treated in the league was a lot different.

But I still appreciated the opportunity, right? And to say that I was an WNBA player, to guard players Tina Thompson and Cheryl Swoops and, oh, yes, I guarded Cynthia Cooper. It's just incredible. I'm glad that I have that opportunity, and I'd like to be able to share that experience with my players and talk to them about you say that's your goal. Let me tell you what that looks like and the work that it takes.

Q. We mentioned Marta a few times. I'd love for you to give us the scouting report. We know what she brings as a player. Who is she as a person? What will she bring to your program?

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, I'm expecting her to be a leader. She has some adjusting to do getting used to California, being here with this new team and the differences. But this is a Bay Area kid. She's Berkeley all the way.

I think she's loving it out here. She brings a competitiveness, a fight, a grit. She knows where we were ranked. She knows where everyone picked us.

She's the type of player that that's motivation for her, and she's bringing that winning mentality. You can't have enough winners. Too many winners I should say. So we're excited about Marta. She's raising the level for sure.

Q. I know we talked about Leilani and that she doesn't



get enough praise for the player and person she is. In a league of superstars she doesn't get a lot of shine. To go from a 22% three-point shooter her freshman year to 38%, one of the best in the country last year, she is sort of lynchpin for what you have been able to assemble. What has she meant over five years for you?

CHARMIN SMITH: She represents our growth. The way she has improved is the way this team has improved. I know it doesn't necessarily show up in wins and losses, but 15 of our 17 losses last year were to top 25 opponents in the country.

So we're a really good team. Just weren't a top 25 team yet. Leilani is a really spectacular point guard and I think her future in this game of basketball is extremely bright. I know we're going to win and she's going to be a big reason why.

Q. In a couple weeks you're hosting your fourth annual Race for Change at Lake Merritt. You'll have a special guest as well. For people who aren't familiar with it, fill us in.

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, so our Race for Change October 21st, we will do our 5k around Lake Merritt to raise money for our diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging department run by Dr. Ty Douglas, and John Carlos will be our special guest there. So our commitment to social justice and helping our communities is legit. It's something that we will continue to do. I invite you all to come out. If you can't walk with us, then I know you can click on the QR code on our website and make a donation.

It's a really important thing for us and we're extremely passionate about it.

Q. Anything that you want to say about Leilani or Marta as we bring them up and put them in the spotlight here? Anything we should ask them?

CHARMIN SMITH: Gosh, I just love this group. You know, we've got a really special team, and as I said before, it's fun to be around them. I've said I have no problems with who rooms with who on the road because they love one another. You're going to see the personalities here. You're going to get to know them well.

Q. Marta, great to meet you.

MARTA SUAREZ: Great to meet you too.

Q. Let's start with the transition and how things have been. You have had some experience with the Pac-12.

Played some Pac-12 teams at Tennessee. What drew you to this conference and Berkeley in particular?

MARTA SUAREZ: I mean, I just knew when I joined the transfer portal I still wanted to compete, I wanted to go in every week, a Power 5. Pac-12 was a conference that I looked up to for a long time. I feel like their game is more similar to the European game. SEC is a very tough, it's physical. I like Pac-12, how it's dynamic, fun.

There are so many players and so many teams. We're going to go into it and every week you have to go out there and fight. I'm excited for that.

Q. Leilani, for you, you graduated from Cal with a double major a year ago. Now in graduate school. What does it mean to graduate with two degrees from Cal and to be in grad school now?

LEILANI McINTOSH: You know, it's a blessing. I'm so happy that I got this opportunity and still get to play basketball at the highest level. My mom is very proud.

Q. I bet she is.

LEILANI McINTOSH: She kind of -- I kind of just wanted to play basketball and get a certificate program, and she kind of talked to me, you can't waste this opportunity to get a masters. Shoutout mom. It's been great.

Q. Leilani for you, you made a decision to come back. You talked about a little bit why you came back and just what your goals are as leader of this team for this season?

LEILANI McINTOSH: Yeah, just a lot of unfinished business. I feel I have grown in a bunch of different categories through my four years, and just playing in the Pac-12 I've built a lot of relationships. I think I still have that energy to kind of just prove myself a little bit more.

And I love this group of girls. Again, like getting an education from Berkeley as well also ties into that factor. I just think I'm excited to get this season started and show you guys what we're capable of.

Q. Leilani, Charmin mentioned this is the best chemistry she's had since she's been at Cal. How has that played out and how this team is different from what we've seen the last couple years?

LEILANI McINTOSH: Yeah, I think when you integrate half our team kind of being new to the program, I think it's important. I personally pride myself on building relationships, so I kind of -- we've kind of taken other

people to the gym with us, we've just hung out a lot off the court.

I think that helps us hold each other accountable on the court and be able to push each other and understand how we're going to I guess -- sorry -- bring the team together this year and flow in a good direction.

Q. This one is for Marta. You're one of the new players. Do you feel like this program, this is a bit of a clean slate when half the team is almost new players? Do you feel like this is a fresh start for everybody?

MARTA SUAREZ: Yeah, I sure do think so. We talk about it very often, how that's the part that we're the most excited for, how we get on so well on and off the court, the chemistry we built.

To be honest, it's sometimes just luck, finding the right pieces and getting it together. I think the coaches did an amazing job making sure the people they were recruiting fit the program and the values that we have.

And the returners, they've done a great job. They're a little late because of some issues in the summer, but I was a little scared-- I'm not going to lie. I'm new. I'm from Spain.

I get there and everybody is so welcoming, hanging out in the locker room all the time. We always hit each other up, let's go get ice cream. It's so exciting. It's fun to then go to practice and be playing with your friends, the people you actually enjoy having time with.

Q. Leilani, Charmin talked about how you guys were in a lot of close games last year. Weren't able to close them out. What do you think is different about this team this year as far as finding a way to win these tight games down the stretch?

LEILANI McINTOSH: It goes back to that chemistry piece. In the past we've been in scenarios where we maybe didn't know how to talk to each other to get us over that hump. I think us starting early and integrating these newbies, just building that culture, and when it comes down to those stretches and we have to make the game-time decisions we're able to talk to each other and communicate together.

Q. Marta, for you, who was the toughest person you competed against when you were at Tennessee?

MARTA SUAREZ: That's a good question. Person as a player our team?

Q. Player.

MARTA SUAREZ: I would say the SEC is a very physical and hard conference. It's like a fight every night and I played South Carolina. I played a championship team. That girl Aliyah Boston, she's proved us all. She just has magnets in her hand. Boxing her out was terrible. It was so complicated. She's a great player and seems like she's a great person, too.

I just want to give her a shoutout.

Q. For both of you, who are your favorite WNBA players?

LEILANI McINTOSH: Since we're in Vegas, shoutout Chelsea Gray, point guard.

MARTA SUAREZ: I love Tamika Catchings. Met her. She's a great person. Everybody loves her and she was a dog, too. So why not?

Q. Marta, this one is for you. You have a team full of international players. I think it's two Spain, three Greece, Sweden, Australia. To come to a program like this that has all these international players, does that make you feel more at home?

MARTA SUAREZ: For sure, it makes a difference. I come from a place where I was the only international one and I come and actually playing with Claudia, she's from Spain and we've known each other since we were ten years old. We started playing, come here, met the Greeks, the Swedes. It's so much fun. It makes you feel a little more welcome. You're not the only one that's different.

Berkeley it's also such a diverse place. It's crazy the amount of people that I've met from so many countries that speak so many languages. There are restaurants from every country, which is very different from what I experienced in Tennessee. You know, it's like a little southern state, which I love, but I'm definitely enjoying my name Berkeley.

Q. Actually about to ask a similar question about how different Knoxville is from Berkeley. What else have you liked about the town? And Leilani, how have you helped with newcomers to get them acclimated?

MARTA SUAREZ: Again, I think my favorite part about the whole experience and the whole program has been the girls and the coaches. Just going to practice every day and we have fun. We go to practice and we have fun with it.

That's what we're so excited for this season. It's very hard to compete against a team that's consistently having fun,



enjoying what they're doing, and playing for each other.

We have players that want to go to the league and that want to do something after, and when you have someone next to you that cheers for you and wants you to get there, it makes it so much easier, so much more enjoyable.

LEILANI McINTOSH: Yeah, and I just think Berkeley is such a cool place to be. I think I've just tried to like take them to all my favorite food spots. We get ice cream like every day. That's bad to say, sorry.

I mean, we just have those moments where we're all studying together and like, okay, let's take a break. We walk to and park and laugh all the way down and lock in again. I think it's just fun.

We also try to experience new things and get out to San Francisco, San Jose, just drive around and just explore ourselves as well.

Q. Listening to Mary talk about how you really transformed yourself as a shooter; field goal percentage is up every single season, especially the three-point line. How do you work on this and refine that craft?

LEILANI McINTOSH: It's easy when Charmin is constantly in my head, like shoot the ball, and you have teammates around you that have so much confidence in you. You sometimes feel like, oh, I took a bad shot, but they're always there to keep picking you up.

I think as a point guard it becomes more of a threat when I'm able to score the ball as well, because I am able to get my teammates open because now they have to respect the shot as well.

Q. The thing you're most looking forward to this season?

MARTA SUAREZ: The thing I'm looking forward to most? To the games. Playing at home. I'm excited. We had an event the other day, tip off event. We had too many fans. We didn't have enough food for the fans.

I think people like our team. We're involved in the community there. I'm excited to play at home. Have fun, and just shoot the ball for sure.

Q. Perfect answer. Too many fans is a good problem to have.

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