

# Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Media Day

Tuesday, October 10, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

**Oregon Ducks**

**Coach Kelly Graves**

**Chance Gray**

**Grace VanSlooten**



Nobody got hurt. All the flights were on time. Everybody got their bags.

All in all, it was really a nice experience, and I think it gives us a jump start to the season, which we need.

**Q. Kelly Graves, head coach of the Oregon Ducks joining us here on the main stage of Pac-12 Women's Media Day in Las Vegas. Great to see you, Coach, how you doing? I can't believe this is your tenth year in Eugene. I didn't know that was possible.**

KELLY GRAVES: Yeah.

**Q. Tell me what excites you most as you look forward to year number ten.**

KELLY GRAVES: Yeah, I really like my team. I think we have a lot of new faces, but we've got a nice blend of some experienced transfers coming in, especially at the point guard spot.

You know, some really talented young kids, two of which are here with us on this Pac-12 media day.

We're excited. I think we're kind of a little bit more like the teams I like to coach, a little blue collar, really competitive. In the past that's done well for us.

**Q. Coach, every four years you get to take an international trip. The timing for you guys couldn't really have come at better time, trying to incorporate the old with the new. What was the trip to -- was it Greece and London? Doesn't sound too bad. What was that like and the ten days you got to practice prior?**

KELLY GRAVES: Yeah, you know, I've been taking teams overseas since 1994 and I think this was my favorite trip. I thought it was just great. We got a lot out of it. As coach, those ten extra days of practice are probably more important than the games in Greece and England.

But we have a really nice team. They get along well. We've got a lot of personality. We played relatively well.

**Q. When it come to Grace, what are the things you're most excited about or looking for her to do when she takes this jump into her sophomore year?**

KELLY GRAVES: Well, what I love most about Grace VanSlooten is the fact she never has a bad day. She comes to practice to work each and every day. She's like a college pro that regard. Very professional about going about her business.

You know, I grew up a Larry Bird fan, so she reminds me a lot of Larry Bird. He spent a lot time on the floor after loose balls doing dirty work. That's what Grace does as well. She plays so hard.

I've been impressed with the improvement she's made in her game. I think certainly great, athlete, great around the basket, good at attacking the basket, but she's really tried to work on her shooting from range and things like that.

So I think you're going to see a better version of Grace this year. Really worked hard and her leadership has been tremendous. It was tough to lead as a freshman, a lot easier an a sophomore. I've seen her really step up in that regard.

**Q. You talked about this being a blue collar team. What does that mean in terms of offense and defense and the way you guys are going to play?**

KELLY GRAVES: Well, you know, I'm an offensive coach. Always have been. Spending more time on the defensive end this year than ever. I think part of that is we may not be quite as talented offensively as we have been in the past. Don't have a ton of great scorers.

So we're going to have to maybe win more games in the 60s and 70s than we've done in the past, but, you know, I'm still -- we want to get out and run. You know, we've got

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sports

I think a great weapon inside in Phillipina Kyei. Philli has made great improvement. People forget she's only played basketball about four years. It's going to be a real focal point for us.

I think she has a chance to be one of the best centers in the conference, and if you are one of the best centers in the Pac-12, you're one of the best in the country.

We're going to really look to get the ball into her a lot more, and then we're going to rely on a bunch of freshmen and then Chance. I liken Chance and Grace to Bam Adebayo and Jimmy Butler. We are going to have to really ride those two a lot this year.

**Q. You must have been reading my mind, I was going to ask you about Chance and her development. We saw flashes of just brilliance last season. What will you expect to see out of her this season?**

KELLY GRAVES: Yeah, I think last year we saw Chance have some great games. Now we just need her to have those great games consistently.

I think she will. She really sets the tone in practice. I mean, she's a tough, tough competitor. She comes every day. It's all about business with her.

That's what I love about both her and Grace. She sets a really nice tone, no primadonnas, that kind of stuff. Yeah, Chance is great at attacking the basket. Her three point shooting has become more consistent in practice, and I think that's really important.

Now, if that dual threat, it's going to make her one of the better guards in the conferences, and then she really defends. We got a couple potential great defenders that maybe we haven't had in the past, kids that think defense first. Chance Grace, Sofia Bell, one of our incoming freshman. I'm excited to see how Chance does this year.

**Q. When we talk about all the nine new faces and newcomers to the team, you also an old face in Oti Gildon. What it is like to have Oti back in the mix, and what does she bring to your program?**

KELLY GRAVES: Oti is like the mayor in Eugene. She is really popular. One of our most popular players ever. She was really the highest -- you know, when we signed her she was the highest rated recruit in Oregon history, and she was part of a great chapter in Oregon basketball. It's good to have her back. Players really relate to her. She's young; I'm old.

You know, she just is a hard worker. I think that work ethic

that she shows each and every day I think will rub off on this team. And already has.

**Q. Coach, a year ago Grace, the injuries just kind of nagging, never felt like she was 100%. How is 100% Grace going to be different than a year ago?**

KELLY GRAVES: Well, we're going to need 100% of Grace each and every game. I liken it to Larry Bird. Larry's career was shortened because he played so darn hard.

You know, every time she goes for a loose ball and runs into the wall or into the backboard you cringe because it's so important we have her on the floor each and every game.

Great example. I think the team really follows her lead. I'm going to rely on her a lot. We're going to isolate her as much as we can. She's got to give us more on the rebound front. I'm telling you, her experience with USA Basketball this last year has added some confidence to her and some swagger. I think that's going to really do well for her this year.

**Q. You talked about Philli. I remember last year at practice you said Mary, if she gets a full off-season with us you're not going to believe the difference. For her to be 15th in the country in rebounding, averaging 20 minutes a game, just think the sky is the limit for how many rebounds she can get?**

KELLY GRAVES: Yeah, and the rebounding is still going to be an important part. Her defensive presence inside where she's made huge strides offensively. She's not just putting back her own misses now. We can actually set things up to go to her.

And I'm telling you, she has -- you see improvement each and every day. Her biggest improvement has been upstairs. Now she believes that she belongs and is a good player and is not setting limits on herself. She used to get tired after three or four minutes. Now she can go the entire practice with no sub and her mindset is completely changed. I'm so proud of her.

She has stuck with us, and this is her third year in the program, and I think people are just going to be amazed as improvement we see.

**Q. We can't be sitting here in Lass Vegas with you when down the street there is an WNBA finals going on. Aces and Liberty. You've got three former players in this game. What is that like, and are you able to stay an extra day and go to the game? You got to get**



**back?**

KELLY GRAVES: My coach told me your three priorities when it comes to the players are, No. 1 current player, No. 2, future players, No. 3, former players. So unfortunately I got to worry about this year's team so I got to get back to practice.

I would love to stay. I stayed in touch with the three of them throughout the playoff run, and really excited for them. I guess I can say this right now. It's easy to know that I'm a Liberty fan right now with Courtney Vandersloot, Sabrina Ionescu, and Nyara Sabally on the team. They better play better in game two, but yeah, it's neat.

Like being a proud father.

**Q. Speak of being a proud father, did I see that you're going to have a new member to the family? Son got engaged?**

KELLY GRAVES: Finally. I got three sons in their 20s. Yeah, my oldest, Max, lives in Baltimore. I was back there last week with the family and he proposed and said yes. So we had a chance to meet her family. Had a big engagement party. It was a lot of fun.

Congratulations to those two. Now Will and Jack, let's go. I mean, what are we waiting for.

**Q. Want to touch back on the WNBA finals. I had a chance to talk with Satou. She was sitting baseline and I asked her, I went up to her and I think it was between third and fourth quarter and I said, you see that basket down there, every time I think about Oregon basketball I think about 2020 cutting down the nets. Such a special team. Probably a lot of people will agree in this room that would've went on to win the championship. As we know the complexion of the Pac-12 now and the players in the WNBA, the legacy that Oregon will leave behind as you see these players in the WNBA, what sort of pride do you swell with?**

KELLY GRAVES: Well, you know, that 2020 season will always leave a hole in my heart because I agree with you. I just don't think there was anybody in the country that was going to touch team. It's kind of played out in the WNBA. You look at how successful those players have been.

So I have great memories here in Las Vegas. I can't believe that was three years ago. Incredible run by an incredible group. You know, they were like rock stars. I was just an observer the whole year. There was not much coaching going on. It was pretty neat. And now to see Satou and Sabrina making all-WNBA and the success of

Ruthie and Nyara, pretty special. Not only in the league, but they're impacting the league and the game beyond.

So that's a special group. I appreciate you bringing that up.

**Q. I'll never forget is a ball screen a shoving cupcakes in you are with face right of that win.**

KELLY GRAVES: And as you can tell, I haven't stopped eating cupcakes ever since. That's my problem. Got to get working on that.

**Q. You look great.**

KELLY GRAVES: You have to say that.

**Q. Chance Grace, Grace VanSlooten, ladies are how has the day been going so far?**

CHANCE GRAY: It's been a pretty good day so far.

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: It's been fun.

**Q. It's about it get a lot better. You heard Coach talking about you and comparing you to Larry Bird and singing your praises. What does it mean when you hear your coach talk about you like that?**

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: I mean, it's great to have a coach that believes in you that much. Your confidence is kind of at an all-time high.

I think confidence is one the biggest parts in a game, so as long as you have that you're going to play well. If you have a coach who believes in you I think that can go on to help the team and be a leader a vocal leader.

**Q. Chance, what was to like this summer working with Coach Ethridge and playing for USA Basketball, in Mexico against some really tough teams?**

CHANCE GRAY: Yeah, it was a great experience. My first time with USA Basketball, so I really enjoyed it and took everything in. It was great playing for another Pac-12 coach and getting just that experience and seeing what it's like to play for her, it was great. I enjoyed it overall.

**Q. I want to ask you both, you're integrating a lot of new players into the team. As veteran players, what responsibility do you feel in terms of making sure those players are comfortable and you guys are building chemistry?**

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: Personally I've been trying my



hardest to be more of a leader vocally on and off the court, making sure we're having those team bonding experiences, whether it's a movie or lunch together, just getting everybody to gel.

I think chemistry is one of the most important things in a game and with a team, and then we've also been talking about being more of a player-led team, and so we've just been doing our best trying to do that, integrate that into the system, and make sure everybody feels welcome and they feel like they can come and ask us questions if they have any.

CHANCE GRAY: Yeah, I would pretty much say the same, just embracing that leadership role, holding everybody accountable for your actions on and off the court, myself as well, and making sure we're bonding and gelling as a team because we do have a lot of the new players.

But I think everybody is taking it in and embracing their roles so it's been pretty good so far.

**Q. We heard coach speak to how maybe this time might be a little bit more defensive minded or have to win games with defense compared to previous years. What do you all think of that? How has this process been so far to really develop on that end of floor and, what potential do you feel you have to be a great defensive team?**

CHANCE GRAY: I just think having more depth is going to help us, playing a little bit more fast paced. Getting up and getting in teams is what I personally like to do as well. It's good to have more people around us that kind of enjoy doing that.

Yeah, I think it'll be great. I think we just have to embrace what we have to do to win games.

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: Yeah, I think so the beginning of the season we did an exercise where it was like groups of three on the team and we wrote down three things we wanted our team to be. I think it was three or four groups came up with the word scrappy or gritty.

I think we're really trying to integrate that. We want to be a team that flies around, make everybody else feel pressured, kind of like we punch them first. We're going to go out and we're just going to play hard, play scrappy, and see where that takes us.

**Q. We asked Coach about the foreign trip and he told us it was great because there was no luggage lost or the flights were on time. I want to get the scoop. Like what was that experience like for you guys with the**

**team and what was the favorite thing that you did?**

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: I mean, it was a great experience just being over there, seeing the different cultures and all the different food and everything. The food was my most favorite part. Especially in Greece. Best gyro I probably ever had. Yeah, it was all really fun. Great bonding trip.

It's kind of cool to just see how other people live and then also kind of makes you look at like yourself and how grateful you can be for that experience, and seeing what other people have and just being grateful.

CHANCE GRAY: For me, I think the trip was just like a blessing in disguise, being able to bond with our team early. Everybody got there in July and June, so just getting to know each other, I think we learned a lot about each other. We were able to get closer.

For me, yeah, I loved both cities, but Greece was my favorite scenery-wise and just very peaceful and relaxing and was able to just take a step back and realize like what all college has done for me already within a year.

**Q. Grace, looking back at last year, struggled so much with lower leg injuries. Felt like every time you felt healthy the next day something would happen. What was that like just riding that roller coaster and how do you get yourself healthy?**

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: Yeah, like you said it was definitely a roller coaster. You know, it was really frustrating for sure. Every time I started to feel healthy again, my normal self, I would go back and sprain the same ankle or it would be the other ankle.

It was definitely a struggle, but this off-season I've been doing my best to rehab it and get back to full strength. Hopefully that's over with and I can go out and play a season full strength, knock on wood.

Yeah, definitely frustrating.

**Q. Coach talked about you don't have any bad days and that's one of the best things he loves about coaching you. When you're going through those injuries and the setbacks, what allows you to have that mindset and to be able to show up like that every day in?**

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: I think just knowing what I need to do for the team to succeed. I think that does include showing up every day. You can have an off day every once in a while, but if you want your whole team to succeed you have to be there every day, whether that's



vocally, on the defensive end if your struggling on the offensive end.

Just make sure you're showing up every day and doing something to help the team and improve the chemistry and everything like that.

**Q. Chance, with the international play the Brazilian team you played against had a lot of pros from the WNBA and had many years of experience. What was it like matching up with people that were just that experienced and what did you just learn basketball-wise from that time?**

CHANCE GRAY: I think it just kind of excited me overall just to like embrace the matchups. I like to get up and play physical so definitely showed me areas that I might need to get stronger, faster, quicker.

But I enjoyed it and I just embraced it. I was very thankful to have that experience at such a young age to know where I need to go in the next couple years if I want to be at that level.

**Q. We talk about the complexion of the team: Nine newcomers, five transfers, four freshmen. You bring in three grad transfers and some new faces. Tell me for each of you the newcomer that we're going to be talking about by the end of the season who is somebody that started to show up in practice that -- you're both smiling, so there is somebody on your mind. Who has impressed you most?**

CHANCE GRAY: There is two that automatically come to mind, but I'm going to talk about our guard, another point guard, Peyton Scott. She came from Miami of Ohio, mid-major so another Ohio kid, which is great for the team.

But she's that fifth-year leader that we needed. She brings in fire every day. She is just as competitive as me and Grace and others on the team. She hates losing just as much as us.

She definitely helps me compete every day and pushes me to be better. Like the older sister that I kind of needed in this next year.

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: Yeah, I agree. I thought of Peyton Scott, too. We call her P-Scotty. But yeah, she just comes in every day with a fire and wants to make everybody around her better. She comes in, never has an off day I've seen either. Just to have a great hard worker, she wants to be the best, wants to win. It's great for the culture of the team.