

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Fairleigh Dickinson vs TCU

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Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Schollmaier Arena

TCU Horned Frogs Coach Mark Campbell Hailey Van Lith Sedona Prince

Media Conference



HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, I mean, I think it starts with taking it one game at a time. To really take advantage of this opportunity to play in this tournament, you have to treat every game with the same amount of respect.

I think it would be a disservice to us to go out here and treat this game like it wasn't the most important game of our life. I'm super excited to get to compete on Friday. I know the rest of the girls are.

I think we have done a great job preparing. We used these two weeks very well. We just are excited to get an opportunity to go play and get better.

SEDONA PRINCE: Yeah, I mean, it's also like a -- this is the end of our season, right? We've been working so hard for ten months. Also I think that our individual journeys, all of us through our own respective careers have been leading up to these next three weeks, to be honest.

I think it's really special. Hailey is right, one game at a time. If you think about big picture and we start thinking about our opponents, who they can be in the future, you start to lose focus and not take the game right in front of us seriously.

That's when teams get knocked out. We're taking every team seriously and not thinking ahead at all. To be honest, we're really excited. It's going to be an awesome three-week journey for us. It's been a lot of hard work and a lot of waiting and adversity to get to this point.

So it's really special and we're very, very focused and aware of how much we need to just enjoy these days that we have together, just because truly like any day could be our last together as teammates.

Q. Hailey you mentioned the time off. This is the longest break you've had in a while. What have you been doing over this period?

HAILEY VAN LITH: I think No. 1, we've been taking care of our bodies, especially for someone like Sedona. I was looking at the box scores from the conference tournament and in the last game she didn't come out; she played all 40

TCU

Q. Question for both you guys. Now that you have a couple days to look at FDU, what stands out about them?

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, I think with a lot of these mid-major teams, they are very small and they all can shoot the three.

You know, it's a typical characteristic. We know that three point is the equalizer, so we have to really come in and be intentional about guarding the three-point line.

SEDONA PRINCE: Yeah, they're a tough team. I feel like these teams, they have a lot to fight for, a lot to prove, and nothing to lose, right? Coming here and having an opportunity to face a top 10 ranked opponent, something they don't get to do very often, if at all.

We can tell just even in film they have a very competitive spirit and are pretty talented. Their post is very athletic. She works hard on the glass, especially on the offensive side.

So it's a challenge for me. Just been really focusing on making sure I block her out and don't let them get extra possessions. Going to be a battle no matter what.

Q. This surrounding, this is what you guys played for, to be here in March. Talk about now that you're here, just to take full advantage of being here, talk about that aspect.



minutes.

Not a lot of people understand how difficult that is for someone of Sedona's size, skillset, the way that her body works. To play 40 minutes after playing two previous games is actually incredible.

So we wanted to make sure that we were fresh, healthy. When your body is rundown and exhausted, that's when injuries happen. So No. 1, we made sure that we're all healthy and fresh. And then on top of that, we cleaned up some things on offense where we know we're going to get junk defense.

We're also working on different schemes where we can switch things up on defense with any type of personnel.

So just little things at this point in the season. But the most important thing is making sure that everyone is healthy.

SEDONA PRINCE: Yeah, thanks buddy.

HAILEY VAN LITH: You've a beast, bro. Respect.

SEDONA PRINCE: It was a long game. It was difficult. Yeah, same. Taking care of our bodies is so true, working on the little details. Obviously we know that we're going to see double teams and a lot of just traps and people trying to get us to turnover the ball.

So really, really honing that in. We seen it so much and had so much in-game practice. But working on the little details of how to really get it out of the trap, hit people in shot pockets and stuff, and get our offense flowing.

Yeah, just really like being -- taking care of our minds off the court as well. It's been a very, very long journey for us, for everybody on our whole team, coaches. It's been a grind. And so taking a step back. Like we had a party at my house last night, just the girls. So taking care --

HAILEY VAN LITH: An appropriate party.

SEDONA PRINCE: Yes, not a party. It was a Bible party actually.

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, but like certainly taking care of our mental health as well, being humans first, young women, and basketball players, but also just friends, right?

Q. Sedona, you were talking about with your individual experiences speaking about the entire team and how that's going to contribute to how you approach these opening rounds. Speak to that more for yourself, how your individual experiences are

informing how you approach the opening rounds?

SEDONA PRINCE: Yeah, I mean, my whole career has been like just a kind of roller coaster of adversity. Learned a lot of lessons along the way. Each tournament I've been through, losing to Haley Van Lith at Louisville in my first ever year playing in March Madness in the Sweet 16.

But learning that lesson. Injuries as well. It's taken a massive toll on me as a person off and off the course. People that I learned from, obviously being teammates with players Sabrina Ionescu, Satou, Ruthie, learning from them at some point in my career.

And then going and playing, being off the court, right, taking a step out of college basketball for nine months and kind of really realizing how special it is and how much I didn't necessarily like fully appreciate it. It's hard to when you don't realize how truly amazing it is.

And then last year obviously a season can change like that. (Snapping fingers.) Really just being able to just I don't know just be in the moment, take all the lessons you learned as a leader, teammate, friend, in my own personal journey and life to bring it this tournament, and how to change my mindset, and hopefully lift up the rest of my teammates's mindsets and just make everyone kind of realize how special it is, but how hard it is and how much we need to work together in order to make it as far as we possibly can.

Q. Hailey called you a beast a minute ago. You're one of the old school post players. In women's basketball, there is not many post players left like you, and only a couple I can think about. Talk about that and your role, how much you enjoy that, how different you see it when you see other teams?

SEDONA PRINCE: Yeah, I mean, I think there is a lot of really, really good posts that I've played against this year that have really changed my game. It's fun for me. I've never really been like a back-to-the basket post player. In Oregon I was put in the high post and Nyara Sabally was used as my low post, five.

I was a passer and a shooter, and that's why I got are really good at that like 12- to 15-foot range shot. So coming here, Mark and I had the conversation of like, you need to get really, really good at catching the ball deep in the post and making simple post moves, but take advantage of being 6'7", getting stronger.

Yeah, it's fun. I feel like I really haven't been able to fully show off my skillset yet, so I hope that I get to go against some competition that -- big players that are strong and

physical and push me out where I have to be more agile around them and show off my shooting skills.

And then smaller lanky players that might be built like me where I get to have a length battle. That's more skill and individual fundamentals come into play.

But, yeah, it's fun. My favorite part about being post is protecting the paint, to be honest.

Q. Hailey, clearly it's a one-game-at-a-time focus. You know quite a few people on another teams playing in this building. Just when you put that in perspective, have you thought about that, just the fact that people you know are also in this building and trying to get to the same place you are? Assuming still some connections.

HAILEY VAN LITH: Yeah, I think that of course I know a lot of people on a lot of different teams. I played on a lot of USA Basketball. I played at a whole other school that's not in this region that I know people at. So that's true for a lot of different teams.

Obviously it was a part of my journey. I've evolved past that part of who I was there, but there is still people there that I love, and so I wish them well. You know, it is what it is.

Q. Hailey, noticed that when you're traveling for away games you always carry a basketball with you on a bus or a plane. When did that start?

HAILEY VAN LITH: It's actually a weighted basketball, not just a normal one. I started it -- actually only started it this year, and it's because my trainer that I've been working with, Irv Roland, he trained Chris Paul, and I was in the summer knowing that I needed to come here and play more of a point guard role, I watched a lot of film with him on Chris.

And so he was sharing with me like what he does pre-game, and the weighted ball handling warmup is a huge part getting him ready for a game, so I thought I would try it.

I like how it makes me feel. I can feel the ball better in my hands. I feel lighter. The ball snaps off better. Like especially more for passing than anything. Like when I'm working on pocket passes, passes out of pick and roll it just comes off faster.

Shoutout to Irv on this one. He has the assist. I just started this year.

Q. How much does it weigh?

HAILEY VAN LITH: It's about five pounds, yeah?

SEDONA PRINCE: Rolls into my seat every time we're on the bus.

HAILEY VAN LITH: You never know where it's at. When the plane is taking off, could be in the front, could be in the back. (Laughter.)

Q. Mark talked often about what a chance you both took different ways. Sedona, you came when there was no nil; a 1-17 team. Hailey, you came with no real idea what was in store for this program. As you guys walk around this building now, see the March Madness branding, you see that you've brought a regional to Fort Worth for the first time ever, what does it mean to have checked the first box of your goals?

SEDONA PRINCE: Yeah, I mean, really cool, really one of those moments -- we talked about it all year, of like this -- when we came in, it's not what we were expecting. Hoping and kind of dreaming what the rebuild would look like. At the time, especially for me, I had come off being -- having a reconstruction in my elbow, not playing basketball for literally like six, seven months. Not even really touching a ball. I was 30 pounds overweight.

Mark and I were having the conversation of like, hey, we could rebuild this. I believe in you. We can do something very, very special here. I was like yeah, yeah, yeah. Absolutely. I think we could, too.

But still, it's really hard to really fully believe that and believe that and understand we could do something like this, where are sitting right now. It's amazing. It's a testament to Mark. Truly. The coach he is, the man he is, the leader that he is. He saw it, knew what we were going to be able to do in the future.

He put the pieces together. Had faith even during the toughest of times, that crazy patch of injuries last year. We still had faith and belief that we were going to be sitting in this position one day.

So it's amazing. Truly we're just -- it's a blessing. All glory goes to God for this whole journey and just the perseverance of everybody that's been along the ride with us.

HAILEY VAN LITH: I think for me, a lot of people may think I'm crazy or things like that, but I always knew what was coming for this team. You know, I expected this type of outcome. The intricate details, how it unfolded were not

necessarily my idea of it, but the bigger picture of what we have been able to accomplish and do, you know, I always knew that this -- what was waiting for us.

You just look at who we have as a staff, personnel on paper, and then you combine that with what happened when we all met each other and the chemistry that came from that immediately.

I've never really doubted for a second that this was where we were headed, but now that you're here, you really just want to enjoy the moment. I think Sedona touched on it a little bit earlier. Like this is both of our last year of eligibility, and like we just love this group.

So basketball is great and all, but I'm enjoy every day that I get to practice with these girls. Like when we had our team dinner last night, all those little moments. Like I know this is the end for me. I'm not coming back to college.

So really just enjoying all that with them.

Q. Clearly this is a moment that you guys have been looking forward to. Talk about being here now but obviously not wanting this to be the culmination of this season, and what this group is able to do.

MARK CAMPBELL: Yeah, it's a unique blend of enjoying the moment and enjoying the opportunity and the excitement that's around it and the feeling, but staying just completely locked in.

Because this -- I've been in enough of these. Man, you can get sent home really quickly. You got to handle your business. The good thing is we got an old veteran group that has been in a whole bunch of these battles, and there is nobody in that locker room that wants this journey to end.

Yeah, we're excited, and I expect this group to do what they have done really all season and handle their business.

Q. The time off for a coach can be a blessing and a curse. How have you managed wanting your older players to get rest with keeping them in that mode of games?

MARK CAMPBELL: It's been a long break, almost two weeks, so it's tricky. I think we did a good job managing week one. Gave them a couple days off to recharge mentally, physically, do their schoolwork.

The fine line of two weeks of grinding, of straight practice is almost like fall training camp all over good afternoon. So balancing that.

Once you get to game week, we started Saturday, so Saturday and Sunday we started our normal routine, normal practice routine. Monday was off. Then you get Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday of prep. So you're finally back in the flow again.

For us, the time off has been really good for our group physically, which I think this time of the year everybody is banged up and bumps and bruises from the wear and tear of the season.

So we managed it well. The first week is a hard week. Got through that. And then since then, since Saturday we've really been in our normal routine now.

Q. Coach, yesterday you signed a contract extension to stay at TCU through 2030. What was the thought process like, and was there an urgency to get it done before the tournament?

MARK CAMPBELL: Yeah, obviously I think you -- what we've already accomplished is unique and special, but it's truly just the beginning. We're digging out of a deep hole and had to get the program up and running.

To be in this spot in year two as a top 10 team in the country and a 2 seed, I think it shows you how special TCU is, what we can accomplish here, ultimately long-term as we try to build a program, not a team.

Right now, the first two years you've been just trying to get a team assembled. The goal is to build a long-term elite women's basketball program. So we have done it really quickly. I'm super grateful that Mike Buddie and Chancellor Boschini and President Pullin are allowing me to stay here, and I think especially with recruiting, for the next crop of kids that are making their college decisions to know I'm going to be here as our leader through 2030 is powerful.

Continuity in college athletics is powerful. It's incredible what we accomplished, but truly we are just getting this thing started.

Q. Coach, you've had a couple days to kind of look at your opponent for round one in Farleigh Dickinson. What stands out about them? They won a lot of games too.

MARK CAMPBELL: You answered your own question. FDU, -they're winners. You don't luck into 29 wins. They have a great culture. They've done a tremendous job with that group. To win 29 games and to do it at their level, your margin for error is tiny.

So they have a special group.

But the biggest thing in March is winning. That team is coming in here expecting to win. It's what they've done all year. So we got our hands full. Obviously we have the scout dialed in of what we wanted to do and try to impose or will.

Thankfully we earned a right to play the games at home where our group has been hard to beat. Hopefully we can continue that streak.

Q. Sedona, she's one of the dying breeds of dominant post players in women's basketball. She said something earlier that you had talked to her about being more of that post presence. Talk about the conversation, her development, and how the game has changed and how she still dominates.

MARK CAMPBELL: Yeah, great question. Me and Sedona have had healthy dialog of trying to figure out how to impose her will in games. Also, she is so unique and so skilled and so talented of giving her freedom to grow and blossom as a player.

If I let her, she would stay on the perimeter and shoot threes all game. So it's been really fun. She's been so coachable. I think the greatest thing she's improved in is getting comfortable around the basket and imposing her will around the basket.

That's what makes her such a unique player. At 6'7" she can shoot on the perimeter. Her ability to pass, her and Hailey's two-man action has been incredible.

And Sedona, to be able to pick and pop, pick and roll, just makes scouting us really difficult because of her versatility.

But it's been fun. She's an old veteran and so we have fun great conversations and she loves the game. Her mind, her basketball IQ at the center position is also what makes her such a unicorn.

She's a really sharp kid.

Q. You talk about obviously continuity in basketball. Not a lot of the continuity in rosters. You've had this group two years in a row; bunch of first and second year transfers. How you have talked about that chemistry?

MARK CAMPBELL: I think that's the million dollar question in college athletics, is who can assemble a roster. So the first step is collect the talent and get the pieces that fit your

style of play.

That's the first part.

That's really hard to get right. The portal is speed dating, and these kids are making quick decisions and we have to make quick decisions. Step one is getting that.

While you're doing that, vetting them and finding out which kid's personalities fit your culture.

So you're juggling those things and that happens rapidly. Once get them here you got to put the puzzle together. I think we've done as good as anybody in the portal era. Signed 12 portal kids in two years; not a high school kid.

We've done it and broken into the elite level of women's basketball. So to their credit, once you get them here, then the real journey begins of forming an identity, identifying your leaders, empowering them, getting roles established. There is so many layers to it.

Ultimately of course the kids, you need them to buy in. You don't have control over that. I think every year, college athletics, that's the norm, is you're going to need to probably have half a roster is going to be new. If you can keep half your roster. Then you only need half. If some leave you need more than half.

Also the hardest part for us, the first initial phase of getting a program up and running is you're selling a vision. There is a big difference between selling a vision and having a product. We now have a product.

We've done a really will are good job of helping a group of kids blossom that were struggling at other programs. So in regards to the future portal kids, I mean, just watch us play. Watch what's happened to Maddy and Hailey and Agnes. Been a whole crop of them. Hit it hard again.

Opens in the middle of our tournament, which is crazy. Can you imagine NBA free agency during the playoffs? That would be wild.

So it is what it is and you got to navigate it. Right now, it's definitely find ways to win. Next week, there is 150 portal kids already, and when a coach gets let go those kids get access to the portal.

The floodgates open next week.

Q. Touch on that. How do you balance starting to evaluate knowing you have so many holes on your roster next year?

MARK CAMPBELL: I think everybody is trying to figure that out on the fly. There isn't a recipe, a blueprint. You got to manage that.

Obviously the ultimate sales pitch is winning. Winning in March is a pinnacle of our sport. That's where you got to keep the main thing the main thing. You better be in the trenches as the portal situation unfolds.

We have such an incredible nucleus coming back of talented players and players that have been in our program. That was a huge carryover from last season. You know, to have that crop of kids that knew us as a staff.

And it's a fun with the college kids. Year one you're getting know each other. When you get to do a second year and third year, which is rare, it's the best. It's family.

And I think Hailey, for what she's done in one season really it's nine months, it's incredible. Man, I wish we had her back for one more year. So anyway, the portal I think it's been a blessing to us. I love the portal.

Hopefully it continues to be good to us.

Q. Question about obviously we talk about Hailey, Taylor, Sedona, et cetera. There were three girls here during that 1-17 season. I guess what can you say about them as teammates, how they bought into your vision and stayed here even though they maybe didn't have the roles they wanted when they first got here?

MARK CAMPBELL: First we need you talk about your Js. Jeez, I can tell you've been saving those. I haven't seen those all year. It's a big week. I get it.

And hey, great article, too. Appreciate it. You summarized our two-year journey beautifully. KG and Aaliyah and Deasia, what those three have seen and been through as student-athletes here is rare and unique. To experience a 1-17 Big XII journey and now to host March Madness to win a league title, tournament championship, I mean, man, talk about an awesome testimony of just enduring and grinding and sticking with something.

Especially in this era when it's easy to tap out and move on. Those three kids are just first of all incredible young women that have been a huge part of our nucleus and our culture. I think they do have a unique experience because they were a part of that one and 17 team. That's no fun. That's a hard year.

So they brought just a great spirit and maturity to our group. Like you said, those three are every bit as important as the big three, you know, Madison, Sedona,

Hailey and Aaliyah has blossomed in our system and style of play. Her role on this 1-17 team was tiny, next to zero.

Now she's a main contributor on one of the best teams in the country. So Aaliyah has worked hard at her game. Spends a lot of time on it and comes from a big time basketball family. So it's been really fun to watch her blossom. Her confidence in herself and belief in herself has grown each year.

So I'm thankful that I've gotten two seasons with each one of those kids. You guys, to pull this off and have an environment in a group that loves each other and enjoys each other at the level these kids do, it's truly player one through 15 to make this whole thing work.

Man, everybody's role is different but it's equally important. I think that's what makes this year's team really special. They understand that.

Q. Going off that, talking about the big three, but like you said there are so many other pieces to this team. As you think about a deep run in March, who are some people you're looking at it step up on the court to help you get where you wanting to?

MARK CAMPBELL: Yeah, well, from Agnes and Dono and Taylor Bigby and Deasia and Una, those kids are playing -- have and are playing huge roles throughout the season.

And you guys, I know you don't get to come watch practices, but those kids are going toe to toe against the first group in practice for the last ten months. So our staff has a high level belief in that group.

In different moments you've seen each one step up throughout the season. We don't win at Iowa State in front of 8,000 people if Deasia doesn't deliver that night. And I could go through each kid.

It's fun because in practice there is great banter. There is a great competitive spirit amongst them. Last week we played -- one of the days just did old school open gym where winner stays, played to nine, pick up, if you're sitting out, pick up a couple teams. You should have seen the environment. It was awesome. It was like summer ball in the middle of March.

So this group is just fun. To win, we've said this, in February, March, you need depth and different people to step up on any given night. Scouting reports, you know each team inside and out. They know us inside and out. So we have a cast of players that are ready when their number is called.

