

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Maryland vs Stanford

Thursday, March 24, 2022

Spokane, Washington, USA

Veterans Memorial Arena

Maryland Terrapins

Brenda Frese

Katie Benzan

Ashley Owusu

Chloe Bibby

Sweet 16 Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Maryland coach Frese. Coach, if you have an opening statement.

BRENDA FRESE: Yeah, you know, excited to be here. Obviously love Spokane. Such great memories from winning in 2015 to go to the Final Four and the Elite Eight in 2008. They definitely know how to host. They do a great job here.

We're thrilled for our conference to have four total teams in the Sweet 16 from the Big Ten, second year in a row with tied for the most of any conference in the country.

Our conference obviously prepares us for now, the strength and the battles that we've played all season. We love where we're at. We love this group. They're really locked in right now and focused. I love how they've attacked the tournament. Since the Big Ten tournament, we've really been able to put a lot of great practice time in the past two weeks.

We're a different team obviously when you look back when we played Stanford on November 27th, almost four months to the day. Angel Reese was in foul trouble, only played 15 minutes. No Katie Benzan, no Diamond Miller. It was a different team health-wise that we weren't able to have.

We're clicking obviously right now, but we're going to need to have that against an incredible team like Stanford, the defending national champions. I feel one of the best



coaches in the country with Tara VanDerveer.

We're looking forward to tomorrow and the matchup with them.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Can you think back to 2008, what kind of stands out from that game? Also what stands out about 2015 and the game here against Tennessee?

BRENDA FRESE: 2008 was a blur, these two twin boys that are here had just been born. They were about two weeks old back with the grandparents.

We played Stanford there. Both teams deserved to go to the Final Four, but unfortunately only one was going to go. It was a phenomenal game, back and forth with all the scoring that took place. Candice Wiggins, the players we had with Laura Harper, Crystal Langhorne, and Coleman. It was an incredible battle.

2015, to beat Tennessee, their storied history, a program like Tennessee, to win to go to the Final Four was also an incredible memory that I'll never forget.

I don't know what it is about Spokane. You talk about 10 Sweet 16s, three have been to Spokane, one to New Mexico. Somehow they must think we enjoy being out here, but we do. Spokane has been really friendly to us as we've come out.

Q. Did you bring the entire Maryland athletic department with you? You mentioned you're a different team from when you played them four months ago. Are you not even watching that film? Is it not going to be very helpful?

BRENDA FRESE: I did watch it. It was extremely painful. I'm glad I watched it early through all the scouting. But you're able to take things, where Stanford likes to scout. They want to play off of players, different sets that you looked at within that game. It's helpful in that regard.

But in regards to the overall picture of what we look like



now as a team, I'm excited because we couldn't drastically be any different. So I think that's the progression you want to see. I'd say the same thing for Stanford. When you look at them in November, as everyone is trying to find their own identity, they're a lot different in March as well. Just rattled off 22 straight wins. Both teams are a lot different.

Q. You just mentioned they're obviously a much different team. In what specific ways have you seen them change or be different?

BRENDA FRESE: First of all, they have 10 starters. Anyone on their team would be starting at any other program. They're really deep. Tremendous length. I mean, obviously they're top 25 scoring, top 15 in rebounding, top 5 in blocks. They do so many things well.

But the most important thing, they put the ball in the basket. Every single player is an option to be able to score on the court.

Q. I don't know how many people you brought back after you won your title, but how much does it help to have players who have gone deep into the tournament? They return basically everyone except Kiana Williams.

BRENDA FRESE: That's something I learned early. When you can get teams the experience of obviously to be so fortunate to win a national championship, to get to a Final Four, to get through these rounds, experience is huge. It allows your rosters and teams to understand how difficult it is to move through every single round.

For us this is where we got to last year. I know this team is hungry to go further. Every round -- we're the last 16 teams here, and every team is elite. It's really difficult to be able to move through the rounds.

Q. Shy talked a little bit about her defense this morning. How far has she come from the early stretches of the season? How valuable is she facing a team that's offensive like they are?

BRENDA FRESE: She got the luxury, maybe not them, to play 40 minutes against Stanford. She should be more than prepared.

But I always joke with her that she came in as one of the worst defenders on our team to now being the best defender, to take the most difficult matchup. She embraces it. She wants it.

But I think a credit to Shy is that she's been so coachable through film, through practice, through her motor, being a

high-energy player. She's been a huge X factor for us on the defensive end. Her buy-in has allowed everybody else to see this freshman come and make the strides. I don't think I've ever had a freshman take that kind of leap and jump to go and become your best defender in a season.

But she's bought in. She committed to it, is a big reason why we're able to have the success that we're having.

Q. You talked about you coming to the Sweet 16 again. What do you think the qualities that your team has this year that's going to get you over the hump?

BRENDA FRESE: Well, we've said as a staff, you know, last year it was kind of unusual through COVID that it was really an easy season for us. It was just us. We were fortunate that we didn't have anyone become ill. This season it's been the complete opposite. We've been faced with so much adversity through injury and illness. We really believe that adversity has prepared us for now.

If anything, I mean, I think it's shown our kids the resiliency that they have. Again, every round that you take on -- we're taking on the defending national champions, like you're going to have to be really, really resilient, you're going to have to be mentally strong for a 40-minute battle.

Q. You have been really clicking on all cylinders offensively the last two games. What has been working so well? How do you hope to carry that into tomorrow's game?

BRENDA FRESE: Well, for us, you know, both having Diamond and Ashley have these last couple weeks where they've been healthy, they're at their highest level, you see how talented those two are. Angel has been that consistent factor for us all season. When Diamond was out, Ashley was out.

Now the three of them have finally kind of had that continuity together. Then they're sharing the wealth. They're really making the right reads, the right plays, really playing for each other.

Q. Are you aware of Tara's challenge that she's doing to raise money for Ukraine?

BRENDA FRESE: I have not.

Q. She pledged to donate \$10 for every made three in the entire women's tournament. It's up to 629 threes, I think. She has challenged every men's and women's coach to join her. I guess I'm going to put you on the spot right here and ask if you're going to join her. I wonder if she cornered you at some point in the 24

hours you've been in Spokane.

BRENDA FRESE: We haven't run into each other yet. Tara has some deep pockets. She's won a national championship. Bless her soul.

I love it. I mean, you talk about bringing awareness. There's so many great causes out there. You are putting me on the spot right now (smiling).

I think that situation has been tough. If you look at we have our own situation right now, Tai Kozlova is from Russia. She's been through an experience and has helped us and our team to be able to support her. She just came back literally about three or four weeks ago from the experience to see her family and not know when she's going to see them again.

I love it. I mean, what a tremendous cause for her to put out there.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Frese, thank you very much.

BRENDA FRESE: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Our student-athletes will be joining us shortly.

We'll welcome our Maryland student-athletes. We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Ashley, Stanford has a lot of strengths on their team, but defensively they're one of the best teams in the country. What do you see out of them that makes them so tough?

ASHLEY OWUSU: I would just say their length and their discipline, being able to defend without fouling.

Q. I know that coaches always say they don't look ahead in the bracket, but players do. When the bracket first came out, did you all want a rematch? Coach talked about obviously you all are so different as a team than when you played them four months ago. Are you eager to prove that?

CHLOE BIBBY: I was going to say I definitely wanted this side of the bracket and I was happy we got it. Obviously, we'll take whatever.

Definitely excited to go out there and have a rematch as you said. We saw them in November, so excited to see them again tomorrow.

KATIE BENZAN: No. Chloe said it all. I didn't have the

opportunity to play them in November, so just having this opportunity, it's going to be fun to see them for the first time and compete.

ASHLEY OWUSU: Yeah, ditto (laughter).

Q. Can you feel the difference in the vibe this year with the tournament and how it's going, just the attention on the tournament, overall energy being different than last year particularly?

KATIE BENZAN: This year definitely feels different just because first we were in College Park hosting in front of our own fans, now we're in a different part of the country. Most of us, I think Chloe might be the only one who has been to this part of the country. It's a new, exciting adventure for us.

In parts of equality, it's great to see March Madness up on there, equal playing field for both the women's tournament and the men's.

CHLOE BIBBY: Nailed it. Great job, Katie (smiling).

Q. You made the big decision to come back and play this year. What has this season meant to you, to be able to play one more year?

CHLOE BIBBY: Yeah, I mean, just a blessing I think. Obviously to get the opportunity to come back with the exact same team that we had, then adding Emma and Shyanne. It's just been a blessing. That's all I can really describe it as.

Obviously this year we've been through a lot of ups and downs and adversity. It's got us to this point now. I think we're trending in the right direction. Yeah, it's just really exciting.

KATIE BENZAN: Yeah, I agree with what Chloe said. Jumping off of what she said, I think we both felt a sense of unfinished business last year. Just to be in the same position, I know we're both just going to put all we have out on that floor to continue our season as much as we can.

Q. Katie, what do you remember specifically about the Sweet 16 round, this game, last year? How much of that was a motivating factor in returning, making sure you got back to this spot right now?

KATIE BENZAN: Yeah, I would say it was a huge motivation to come back. I just felt so bummed out last year, to say the least. Just to have the same team back, just to have this blessing to play for such a legendary coaching staff, with legendary players, I just feel so lucky.



But to be in this position again, it's first a blessing but also so much fun. Not a lot of teams get to go to the Sweet 16, so it's going to be fun and it's going to be an adventure, but it's going to also be a challenge. Stanford isn't an easy team so we're just looking forward to playing our best out there.

Q. This year particularly there has been a lot of adversity, including Coach Frese losing her father. How do you think she's weathered that storm?

KATIE BENZAN: Coach B is one of the strongest women I know. To be able to coach that same day, to stay with us, to honor her father and her family like that. I don't know if I could have the strength to do that.

Just her role model, she just has set, is such an example as a woman, a mother, a coach. I'm just so lucky to be able to look up to her and learn lessons from her.

CHLOE BIBBY: I mean, I think she's instilled that toughness and that competitive spirit in all of us this year. Obviously what she's gone through, able to overcome, it's just incredible.

She's brought that fight every single day, whether it's in practice or whether it's a game. We feel that passion in her when she's on the floor. I think that fuels all of us. We want to play hard for her. We want to play that Maryland style basketball that she loves.

Really, it all just stems from her, what she does for this team, this program. She's our leader and we're going to follow her.

Q. Katie, you mentioned March Madness branding. What else? How is your weight room? The swag bags? Any of you guys. If nothing else, what's still lacking?

KATIE BENZAN: Well, we just got some new gear for the Sweet 16. I think we were all excited about it. I think we got something new that I don't think any of us have seen before, like a hoodie pillow, which we're excited, especially with the long flight back, I think it will be useful when we take that redeye Sunday night (smiling).

In terms of the weight room, we haven't really seen one just because of all the traveling. I think it's a little bit different than last year being in one place.

I think the food has also been very good. We have no complaints there.

What else is there?

CHLOE BIBBY: Yeah, I'm not sure. Haven't really seen the men's swag bags. I don't know. Have a look at that.

KATIE BENZAN: We got to check that out.

CHLOE BIBBY: Yeah, we got to go check that (laughter).

I think from the TV side of it, too, they've done a great job of making that equal. Women's have great prime time spots. This is the most viewings we've had this year. It's just awesome to see we're getting the opportunity, and it's following through, seeing people want to watch women's basketball, so that's exciting.

Q. It's so weird this year, or different, because last year everyone was in a bubble. This year you got to walk around campus theoretically before you came out here. How much fun was that to be able to celebrate?

ASHLEY OWUSU: It's great. This year we even have roommates. I think that's pretty cool. Last year we were by ourselves. Just being able to see everyone, we have the band here, the cheer team with us, so that's pretty cool.

KATIE BENZAN: Yeah, just to have the student section at games when we were home, that was a lot of fun to see the support, the positive energy. It's been contagious.

CHLOE BIBBY: Definitely. Love that the cheer and band are here. Wasn't great being in our rooms for a couple days and not seeing anything. Really good that we could go out. Even while we're here, we can go enjoy the sun, go for a walk around. I prefer this way.

THE MODERATOR: Thank our student-athletes.

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