

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Media Day

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Stanford Cardinal

Tara VanDerveer



Q. 38th year at Stanford, and I think about all that you've been through and all the different teams and all the championships you've won. And every year, it's a little bit different. So give us a state of the program, and this group in particular coming in. What's going to be the calling card?

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: First, it's great to be here, and great to see you, Ashley and Mary. We're very excited about our team. We returned four of our starting five. I would say Cameron Brink had a great summer playing for USA in three on three, and I'm sorry she's not here. She rolled her ankle in practice. But she is really improved.

I'm really impressed with how hard she's playing, how competitive she is, her passing, her scoring. Hannah Jump is here, and we're so excited that Hannah is back. She's just working hard. She's always the first one in the gym, the last one to leave.

Talana Lepolo, our point guard is I think again improved, played USA basketball. And it's been -- her shot looks really good. Forward leader for us. And Kiki Iriafen is playing some great basketball. So we're very excited.

And then different players that have been working out, Elena Bosgana played for her national team, and Brooke Demetre has had a great summer. We have three freshmen and different people I think could really step up for us. So it'll be fun.

Q. Let's dive in to some of the freshmen because it's a highly acclaimed group. Will they see time immediately? What are they going to give you?

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: Well, I say immediately. I think for freshmen the best thing, the best thing they have are upperclassmen that are leading the way. But they are going to make -- they're going to really help us do well this year. They're very talented.

Chloe Clardy is from Arkansas. She is having a fabulous preseason. Nunu AGara is just incredibly coachable,

versatile and Courtney Ogden, a young lady from Atlanta is again versatile, shoots the three. They're incredibly quick learners.

All of them are -- they're just catching on very quickly and they're very mature, but they're still freshmen. So we're counting on our returners to lead the way, and they're doing a great job.

Q. Tara, can you talk about the way you guys ended last season and what motivation you think that that brings to your returning players coming into this season?

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: Well, I think that last year -- it was disappointing how we ended our season, but we're not in the NBA or WNBA. We play two out of three or anything. You have a bad game and you're done.

But I think the returners have worked really hard in the off season, and there's a lot of excitement about this year's team. We want to have a lot of fun, play well. We're playing a great schedule. And I'm very impressed with just the sisterhood that they're establishing, the foundation.

The Stanford culture I think is very strong and positive, and we're just trying to build on that.

Q. Tara, just having the smaller roster going into the season, what kind of challenges has it been for you just getting them ready for the season, just knowing that everyone's going to kind of have to have a little bit more playing time and with more injury risk and everything like that?

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: I think smaller rosters is all relative. We've ordinarily had maybe 14 or 15 players on our team, and we're the only ones that have ever done that. And because I felt, wow, you have an opportunity to get a Stanford degree, but what I'm finding now is that it's -- you know, if you have that many players and you also have that much maybe opportunity for disappointment for people not to play or not to have things go their way, so we have 12. We won a national championship with 11 and 12 and 11. So I guess we've got the right number. Keeping

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them healthy is very important.

Q. Tara, it's very rare for your team not to be picked in the top of the league. Can you just speak to the depth of the league this year?

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: The PAC-12 has as long as I can remember always been extremely strong and deep, and this year is no different. You can't look and think that you're going to get a win against any team. You're going to have to play the game, which is great.

We want to have great competitive games. And so whether it's Utah or Colorado or UCLA, I mean, we have great programs. No one can take anyone for granted, and that's a great situation to be in.

Q. Coach, can you talk, I guess, specifically about Cam and the improvements that you expect to see from her this season which I think going to be in the running for national player of the year?

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: Mike, Cam played USA basketball, three on three. And I told her, Cam, in three on three when you take a three, it counts two points versus one, whereas in our game, it's a little bit different.

But she really got excited about shooting that three. She also loved the space, and so I said, hey, you can create your own space by running the floor really hard. So she's running the floor hard. She's taking threes. She has great hands, great touch.

What I love about Cam is she's not fouling. So I'm really excited about that. She's aggressive and understands how important she is for our team to be out there. And I think people like Hannah Jump, Talana, Elena, they really space the floor really well. I think you'll really get to see Cam. I think she should be in the running for player of the year. She's that good.

Q. Tara, where are you going to get your outside of Cam and Hannah as reliable scorers for you? Where else is there going to be offense coming from?

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: Well, I don't think we've ever recruited a player, and there's certainly not anyone on our team right now who doesn't think they are a great offensive player.

Kiki, hitting the high post shot, she's shooting threes, driving it, attacking the basket. Talana, knocking down shots. She is probably is more of a pass first point guard, but she is not shy.

Elena has never met a shot she doesn't like. Pass is a four letter word for her. We have player on top of player that are really, really skilled, and but we've kind of gone back to running some of our older offenses, and the ball is moving.

We don't have any sticky hands. And it's really fun to watch the ball movement, the spacing and the coachability of people to say, hey, we're going to get the ball inside to Cam. She's doubled. She's kicking it out. She is passing really well. So I think we have a lot of offense. I'm worried more about the defense.

Q. I was wondering with all the success you've had, Stanford's had, the PAC-12's had in women's basketball, your thoughts on the league kind of being broken up after the season?

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: It's heartbreaking. This has been my whole life. I woke up when I heard about it, and I said I'm in a bad dream. This is a nightmare.

But we are committed to this year being a great year. Our team's theme is best year ever, and I think that that's kind of what everyone wants. We want to make the very best of it, and we're really thankful that we have such support in the PAC-12 from everyone.

We play -- we represent great universities, and we're very proud of the success that we have, and we're just going to make it the best year ever.

Q. Just to circle around back to Cam real quick, a quality about her that we don't talk about much is just how competitive she is. And you've coached a lot of competitive people at the international level, USA basketball. But when she takes the floor in practice or games, she just brings it every single minute. Can you just speak to that?

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: Cam is very competitive. Hannah is very competitive. Talana is very competitive. But being competitive means you're willing to do the work to win, not just when the game comes, you're going to show up and try hard.

Being competitive means you do all the little things. And that's what I think our players are really recognizing that in order to have a really successful team, a National Championship team like what Lexi and Lacey did, you're scrappy, you're getting on the floor for loose balls, what Kiana did, you're unselfish, things like that. And you have to rebound to have a great team.

But Cam is super competitive, but, I don't know, Hannah Jump is right up there, too.

Q. Coach, I want to talk about your coaching staff, one of my favorite follows on Twitter, Birdie McCall is back, as well as Tempie. What was the motivation behind that to bring those guys back?

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: I'm so thankful the NCAA changed the rules so we can add another coach and hiring Erica McCall, Bird, she is fantastic. I was telling a story that we had a practice game where she was coaching the guys and playing against the women.

And afterwards, it was her first win. And she said, Tara, I know why you've been doing this for so long. It's so much fun. She brings so much energy, so much positivity.

And Tempie is just a wonderful, wonderful person to have back. When have you people that want to be there, that want to work really hard, I know we got John Cantalupi back too. So we're really excited about our staff, our people. We're having fun. We're really enjoying each other's company.

Q. I read that you said last year's team you kind of compared to the Warriors, one of the issues that you didn't have that great team chemistry that call championship teams sort of need. What's your sense of your chemistry with this group? Is that a player led thing? How does a coach try and help build that?

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: I think as a coach, if there are kudos when we do well, then if we don't do as well as we should, then I have to take responsibility for that.

And when I look at there with 2020 hindsight, there were probably a lot of things I needed to do differently. I think when you do have 15 players, maybe it's really defining roles better, understanding leadership better, teaching things, really communicating better with the team.

And Chiney Ogwumike's dad told me this, every disappointment is a blessing. Last year was a disappointment. Our team has really moved on in a big way from that. And our culture and the strength of our program, the sisterhood is really shining, and we want that to shine.

So we're -- you can look in the rearview mirror or, but if you're studying the rearview mirror, you're going in the ditch, and we're going forward and we're excited.

Q. Last week when we were at the news conference for the WNBA announcement that the Warriors and Joe Lacob, he gave you the ultimate compliment. He said you're the reason he loves women's basketball. He

called you the goddess of women's basketball. And for a guy that has as much money and impact in the city of San Francisco and Oakland, built that arena, to say that, what did that feel like and what do you think about it coming to the Bay?

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: Well, first of all, I have the ultimate respect for Joe and the job he's done the Warriors. It's phenomenal. And I'm so excited that Chase Center and the Warriors will be having a WNBA team.

I think we're just seeing the enthusiasm for basketball, and we've had it in the Bay Area for a long time, and we're really excited that there's a WNBA team. But I think that it's just a really nice compliment, and I thank him very much, and it's -- I guess some of it is really just trying to work really hard to have a great team every year.

It's more important what players think, not so much outside people. So your players have to buy into your vision, and your players have to be excited about playing on the team that you coach. And I want to be a coach that I want to play for and that our players want to play for and want to play hard for.

Q. We asked Kelly earlier about some of his Oregon players, especially Sabrina playing in the WNBA finals, but the pride that he takes and the part he somewhat played in coaching some of these ladies that are now helping to expose women's basketball on a higher level. For you with the players that come from Stanford, but also from this conference that's helped elevate the exposure for women's basketball, where it is at, it is peaking, and it obviously hasn't reached its peak. It's still growing, but the pride you take and the part that you've played in that from Stanford's standpoint and also PAC-12.

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: Well, I'm very excited about, you know, the success that our players have had beyond Stanford. Obviously playing professionally, but also in the communities, the things that they're doing as leaders, as women, you know, the jobs that they have, the impact they have.

And Mary referenced being at Chase Center for the announcement of the WNBA team. There was a lot of Stanford there. You know, there was a lot of Stanford there. And it's really exciting to see that people that have played for me are giving back and that they really love the game of basketball. And I don't break my arm patting myself on the back, but I do take great pride in their success.

Q. As we bring up Hannah Jump to join the stage. I've



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got a microphone and you've got a microphone. Can you give a shout out to your mom as one of my all-time favorite human beings? How is she doing?

TARA ANN VANDERVEER: My mom is -- maybe she's watching in Colorado, and she's a huge PAC-12 women's basketball fan. And she knows the team. She cheers for us, and she has been at the tournament. She's not able to come anymore.

But, Mom, if you're watching, we're going to have a great season. Relax.

Q. Love that.

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