

PAC-12 Women's Basketball Media Day

Thursday, October 20 2016



Cynthia Cooper-Dyke

Courtney Jaco

Ivana Jakubcova

USC

THE MODERATOR: Start with an opening statement and then questions for coach.

CYNTHIA COOPER-DYKE: Good morning. We're very excited for this year. We have a lot of new faces and a lot of new energy in practice. Really five new freshmen, one red-shirt freshman, and then Ivana, new kid on the block. So we're very young, very excited to compete in the number one conference in the nation RPI-wise. Strength of schedule, number one conference, and such a deep conference with it being so incredibly competitive. Maybe not a lot of people know that the team that finished in fifth place in the Pac-12 made it to the Final Four. So we're very excited to compete at a very high level on a consistent basis, on an every-night basis in the Pac-12 this year. So that's my opening statement.

Courtney, would you like to make an opening statement?

COURTNEY JACO: Yeah, just to piggyback off of what Coach Cooper said, a lot of new faces on the team, but we've taken this summer and appreciated really getting to know each other. The trip we took to Italy really helped with just getting to know one another on a basketball level and a personal level. So definitely excited for what's in store.

CYNTHIA COOPER-DYKE: That's it, right? Good job, Courtney.

Q. This conference is going to set a really fast pace competitively with a lot of new faces. Is there a sense of pressure to get things going quickly so that you guys can experience some success really quickly when some experienced teams are probably going to get out of the gate really fast?

CYNTHIA COOPER-DYKE: Yeah, I think there is some pressure to get off to a quick start, especially in the conference, but I think that's what preseason is for. So we have some teams lined up in our preseason that I think will be very competitive for us and get us

prepared mentally, physically. Then just speed, just to gain speed and the level of intensity that you've got to have in those games in order to be successful is going to get us prepared right from the beginning.

So, yeah. We have a very competitive conference. I expect every single game this year in the Pac-12 Conference to be competitive. That's just how much depth we have and how competitive this conference is.

I mean, you don't have the number one RPI in the nation -- they don't just throw that out. You compete, you win games, and that's what makes a great conference. And I think the Pac-12 has shown and demonstrated over the last few years just how competitive we are right from the beginning.

Q. In years past you may have been dealing with players having to play out of position, and you've kind of had to fill some holes due to unforeseen circumstances. Now that it seems like while you're young, you've got some height now, you've got some good players in the block, some potential. What can we expect to see in terms of maybe style offensively and defensively with some of these players that fit into these positions?

CYNTHIA COOPER-DYKE: That's a great question. I think this year we'll have players in the natural position so they can do things and showcase their talents from their position. I think that's going to be important. It's going to also be important for us because we have players playing out of position, the great thing about that is now they have multiple talents that they can utilize in different positions. So we'll still showcase some of the, for example, post-up moves of Jordan Adams, and then we'll throw her at the point guard position as well. And then her natural position, which is on the wing.

So we'll have some players that will still play three different positions just because they have experience in those areas.

But it feels great to have Ivana at 6'6", and Asiah at 6'4", and Dani at 6'4", and now we have Kris Simon, Kristin Simon who can just now be at her true position at the four and really showcase her talents. And then Jaco can play multiple positions at the one and the two. So when we want her to just worry about shooting, we

can put her on that wing and let her knock down her three-pointer. When we want her to lead us as a team and showcase her leadership ability, we can put her on the point guard position. So it actually works both ways for us. We've got some -- I thought we got some much-needed experience last year that I think will benefit us this year.

Q. What can you tell us about this incoming freshman class that comes in highly touted, top 15 nationally? Not only with the success of your recruiting class, but with the success of Pac-12 recruiting classes, what are you hearing on the recruiting trail to not only respect USC, but the Pac-12 at-large, considering what happened last season with two Final Four teams?

CYNTHIA COOPER-DYKE: Yeah, we have, I want to say, five or six teams with top 15, top 16 recruiting classes, and that's no surprise to me because the Pac-12, we do a fantastic job of, one, supporting each other and, two, going out on the recruiting trail and really competing against the other conferences for the top talent in the nation. So I look for a very competitive, competitive year with all of the top recruiting classes in the Pac-12.

But for our freshmen, we have Valerie Higgins who can play the one, two, three, four, and really she's a winner, so she'll play wherever you put her. She's at six foot and she can do it all. She plays great defense.

Everyone talks about Cynthia Cooper as a basketball player, but nobody talks about my defense. That's because I didn't play any. Throw that out there right now. So Val is incredible. And then Minyon Moore, she's just a fireball of energy. She just hawks the ball, defensively, offensively she's running the floor. She's a 5'8" point guard. She's a great leader and she just turned 18. She communicates extremely well. She can shoot it. Get to the rim. We just love her energy every single day in practice.

Then we have Ja'Tavia Tapley who is a 6'2" wing, an X-factor for us. She can play, once again, the two, three or the four. She's been working on her outside shot, her three-point shot. But she can slash to the basket. I think every day she surprises us, whether it be defensively blocking shots, because she has these incredibly long arms and she's athletic, or getting to the rim, or a nice pass or a dish-off. So she's maturing before our eyes. Every single day she gets better. And I think as Courtney mentioned earlier, our trip to Italy really helped get some games under our belt, get some team camaraderie, and helped us get on the same page.

Last but certainly not least, our true freshman is Asiah. Asiah can block shots with the best of them. 6'4", long

arms, athletic. Asiah is working on her moves back to the basket, but she has a nice 10- to 15-foot jumper, and we love to see her get up and rebound. To be honest with you, I love to see her beat Daisha (phonetic) up in practice. I give her a chest bump every time she blocks a shot in practice. So it's great. Dani was a mid-year kid last year from Australia. 6'4", she's our big body post player from Australia. She has great hands, great moves back to the basket. Then she's probably one of our toughest post players besides Kristen Simon that we have. So we're very excited about our freshman class, and then our newcomer, Ivana. Ivana I'll talk about her in her face instead of behind her back. She can shoot the ball. She's a great leader. She actually won our fitness test, so she really wants to have a great year, and it shows out on the court from her mid-range game, to her knocking down a three-pointer, and then her work back to the basket. So she's starting to get into the block party. So she's been blocking shots lately, and I just love how her game is continuing to develop every single practice.

Did I sound excited? Because I am.

Q. Tell me a little bit, because you haven't really mentioned Val Higgins, how is she doing?

CYNTHIA COOPER-DYKE: Yeah, I mentioned her first, but she is doing fantastic.

Q. Is she going to play a one or two?

CYNTHIA COOPER-DYKE: She's going to play wherever she wants. No, just kidding. No, Valerie, I see her starting at the wing. So she'll play the two or the three. But the way she's playing right now it's going to be hard to keep her off the court because she's penetrating to the basket. And we all know Val can play defense, but she has great instincts. So she's a winner. And we want to keep her on the court as much as possible, keep her healthy. And not just grow in practice, but grow with on the court experience, so she's doing fantastic.

Q. Do you really think she's going to start right away?

CYNTHIA COOPER-DYKE: I don't know. I don't have a starting lineup right now. But I will tell you -- you just put me on the spot in front of my players? No, I can foresee a scenario where Val will absolutely start right from the beginning.

Q. I know that Coach has hyped you up. What do you feel personally that you were going to bring to the team this year, being a transfer, working hard over the summer, as she said, and seeing the competitive nature of this conference?

IVANA JAKUBCOVA: Well, I've really been trying to

focus on my defense. My main goal was to be a factor on the defensive end. I've been trying to see where I can get into the right position, too. Either taking charge, blocking shots or being at the right time, at the right place. So that's what I've been focusing on. I also really want to help the team with rebounding. Of course, I have the height, so on the offensive end I would also really like to knock down every open shot. That's my main focus to really, really have that faith in my teammates that every time they pass me that ball and I'm open, it's going to go in.

CYNTHIA COOPER-DYKE: I want that too.

IVANA JAKUBCOVA: That's what I'm focusing on. And also getting tougher every single day in the paint.

Q. Coach Cooper, congratulations on being named one of the WNBA's greatest players of all time. How has that helped in the recruiting process?

CYNTHIA COOPER-DYKE: Oh, it's great. I was on television every day, and it was like, hey, that's me. Sometimes I surprise myself, because some of the other recruits were saying, hey, is that you? Yeah, with my Jheri curl. So, no, it's been fantastic. Let me just say this, the WNBA is incredible. I talk about the talent of the WNBA, and I see the talent in the Pac-12, and I believe the WNBA is alive and well, because the Pac-12 has so much talent that when we pass the torch and we're able to send those players to the WNBA, the WNBA will be alive and well.

So as a former player in the WNBA, I can't wait to see our Pac-12 athletes in the WNBA showcasing the talent that the Pac-12 has. So it was an honor for me to be among the top 20. Hopefully they won't forget me when they get to 25 and 30. So I'm enjoying the moment. But I will say that when I look at what the coaches in the Pac-12 are doing on the recruiting trail, I believe we're going to be one of the major conferences that feed talent into the WNBA here in the near future.

Q. Coach, we have Joan Bonvicini in the room, and I'm remembering back to her days as a coach in Long Beach State, she had fiery players like Penny Toler, Traci Waites and I used to go watch practice. You too were a player who was fired up. So who on your team this year can you go to early on in this season, someone who is a fiery player, someone who is going to get into that locker room, during practice, after practice, who is going to take that weight on their shoulders?

CYNTHIA COOPER-DYKE: I'm going to say a freshman. Minyon. I think Minyon Moore, she'll do it, and I think Valerie Higgins. Valerie's kind of a quiet assassin, so she's going to quietly go talk to people, motivate them. I think Minyon is one of those people

that, hey, hey, hey, we're here to win, remember. So we've got to do this, this, and this. And I think people listen to her because they respect the effort that she gives day-in and day-out in practice.

Q. Courtney, I was wondering what you could tell us about playing with Jordin Canada in high school, and now you guys are rivals going to different schools in the so Cal area? I was wondering what's it like playing with her in high school and going up against her now?

COURTNEY JACO: Playing with her was great. All I had to do was stand in the corner and she'd give me the ball, you know what I'm saying. So she's a great player, a great competitor. Playing against her is weird now. But I'm definitely happy for her and what she's doing with UCLA and how she's leading their team. That's definitely something that I could have told everybody in high school that she'd be able to do. So it's a little bit weird, but definitely happy every time I get to play against her. We both just give the maximum amount of effort that we can. It's all good after the games. We're really great friends.